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9 Case studies

Introduction

How can knowledge of the ways in which children learn and the means by which schools achieve their goals be verified, built upon and extended? This is a central question for educational research. The problem of verification and cumulation of educational knowledge is implicit in our discussion of the nature of educational inquiry in the opening chapter of the book. There, we outline three broad approaches to educational research. The first, based on the 'scientific' paradigm, rests upon the creation of theoretical frameworks that can be tested by experimentation, replication and refinement. The second approach seeks to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors and consequently may be described as interpretive and subjective. A third, emerging, approach that takes account of the political and ideological contexts of much educational research is that of critical educational research.

The paradigm most naturally suited to case study research, the subject of this chapter, is the second one, with its emphasis on the interpretive and subjective dimensions. The first paradigm, the 'scientific', is reflected in our examples of quantitative case study research. The use of critical theory in case study research is at a comparatively embryonic stage but offers rich potential. Our broad treatment of case study techniques follows directly from a typology of observation studies that we develop shortly. We begin with a brief description of the case study itself.

What is a case study?

A case study is a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle (Nisbet and Watt, 1984: 72), it is 'the study of an instance in action' (Adelman et al., 1980). The single instance is of a bounded system, for example a child, a clique, a class, a school, a community. It provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles. Indeed a case study can enable readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles can fit together (ibid.: 72–3). Case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis.

Case studies can establish cause and effect, indeed one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognizing that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects. As Nisbet and Watt remark (p. 78), the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Sturman (1999: 103) argues that a distinguishing feature of case studies is that human systems have a wholeness or integrity to them rather than being a loose connection of traits, necessitating in-depth investigation. Further, contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 316) suggest that case studies are distinguished less by the methodologies that they employ than by the subjects/objects of their inquiry (though, as indicated below, there is frequently a resonance between case studies and interpretive methodologies). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 322) further suggest that the case
study approach is particularly valuable when the researcher has little control over events. They consider (p. 317) that a case study has several hallmarks:

- It is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case.
- It provides a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case.
- It blends a description of events with the analysis of them.
- It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events.
- It highlights specific events that are relevant to the case.
- The researcher is integrally involved in the case.
- An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report.

Case studies, they suggest (ibid.: 319): (a) are set in temporal, geographical, organizational, institutional and other contexts that enable boundaries to be drawn around the case; (b) can be defined with reference to characteristics defined by individuals and groups involved; and (c) can be defined by participants’ roles and functions in the case. They also point out that case studies:

- will have temporal characteristics which help to define their nature;
- will have geographical parameters allowing for their definition;
- will have boundaries which allow for definition;
- may be defined by an individual in a particular context, at a point in time;
- may be defined by the characteristics of the group;
- may be defined by role or function;
- may be shaped by organizational or institutional arrangements.

Case studies strive to portray ‘what it is like’ to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of participants’ lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for, a situation. Hence it is important for events and situations to be allowed to speak for themselves rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated or judged by the researcher. In this respect the case study is akin to the television documentary.

This is not to say that case studies are unsystematic or merely illustrative; case study data are gathered systematically and rigorously. Indeed Nisbet and Watt (ibid.: 91) specifically counsel case study researchers to avoid:

- journalism (picking out more striking features of the case, thereby distorting the full account in order to emphasize these more sensational aspects);
- selective reporting (selecting only that evidence which will support a particular conclusion, thereby misrepresenting the whole case);
- an anecdotal style (degenerating into an endless series of low-level banal and tedious illustrations that take over from in-depth, rigorous analysis); one is reminded of Stake's (1978) wry comment that 'our scrapbooks are full of enlargements of enlargements', alluding to the tendency of some case studies to over-emphasize detail to the detriment of seeing the whole picture;
- pompous (striving to derive or generate profound theories from low-level data, or by wrapping up accounts in high-sounding verbiage);
- blandness (unquestioningly accepting only the respondents' views, or only including those aspects of the case study on which people agree rather than areas on which they might disagree).

