Case Study Research: In-Depth Understanding in Context

Helen Simons

The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2 ed.)
Edited by Patricia Leavy

Print Publication Date: Nov 2020 Subject: Psychology Online Publication Date: Sep 2020
DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.013.29

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter explores case study as a major approach to research and evaluation. After first noting various contexts in which case studies are commonly used, the chapter focuses on case study research directly. Strengths and potential problematic issues are outlined, followed by key phases of the process. The chapter emphasizes how important it is to design the case, to collect and interpret data in ways that highlight the qualitative, to have an ethical practice that values multiple perspectives and political interests, and to report creatively to facilitate use in policymaking and practice. Finally, the chapter explores how to generalize from the single case. Concluding issues center on the need to think more imaginatively about design and the range of methods and forms of reporting required to persuade audiences to value qualitative ways of knowing in case study research.

Keywords: case study, singular, contexts, interpretation, qualitative, generalization, particularization, artistic, creative methods, ethical

Introduction

THIS chapter explores case study as a major approach to research and evaluation using primarily qualitative methods, as well as documentary sources, contemporaneous or historical. However, this is not the only way in which case study can be conceived. No one has a monopoly on the term. While sharing a focus on the singular in a particular context, case study has a wide variety of uses, not all associated with research. A case study, in common parlance, documents a particular situation or event in detail in a specific sociopolitical context. The particular can be a person, a classroom, an institution, a program, or a policy. In the sections that follow, I identify different ways in which case study is used before focusing directly on qualitative case study research. However, first I wish to indicate how I came to advocate and practice this form of research. Origins, context, and opportunity often shape the research processes we endorse. It is helpful for the reader, I think, to know how I came to the perspective I hold.

The Beginnings

I first came to appreciate and enjoy the virtues of case study research when I entered the field of curriculum evaluation and research in the 1970s. The dominant research paradigm for educational research at that time was experimental or quasi-experimental, cost–benefit, or systems analysis, and the dominant curriculum model was aims and objectives (House, 1993). The field was dominated, in effect, by a psychometric view of research in which quantitative methods were preeminent. But the innovative projects we were asked to (p. 678) evaluate (predominantly, but not exclusively, in the humanities) were not amenable to such methodologies. The projects were challenging to the status quo of institutions, involved people interpreting the policy and programs, were implemented differently in different contexts and regions, and had many unexpected effects.

We had no choice but to seek other ways to evaluate these complex programs, and case study was the methodology we found ourselves exploring to understand how the projects were being implemented, why they had positive effects in some regions of the country and not others, and what the outcomes meant in different sociopolitical and cultural contexts. What better way to do this than to talk with people to see how they interpreted the "new" curriculum; to watch how teachers and students put it into practice; to document transactions, outcomes, and unexpected consequences; and to interpret all in the specific context of the case (Simons, 1971, 1987, ch. 3). From this point on and in further studies, case study in educational research and evaluation came to be a major methodology for understanding complex educational and social programs. It also extended to other practice professions, such as nursing, health, and social care (Greenhalgh & Worrall, 1997; Shaw & Gould, 2001; Zucker, 2001). (For further details of the evolution of the case study approach and qualitative methodologies in evaluation, see Greene, 2000; House, 1993, pp. 2–3; Simons, 2009, pp. 14–18).

This was not exactly the beginning of case study, of course. It has a long history in many disciplines (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2004; Platt, 2007; Ragin, 1992; Simons, 1980), many aspects of which form part of case study practice to this day. But its evolution in the context just described was a major move in the contemporary evolution of the logic of evaluative inquiry (House, 1980). It also coincided with movement toward the qualitative in other disciplines, such as sociology and psychology. This was all part of what Denzin & Lincoln (1994) termed "a quiet methodological revolution" (p. ix) in qualitative inquiry that had been evolving over the past two decades.

There is a further reason why I continue to advocate and practice case study research and evaluation to this day, and that is my personal predilection for trying to understand and represent complexity, for puzzling through the ambiguities that exist in many contexts and programs, and for presenting and negotiating different values and interests in fair and just ways.

Put more simply, I like interacting with people, listening to their stories, trials and tribulations—giving them a voice in understanding the contexts and projects with which they are involved and finding ways to share these with a range of audiences. In other words, the move toward case study methodology suited my preference for how I learn—through observation of people, events and social interaction in particular sociopolitical contexts.

Concepts and Purposes of Case Study

Before exploring case study as it has come to be established in educational research and evaluation since the mid-sixties I wish to acknowledge other uses of case study. More often than not, these relate to purpose, and appropriately so in their different contexts, but many do not have a research intention. For a study to count as research, it would need to be a systematic investigation generating evidence that leads to "new" knowledge that is made (p. 679) public and open to scrutiny. There are many ways to conduct research stemming from different traditions and disciplines, but they all, in different ways, involve these characteristics.

Everyday Usage: Stories We Tell

The most familiar of these uses of case study is the everyday reference to a person, an anecdote or story illustrative of a particular incident, event, or experience of that person. It is often a short, reported account seen commonly in journalism but also in books exploring a phenomenon, such as recovery from serious accidents or tragedies where the author chooses to illustrate the story or argument with a "lived" example. The story is sometimes written by the author and sometimes by the person whose tale it is. "Let me share with you a story" is a phrase frequently heard.

The spirit behind this everyday usage and its power to connect can be seen in a report by Tim Adams of the London Olympics opening ceremony's dramatization by Danny Boyle.

> It was the point when we suddenly collectively wised up to the idea that what we are about to receive over the next two weeks was not only about "legacy collateral" and "targeted deliverables," not about G4S failings and traffic lanes and branding opportunities, but about the second-by-second possibilities of human endeavour and spirit and communality, enacted in multiple places and all at the same time. Stories in other words
>
> (Adams, 2012).

This was a collective story, of course, not an individual one, but it does convey some of the major characteristics of case study—that richness of detail, time, place, multiple happenings, and experiences—that are also manifest in case study research, although carefully evidenced in the latter instance. We can see from this common usage how people have come to associate case study with story. I return to this thread in the reporting section.

Individual Cases in the Professions

In professional settings, in health and social care, case studies, often called *case histories*, are used to accurately record a person's health or social care history and his or her current symptoms, experience, and treatment. These case histories include facts, as well as judgments and observations about the person's reaction to situations or medication. Usually they are confidential. Not dissimilar is the detailed documentation of a case in law, often termed a *case precedent* when referred to in a court case to support an argument being made. However, in law there is a difference in that such case precedents are publicly documented, whereas in health and social care, confidentiality of the client is the prime concern.

Case Studies in Teaching

Exemplars of Practice

In education, but also in health and social care training contexts, case studies have long been used as exemplars of practice. These are brief descriptions with some detail of a person or project's experience in an area of practice. Though frequently reported accounts, they are based on a person's experience and sometimes on previous research.

(p. 680) Case Scenarios

Management studies are a further context in which case studies are often used. Here the case is more like a scenario outlining a particular problem situation for the management student to resolve. These scenarios may be based on research, but frequently are hypothetical situations used to raise issues for discussion and resolution. What distinguishes these case scenarios and the case exemplars in education from case study research is the intention to use them for teaching purposes.

