

The Case Study Approach

Purpose: To evoke a description and interpretation of a culture.

Can be used to suggest a perspective, furnish a slice of life, assess program goals.

Strength of the case study: lies in the researcher's ability to conduct a study that is of high quality as well as ethically and methodologically sound.

Bogdan & Bilken, 1982; Bulmer, 1984; Hammersley, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 1984.

Techniques include: Research design considerations, the role of theory, explicating underlying assumptions, data collection, and analysis, and case study writing. Writing the case study involves data analysis, conceiving insightful interpretations, and skillful writing.

RESEARCH DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

A hypothesis is not determined in advance.

Begins with the question: "What is going on here?"

The focus draws boundaries around the research and keeps the research task manageable.

A well crafted and conceptualized focus assists the researcher to choose respondents from whom to collect data, analyze information in light of the assumptions in the focus, and make decisions and choices about data collection.

The focus becomes clearer as the research proceeds and the researcher becomes more informed and knowledgeable about the issue under study.

One of the researcher's responsibilities is to hone the focus and boundaries as the data collection and analysis proceed.

The boundaries that define the focus are conceptual, pragmatic, and logistical.

Conceptual boundaries are the theories and disciplinary perspectives that inform the study.

Pragmatic and logistic boundaries include time (e.g., duration of the study), place (e.g., setting for data collection), and financial support (e.g., research grant financing).

ROLE OF THEORY

Guiding theory-provides an informed place from which to start the data collection and analysis. Guiding theory helps the researcher as she or he composes questions to ask respondents, sets boundaries for the focus, and builds interpretations from the data and with the respondents.

Case Study Writing

Step 1: Decide what data to include:

Consider the following:

1. How do the data analyzed relate to the focus of the study?
2. Are the data interesting? Do they add to existing theory in the area under study?
3. What information can best convey the respondent's points of view and context of the study?
4. What information is complete enough to include in the case study?

What is left out or not said can communicate as eloquently as those meanings conveyed candidly (Van Maanen, 1988).

Step 2: Compile themes

Step 3: Decide Case Study Style: educational case studies are generally told from the respondents' point of view. If the researcher puts too much of her/himself into the study, questions of oversubjectivity are immediately raised (Geertz, 1988). Too much of the researcher's voice could result in a lively tale about his or her experiences that makes interesting reading but is questionable in light of rigorous qualitative research standards.

Step 4: Write the first draft: this first effort is primarily a descriptive one. The purpose is to "recreate...meaning with an appropriate image" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 176).

Step 5: Rewrite and Edit Draft: the fifth step is to rewrite and edit the case study draft to build interpretations and thick description (Geertz, 1973) (i.e., evocative writing that conveys the physical, emotion, and philosophical beliefs of the setting). Qualitative research that is only descriptive has been justifiably criticized for being conceptually thin and theatrically meager (Glaser, 1978).

Step 6: Assure High Quality: a technique to assure this process is to have the nearly final case study member checked by several respondents. A high quality case study can be further assured by having the case study audited (i.e., field notes and cased study read by a methodologically informed but uninvolved peer). (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986; Skrtic, 1985).

Conclusion

A case study is not simply a chronicle of the events, circumstances, and respondents' impressions of the study. It is a text with a structure and organization. This structure is a tool crafted and used to convey the knowledge and meanings expressed by the respondents. The structure, form, style, and voice of the case study are ways to express the content and knowledge of the culture.

THE CASE STUDY APPROACH

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Purpose: to evoke a description and interpretation of a culture.

Strengths: their depiction of a particular case, description of a specific context, and the ability to provide an interpretive account of the way research participants make meaning.

THE STRENGTH OF CASE STUDY RESEARCH LAYS IN THE RESEARCHER'S ABILITY TO CONDUCT A STUDY THAT IS OF HIGH QUALITY AS WELL AS ETHICALLY AND METHODOLOGICALLY SOUND.