

Case Studies

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Definition of a case study

- A research strategy that focuses on exploration of a complex phenomenon and related context
- Case study is scarcely mentioned in the Patten text.
- Most of the information for tonight's presentation is from Robert K. Yin

When to use a case study

- The research question focuses on "how" or "why"
- To explore, describe, or explain
- When researcher has little control over behaviors
- When the issue is contemporary
- To understand complex social phenomena

Criticisms of case studies

- Lack of rigor
 - Sloppily done, bias, confusion with teaching case studies
- Offer little reason to believe they are generalizable
- Take a long time to conduct

Famous case studies

- "All the President's Men" by Bernstein and Woodard about the Watergate cover-up
- Tracy Kidder has written several popular books
 - Among Schoolchildren
 - Soul of a New Machine
 - House

The case study design

- Determine the question (usually how or why)
- Any propositions. May be informed by theory or developing a theory.
- The unit(s) to be analyzed (I.e. student, class, school, district, or an event)
- The links between data to propositions
- Interpretation and how it was done

Strengthening case study validity

- Use multiple sources
- Have informants review the report
- Do explanation building
- Do time-series analysis
- Develop and use a protocol
- Try to replicate

Skills for case study researcher

- Ask good questions
- Listen carefully
- Have a firm grasp on the issues under study
- Ability to adapt
- Free from preconceived notions

Sources of information

- Documents
- Archives
- Interviews
- Direct observations
- Participant-Observation
- Physical artifacts

Data analysis

- Two strategies
 - Return to your theoretical underpinnings
 - Set a descriptive framework for your study
- Analysis
 - Identifying themes or categories
 - Look at your outcome variables
 - Offer explanations and rival explanations
 - Conduct time-series analysis

Writing the report

- Determine your audience's needs and interests
- Determine the framework for the report
 - Linear analysis
 - Chronological
 - Comparative
 - Theory building
 - Etc.