Country Case Studies

Then there are case studies of programs, projects, and even countries, as in international development, where a whole-country study might be termed a case study or, in the context of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, which examines the state of the art of a subject, such as education or environmental science in one or several countries. This may be a contemporaneous study and/or what transpired in a program over a period of time. Such studies often do have a research base, but frequently are reported accounts that do not detail the design, methodology, and analysis of the case as a research case study would do. Nor do they report in ways that give readers a vicarious experience, through observations, incidents, and voices of participants, of what it is like to live in the particular context of the case. Such case studies tend to be more knowledge and information focused than experiential.

Case Study as History

Closer to a research context is case study as history—what transpired at a certain time in a certain place. This is likely to be supported by documentary evidence but not primary data, unless it is an oral history (see Leavy, 2011, for the evolution and practice of oral history as a research method). In education, in the late 1970s, Stenhouse (1978) experimented with a case study archive. Using contemporaneous data gathering, primarily through interviewing, he envisaged this database, which he termed a *case record*, forming an archive from which different individuals, at some later date, could write a *case study*. This approach uses case study as a documentary source to begin to generate a history of education, as indicated in the subtitle of Stenhouse's 1978 paper, "Towards a Contemporary History of Education."

Case Study Research

From here on, my focus is on case study research per se, adopting for this purpose the following definition: "Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution or system in a "real-life" context. It is research based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led" (Simons, 2009, p. 21). For further related definitions of case study, see Stake (1995), Merriam (1988), and Chadderton and Torrance (2011). For definitions from a slightly different perspective, see Yin (2004) and Thomas (2016, p. 23).

Not Defined by Method or Perspective

The inclusion of different methods in the definition quoted above signals that case study research is not defined by methodology or method. What defines case study is its singularity and the concept and boundary of the case. It is theoretically possible to conduct a case study using primarily quantitative data if this is the best way of providing evidence to inform the issues the case is exploring. This may not happen often, and only perhaps in some disciplines like medicine, although even in that context, there is increasing recognition, particularly in clinical settings, that client-centered and context studies are important for diagnosis and treatment (Greenhalgh & Worrall, 1997). It is equally possible to conduct case study that is mainly qualitative, to engage people with the experience of the case or to provide a rich portrayal of a person (MacDonald, 1977) or an event, project, or program. While the focus of the case is usually a project, program, or policy, within the case there can be portrayals of individuals who are key actors. These are what I term *case profiles*. In some instances, these profiles, or even shorter cameos of individuals, may be quite prominent. For it is through the perceptions, interpretations, and interactions of people that we learn how policies and programs are enacted (Kushner, 2000, p. 12). The program is still the main focus of analysis in such cases, but, in exploring how individuals play out their different roles in the program, we get closer to the actual experience and meaning of the program in practice.

In the past three decades the literature and associated courses and conferences on mixed methods in educational and social research has proliferated (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989); (Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003). This development, which first became evident in the eighties, evolved partly to overcome the partisan focus of either quantitative or qualitative research, but it also provides a perspective from different methodologies that may add to understanding of the case and increases the options for learning from different ways of knowing. Mixed methods methodology is sometimes preferred by stakeholders who believe it provides a firmer basis for informing policy. This is not necessarily the case, but is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore. Case study research has always been open to the inclusion of different methods because what is paramount in case research is understanding the complexity and uniqueness of the case, and a variety of methods offer different angles to comprehending this complexity and uniqueness. For further discussion of the complexities of mixing methods and the virtue of using qualitative methods and case study in a mixed methods design, see Greene (2007). The focus for the remainder of this chapter will be on the qualitative dimension of case study research.

Case study research may also be conducted from different standpoints—realist, interpretivist, or constructivist, for example. My perspective falls within a constructivist, interpretivist framework. What interests me is how I and those in the case perceive and interpret what we find and how we construct or co-construct understandings of the case. This suits not only my predilection for how I see the world, but also my preferred phenomenological approach to interviewing and curiosity about people and how they act in social and professional life.

(p. 682) Qualitative Case Study Research

Qualitative case study research shares many characteristics with other forms of qualitative research, such as narrative, oral history, life history, ethnography, in-depth interview and observational studies that utilize qualitative methods. However, its focus, purpose, and origins, in educational research and evaluation at least, are a little different. The focus is clearly the study of the singular. The purpose is to portray an in-depth view of the quality and complexity of social/educational programs or policies as they are implemented in specific sociopolitical contexts. What makes it qualitative is its emphasis on subjective ways of knowing, particularly the experiential, practical, and presentational rather than the propositional (Heron, 1992, 1999) to comprehend and communicate what transpired in the case.

Characteristic Features and Advantages

Case study research is not method dependent, as noted earlier, nor is it constrained by resources or time. Although it can be conducted over several years, which provides an opportunity to explore the process of change and explain how and why things happened, it can equally be carried out contemporaneously in a few days, weeks, or months. This flexibility is extremely useful in many contexts, particularly when a change in policy or unforeseen issues in the field require modifying the design.

Flexibility extends to reporting. The case can be written up in different lengths and forms to meet different audience needs and to maximize use (see the section on reporting). Using the natural language of participants and familiar methods (like interview, observation and oral history) also enables participants to engage in the research process, thereby contributing significantly to the generation of knowledge of the case. As I have indicated elsewhere (Simons, 2009), “This is both a political and epistemological point. It signals a potential shift in the power base of who controls knowledge and recognizes the importance of co-constructing perceived reality through the relationships and joint understandings we create in the field” (p. 23).

Possible Disadvantages

If one is an advocate, identifying advantages of a research approach is easier than pointing out its disadvantages, something detractors are quite keen to do anyway! But no approach is perfect, and here are some of the issues that often trouble people about case study research. The sample of one is an obvious issue that worries those convinced that only large samples can constitute valid research, especially if it is to inform policy. Understanding complexity in depth may not be a sufficient counterargument, and I suspect there is little point in trying to persuade otherwise. For frequently this perception is one of epistemological and methodological, if not ideological, preference.

However, there are some genuine concerns that many case researchers face: the difficulty of processing a mass of data; of “telling the truth” in contexts where people may be identifiable; personal involvement, when the researcher is the main instrument of data gathering; and writing reports that are data based, yet readable in style and length. But one issue that concerns advocates and nonadvocates alike is how inferences are drawn from the single case.

(p. 683) Answers to some of these issues are covered in the sections that follow. Whether they convince may again be a question of preference. However, it is worth noting here that I do not think we should seek to justify these concerns in terms identified by other methodologies. Many are intrinsic to the nature and *strength* of qualitative case study research.

Subjectivity, for instance, both of participants and of the researcher, is inevitable, as it is in many other qualitative methodologies. This is often the basis on which we act. Rather than seeing this as bias or something to counter, it is an intelligence that is essential to understanding and interpreting the experience of participants and stakeholders. Such subjectivity needs to be disciplined, of course, through procedures that examine the validity of individuals’ representations of “their truth” and demonstrate how the researcher took a reflexive approach to monitoring how his or her own values and predilections may have unduly influenced the data.

