

6. Questions of Quality

If the purpose of this research is to use learning history at an institutional level in order to aid learning and change toward a more sustainable future then the quality of what I have done might surely be defined in terms of the simple criterion: has learning and change occurred in the field? This question is misleading in its simplicity however. This is action research, built on a systemic rather than a linear 'cause-effect' view of change.

Consequences, intended and unintended intertwine. What might support the learning of some participants might compromise my ethical responsibility to others. And as the last chapter showed, consequences are anyway difficult to assess. Action in the field has meaning sometimes when there is no evidence to confirm it. Nonetheless the field does offer up evidence if I can only know how to interpret it. In this chapter I consider questions of quality in relation to the overall purpose of creating learning and stimulating practical change through my work. Starting with a discussion of quality as it is described in the action research literature I will go on to derive a set of personal criteria that helped guide me in the conduct of my research and in my assessment of its quality. These build on the quality criteria of presentation that were introduced in Chapter 1 as congruence and elegance.

Quality in Action Research

Quality in action research is a difficult area to address because of the very nature of this type of research. Most quantitative and some qualitative social research sets out to create knowledge by following some version of the scientific model of experimentation. Field research is set up in relation to a question or hypothesis. From the data that is gathered new knowledge can be deduced/induced or inferred. Quality then can be defined in terms of how well the experiment is conducted. Criteria like 'rigor' and 'relevance' (Dodge, Ospina et al. 2005) or, for example the double hurdle of 'rigor' and 'scholarship' (Pettigrew 2001) can variously be applied to a piece of research to judge its quality.

However as Chapter 4 outlined, action research is an emergent process. There is no sense of research as a single controllable experiment. Rather it is an unfolding process, which the researcher must navigate, rather than control. And it is participative: the researcher is embedded in the field of research rather than distant from it. Value, learning and knowledge is sought as much for co-participants in the research as it is for the wider field of academic knowledge (Heron and Reason 2001).

The implications are that quality in research of this nature needs to be rethought entirely. And action research scholars have been doing this. Dawn Chandler and Bill Torbert have characterised the wider focus of action research in relation to standard research by setting out their 27 flavours (Chandler and Torbert 2003). They describe quality in action research as coming from how these flavours are differentiated and integrated. The 27 flavours come from looking across the dimensions of time, voice and practice in any research and the researchers stress particularly that the present-future orientation of action research is a dimension that is often absent in other forms of research.

We propose that quality in action research (and in all social science, once we understand action research as ubiquitous) increases: first, to the degree that the research clearly differentiates and integrates subjective (first-person), inter-subjective (second-person) and objective (third-person) voices; and second, to the degree that the research clearly differentiates and integrates past (t1), present (t2) and future (t3) temporal dimensions.

(Chandler and Torbert 2003 p.147)

This proposition links quality to scope and breadth in the research and it is helpful in acknowledging the multi-faceted nature of action research. I find it consoling as it helps me to make some sense out of the chaos I sometimes experience when I try to move between the different layers of inquiry in my work. So it helps me to locate my work. However I balk at working out validity criteria for each flavour as is suggested at the end of the flavours paper. The typology suggests to me instead the need for some guiding principles that might apply to all flavours.

Other action research scholars have been working to describe more holistic principles. After exploring the trend of the debate on quality and validity in qualitative research,

Peter Reason discusses the practical nature of action research and its relation to worthwhile purposes warning that it is neither simply about what works nor the pursuit of getting things right. There is a naturally improvised aspect to action research and unlike scientific research:

Our actions and our purposes are not discrete experiments but part of the emergent process of life

(Reason 2006 p.189)

This discussion leads to his conclusion that quality in action research will:

... rest internally on our ability to see the choices we are making and understand their consequences; and externally on whether we articulate our standpoint and the choices we have made transparently to a wider public

(Reason 2006 p.190)

This sentence can read a little flat to a researcher setting out and looking for well-defined quality criteria by which to guide her research plan. It did to me 3 years ago. And yet, reading it now, I find it positively scintillating! The greater has been that experience it seems, the more I can relate to it. Similarly, in a 2007 paper, Marshall and Reason helpfully build on the 2006 paper describing the 'attitude of inquiry' as the process that underlies the making of quality choices in action research (Marshall and Reason 2007). In this paper they tentatively suggest some of the characteristics that might be associated with such an attitude: curiosity, willingness to explore purposes, humility, participation and radical empiricism. They describe too the disciplines of an inquiring practice. Reading these characteristics and disciplines in 2009, I reflect that these too are alive with my experiences and conundrums. For example Marshall and Reason describe one characteristic of this attitude of inquiry as follows:

Radical empiricism acknowledges the paradox that the world we inhabit is largely created by our language and perspectives while at the same time being utterly unknowable.

