Relational and Existential Challenges of Practicing Dialogic Action Research – Working with Social Concrete Blocks in Organizations

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The article illustrates that there seems to be a fairly large distance between action research ideals of dialogue, democracy, participation, and involvement and the actual challenges we have met when practicing dialogic action research in hierarchical organizations where dialogue is always already embedded in organizational power relations. An overall purpose is to show that we are not only involved professionally as action researchers, but also challenged existentially as human beings when practicing dialogic action research. This has at least two consequences. One is about giving up knowing in advance. The other is about focusing on the quality of the relations with the participants, because this relationship seems to have critical impact on the quality of the results of dialogic action research projects.

The article presents some concepts developed in dialogic action research projects in Danish, private and public organizations such as AR dilemmas, self-referentiality, emergent mutual involvement and not knowing, social concrete blocks, and the arbitrary punctuator.

Key words: dialogue, action research, emergence, interpersonal relations, organizational conflicts