Types of Case Study

There are numerous types of case study, too many to categorize, I think, as there are overlaps between them. However, attempts have been made to do so and, for those who value typologies, I refer them to Bassey (1999) and, for a more extended typology, to Thomas (2011). A slightly different approach is taken by Gomm et al. (2004): noting, in an annotated bibliography, the different emphases in major texts on case study. What I prefer to do here is to highlight a few familiar types to focus the discussion that follows on the practice of case study research.

Stake (1995) offered a threefold distinction that is helpful when it comes to practice, he says, because it influences the methods we choose to gather data (p. 4). He distinguishes between an *intrinsic case study*, one that is studied to learn about the particular case itself, and an *instrumental case study*, in which we choose a case to gain insight into a particular issue (i.e., the case is instrumental to understanding something else; p. 3). The *collective case study* is what its name suggests: an extension of the instrumental to several cases.

Theory-led or *theory-generated case study* is similarly self-explanatory, the first starting from a specific theory that is tested through the case and the second constructing a theory through interpretation of data generated in the case. In other words, one ends rather than begins with a theory. In qualitative case study research, this is the more familiar route. The theory of the case becomes the argument or story you will tell.

Evaluation case study has three essential elements. Its purpose is to determine the *value* of a particular project, program or policy, to include and balance different interests and perspectives and to report findings to a range of stakeholders in ways that they can use. It is a social, political and ethical practice. It needs to be responsive to issues or questions identified by stakeholders, including those who commission evaluations, who often have different perspectives of the program and different interests in the expected outcomes. The task of the evaluator in such situations becomes one of negotiating and representing all interests and values in the program fairly and justly. This is an inherently political process and requires an ethical practice that offers participants some protection over the personal data they give as part of the research and agreed audiences access to the findings presented in ways they can understand. The ethical protocols that have evolved to support this process are outlined in the section on ethics.

(p. 684) Designing Case Study Research

Design issues in case study sometimes take second place to those of data gathering, the more exciting task, perhaps, in beginning research. However, it is critical to consider the design at the outset, even if changes are required in practice due to the reality of what is encountered in the field. In this sense, the design of case study is emergent, rather than preordinate (predetermined in advance), shaped and reshaped as understanding of the significance of foreshadowed issues emerges and other, perhaps more pertinent issues are discovered.

Before entering the field, there are a myriad of planning issues to think about related to stakeholders, participants, and audiences. These include whose values matter, whether to engage these groups in data gathering and interpretation, the style of reporting appropriate for each, and the ethical guidelines that will underpin data collection and reporting. However, here I emphasize only three: the broad focus of the study, what the case is a case of, and framing questions/issues. These steps are often ignored in an enthusiasm to gather data, resulting in a case study that claims to be research but lacks the basic principles required for generation of valid, public knowledge.

Conceptualize the Topic

First, it is important that the topic of the research is conceptualized in a way that it can be researched (i.e., it is not too wide). This seems an obvious point to make, but failure to think through precisely what it is about your research topic you wish to investigate will have a knock-on effect on the framing of the case, data gathering and interpretation and may lead, in some instances, to not gathering or analyzing data that actually inform the topic. Further conceptualization or reconceptualization may be necessary as the study proceeds, but it is critical to have a clear focus at the outset.

What Constitutes the Case

Second, it is important to decide what would constitute the case (i.e., what it is a case of) and where the boundaries lie. This often proves more difficult than first appears. And sometimes, partly because of the semifluid nature of the way the case evolves, it is only possible to finally establish what the case is a case of at the end. Nevertheless, it is useful to identify what the case and its boundaries are at the outset to help focus data collection while maintaining an awareness that they may shift. This is emergent design in action.

In deciding the boundary of the case, there are several factors to bear in mind. Is it bounded by an institution or a unit within an institution, by people within an institution, by region, or by project, program, or policy? If we take a school as an example, the case could be composed of the principal, teachers and students, or the boundary could be extended to the cleaners, the caretaker, or the receptionist, people who often know a great deal about the subnorms and culture of the institution.

If the case is a policy or particular parameter of a policy, the considerations may be slightly different. People will still be paramount—those who generated the policy and (p. 685) those who implemented it—but there is likely also to be a political culture surrounding the policy that had an influence on the way the policy evolved. Would this be part of the case? In evaluation case study it invariably would, because it is difficult to fully comprehend how a policy is interpreted and implemented without an understanding of the values and intentions behind the setting up of the policy in the first place.

Whatever boundary is chosen, it may change in the course of conducting the study when issues arise that can only be understood by going to another level. What transpires in a classroom, for example, if a classroom is the case, is often partly dependent on the support of the school leadership and culture of the institution and this, in turn, to some extent is dependent on what resources are allocated from the local education administration. Much like a series of Russian dolls, one context inside the other.

Unit of analysis

Thinking about what would constitute the unit of analysis—a classroom, an institution, a program, a region—may help in setting the boundaries of the case, and it will certainly facilitate analysis. But this is a slightly different issue from deciding what the case is a case of. Taking a health example, the case may be palliative care support, but the unit of analysis the palliative care ward. The focus would be directly on how palliative care was managed in the context of a *particular* ward or wards and the understanding this generated for palliative care support in general. Here, as in the school example, you would need to consider which of the many people who populate the ward form part of the case—is it the nurses, interns, or doctors only, or does it extend to patients, cleaners, nurse aides, and medical students? If you took palliative care support as the unit of analysis, you would be less concerned about the specific details of the ward. Your focus would be more on the broader policy, key strategies, and units supporting palliative care, as well as the perspective of key actors in the process and how they delivered such care.

Framing Questions and Issues

The third most important consideration is how to frame the study, and you are likely to do this once you have selected the site or sites for study. There are at least four approaches: specific research or evaluative questions, foreshadowed issues (Smith & Pohland, 1974), theoretical framework, or a program logic. To some extent, your choice will be dictated by the type of case you have chosen, as well as by your personal preference for how to conduct it—in either a structured or an open way.

Initial questions give structure; foreshadowed issues give more freedom to explore. In qualitative case study, foreshadowed issues are more common, allowing scope for issues to change as the study evolves, guided by participants' perspectives and events in the field. With this perspective, it is more likely that you will generate a theory of the case toward the end, through your interpretation and analysis, rather than start with a preexisting theoretical framework. See Thomas (2016, ch. 11) for an exploration of different ways to generate theory in and of your case.

If you are conducting an *instrumental case study*, staying close to the questions or foreshadowed issues is necessary to be sure you gain data that will illuminate the central focus (p. 686) of the study. This is critical if you are exploring issues across several cases, although it is possible also to do a cross-case analysis from cases that have each followed a different route to discovering significant issues.