(Marshall and Reason 2007 p.373)

This description articulates the tension I feel right now as I write when I attempt to understand the consequence of my actions whilst knowing I can never understand these

fully. And when I go on to read the disciplines of inquiring practice as set out in this paper that include: *developing capacities for multiple ways of knowing, enabling participation to generate high quality knowing* and so on, I catch myself reading and mentally ticking off: 'yep - I have several examples of that'. I do this of course with the further desired discipline: *'a sense of self-irony, playfulness and lack of ego-attachment!'* (p.374)

Yet had I set out at the start of the research to develop such disciplines I think that, as with the earlier statement on choice I would not have known how to start. So the criteria fall short as a starting guide for a practitioner. There are two possible reasons for this. Firstly it is possible that these kinds of criteria are oriented at assessment rather than guidance. They come from those in action research education who need to be able to find general ways to assess a piece of work that has taken place. This might then account for some of the retrospective feel to these criteria. For instance my 'curiosity' is something that can be externally assessed but it is not something I might easily acquire. This links to the second point which is that an 'attitude of inquiry' is not something that can be acquired like a skill in a vacuum. It is a discipline, a state of mind even, that can only be cultivated gradually through experience and in the context of a inquiry that has a particular set of aims and a particular set of procedures. The acquired discipline is in turn shaped by the context in which it is developed. Guidelines or quality criteria for inquiry can then only take on life when they are complemented with and, to an extent, tailored to a specific inquiry. This might account for them only making sense to me when I've done some action research. Quality then in action research seems to be personal and context dependent.

The literature can only point at principles and offer them tentatively as helpful and echoing this view ultimately Marshall and Reason caution that:

The criteria used to judge the quality of action research are in no sense absolute, rather they represent choices that action researchers must make – and then articulate – in the conduct of their work (Reason, 2006).

(Marshall and Reason 2007 p.370)

It dawns on me then that quality criteria in action research *have* to be personally defined. The researcher needs to fumble and grope her way toward these quality criteria while

simultaneously fumbling and groping her way with the procedures she adopts to meeting her continuously moving purposes. Torbert's writing on the four territories of experience is helpful here in linking research procedures and purposes to quality (Torbert 2001). He has conceptualised action inquiry as a bringing together of four territories of experience which break down as follows:

Visioning: The spiritual territory: exploration of one's intention or purpose in the world.

Strategising: The mental/emotional territory: planning to act in the world.

Performing: The embodied territory, acting in the world.

Assessing: The external territory: listening to the world.

The territories of experience are very helpful as they lay out a research procedure and in the 27 flavours paper, Chandler and Torbert remind us that the four territories of experience are another good way to assess quality:

However, engaging in a greater number of the 27 flavors of action research in a given project is not the only criterion of quality in action research. Critical to understanding research in the present and future times are the four territories of experience, from attentive visioning through assessment of effects in the outside world. At any given moment, vision, strategy, action and outcomes are either in or out of alignment. We propose that single-, double- and triple-loop feedback progressively give a person, team or wider organising process increasingly sophisticated capacities for quality action research that leads to increasingly frequent and immediate changes toward more timely action

(Chandler and Torbert 2003 p.147)

Here I understand quality to be conceptualised as an agility of practice. What Chandler and Torbert call 'timely action' relates to how well the researcher moves across the territories of experience and adjusts visions as she goes. The idea of inquiry as an ongoing practice of trying to align these territories catches for me the improvised and emergent nature of action research whilst allowing for the fruits of an endeavour to be sought through quality processes of inquiry. Experiments neither fail nor succeed. But quality comes from asking why they took place and what re-visioning might occur as a result of them. With this perspective quality comes through practice and might be achieved by an ongoing and personal cultivation of an 'attitude of inquiry' to support the

timely traversal of the territories of experience so that our changing visions and overall purposes can be met.

Finally, lest quality become an end in itself, it is Hilary Bradbury who helps me to relate quality back to the purposes of the research. Drawing on the pragmatic tradition, and writing specifically about learning history, she says that quality might be conferred if the learning history has led to actionable learning for those participating in it (Bradbury in (Roth and Bradbury 2008)). In other words has the process added value for them? Has it supported participation and partnership? Has it left them stronger when it was over? (Ibid p.360) These questions echo the simple statement of quality with which I started and will be reflected through the thesis in my reflections on enduring consequences.

