Chapter 15
Case Study Method and Research Design:
Flexibility or Availability for the Novice Researcher?

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ABSTRACT
Case study is prominent in qualitative research literature, yet the methodologists do not have a full consensus on whether it is an approach, a method, a methodology, or a design. Perhaps this flexibility contributes to ambiguity for the burgeoning researcher. The works of prominent methodologists, namely Robert Yin, Sharan Merriam, and Robert Stake, are explored as an attempt to define case study and then explain how it can be utilized as a ‘road map’ for engaging case study to investigate current practices in inclusivity and wellbeing. The author serves as a provocateur and explores the question: “How do you surface deep knowledge in your interview participants?” This chapter contributes knowledge to the field of research, specifically methodological information for the novice researcher considering using case study as a research method. Dually, this chapter brings into focus examples of case study method applied to explore inclusion and wellbeing.

INTRODUCTION
Case study research can be viewed as complex to grasp for the beginning researcher as there is a plethora of literature exploring case study as a method in social inquiry (Stake, 1978), case study as a methodology (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995), case study design (Yin, 2003); and case study as an approach (Maton & Salem 1995; Yazan, 2015). Research methodologists as yet, do not have accord on the design and implementation of case study (Yazan, 2015). This raises the question of what exactly is case study. According to Thomas (2011) case study is a common approach with qualitative researchers as it offers

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methodological flexibility allowing for the utilization of different paradigmatic positions. Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift (2014) suggest it also offers research design, and methods flexibility.

This chapter begins by exploring what case study is and when it should be used. The research design framework is then presented and the five components of the research design are explored: goals; conceptual framework; research questions; method; and validity. The process of theory development, the writing up of theory, and theory reflection are then explained and supported with from studies into inclusion and wellbeing. The significant and limitations of utilizing case study are then unpacked. The chapter concludes with a summary of the purpose of utilising case study together with An Interactive Research Design (Maxwell 2009).

BACKGROUND

This chapter explores three research problems: what is case study?; how does it link to research design?; and when and why should be used? It is structured according to the thinking process that the author engaged in when trying to make sense of case study and considering the complexity of context where mainstream schools were exploring meaningful engagement with students with disabilities, learning difficulties and special needs. The literature used terms like method and methodology interchangeably so trying to obtain conceptual clarity involved a great deal of reading and reflection. This meant battling with questions like: what exactly is case study? What data collection and analysis methods are used? How do I actually do a case study? To use an analogy, a road map was needed in order to navigate to the destination. That road map was needed, for making sense of and doing case study, and was An Interactive Model of Research Design (Maxwell, 2009) which provided the basis for understanding all of connections that shaped this case study research. It is this journey into knowing that the author wishes to share in this chapter.

WHAT IS CASE STUDY

The literature on case study at times appears confusing. The first step in utilising case study was a journey into knowing and understanding that there are different trains of thought about case study. In exploring these different trains of thought there was a need to consider which one best linked to my educational field of study and my philosophical orientation. Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest there are only two forms of case study: one put forward by Stake (1995) and the other by Yin (2003, 2006). Further to this Yazan (2015) suggests an additional approach used by Merriam (1998). The approach that each theorist takes in outlining case study is underpinned by a particular philosophical stance and the novice researcher needs to firstly understand which philosophical orientation best suits their own study.

Interpretivism and positivism are two approaches to research methods in sociology. Cavaye (1996) suggests that they can be present simultaneously while Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) suggest that constructivist and interpretivists (sometimes termed as qualitative purists) reject positivism. Stake (1995) sees case study research as underpinned by a viewpoint that “knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (p. 99). This approach “recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but it does not reject outright some notion of objectivity” and is interpretive (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p. 10). In general terms constructivism is built upon the notion of a social construction of reality.
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