Opting to start with a theoretical framework provides a basis for formulating questions or identifying issues, but it can also constrain the study to only those questions/issues that fit the framework. The same is true with using program logic to frame the case. This approach is frequently adopted in evaluation case study, where the evaluator, individually or with stakeholders, examines how the aims and objectives of the program relate to the activities designed to promote it and the outcomes and impacts expected. It provides direction and is useful for engaging stakeholders in thinking through the assumptions underlying any theory of change they propose. However, it can lead to simply confirming what was anticipated, rather than documenting what transpired in the case (see Rogers, 2017; and Funnell & Rogers, 2011, for helpful accounts of the potential and pitfalls of adopting a logic model as a framework).

Whichever approach you choose to frame the case, it is useful to think about the rationale or theory for each question or aspect of the framing and what methods would best enable you to gain an understanding of them. This will not only start a reflexive process of examining your choices—an important aspect of the process of data gathering and interpretation—but also aid analysis and interpretation further down the track.

Methodology and Methods

Qualitative case study research, as already noted, appeals to subjective ways of knowing and to a primarily qualitative methodology that captures experiential understanding (Stake, 2010, pp. 56–70). It follows that the main methods of data gathering to access this way of knowing will be qualitative. Interviewing, observation, and document analysis are the primary three, often supported by critical incidents, focus groups, cameos, vignettes, diaries/journals, and photographs. Before gathering any primary data, however, it is useful to search relevant existing sources (written or visual) to learn about the antecedents and context of a project, program, or policy as a backdrop to the case. This can sharpen framing questions, avoid unnecessary data gathering, and shorten the time needed in the field.

Given that there are excellent texts on qualitative methods (see, for example, Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Seale, 1999; Silverman, 2000, 2004; Stake, 2010), I will not discuss all potential relevant methods here, but simply focus on the *qualities* of the primary methods that are particularly appropriate for case study research.

Primary Qualitative Data Gathering Methods

Interviewing

The most effective style of interviewing in qualitative case study research is the unstructured interview, in which active listening and open questioning are paramount, whatever prequestions or foreshadowed issues have been identified. Specific advantages of this approach to gaining in-depth data are the opportunity to document multiple perspectives and (p. 687) experiences and establish which issues are most significant in the case—an important step in refining the emergent design. This form of interviewing can include photographs—a useful starting point with certain cultural groups and the less articulate, to encourage them to tell their story through connecting or identifying with something in the image. The flexibility of unstructured interviewing has three further advantages for understanding participants' experiences. First, through questioning, probing, listening, and, above all, paying attention to the silences and what they mean, you can get closer to the meaning of participants' experiences. It is not always what they say. For thoughtful observations of the meaning of silences in qualitative research, see Mazzei (2003, 2007).Second, unstructured interviewing is useful for engaging participants in the process of research. Instead of starting with questions and issues, invite participants to tell their stories or reflect on specific issues, to conduct their own self-evaluative interview, in fact. Not only will they contribute their particular perspective to the case, they will also learn about themselves, thereby making the process of research educative for them as well as for audiences of the research. Third, the open-endedness of this style of interviewing has the potential for creating a dialogue between participants and the researcher and between the researcher and the public, if enough of the dialogue is retained in the publication (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985).

Observations

Observations in case study research are likely to be close-up descriptions of events, activities, and incidents that detail what happens in a particular context. These will record time, place, specific incidents, transactions, dialogue, and note characteristics of the setting and of people within it without preconceived categories or judgment. No description is devoid of some judgment in selection, but, on the whole, the intent is to describe the scene or event as it is, providing a rich, textured description to give readers a sense of what it was like to be there or provide a basis for later interpretation.

Take the following excerpt from a study of the West Bromwich Operatic Society. It is the first night of a new production, *The Producers*, by this amateur operatic society. This brief excerpt is from a much longer observation of the overture to the first evening's performance, detailing exactly what the production is, where it is, and why there is such a tremendous sense of atmosphere and expectation surrounding the event. Space prevents including the whole observation, but I hope you can get a glimmer of the passion and excitement that precedes the performance:

> Birmingham, late November, 2011, early evening.… Bars and restaurants spruce up for the evening's trade. There is a chill in the air but the party season is just starting …
>
> A few hundred yards away, past streaming traffic on Suffolk Street, Queensway, an audience is gathering at the New Alexandra Theatre. The foyer windows shine in the orange sodium night. Above each one is the rubric: WORLD CLASS THEATRE.

> Inside the preparatory rituals are being observed; sweets chosen, interval drinks ordered and programmes bought. People swap news and titbits about the production …
>
> The bubble of anticipation grows as the 5-minute warning sounds. People make their way to the auditorium.
>
> There have been so many nights like this in the past 110 years since a man named William Coutts invested £10,000 to build this palace of dreams.… So many fantasies have been played under this arch: melodramas and pantomimes, musicals and variety.… So many audiences, (p. 688) settling down in their tip-up seats, wanting to be transported away from work, from ordinariness and private troubles …
>
> The dimming lights act like a mother’s hush. You could touch the silence. *Boinnng!* A spongy thump on a bass drum, and the horns pipe up that catchy, irrepressible, tasteless tune and already you’re singing under your breath, “Springtime for Hitler and Germany …”
>
> The orchestra is out of sight in the pit. There’s just the velvet curtain to watch as your fingers tap along. What’s waiting behind?
>
> Then it starts it to move.
>
> Opening night …
>
> It’s opening night!
>
> (Matarasso, 2012, pp. 1–2)

For another and different example—a narrative observation of an everyday but unique incident that details date, time, place, and experience—see Simons (2009, p. 60).

Such naturalistic observations are also useful in contexts where we cannot understand what is going on through interviewing alone or in cultures with which we are less familiar and where key actors may not share our language or have difficulty expressing what they mean. Careful description in these situations can help identify key issues, discover the norms and values that exist in the culture, and, if sufficiently detailed, allow others to cross-corroborate what significance we draw from these observations. This last point is very important to avoid the danger in observation of ascribing motivations to people and meanings to transactions.

Finally, naturalistic observations are very important in highly politicized environments, often the case in commissioned evaluation case study, where individuals in interview may try to elude the “truth” or press upon you that their view is the right view of the situation. In these contexts, naturalistic observations not only enable you to document interactions as you perceive them, but also provide a cross-check on the veracity of information obtained in interviews.

Document Analysis

Analysis of documents, as already intimated, is useful for establishing what historical antecedents might exist to provide a springboard for contemporaneous data gathering. In most cases, existing documents are also extremely pertinent for understanding the policy context.

In a national policy case study I conducted on a major curriculum change, the importance of preexisting documentation was brought home to me sharply when certain documentation initially proved elusive to obtain. It was difficult to believe that it did not exist, because the evolution of the innovation involved several parties who had not worked together before and they needed to develop a shared understanding of the 'new' curriculum. There was bound, I thought, to be minuted meetings sharing progress and documentation of the "new" curriculum. In the absence of some crucial documents, I began to piece together the story through interviewing different individuals who had a role to play in the evolution of the new curriculum. But there were gaps, and certain issues did not make sense.