Case studies can make theoretical statements, but, like other forms of research and human sciences, these must be supported by the evidence presented. This requires the nature of generalization in case study to be clarified. Generalization can take various forms, for example:

- from the single instance to the class of instances that it represents (for example a
single-sex selective school might act as a case study to catch significant features of other single-sex selective schools;
- from features of the single case to a multiplicity of classes with the same features;
- from the single features of part of the case to the whole of that case.

More recently Simons (1996) has argued that case study needs to address six paradoxes; it needs to:
- reject the subject–object dichotomy, regarding all participants equally;
- recognize the contribution that a genuine creative encounter can make to new forms of understanding education;
- regard different ways of seeing as new ways of knowing;
- approximate the ways of the artist;
- free the mind of traditional analysis;
- embrace these paradoxes, with an overriding interest in people.

There are several types of case study. Yin (1984) identifies three such types in terms of their outcomes: (a) exploratory (as a pilot to other studies or research questions); (b) descriptive (providing narrative accounts); (c) explanatory (testing theories). Exploratory case studies that act as a pilot can be used to generate hypotheses that are tested in larger scale surveys, experiments or other forms of research, e.g. observational. However Adelman et al. (1980) caution against using case studies solely as preliminaries to other studies, e.g. as pre-experimental or pre-survey; rather, they argue, case studies exist in their own right as a significant and legitimate research method.

Yin's (1984) classification accords with Merriam (1988) who identifies three types: (a) descriptive (narrative accounts); (b) interpretative (developing conceptual categories inductively in order to examine initial assumptions); (c) evaluative (explaining and judging). Merriam also categorizes four common domains or kinds of case study: ethnographic, historical, psychological and sociological. Sturman (1999: 107), echoing Stenhouse (1985), identifies four kinds of case study: (a) an ethnographic case study – single in-depth study; (b) action research case study; (c) evaluative case study; and (d) educational case study. Stake (1994) identifies three main types of case study: (a) intrinsic case studies (studies that are undertaken in order to understand the particular case in question); (b) instrumental case studies (examining a particular case in order to gain insight into an issue or a theory); (c) collective case studies (groups of individual studies that are undertaken to gain a fuller picture). Because case studies provide fine grain detail they can also be used to complement other, more coarsely grained – often large scale – kinds of research. Case study material in this sense can provide powerful human-scale data on macro-political decision-making, fusing theory and practice, for example the work of Ball (1990), Bowe et al. (1992) and Ball (1994a) on the impact of government policy on specific schools.

Case studies have several claimed strengths and weaknesses. These are summarized in Box 9.1 (Adelman et al., 1980) and Box 9.2 (Nisbet and Watt, 1984). From the preceding analysis it is becoming clear that case studies frequently follow the interpretive tradition of research – seeing the situation through the eyes of participants – rather than the quantitative paradigm, though this need not always be the case. Its sympathy to the interpretive paradigm has rendered case study an object of criticism, treating peculiarities rather than regularities (Smith, 1991: 375). Smith (1991: 375) suggests that:

The case study method ... is the logically weakest method of knowing. The study of individual careers, communities, nations, and so on has essentially passed. Recurrent patterns are the main product of the enterprise of historic scholarship.

This is prejudice and ideology rather than critique, but signifies the problem of respectability and legitimacy that case study has to conquer amongst certain academics. Like other research methods, case study has to demonstrate
CASE STUDIES

Box 9.1
Possible advantages of case study

Case studies have a number of advantages that make them attractive to educational evaluators or researchers. Thus:

