

Gateway of Experience
The Merton Learning History

Introducing Merton

Setting up the Read

A lot of what is discussed in this thesis centres on the creation of a set of learning histories and the subsequent work with them. To ground that discussion I want to first invite you into the experience of learning history by reading one.

Research participants have been invited to read a learning history in a way that allows them to construct their own meanings and learnings from it. They are encouraged particularly to respond on their own terms to the history and so to read it as a 'writerly' text. To support this invitation I have written 'Active Reader Guidelines'. Before starting you may wish to refer to the guidelines that were passed to participants at the learning history workshop. You will find them in Appendix A.

The Merton Rule is the history I am introducing here. It is the first one that was written and is presented unpolished to you. As a story it is the most engaging and accessible for readers outside local government. Note that it has been written for that audience.

Though stylistically it is the least developed history, it is also the one that has been most worked with different participants. The aesthetic of the history artefact is important as I will discuss later. Because of this I have included here the exact booklet form with which participants have also worked. A copy of this is also on the enclosed disc.

Reading Merton

Now take out the Merton learning history booklet or if accessing the electronic version open the Merton learning history file. Maybe flick through it taking in the key (p.7), the table of themes at the back (p.39) and the perspective adding section (p.33). An active read of act 1 (p.9-20) is a necessary experience for what is to come. It is important to get a sense of the content of act 2 (p.22-41), though a lighter read will suffice.

Reflecting on the Read

Your response

You have now experienced the Merton learning history in much the way as other participants in the research have. After the read, participants have sometimes been asked to fill out worksheets of their reactions and responses. You may wish to look at a sample worksheet in Appendix B and take a moment to note some of your responses.

Others' responses

On page 33 of the Merton learning history you may have read how this document has been taken to diverse audiences and how the responses varied within audiences as well as across them. Individual readers were often asked to fill out the worksheets or were debriefed in conversation. At the learning history workshop, where institutional actors came together, readers of Merton (six in all) recorded their own responses first in workbooks that were summarized and can be read on the learning history website.⁴ Then collectively they put their responses on a poster shown in Figure 5 on the next page. More will be said about that process later. For now I want to point to the diversity of feelings, interest and questions that can be evoked by reading a learning history.

From here I will move into the field of inquiry and action. The context of the research will be set out and then the chapters that follow will go into the questions raised by the research and some of which are illustrated already in the Merton learning history.

⁴ You can read a summary of the individual workbook responses to Merton on the learning history website http://academicmum.typepad.com/lcw_learning_history_inno/learning_history_merton_rule/index.html

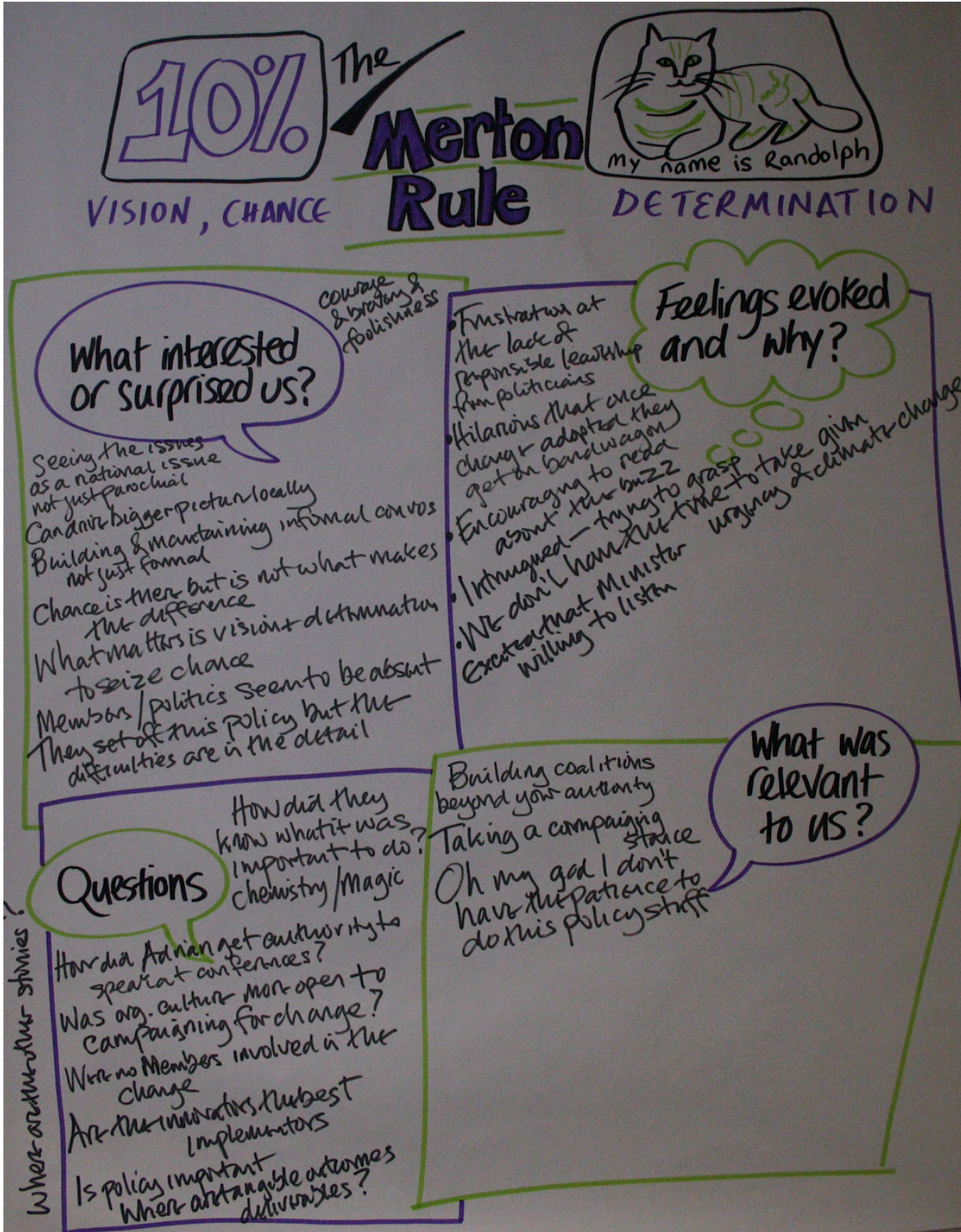


Figure 5: One response to Merton: workshop response poster (Feb 2008)