It was only when I presented two versions of what I discerned had transpired in the development of this initiative in an interim report 18 months into the study that things started to change. Subsequent to the meeting at which the report was presented, the "missing" (p. 689) documents started to appear. Suddenly found! What lay behind the "missing" documents, something I suspected from what certain individuals did and did not say in interview, was a major difference of view about how the innovation evolved, who was key in the process, and whose voice was more important in the context: political differences, in other words, that some stakeholders were trying to keep from me. The emergence of the documents enabled me to finally produce an accurate and fair account.

This is an example of the importance of having access to all relevant documents relating to a program or policy to study it fairly. The other major way in which document analysis is useful in case study is for understanding the values, explicit and hidden, in policy and program documents and in the organization where the program or policy is implemented. Not to be ignored as documents are photographs; these, too, can form the basis of a cultural and value analysis of an organization (Prosser, 2000).

Creative Artistic Approaches

Increasingly, some case study researchers are employing creative approaches associated with the arts as a means of data gathering and analysis. Artistic approaches have often been used in representing findings, but less frequently in data gathering and interpretation (Simons & McCormack, 2007). A major exception is the work of Richardson (1994), who views the very process of writing as an interpretative act, and that of Cancienne and Snowber (2003), who argue for movement as method.

The most familiar of these creative and artistic forms are written—narratives and short stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Richardson, 1994; Sparkes, 2002), poems or poetic form (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Duke, 2007; Richardson, 1997; Sparkes & Douglas, 2007), and cameos of people, or vignettes of situations. These can be written by participants or by the researcher or developed in partnership. They can also be shared with participants to further the interpretation of the data.

Photographs also have a long history in qualitative research for presenting and constructing understanding (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Collier, 1967; Prosser, 2000; Rugang, 2006; Walker, 1993). The photo story in particular—a selection of photographs placed in sequence to show the interpretation of an event or circumstance—is a powerful way of telling. Less common are other visual forms of gathering data, such as “draw and write” (Sewell, 2011), artifacts, drawings, sketches, paintings, and collages, although these, too, are increasingly being adopted. For examples of the use of collage in data gathering, see Duke (2007) and Butler-Kisber (2010), and for charcoal drawing, see Elliott (2008). Collages have the potential not only for revealing inner states and feelings, but also for documenting conflicts and tensions in a case. Duke (2007) made effective use of collage in this respect to portray differences and tensions with doctors in a medical setting where she, in her role as a nurse consultant, was conducting research as well as performing her normal nurse duties. The collage served to channel the emotions she was experiencing in this hierarchical context without influencing the research or her professional role. More recently, Plakoyiannaki & Stavraki (2018) explored the various ways in which collages can be interpreted to reveal the meaning embedded in the juxtaposition of images and visual metaphors in a collage. They also offer a heuristic analytic approach to counter what they see as limitations in some of the other forms of analyzing collages. Though written primarily for an audience in management research, many aspects of their paper are pertinent for case study research.

(p. 690) Videos can be a useful means of documenting events and interactions between people, especially when individuals cannot be interviewed. See, for example, Flewitt (2005) for a discussion of the value of video for exploring communications between young children in the home and preschool contexts. In other contexts—videos of classroom events, for example—they can be extremely useful for engaging participants and stakeholders in the interpretation of such events. It is often suggested, furthermore, that videos are a useful means of reporting case study data. Not, I suggest, in raw form. Beyond the ethical issue of the potential identification of individuals is the difficulty of understanding what is going on if you were not present at the time and had a grasp of other data relevant to that understanding. In other words, videos have a temporary life. Without additional data, the distant viewer may not comprehend. This is a separate issue from preparing a video report, composed of different kinds of data to tell the story of the case in a visual, succinct way. Such videos have the power to engage different audiences and can facilitate immediate understanding of the critical issues in the case. An excellent example of this is the CD that Jenny Elliot (2008) prepared as part of her Ph.D. thesis, showing how it was possible through the research she conducted to get a unit of brain-damaged men to dance. The video was widely shown subsequently in many healthcare contexts.

In qualitative inquiry broadly, these creative approaches are now quite common. And in the context of arts and health (see, for example, Frank, 1997; Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008; Spouse, 2000), they are frequently used to illuminate perspectives of individuals in therapeutic settings or enhance understanding of how spaces and environments in health and social care affect those who inhabit them (Fenner, 2011, 2017). However, in case study research to date, narrative forms have tended to dominate, possibly because the contexts in which much case study research is conducted are policy or program focused where narrative forms of understanding are more the norm. This is not to say creative approaches may not be useful in these contexts. It may be a question of lack of familiarity with such approaches and acceptance of their usefulness in those environments.

Finally, for capturing the quality and essence of peoples' experience, nothing could be more revealing than a recording of their voices. Video diaries—self-evaluative portrayals by individuals of their perspectives, feelings, or experience of an event or situation—are a most potent way both of gaining understanding and of communicating that to others. It is rather more difficult to gain access for observational videos because it is hard to effectively disguise individuals. Even if consent is granted, where individuals are visible it is not possible to foresee how portrayals of their life and experience will be viewed years after the research is completed. Research is context and time bound. So, video diaries may be most useful in a temporal sense to facilitate understanding of the case. See Simons (2007) for an exploration of the ethical dimension of the use of visual data.

Ethics

It will be evident from the foregoing discussion of qualitative methods that close-up portrayals of individuals and contexts requires sensitive ethical protocols. Negotiating what information becomes public can be quite difficult in singular settings where people are identifiable and intricate or problematic transactions have been documented. The consequences that ensue from making knowledge public that hitherto was private may be (p. 691) considerable for those in the case. It may also be difficult to portray some of the contextual detail that would enhance understanding for readers because it would raise the risk of identifiability of individuals, as would visual data, as already noted.

The ethical stance that underpins the case study research and evaluation I conduct stems from a theory of ethics that emphasizes the centrality of relationships in the specific context (see Kirkhart, 2013, for the concept of relational validity that supports this focus) and the consequences for individuals, while remaining aware of the research imperative to publicly report. It is essentially an independent democratic process based on the concepts of fairness and justice, in which confidentiality, negotiation, and accessibility are key principles (MacDonald, 1976; Simons, 2009, ch. 6; and Simons, 2010). The principles are translated into specific procedures to guide the collection, validation, and dissemination of data in the field. These include:

- engaging participants and stakeholders in identifying issues to explore and sometimes also in interpreting the data;

- documenting how different people interpret and value the program;
- negotiating what data become public, respecting both the individual's "right to privacy" and the public's "right to know";
- offering participants opportunities to check how their data are used in the context of reporting;
- reporting in language and forms accessible to a wide range of audiences; and
- disseminating to audiences within and beyond the case.

For further discussion of the ethics of democratic case study evaluation and examples of their use in practice, see Simons (2000, 2006, 2009, ch. 6, 2010).

Getting It All Together

Case study is so often associated with story or with a report of some event or program that it is easy to forget that much analysis and interpretation has gone on before we reach this point. In many case study reports, this process is hidden, leaving the reader with little evidence on which to assess the validity of the findings and having to trust the one who wrote the tale.