1. Case study data, paradoxically, is 'strong in reality' but difficult to organize. In contrast, other research data is often 'weak in reality' but susceptible to ready organization. This strength in reality is because case studies are down-to-earth and attention-holding, in harmony with the reader's own experience, and thus provide a 'natural' basis for generalization.
2. Case studies allow generalizations either about an instance or from an instance to a class. Their peculiar strength lies in their attention to the subtlety and complexity of the case in its own right.
3. Case studies recognize the complexity and 'embeddedness' of social truths. By carefully attending to social situations, case studies can represent something of the discrepancies or conflicts between the viewpoints held by participants. The best case studies are capable of offering some support to alternative interpretations.
4. Case studies, considered as products, may form an archive of descriptive material sufficiently rich to admit subsequent reinterpretation. Given the variety and complexity of educational purposes and environments, there is an obvious value in having a data source for researchers and users whose purposes may be different from our own.
5. Case studies are 'a step to action'. They begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use for staff or individual self-development, for within-institutional feedback; for formative evaluation; and in educational policy making.
6. Case studies present research or evaluation data in a more publicly accessible form than other kinds of research report, although this virtue is to some extent bought at the expense of their length. The language and the form of the presentation is hopefully less esoteric and less dependent on specialized interpretation than conventional research reports. The case study is capable of serving multiple audiences. It reduces the dependence of the reader upon unstated implicit assumptions . . . and makes the research process itself accessible. Case studies, therefore, may contribute towards the 'democratization' of decision-making (and knowledge itself). At its best, they allow readers to judge the implications of a study for themselves.

Source Adapted from Adelman et al., 1980

Box 9.2
Nisbet and Watt's (1984) strengths and weaknesses of case study

Strengths

1. The results are more easily understood by a wide audience (including non-academics) as they are frequently written in everyday, non-professional language.
2. They are immediately intelligible; they speak for themselves.
3. They catch unique features that may otherwise be lost in larger scale data (e.g. surveys); these unique features might hold the key to understanding the situation.
4. They are strong on reality.
5. They provide insights into other similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases.
6. They can be undertaken by a single researcher without needing a full research team.
7. They can embrace and build in unanticipated events and uncontrolled variables.

Weaknesses

1. The results may not be generalizable except where other readers/researchers see their application.
2. They are not easily open to cross-checking, hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective.
3. They are prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts made to address reflexivity.

reliability and validity. This can be difficult, for 'given the uniqueness of situations, they may be, by definition, inconsistent with other case studies or unable to demonstrate this positivist view of reliability. Even though case studies do not have to demonstrate this form of reliability, nevertheless there are important questions to be faced in undertaking case studies, for example
(Adelman et al., 1980; Nisbet and Watt, 1984; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995):

What exactly is a case?
How are cases identified and selected?
What kind of case study is this (what is its purpose)?
What is reliable evidence?
What is objective evidence?
What is an appropriate selection to include from the wealth of generated data?
What is a fair and accurate account?
Under what circumstances is it fair to take an exceptional case (or a critical event – see the discussion of observation in Chapter 17)?
What kind of sampling is most appropriate?
To what extent is triangulation required and how will this be addressed?
What is the nature of the validation process in case studies?
How will the balance be struck between uniqueness and generalization?
What is the most appropriate form of writing up and reporting the case study?
What ethical issues are exposed in undertaking a case study?

A key issue in case study research is the selection of information. Though it is frequently useful to record typical, representative occurrences, the researcher need not always adhere to criteria of representativeness. For example, it may be that infrequent, unrepresentative but critical incidents or events occur that are crucial to the understanding of the case. For example, a subject might only demonstrate a particular behaviour once, but it is so important as not to be ruled out simply because it occurred once; sometimes a single event might occur which sheds a hugely important insight into a person or situation (see the discussion of critical incidents in the chapter on observation); it can be a key to understanding a situation (Flanagan, 1949).

For example, it may be that a psychological case study might happen upon a single instance of child abuse earlier in an adult’s life, but the effects of this were so profound as to constitute a turning point in understanding that adult. A child might suddenly pass a single comment that indicates complete frustration with or complete fear of a teacher, yet it is too important to overlook. Case studies, in not having to seek frequencies of occurrences, can replace quantity with quality and intensity, separating the significant few from the insignificant many instances of behaviour. Significance rather than frequency is a hallmark of case studies, offering the researcher an insight into the real dynamics of situations and people.

**Types of case study**

Unlike the experimenter who manipulates variables to determine their causal significance or the surveyor who asks standardized questions of large, representative samples of individuals, the case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit – a child, a clique, a class, a school or a community. The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population to which that unit belongs.