In this section I have looked at quality in action research as it is described in the literature. By relating this to my experiences over the period of my research I have observed how these descriptions do not instruct for going forward so much as affirm in retrospect. There are no off the shelf answers as to how to 'do quality' though there are plenty of guidelines and maps to support the development of one's definitions and criteria. In the next section I will set out mine. Curiously many of these become clearer in retrospect suggesting that cultivating practices of quality starts with not knowing and leaping into experience. . I am happier to think about this paradox at the end of my action research project than at the start! But perhaps it explains why I have shuddered sometimes at the mention of quality these past three years.

Personal Quality Criteria

In this section I will propose a number of criteria that emerged as important for me to ensure quality in the action research I was conducting. These criteria have changed, been enriched and developed as the experience of the research has gone on. I have always been working to some version of them. Together they represent for me what is an important though nebulous idea of integrity that I have always had in mind whilst making critical choices. These criteria have already been implicitly illustrated in Chapter 2 when I reflected on how I scoped the field for projects to feature in the research.

Now I will explicitly introduce each criterion and relate it to the literature of the previous section. I will then draw from my description of the learning history workshop of the previous chapter to set out a simple illustration of each one.

Criterion 1: Quality as Watchfulness

The first criterion I identified was early in the research process and it related to Reason's general guidance – discussed in the previous section - that quality relies on the way we make choices, assess them, articulate them and react to their consequences. From this reading came a commitment to what I called transparency of choice. I wondered how might I cultivate an ability to see the choices I make? My personal explorations of decision-making processes (described in Chapter 3) left me under no illusion that many decisions I might make would be implicit or presumed.... *if I didn't watch out*. As I believed choice to be more tacit and less rationalised than perhaps commonly thought, transparency of choice demanded in turn a certain '*quality of watchfulness*'. This chimed with conclusions I'd reached at the end of my MSc when, after several cycles of trying to capture 'the best way' for me to do first-person inquiry, I threw my hands up and concluded that it would always vary but that overall it amounted to being watchful of what I was doing and why (Gearty 2006). At different times, the way of being watchful will vary, but the spirit of watchfulness is about staying awake to the choices that are being made and the feedback that is coming in from the system. This echoes with ideas from narrative inquiry that it is

Wakefulness that ...most needs to characterize the living out of our narrative inquiries

(Clandinin and Connelly 2000 p.186)

This criterion brings awareness to the discipline of “*engaging in, and explicat(ing) research as an emergent process*” (Marshall and Reason 2007 p.376). It relates too to Torbert’s ‘assessing’ territory of experience. As an action researcher I did not have the luxury of a consistent narrative for my research – I had to let it unfold and keep watch over what narratives were emerging. This quality might be summed up by the old adage to ‘expect the unexpected’. In both my inner and outer worlds, watchfulness was needed to help me to see past the screens of static expectation and so to be receptive to what the world might really be telling me.

An illustration

In early December 2007, Geoff and I sat in my study planning the workshop. We had a handful of sign-ups and no more. “There’s no point in designing this”, said Geoff, “if we’ve got nobody coming”. As we discussed what to do, I checked my mails and found a message from a contact announcing that five people from a nearby local authority would be attending. These included three officers and two elected politicians. Geoff and I cheered instantly. But then I remember saying – ‘wait – do we want so many from one local authority and do we want politicians?’. We went on to discuss this much more strategically and came to a decision as to how to reply. This was an example then of being watchful and trading off my desire to get anyone in the room, with the overarching vision of getting ‘the system’ in the room. I needed to be watchful to check that I was discerning between the two.

Criterion 2: Quality as Postheroic Narrative

Linked to the first criterion was a second that is in its way a special case of watchfulness. It has to do with how I articulated what I was doing to myself and to the field. Again, quite early in the process, I had a strong sense of wanting my research to achieve quality by having integrity. Though what this meant was as yet nebulous, I had some feel that integrity included holding on to some core purpose in the research and not getting completely sucked into what was happening during the emergent process that would undoubtedly unfold. I was particularly aware at this time of the dangers that might lie in getting wrapped up in my own heroic narrative. There would be a tendency surely to airbrush out some of the mess, to postrationalise it into a glowing success and in so doing compromise the integrity of the research. I called this criterion '**quality as postheroic narrative**'. Clearly it links to my search for congruence and the desire to keep faith with the ideas behind learning history that suggest a 'human' rather than a 'sanitised' account. But this criterion relates not just to how I give account of the research. It has also informed how I go about it. Reason and Marshall describe humility as a characteristic of importance in an inquiring researcher. Humility for them is about accepting:

the limits of our current knowing, recognizing that we do not understand or know how to do something