This section briefly outlines possibilities, first, for analyzing and interpreting data, and second, for how to communicate the findings to others. However, it is useful to think of them together and indeed, at the start, because decisions about how you report may influence how you choose to make sense of the data. Your choice may also vary according to the context of the study—what is expected or acceptable—and your personal predilections, whether you prefer a more rational than intuitive mode of analysis, for example, or a formal or informal style of writing up that includes images, metaphor, narratives, or poetic forms.

Analyzing and Interpreting Data

When it comes to making sense of data, I make a distinction between analysis—a formal inductive process that seeks to explain—and interpretation, a more intuitive process that (p. 692) gains understanding and insight from an holistic grasp of data, although they may interact and overlap at different stages.

The process, whichever emphasis you choose, is one of reducing or transforming a large amount of data to themes that can encapsulate the overarching meaning in the data. This involves sorting, refining, and refocusing data until they make sense. It starts at the beginning with preliminary hunches, sometimes called *interpretative asides* or *working hypotheses*, later moving to themes, analytic propositions, or a theory of the case.

There are many ways to conduct this process. Two strategies often employed are *concept mapping*—a means of representing data visually to explore links between related concepts—and *progressive focusing* (Parlett & Hamilton, 1976), the gradual reframing of initially identified issues into themes that are then further interpreted to generate findings. Each of these strategies tends to have three stages: initial sense making, identification of themes, and examination of patterns and relationships between them.

If taking a formal analytic approach to the task, the data would likely be broken down into segments or data sets (coded and categorized) and then reordered and explored for themes, patterns, and possible propositions. If adopting a more intuitive process, you might focus on identifying insights through metaphors and images, lateral thinking, or puzzling over paradoxes and ambiguities in the data, after first immersing yourself in the total data set and reading and rereading interview scripts, observations, and field notes to get a sense of the whole. Trying different forms of making sense through poetry, vignettes, cameos, narratives, collages, and drawing are further creative ways to interpret data, as are photographs taken in the case arranged to explain or tell the story of the case.

Reporting Case Study Research

Narrative Structure and Story

As indicated in the introduction, telling a story is often associated with case study and some think this is what a case study is. In one sense it is, and, given that story is the natural way in which we learn (Okri, 1997), it is a useful framework both for gathering data and for communicating case study findings. Not any story will do, however. To count as research, it must be authentic, grounded in data, interpreted and analyzed to convey the meaning of the case.

There are several senses in which story is appropriate in qualitative case study: in capturing stories participants tell, in generating a narrative structure that makes sense of the case (i.e., the story *you* will tell), and in deciding how you *communicate* this narrative (i.e., in story form). If you choose a written story form, Harrington (2003) and Caulley (2008) are useful authors to consult to ensure the story is clearly structured, well written, and contains only the detail that is necessary to give readers the vicarious experience of what it was like in the case. Harrington (2003) reminds us, among other things, that it is not only in the technical sense that good writing is required—using plain, precise, direct language and grammar—but also how we convey meaning—"'selecting telling details' … 'balancing the particular and the universal' … 'structuring stories so insight emerges'" (p. 97). If the story is to be communicated in other ways, through, for example, audio or videotape or computer or personal interaction, the same applies, substituting visual and interpersonal skill for written. In addition to these authors, I often get inspiration for constructing a story or a portrayal of a person from novelists who write well.

(p. 693) Matching Forms of Reporting to Audience

The art of reporting is strongly connected to usability, so forms of reporting need to connect to the audiences we hope to inform: how they learn, what kind of evidence they value, and what kind of reporting maximizes the chances they will use the findings to promote policies and programs in the interests of beneficiaries. As Okri (1997) further reminds us "The writer only does half the work, the reader does the other" (p. 41).

There may be other considerations as well: How open are commissioners to receiving stories of difficulties as well as success stories? What might they need to hear beyond what is sought in the technical brief? And through what style of reporting would you try to persuade them? If you are conducting noncommissioned case study research, the scope for different forms of reporting is wider. In academia, for instance, many institutions these days accept creative and artistic forms of reporting when supported by supervisors and appreciated by examiners.

Styles of Reporting

The most obvious form of reporting is *linear*, often starting with a short executive summary and a brief description of focus and context, followed by methodology, the case study itself in its totality, or demonstrated in the thematic analysis, findings, and conclusions or implications. *Conclusion-led* reporting is similar in terms of its formality, but simply starts the other way around. From the conclusions drawn from the analyzed data, it works backward to tell the story through narrative, verbatim, and observational data of how these conclusions were reached. Both have a strong storyline. The intent is analytic and explanatory.

Quite a different approach is to engage the reader in the experience and veracity of the case. Rather like constructing a portrait or editing a documentary film, this involves the sifting, constructing, and reordering of frames, events, and episodes to tell a coherent story primarily through interview excerpts, observations, vignettes, and critical incidents that depict what transpired in the case. Interpretation is indirect through the weaving of the data. The story can start at any point, provided the underlying narrative structure is maintained to establish coherence (House, 1980, p. 116).

Different again, and from the other end of a continuum, is a highly *interpretative* account that may use similar ways of presenting data but weaves a story from the outset that is highly interpretative. Engaging metaphor, images, short stories, contradictions, paradoxes, and puzzles, it is invariably interesting to read and can be most persuasive. However, the evidence is less visible and therefore less open to alternative interpretations.

Even more persuasive is a case study that uses *artistic forms* to communicate the story of the case. Paintings, poetic form, drawings, photography, collage, and movement can all be adopted to report findings, whether the data were acquired using these forms or by other means. The arts-based inquiry movement (Mullen & Finley, 2003) has contributed hugely to the validation and legitimation of artistic and creative ways of representing qualitative research findings. The journal *Qualitative Inquiry* contains many good examples, but see also Liamputtong & Rumbold (2008). Such artistic forms of representation may not be for everyone or appropriate in some contexts, but they do have the power to engage an audience and the potential to facilitate use.

Before leaving reporting, it is important to mention that in recent years, not surprisingly given the rapid growth and ever-changing technology at our disposal, there has been an increase in the use of data visualization techniques, both to present data and to report findings. (p. 694) See, for example, some of the excellent ideas offered by Stephanie Evergreen (2013, 2016) using graphics and charts of different kinds to summarize data effectively. Telling the story of the case, then, can be visual as well as literary. Using these techniques, linked often with quotations from interviews and pictorial evidence of context, it is possible to communicate the findings of a case in a few pages, or even just one page. This can be of immense benefit to policy makers who may have little time to read long case reports or those who value visual learning as much as written. Such techniques are unlikely to replace the narrative form. Given the importance of people and context in case study, the need to represent participants' voices and the sociopolitical context will invariably demand a longer and integrated story. Data visualization is an added strength and an option for those who are persuaded by visual means or who have little time.

Generalization in Case Study Research

One of the potential limitations of case study often proposed is that it is impossible to generalize. This is not so. However, the way in which one generalizes from a case is different from that adopted in traditional forms of social science research that utilize large samples (randomly selected) and statistical procedures and that assume regularities in the social world that allow cause and effect to be determined. In this form of research, inferences from data are stated as formal propositions that apply to all in the target population. See Donmoyer (1990) for an argument on the restricted nature of this form of generalization when considering single-case studies.