Antipathy among researchers towards the statistical-experimental paradigm has created something of a boom industry in case study research. Delinquents (Patrick, 1973), dropouts (Parker, 1974) and drug-users (Young, 1971) to say nothing of studies of all types of schools (King, 1979) attest to the wide use of the case study in contemporary social science and educational research. Such wide use is marked by an equally diverse range of techniques employed in the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. Whatever the problem or the approach, at the heart of every case study lies a method of observation. Box 9.3 sets out a typology of observation studies.

Acker’s (1990) study is an ethnographic account that is based on several hundred hours of participant observational material, whilst Boulton’s (1992) work, by contrast, is based on highly structured, non-participant observation
conducted over five years. The study by Wild, Scivier and Richardson (1992) used participant observation, loosely structured interviews that yielded simple frequency counts. Bease and Cohen’s (1990) study of coping with computers used highly structured observation schedules, undertaken by non-participant observers, with the express intention of obtaining precise, quantitative data on the classroom use of a computer programme. This was part of a longitudinal study in primary classrooms, and yielded typical profiles of individual behaviour and group interaction in students’ usage of the computer programme. Antonsen’s (1988) study was of a single child undergoing psychotherapy at a Child Psychiatric Unit, and uses unstructured observation within the artificial setting of a psychiatric clinic and is a record of the therapist’s non-directive approach. Finally Houghton’s (1991) study uses data from structured sets of test materials together with focused interviews with those with whom this international student had contact. Together these case studies provide a valuable insight into the range and types of case study.

There are two principal kinds of observation in case study – participant observation and non-participant observation. In the former, observers engage in the very activities they set out to observe. Often, their ‘cover’ is so complete that as far as the other participants are concerned, they are simply one of the group. In the case of Patrick for example, born and bred in Glasgow, his researcher role remained hidden from the members of the Glasgow gang in whose activities he participated for a period of four months (see Patrick, 1973). Such complete anonymity is not always possible, however. Thus in Parker’s study of downtown Liverpool adolescents, it was generally known that the researcher was waiting to take up a post at the university. In the meantime, ‘knocking around’ during the day with the lads and frequenting their pub at night rapidly established that he was ‘OK’:

I was a drinker, a hanger-rounder, and had been tested in illegal ‘business’ matters and could be relied on to say nothing since I ‘knew the score’.

(Parker, 1974)

Cover is not necessarily a prerequisite of participant observation. In an intensive study of a small group of working-class boys during their last two years at school and their first months in employment, Willis (1977) attended all the different subject classes at school – ‘not as a teacher, but as a member of the class’ – and worked alongside each boy in industry for a short period.

Non-participant observers, on the other hand,
stand aloof from the group activities they are investigating and eschew group membership – no great difficulty for King (1979), an adult observer in infant classrooms. Listen to him recounting how he firmly established his non-participant status with young children:

I rapidly learnt that children in infants’ classrooms define any adult as another teacher or teacher surrogate. To avoid being engaged in conversation, being asked to spell words or admire pictures, I evolved the following technique.

To begin with, I kept standing so that physical height created social distance ... Next, I did not show immediate interest in what the children were doing, or talk to them. When I was talked to I smiled politely and if necessary I referred the child asking a question to the teacher. Most importantly, I avoided eye contact: if you do not look you will not be seen.

(King, 1979)

The best illustration of the non-participant observer role is perhaps the case of the researcher sitting at the back of a classroom coding up every three seconds the verbal exchanges between teacher and pupils by means of a structured set of observational categories.

It is frequently the case that the type of observation undertaken by the researcher is associated with the type of setting in which the research takes place. In Box 9.3 we identify a continuum of settings ranging from the ‘artificial’ environments of the counsellor’s and the therapist’s clinics (cell 5 and 6) to the ‘natural’ environments of school classrooms, staffrooms and playgrounds (cells 1 and 2). Because our continuum is crude and arbitrary we are at liberty to locate studies of an information technology audit and computer usage (cells 3 and 4) somewhere between the ‘artificial’ and the ‘natural’ poles.

