Making Space for Difference: The CARPP Approach to Action Research

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At the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP), action research is embodied in a distinctive way that is eclectic and varied yet thematically coherent and values-based. This paper offers an articulation of this approach, using an experimental presentational form that combines descriptive storied form with analytical exploration. This exploration describes CARPP Action Research as the creation of ‘different spaces’ in which the action researcher/facilitator seeks to create qualities of boundedness, safety and validity, working with participants through cycles of action and reflection. Practices to engender such qualities are described and it is proposed that these offer an ‘emancipatory potential’ that, when realised, enables participants to take action outwards to the social and institutional settings of which they are a part. Two illustrative stories of practice are given, one describing how an MSc student in CARPP established an inquiry group, the other describing an action research programme with managers. The stories show how some of the qualities and values of the Centre are enacted through detailed practice that is sensitive to context. Links to critical theory are offered, and some questions as to the enduring consequences of such practice are considered.

Key words: communicative space, reflective practice, collaborative action research, emancipation, stories