Making inferences from cases with a qualitative data set arises more from a process of interpretation in context, appealing to tacit and situated understanding for acceptance of their validity. Such inferences are possible where the context and experience of the case is richly described so the reader can recognize and connect with the events and experiences portrayed. There are two ways to examine how to reach these generalized understandings. One is to generalize from the case to other cases of a similar or dissimilar nature. The other is to see what we learn in depth from the uniqueness of the single case itself.

Generalizing from the Single Case

A common approach to generalization and one most akin to a propositional form is cross-case generalization. In a collective or multisite case study, each case is explored to see if issues that arise in one case also exist in other cases and what interconnecting themes exist between them. This kind of generalization has a degree of abstraction and potential for theorizing and is often welcomed by commissioners of research concerned that findings from the single case do not provide an adequate or "safe" basis for policy determination.

However, there are four additional ways to generalize from the single case, all of which draw more on tacit knowledge and recognition of context, although in different ways. In *naturalistic generalization*, first proposed by Stake (1978), generalization is reached on the basis of recognition of similarities and differences to cases with which we are familiar. To enable such recognition, the case should feature rich description; people's voices; and (p. 695) enough detail of time, place, and context to provide a vicarious experience to help readers discern what is similar and dissimilar to their own context (Stake, 1978).

Situated generalization (Simons, Kushner, Jones, & James, 2003) is close to the concept of naturalistic generalization in relying for its generality on retaining a connectedness with the context in which it first evolved. However, it has an extra dimension in a practice context. This notion of generalization was identified in an evaluation of a research project that engaged teachers in and with research. Here, in addition to the usual validity criteria to establish the methodological warrant for the findings, the generalization was seen as dependable if trust existed between those who conducted the research (teachers, in this example) and those thinking about using it (other teachers). In other words, beyond the technical validity of the research, teachers considered using the findings in their own practice because they had confidence in those who generated them. This is a useful way to think about generalization if we wish research findings to improve professional practice.

The next two concepts of generalization—*concept* and *process generalization*—relate more to what you discover in making sense of the case. As you interpret and analyze, you begin to generate a theory of the case that makes sense of the whole. Concepts may be identified that make sense in the one case but have equal significance in other cases of a similar kind, even if the contexts are different. It is the concept that generalizes, not the specific content or context. This may be similar to the process Donmoyer (2008) identifies of "intellectual generalization" (as cited in Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 15) to indicate the cognitive understanding one can gain from qualitative accounts even if settings are quite different.

The same is true for generalization of a process. It is possible to identify a significant process in one case (or several cases) that is transferable to other contexts, irrespective of the precise content and contexts of those other cases. An example here is the collaborative model for sustainable school self-evaluation I identified in researching school self-evaluation in a number of schools and countries (Simons, 2002). Schools that successfully sustained school self-evaluation had an infrastructure that was collaborative at all stages of the evaluation process from design to conduct of the study, to analyzing and interpreting the results, and to reporting the findings. This ensured that the whole school was involved and that results were discussed and built into the ongoing development of school policies and practice. In other cases, different processes may be discovered that have applicability in a range of contexts. As with concept generalization, it is the process that generalizes not the substantive content or specific context.

Particularization

The forms of generalization discussed above are useful when we have to justify case study in a research or policy context. But the overarching justification for how we learn from case study is *particularization*—a rich portrayal of insights and understandings interpreted in the particular context. Several authors have made this point (Flyvberg, 2006; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995, 2006). Stake (2005) puts it most sharply when he observes that “the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization” (p. 8), referring here to the main reason for studying the singular, which is to understand the uniqueness of the case itself.

(p. 696) My perspective (explored further in Simons, 1996, 2009, p. 239; Simons & McCormack, 2007) is similar in that I believe the “real” strength of case study lies in the insights we gain from in-depth study of the particular. But I also argue for the universality of such insights—if we get it “right,” by which I mean that if we are able to capture and report the uniqueness, the essence of the case, in all its particularity and present it in a way we can all recognize, we will discover something of universal significance. This is something of a paradox. The more you learn in depth about the particularity of one person, situation, or context, the more likely you are to discover something universal. This process of reaching understanding has support both from the way in which many discoveries are made in science and in how we learn from artists, poets, and novelists, who reach us by communicating a recognizable truth about individuals, human relationships, and/or social contexts.

This concept of particularization is far from new, as the quotation below from a preface to a book written in 1908 attests. Stephen Reynolds, the author of *A Poor Man’s House* (Reynolds, 1908) noted in the preface that the substance of the book was first recorded in a journal, kept for purposes of fiction and in letters to one of his friends, but fiction proved an inappropriate medium. He felt that the life and the people were so much better than anything he could invent. The book therefore consists of the journal and letters drawn together to present a picture of a typical poor man’s house and life, much as we might draw together a range of data to present a case study. It is not the substance of the book that concerns us here, but the methodological relevance to case study research. Reynolds pointed out that the conclusions in his book were tentative and possibly went beyond *this* man’s life, so he thought some explanation of the way he arrived at them was needed:

> Educated people usually deal with the poor man’s life deductively; they reason from the general to the particular; and, starting with a theory, religious, philanthropic, political, or what not, they seek, and too easily find, among the millions of poor, specimens—very frequently abnormal—to illustrate their theories. With anything but human beings, that is an excellent method. Human beings, unfortunately, have individualities. They do what, theoretically, they ought not to do, and leave undone those things they ought to do. They are even said to possess souls—untrustworthy things beyond the reach of sociologists. The inductive method—rea-

> soning from the particular to the general … should at least help to counterbalance the psychological superficiality of the deductive method.
>
> (Reynolds, 1908, preface)[1]

Slightly overstated, perhaps, but the point is well made. In our search for general laws, we not only lose sight of the uniqueness and humanity of individuals, but also reduce them in the process, failing to present their experience in any "real" sense. What is astonishing about the quotation is that it was written over a century ago, and yet many still argue that you cannot generalize from the particular.

Going even further back to 1798, Blake proclaimed that 'To generalise is to be an idiot; to particularise is the alone distinction of merit" (Blake,1798, cited by Keynes (1957). In research, we may not wish to make such a strong distinction; these processes both have their uses in different kinds of research. But there is a major point here for the study of the particular that Wilson (2008) notes in commenting on Blake's perception when he says, "Favouring the abstract over the concrete, one 'sees all things only thro' the narrow chinks of his cavern' " (referring here to Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* [1793], as cited in Wilson, 2008, p. 62). The danger Wilson is pointing to here is that abstraction relies heavily on what we (p. 697) know from our past understanding of things, and this may prevent us experiencing a concrete event directly or "apprehend[ing] a particular moment" (Wilson, 2008, p. 63).

Blake had a different mission, of course, from case researchers, and he was not himself free from abstractions, as Wilson points out, although he [Blake] fought hard "to break through mental barriers to something unique and living" (Wilson, 2008, p. 65). It is this search for the "unique and living" and experiencing the "isness" of the particular that we should take from the Blake example to remind us of the possibility of discovering something "new," beyond our current understanding of the way things are.