Although in theory each of the six examples of case studies in Box 9.3 could have been undertaken either as a participant or as a non-participant observation study, a number of factors intrude to make one or other of the observational strategies the dominant mode of inquiry in a particular type of setting. Bailey explains as follows:

In a natural setting it is difficult for the researcher who wishes to be covert not to act as a participant. If the researcher does not participate, there is little to explain his presence, as he is very obvious to the actual participants ... Most studies in a natural setting are unstructured participant observation studies ... Much the opposite is true in an artificial environment. Since there is no natural setting, in a sense none of the persons being studied are really participants of long standing, and thus may accept a non-participant observer more readily ... Laboratory settings also enable a non-participant observer to use sophisticated equipment such as videotape and tape recordings ... Thus most studies in an artificial laboratory setting will be structured and will be non-participant studies.

(Bailey, 1978)

What we are saying is that the unstructured, ethnographic account of teachers’ work (cell 1) is the most typical method of observation in the natural surroundings of the school in which that study was conducted. Similarly, the structured inventories of study habits and personality employed in the study of Mr Chong (cell 6) reflect a common approach in the artificial setting of a counsellor’s office.

Why participant observation?

The natural scientist, Schutz (1962) points out, explores a field that means nothing to the molecules, atoms and electrons therein. By contrast, the subject matter of the world in which the educational researcher is interested is composed of people and is essentially meaningful to them. That world is subjectively structured, possessing particular meanings for its inhabitants. The task of the educational investigator is very often to explain the means by which an orderly social world is established and maintained in terms of its shared meanings. How do participant observation techniques assist the researcher in this task? Bailey (1978) identifies some inherent
advantages in the participant observation approach:

- Observation studies are superior to experiments and surveys when data are being collected on non-verbal behaviour.
- In observation studies, investigators are able to discern ongoing behaviour as it occurs and are able to make appropriate notes about its salient features.
- Because case study observations take place over an extended period of time, researchers can develop more intimate and informal relationships with those they are observing, generally in more natural environments than those in which experiments and surveys are conducted.
- Case study observations are less reactive than other types of data-gathering methods. For example, in laboratory-based experiments and in surveys that depend upon verbal responses to structured questions, bias can be introduced in the very data that researchers are attempting to study.

**Recording observations**

I filled thirty-two notebooks with about half a million words of notes made during nearly six hundred hours of observation.

(King, 1979)

The recording of observations is a frequent source of concern to inexperienced case study researchers. How much ought to be recorded? In what form should the recordings be made? What does one do with the mass of recorded data? Lofland (1971) gives a number of useful suggestions about collecting field notes:

- Record the notes as quickly as possible after observation, since the quantity of information forgotten is very slight over a short period of time but accelerates quickly as more time passes.
- Discipline yourself to write notes quickly and reconcile yourself to the fact that although it may seem ironic, recording of field notes can be expected to take as long as is spent in actual observation.
- Dictating rather than writing is acceptable if one can afford it, but writing has the advantage of stimulating thought.
- Typing field notes is vastly preferable to handwriting because it is faster and easier to read, especially when making multiple copies.
- It is advisable to make at least two copies of field notes and preferable to type on a master for reproduction. One original copy is retained for reference and other copies can be used as rough draft to be cut up, reorganized and rewritten.
- The notes ought to be full enough adequately to summon up for one again, months later, a reasonably vivid picture of any described event. This probably means that one ought to be writing up, at the very minimum, at least a couple of single space typed pages for every hour of observation.

