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EMPOWERMENT OF CARE WORKERS AND RESIDENTS AT NURSING HOMES IN DENMARK

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Abstract:
How action research has contributed to the empowerment of residents and employees at nursing homes (2010-2015).

The project goal:
Empowerment (Freire 1974):
· More autonomy, participation and social life for the residents.
· A better working life for the employees.

The context:
· Employees felt trapped in a negative spiral of stress.
· Residents felt they were treated without respect and that they were socially isolated.
· Growing critique of the focus on cost efficiency and standardized measurement in care service (New Public Management) (Szebehely 2005).

Action Research:
· To frame democratic learning and acting (Lewin 1948); “A shared commitment to democratic social change” (Brydon-Miller 2008).
· To transform a habitual practice into a more social, reflexive, collective and morally obliging praxis (Kemmis 2008).

The people involved in the project:
Residents, relatives, employees, management, senior citizens organisations, researchers.

Important processes and methods:
· Group interviews, future workshops (Jungk & Müllert 1987), network conference with residents, employees, manager, experts and senior organisations.

A future workshop is
a. a methodology where citizens and local stakeholders are the driving forces in the production of future visions, actions and scenario building
b. facilitated by specific rules to eliminate the influence of power relations within the group

The concrete outcome:
Higher job satisfaction for employees and increased autonomy and a better social life for residents:
· Asking the residents (and their relatives) about their wishes, opinions and needs for care.
· Involving residents (and their relatives) in decision making at all levels at the nursing home.
· Behaving respectfully, for example by knocking at the door before entering a resident’s flat.
· Supporting social activities for the residents in the afternoon by changing staff working hours.
· Establishing a grocery store inside the nursing home so residents can buy small items and at the same time establish an informal venue.
· Establishing mentorship relations between residents in order to combat isolation of new residents etc.

The roles of the action researchers:
· Facilitation of democratic knowledge building.
· Framing and documentation of the process of change, supporting task forces, adding knowledge and involving other external parties with additional knowledge.

Aspects of particular concern:
Ethical challenges and power structures between management, employees and residents (Gaventa & Cornwall 2008).