Focusing on particularization does not diminish the usefulness of case study research for policy makers or practitioners. Grounded in recognizable experience, the potential is there to reach a range of audiences and to facilitate use of the findings. It may be more difficult for those who seek formal generalizations that seem to offer a safe basis for policy making to accept case study reports. However, particular stories often hold the key to why policies have or have not worked well in the past. It is not necessary to present long cases—a criticism frequently leveled—to demonstrate the story of the case. Such case stories can be most insightful for policy makers who, like many of us in everyday life, often draw inferences from a single instance or case, whatever the formal evidence presented "I am reminded of the story of …" Stake (2006, pp. 197–198) also reminds us that we are constantly making small generalizations from particular situations as we go about our professional work and life. These may not survive systematic research scrutiny, but the point Stake is making here is that it is our natural tendency to generalize from the particular in making sense of our worlds. In case study research that aspires to represent "lived experience," this seems a natural way to proceed.

The case for studying the particular to inform practice in professional contexts needs less persuasion because practitioners can recognize the content and context quite readily and make the inference to their own particular context (Simons et al., 2003). In both sets of circumstances—policy and practice—it is more a question of whether the readers of our case research accept the validity of findings determined in this way, how they choose to learn, and our skill in telling the case study story.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In this chapter, I have presented an argument for case study research, making the case, in particular, for using qualitative methods to highlight what qualitative case study research can bring to the study of social and educational programs. I outlined the various ways in which case study is commonly used before focusing directly on case study as a major mode of research inquiry, noting characteristics it shares with other qualitative methodologies, as well as its difference and the difficulties it is often perceived to have. The chapter emphasizes the importance of thinking through what the case is to be sure that the issues explored and the data generated do illuminate this case and not any other.

But there is still more to be done. In particular, I think we need to be more adventurous in how we craft and report the case, and I have made several suggestions in the text as to how this could be done. I suspect also that we may have been too cautious in the past in how we justified case study research, borrowing concepts from other disciplines and forms of (p. 698) educational research. Fifty years on, it is time to take a greater risk—in demonstrating the intrinsic nature of case study research and what it can offer our understanding of human and social situations.

I have already drawn attention to the need to design the case, although this could be developed further to accentuate the uniqueness of the particular case. One way to do this is to feature individuals more in the design itself, not only to explore programs and policies through perspectives of key actors or groups and transactions between them, which to some extent happens already, but also to get *them* to characterize what makes the context unique. This is the reversal of many a design framework that starts with the logic of a program and takes forward the argument for personalizing evaluation (Kushner, 2000) on the grounds that it is through individuals that programs and policies are enacted. Apart from this attention to design, there are three other issues I think we need to explore further: the warrant for creative methods in case study, more imaginative reporting, and how we learn from a study of the singular.

Warrant for More Creative Methods in Case Study Research

The promise that creative methods have for eliciting in-depth understanding and capturing the unusual, the idiosyncratic, the uniqueness of the case, was mentioned in the methods section. Yet, in case study research, particularly in program and policy contexts, we have few good examples of the use of artistic approaches for eliciting and interpreting data, although there are more, indicated below for presenting it. This may be because case study research is often conducted in academic or policy environments, where propositional ways of knowing are more valued.

Using creative and artistic forms in generating and interpreting case study data offers a form of evidence that acknowledges experiential understanding in illuminating the uniqueness of the case. The question is how to establish the warrant for this way of knowing and persuade others of its virtue. The answer is simple: by demonstrating the use of these methods in action, by arguing for a different form of validity that matches the intrinsic nature of the method, and, above all, by good examples. I earlier noted the impact that Elliott's CD of men with brain damage had on audiences beyond the case. Rugang (2006) also used the CD form, two in this instance, presenting contrasting photographs of a "new" culture and an old culture in one province in China. These told the story well, as did a narrative poem by Duke (2007) of her leadership illustrating how she performed her role as a nurse consultant with responsibility to help other nurses research concurrent with her usual job as a senior nurse.

Re-presenting Findings to Engage Audiences in Learning

In evaluative and research policy contexts, where case study is often the main mode of inquiry or part of a broader study, case study reports often take a formal structure or, sometimes, where the context is receptive, a portrayal or interpretative form. But, too often, the qualitative is an add-on to a story told by other means or reduced to issues in which the people who gave rise to the data are no longer seen. However, there are many ways to put them center stage.

(p. 699) Tell good stories and tell them well. Or, let key actors tell their own stories in narrative or on video. Explore the different ways technology can help. Make video clips that demonstrate events in context, illustrate interactions between people, give voice to participants—show the reality of the program, in other words. Use graphics to summarize key issues and interactive cartoon technology, as seen on some TED presentations, to summarize and visually show the complexity of the case. Explore the data visualization techniques now becoming widely available. Video diaries were mentioned in the methods section: seeing individuals tell their tales directly is a powerful way of communicating, unhindered by "our" sense making. Tell photo stories. Let the photos convey the narrative, but make sure the structure of the narrative is evident to ensure coherence. These are just the beginnings. Those skilled in information technology could no doubt stretch our imagination further.

One problem and a further question concerns our audiences. In your thesis you may well have scope to experiment with some of these alternative forms of presentation. In other contexts—I am thinking here of policy makers and commissioners—it may be more challenging, and you may wonder if they will accept these alternative modes of communication. Maybe not, in some cases. However, there are three points I wish to leave you with. First, if people are fully present in the story and the complexity is not diminished, those reading, watching, or hearing about the case will get the message. If you are worried about how commissioners might respond, remember that they are no different from any other stakeholder or participant when it comes to how they learn from human experience. Witness the reference to Okri (1997) earlier about how we learn and Stake's (2010) reminder of how we generalize from the particular in everyday life.

Second, when you detect that the context requires a more formal presentation of findings, respond according to expectation, but also include elements of other forms of presentation. Nudge a little in the direction of creativity. Third, simply take a chance. Challenge the status quo. Find situations and contexts where you can fully represent the qualitative nature of the experience in the cases you study with creative forms of interpretation and representation. And let the audience decide.

Learning from a Study of the Singular

Finally, to return to the issue of "generalization" in case study that worries some audiences. I pointed out in the generalization section several ways in which it is possible to generalize from case study research, not in a formal propositional sense or from a case to a population, but by retaining a connection with the context in which the generalization first arose—that is, to realize in-depth understanding in context in different circumstances and situations. However, I also emphasized that, in many instances, it is particularization from which we learn. That is the point of the singular case study, and it is an art to perceive and craft the case in ways that we can.

Acknowledgments

Parts of this chapter build on ideas first explored in Simons (2009).

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Notes:

([1.]) I am grateful to Bob Williams for pointing out the relevance of this quotation from Reynolds to remind us that “there is nothing new under the sun” and that we sometimes continue to engage endlessly in debates that have been well rehearsed before.

Helen Simons

Helen Simons, School of Education, University of Southampton