(Marshall and Reason 2007 p.372)

In my actions from moment to moment I have aspired to create a narrative that is postheroic. So I have tried to pay attention to how I am shaping my research story and what I am choosing not to include and why that might be. So I recognise that overall there is a sense of contingency about anything I might narrate. I am solidly with Bateson's view that what the conscious self might report will be an edited, partial view of the world to suit its own purposes (Bateson 1972). Such a view drives me into the arms of humility – it is a place I am actually quite comfortable. Holding an ironic position in relation to all my endeavours is a long-held personal habit. So the question for me is more how to take my endeavours seriously enough, to actually stand up for them as though they were really important whilst also staying distant from them. Early on in my research I posed a question that has been with me the whole way through:

How do I maintain dispassionate passion in my research?

This is about the nature of my humility perhaps. I have a style that can be irreverent; I use humour frequently to connect with people on a different level, to humanise an encounter but also because, quite simply, I enjoy laughing. It is like oxygen to me. The question for me is about keeping this *irreverence tender and timely* in what I do. In terms of quality as a postheroic narrative, the search is to 'keep it real' with the help of my dispassionate clown and my earnest and passionate achiever. Is this the dilemma of the posthero?

An Illustration

At the learning history workshop there was one participant who clearly did *not* enjoy being sat down and asked to read the learning history. He objected loudly at the end of the big read and wrote quite offensive comments in his workbook. This is a long story and one I ultimately chose not to include. When rendering my account of the learning history workshop in the last chapter I continually paused to check what it was I was not saying. Sometimes I made this pause explicit, checking for any reluctance and looking for balance. This kind of pause is a familiar practice to me in what I say and do. In my description of the workshop I tried to balance what worked and what didn't but I also wanted to make the balance representative. So in the end I took the story of the irritable learning history participant out. His reactions provoked me emotionally. There was drama in it too. But when I reflected on it I realised his behaviour and comments were not representative of the day. To dwell on them would have added dramatic content but would have skewed the story. It would have created an anti-hero. So it would have gone against my postheroic criterion that calls for balance and reasoned interpretation.

Criterion 3: Quality of Achieved Alignment

The third criterion relates particularly to Bradbury's pragmatic definition of quality as being actionable. It comes too from recognising that quality comes from the old-fashioned concept of hard work. I wanted to define a criterion that sits with the paradox that striving towards excellence and results is of great value even though achievement and outcomes are questionable aspirations.

Inasmuch as there are question marks over whatever account of the research I might give, equally there are question marks over any consequence I might want to ascribe to the actions I have taken. I do hold the view that these consequences are to a large extent unknowable. This is not only at one with the point made earlier – following Bateson - that my conscious mind will skew what it sees according to its purposes. It is also because of the systemic nature of action research where I am participating and embedded in an interconnected network of co-subjects. The meaning of individual agency is questionable in such a network. My actions insofar as they do have ramifications will be continuously translated in their meaning by my co-participants in the wider field. Therefore ascribing consequences to my actions at a systems level has little meaning. It seems grandiose of me to even discuss it. This is the paradox that is acknowledged by the earlier described quality of “radical empiricism” where we are exhorted, despite the inherent limitation of what can be known to nonetheless try to find things out: to iteratively seek “*confirmation and disconfirmation of sense-making and of positions held*” and to adjust these positions accordingly (Marshall and Reason 2007 p.373). So the unknowable nature of the consequences of many of our actions cannot be an excuse for ignoring those consequences altogether. I mentioned the achiever²² in me in passing at the end of Chapter 4 and this has particular relevance here. What consequences I can know, however limited they are, must I think be passionately pursued by my achiever and celebrated for what they are. This is the only way I can find

²² With the word achiever, I am reluctantly borrowing language from Bill Torbert and David Rooke's typology of Leadership most recently published in (Rooke and Torbert, 2005). They define 7 action logics through which Leaders might progress. The 'achiever' action logic refers to 4th stage. A person with this action logic succeeds in conventional terms. They perform well and get results. However the achiever is sometimes limited by not questioning the underlying frameworks that set the goals they achieve. Though I have disagreements with the hierarchical framework I find the language invades my thinking in a useful way!

to bring hard work and endeavour back into my action research and escape where I find myself most comfortable: sitting, reflecting and commentating on the fence. Saying 'Tant-pis'²³ every time things don't quite go right.