The sort of note-taking recommended by Lofland and actually undertaken by King (1979) and Wolcott (1973) in their ethnographic accounts grows out of the nature of the unstructured observation study. Note-taking, confessed Wolcott, helped him fight the acute boredom that he sometimes felt when observing the inimicable meetings that are the daily lot of the school principal. Occasionally, however, a series of events would occur so quickly that Wolcott had time only to make cursory notes which he supplemented later with fuller accounts. One useful tip from this experienced ethnographer is worth noting: never resume your observations until the notes from the preceding observation are complete. Until your observations and impressions from one visit are a matter of record, there is little point in returning to the classroom or school and reducing the impact of one set of events by superimposing another and more recent set. Indeed, when to record one's data is but one of a number of practical problems identified by Walker, which are listed in Box 9.4 (Walker, 1980).
Planning a case study

In planning a case study there are several issues that researchers may find useful to consider (e.g. Adelman et al., 1980):

- The particular circumstances of the case, including: (a) the possible disruption to individual participants that participation might entail; (b) negotiating access to people; (c) negotiating ownership of the data; (d) negotiating release of the data;
- The conduct of the study including: (a) the use of primary and secondary sources; (b) the opportunities to check data; (c) triangulation (including peer examination of the findings, respondent validation and reflexivity); (d) data collection methods – in the interpretive paradigm case studies tend to use certain data collection methods, e.g. semi-structured and open interviews, observation, narrative accounts and documents, diaries, maybe also tests, rather than other methods, e.g. surveys, experiments. Nisbet and Watt (1984) suggest that, in conducting interviews, it may be wiser to interview senior people later rather than earlier so that the most effective use of discussion time can be made, the interviewee having been put into the picture fully before the interview; (e) data analysis and interpretation, and, where appropriate, theory generation; (f) the writing of the report – Nisbet and Watt (ibid.) suggest that it is important to separate conclusions from the evidence, with the essential evidence included in the main text, and to balance illustration with analysis and generalization;
- The consequences of the research (for participants). This might include the anonymizing of the research in order to protect participants, though such anonymization might suggest that a primary goal of case study is generalization rather than the portrayal of a unique case, i.e. it might go against a central feature of case study. Anonymizing reports might render them anodyne, and Adelman et al. suggest that the distortion that is involved in such anonymization – to render cases unrecognizable might be too high a price to pay for going public.

Nisbet and Watt (1984: 78) suggest three main stages in undertaking a case study. Because case studies catch the dynamics of unfolding situations it is advisable to commence with a very wide field of focus, an open phase, without selectivity or prejugement. Thereafter progressive focusing enables a narrower field of focus to be established, identifying key foci for subsequent study and data collection. At the third stage a draft interpretation is prepared which needs to be checked with respondents before appearing in the final form. Nisbet and Watt (ibid.: 79) advise against the generation of hypotheses too early in a case study; rather, they suggest, it is important to gather data openly. Respondent validation can
**Box 9.5**  
Continua of data collection, types and analysis in case study research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unstructured (field notes)</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Structured (survey, census data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(interviews – open to closed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative (field notes)</td>
<td>Data types</td>
<td>Numeric (ratio scale data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(coded qualitative data and non-parametric statistics)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jornalistic (impressionistic)</td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Statistical (inferential statistics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(content analysis)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Sturman, 1997

be particularly useful as respondents might suggest a better way of expressing the issue or may wish to add or qualify points.

There is a risk in respondent validation, however, that they may disagree with an interpretation. Nisbet and Watt (ibid.: 81) indicate the need to have negotiated rights to veto. They also recommend that researchers: (a) promise that respondents can see those sections of the report that refer to them (subject to controls for confidentiality, e.g. of others in the case study); (b) take full account of suggestions and responses made by respondents and, where possible, to modify the account; (c) in the case of disagreement between researchers and respondents, promise to publish respondents’ comments and criticisms alongside the researchers’ report.

Sturman (1997) places on a set of continua the nature of data collection, types and analysis techniques in case study research. These are presented in summary form (Box 9.5). At one pole we have unstructured, typically qualitative data, whilst at the other we have structured, typically quantitative data. Researchers using case study approaches will need to decide which methods of data collection, which type of data and techniques of analysis to employ.

**Conclusion**

The different strategies we have illustrated in our six examples of case studies in a variety of educational settings suggest that participant observation is best thought of as a generic term that describes a methodological approach rather than one specific method. What our examples have shown is that the representativeness of a particular sample often relates to the observational strategy open to the researcher. Generally speaking, the larger the sample, the more representative it is, and the more likely that the observer’s role is of a participant nature.