So I am gently trying to reintroduce the notion that striving for results has a place in conducting quality action research. Action research is naturally improvised and experimental. I am interested in finding a criterion that comments on the nature of these experiments: I want to look at their success in quite a bounded way (did they work?) and also more broadly (what learning has occurred as a result of them?).

The best way I have found to describe this - is in terms of Chinese whispers, Torbert's territories of experience and Bradbury's overarching pragmatic goal. Please bear with me! Imagine that, to reach Bradbury's pragmatic goal of actionable learning in the system I conduct action experiments. If each action experiment is understood as a path through Torbert's territories of experience from vision to feedback, then my strife comes from ultimately *wanting* an action experiment to 'work', to 'align' whilst not really minding if it doesn't. One congruent way of defining success - that still allows a system's view of cause and effect - might be when the territories of vision, strategy, actions and assessment reach some kind of alignment. When they do I want to stop awhile and celebrate it as a quality moment.

In the "assessing" territory the researcher listens to the world and tries to understand the feedback from it in relation to that which she originally set out to do (the vision). If the vision is a message passed into the system, then feedback in this case is akin to a Chinese whisper returned from a long line of whisperers. The whisper that returns is often a surprise. But sometimes, it might ring true. We can assess what returns in relation to its life in the system and the original vision. The quality criterion that results is **quality as achieved alignment**. It results from the attempt to line these territories up and a noticing when they do. This carries for me the responsibility to respond rather than just to reflect on the unexpected results of my experiments. It is putting a sense of purpose into my experiments and also gives me a guide for looking at how they are linking together in service of my declared purpose. It allows, however fleetingly,

²³ French for 'never mind'

moments of success to be savoured when the Chinese whisper that returns rings true to the message that was put in.

The criterion of achieved alignment is reaching out to words like outcomes and results that are associated with more traditional research. For me these still have a place, albeit a diminished one, in action research.

An Illustration

There was clearly striving involved in convening the learning history workshop. I set out a vision for an expanded workshop in July 2007 that supported my overall purposes of encouraging participative learning in the system. This vision became very consuming. In February 2008 it occurred and, the attendance numbers fed back from the assessing territory that my strategies for realising that part of the original vision had worked. I took the fact that 26 people did attend as concrete feedback that the process of convening and engaging the system had, on one level, been successful. So alignment of Torbert's four territories was achieved at this point, and this mattered to me.

On the other hand when I tried to use the learning history website to influence in the third-person domain it did not work in the way I envisaged. From the way people accessed the website I noticed that 'aligned achievement' was not being reached: or to put it more bluntly my experiment failed. Here I didn't continue striving to make it work. I altered my vision for the website being a site for third-person inquiry and I reflected on how this impacted on the overall vision for the research. This 'misaligned' experiment joins several other 'misaligned' experiments from which I am continuing to learn about the nature of online communities. The quality then comes I think from noticing the misalignment, learning from it and adjusting accordingly.

Criterion 4: Quality as Checkpoints and Evaluation

The previous criterion has proposed that quality has to do with setting off experiments that I want, in some way, to be successful. The fourth criterion has a lot to do with the practical implications of this aspiration. Starting out, I saw quality as being achieved not just by being 'watchful' to consequences but also by being quite pro-active in seeking feedback that would help me to evaluate my research. I put procedures in place to systematically seek feedback so that there would be a consistency, and therefore a quality, in how I was going about my work. Quite aside then from any data they might surface procedural checkpoints relate for me to this idea of integrity. They helped me to ensure that I was treating participants fairly and with consistency. And in Chapter 4 I described how I also hoped that checkpoints might sometimes aid further learning. So I sometimes called them 'reflection points'. Finally there is the data these checkpoints actually surface. This is also of value. Firstly it is consistent and comparable. It provides evidence as to the impact of the action experiment, be it the nature of the question being asked or the mere act of asking for feedback in this way. Secondly it increases the possibility of the 'unexpected'. Taking a procedural approach to gathering feedback leads to questions being asked when the energy the researcher or participants might feel for such questions has long ebbed. If it was not proceduralised then, it is unlikely one might ask. Speaking personally there is often a temptation to be lazy after a high-energy event, interview or exchange has taken place. It can be hard to muster up the energy to go back and ask about it. But often it is by asking from this low energy place that some interesting and unexpected feedback comes in. On the other hand one doesn't want to weigh the research down with unnecessary procedures. The tension between duty, consistency and procedure must be managed. And this is again a question of being aware of the choices one makes. Including this as a quality criterion is my nod at 'rigor' and scientific method in the action research frame. I called it '**quality as checkpoints and evaluation**'. As opportunistic as the 'watchfulness' of criterion 1 is, this criterion is systematic and procedural. It is a safety net. The use of procedure has a place in seeing through the action experiments that make up the research and in assessing just how successful they have been.

An illustration

I described in Chapter 5 how I decided not get formal feedback at the end of the workshop event opting instead to ask participants about any actionable learning for them three months later. This checkpoint was a more consistent test of enduring consequences but it yielded fewer responses. To evaluate participants' reactions to the workshop I taped short voxpops with seven of them on the day.

I think now it was a mistake not to get feedback at the end of the workshop. True, they may have been of limited value and I would have needed to be watchful not to over-value them or be seduced into a narrative of unequivocal 'success' by them. But they might have helped me see to some of what I didn't see about the event. They would have represented another kind of voice. This was the case with the workbooks I gathered at the workshop. They gave me an invaluable insight into the experience of 'the big read' for participants. 'Evaluation and Checkpoints' are important to proceduralise the research and avoid laziness. However the other quality criteria are vital in helping to guide how to place and process these checkpoints.

Criterion 5: Quality as Brave Consequence

Finally there is the idea of “quality as brave consequence”. Here the discussion on consequences comes together with the ethical aspects of the research. Conducting ethical research means being aware of its consequences for participants and responding accordingly. It connects particularly to questions about transparency of choice and the question of what it is ethical to articulate to the wider field. My early ideas about conducting research with integrity linked to ethics, but whereas ethics connoted ‘standards’ to me, integrity connoted ‘values’. I embarked on the research with the genuine belief that if I treated participants with the utmost respect and dignity, then I would naturally meet any standards that define what is an ethical piece of research. It presumed an attention at all times to the impact of what I was doing. This inversion of thinking was to make quite a difference later on in what transpired. For instance I ended up in an ethically tricky position by using people’s real names in the research. However the safer option of anonymising would, I felt lessen the integrity of the research. So this aspect of quality, I call “**quality of brave consequence**”, is driven by ideas of integrity rather than of caution. Consequence is continuously considered, but it is considered bravely rather than as a means of achieving a safe standard.

An illustration

My account of the learning history workshop describes how, in order to get it to work, I realised I actually needed to scale up my plans for that event. And at a certain point in July 2007 this felt daunting for me. I felt uninvited and small in relation to the field I was trying to influence. So building resolve and undertaking to make that bigger event happen was I think an example of ‘quality as brave consequence’. Though what is brave is only defined in relation to my own demons and perceptions of what feels risky. It is a personal definition. I asked in the last chapter might I have been braver? Perhaps. The bravery I required for an event of 26 was probably similar to that required for 100. However the energy and support required would not have been the same. So matching ambitions, bravery and energy is important. ‘Brave consequence’ feels binary to me – I am either being brave or I’m not. With the workshop I went ‘fearwards’²⁴. Other criteria

²⁴ A term Geoff Mead has used in session when encouraging us in supervision with the writing. He attributes the term to the writer Barbara Turner.

can then be used to judge how well my fearwards move served the purposes of the research.

Summary

This then is a fair statement of where I have got to in my thinking about the criteria of quality that have guided my action research and that I have been using to assess it. I have reflected that, paradoxically, quality in action research is emergent and personal. It can only start to come to light once the researcher gets going. And it can only be personally defined and continually refined in the context of the inquiry in which one is engaged. I have set out five criteria of quality that seem important at the point of writing.

I will continue to refer to these criteria, implicitly or explicitly, as I write though I will not return to assess the research overall in relation to them. Such a move to 'telling' you the research has quality would be inappropriate I feel. It would overly solidify the criteria and it would exclude the reader from deciding for him/herself as to where this work exhibits quality. My hope instead is that through the accounts in this dissertation I am 'showing' quality as it has been described above.

This chapter concludes the delineation of the field of inquiry and practice. In the next part of the thesis I will move to reflect in more detail on aspects of the practice within that field. I will start with a chapter that relates directly to integrity and the criteria discussed in this chapter. It is a chapter that looks in more detail at the practice of being a responsible learning historian.

