

# CHAPTER 1

## DEFINING CASE STUDY IN EDUCATION RESEARCH

### Key points



- Personal definitions of case study
- Development of case study use in education
- Intrinsic versus instrumental case study
- Models of case study – making choices

### Introducing case study

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We believe that it is possible to use case study in educational research to enhance our understanding of contexts, communities and individuals. By helping to provide an accessible text which guides you through both the practicalities of carrying out research and the deeper issues surrounding them, powerful progress can be made in enabling new researchers to make constructive use of a research approach which can begin to capture the complexity of learning and teaching and the contexts and communities surrounding them. However, it is perhaps only by looking critically

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at the choices we make about case study, the ways in which we go about using it to shape data collection and analysis and the clarity with which we report case study, that we can argue for the quality and value of this approach to research in educational settings.

Prior to investigating definitions and changes in case study use in education, it can be helpful to reflect on your existing beliefs about what case study may mean and what shape it may have taken in your experiences up to now. Retain any notes from this preliminary activity so that you can revisit them as you progress through the book.

### Activity 1.1



#### What are your assumptions about case study?

**Before you read this first chapter, consider your own understanding of case study based on your reading and experiences to date – these may come from the media, from reading or personal experiences.**

- What do you think are the key characteristics of case study based on your reflections?
- Is there anything distinctive about case study? If yes, what might this be?
- Write a brief paragraph outlining your conclusions.

Retain these accounts, as you may wish to return to them as you develop your understanding of case study to help you reflect on your changing perspective. Now, to establish an understanding of how case study has developed in research within education contexts, this next section considers the political influences key figures who have played a part in shaping case study use.

### Developing use of case study in education contexts

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In order to understand current work around case study use in education, it is important to consider, briefly, how this has changed and developed over the last half century. Case study use in education research began to gain great prominence in the 1970s in the UK and the USA as a reaction against the dominant positivist model which focused on measurement

and statistical analysis as the means of attaining valid and valuable insights into schools and classrooms (Elliott and Lukeš, 2008). In the UK, Lawrence Stenhouse was a particularly strong proponent of the use of case study and provides justification for case study as a means of gaining greater understanding within education communities (1978, 1979) and we will consider his particular contribution and arguments as well as developing issues around case study work in education.

Despite, the ebb and flow of politicians and policy, in the UK and USA in particular, where in the 1990s and early twenty-first century, simplistic and often narrow notions of what works and what reflects 'good' research have emerged (Oancea and Pring, 2008), case study continues to play an important role in education research. In the following section, we consider the emerging contexts for case study development, particularly in the UK and USA, key individuals establishing their own versions of case study and the frequently contested concept of case study itself.

### **Policy perspectives on research and case study**

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The emerging focus on case study as a means of carrying out education research took place through the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the UK and North America. To some extent, it could be argued that this was a reaction against the heavily quantitative bias in research in education up to that point and the primacy of measurement as a means of capturing meaningful data. Oancea and Pring (2008) chart the perceived policy desire for answers and evidence which can have universal applications during the 1990s and early twenty-first century in North America and the UK. They highlight the increasingly critical commentary of policymakers with regard to education research and the focus on a narrow orthodoxy (2008) of research which was concerned with 'what works', and the superiority of, for example, experimental designs and with 'scientific' research, particularly randomized control trials. In the USA, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, 2001 focused strongly on a narrow kind of scientific research as a basis for understanding and improving education. It could be argued that these approaches have assumed that there is a universally applicable model of research that ignores the complexity of education settings and the significance of the diverse individuals and organizations that enhance that complexity. This 'scientific' approach is also in danger of seriously disempowering those at the heart of the education process while failing to recognize the value of different forms of engagement with issues in education. In the face of such challenges to education research, case study emerges as a possible champion that might be able to deepen

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understanding in real contexts rather than simply providing decontextualized 'evidence'. A striving for clear definitions of case study and modes of working within this genre in order to ensure quality has been the focus of much writing and debate over the last 30 plus years. In the next section, we consider some of the key figures who have been important voices in the development of case study.

### People and case study

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**Stenhouse** (1978, 1979) was an early supporter of case study in education research; he felt strongly that this was a means of capturing complexity but that a key component of such an approach had to be that it was verifiable. There was confidence in what might be discovered and used to enhance decision-making. Emerging approaches to case study were also being impacted by notions of ethnography which had its roots in anthropological research. Indeed, some researchers viewed case study as essentially ethnography. Stenhouse (1979) challenged such a view stating that originally ethnographic research had relied on certain assumptions that were not applicable in education. These assumptions were that the researcher would lack familiarity with the contexts and situations to be studied, that researchers would tend to draw on theory from ethnography rather than education, and that they would not normally make copies of field notes available. In education case studies, on the other hand, he argued that educationalists tend to be familiar with settings where research occurs and that there should be limits to theory specific to other disciplines being imposed on education. Finally, he argues that for research to be verifiable, field notes should be available as an important record of the study. Consideration of the possible significance of a case record as a means of enhancing verification and perceived quality in case study, is continued in Chapter 6.

**Robert Yin**'s work (1983) was one of the few books on case study available in the 1980s and he writes from a broad social science perspective rather than an education specific one. His background is in quantitative work and his view of case study reflects this as he attempts to make it fit a quantitative model of research. Characterizing case study as a method, he has identified (2009) three forms of case study: **exploratory**, **descriptive** and **explanatory**. The first of these, exploratory, is simply characterized as the collection of data and subsequent looking for patterns in the data. Next, descriptive sets out a consideration of possible theories to frame the study and research questions to focus it. Finally, explanatory takes the previous two forms a step further as it proceeds to answer or

explain the how or why of the issue, situation, person or group being studied. He also tends to try to impose quantitative concepts of validity on case study research. We would argue that these concepts of validity are too simplistic for educational settings and that different definitions of quality need to be considered for case study. Later in this chapter, we suggest alternative approaches to case study models and how these might be defined.

**Sharan Merriam** (1988) is somewhat unusual in that her definition of case study has evolved over the years. In her first book, she focused on the end product of case study: 'A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit' (Merriam, 1988: 21). Ten years and much research later, she revised her definition to focus on the case rather than the outcome, agreeing with Smith (1978) and Stake (1995) that the most important aspect of case study is determining that the case is a bounded unit. She writes, the case is 'a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. I can "fence in" what I am going to study' (Merriam, 1998: 27). She admits, however, that case study may be defined as the process used, the case or bounded unit, or the end product and that all may be appropriate definitions (p. 34).

Merriam also describes three types of case study: **particularistic**, **descriptive** and **heuristic**. Particularistic focuses on a specific event or phenomenon. She suggests that it is an especially appropriate approach for practical problems, 'for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice' (1998: 29). Descriptive case study focuses on **thick description** of whatever is being studied. Thick description may be defined as 'the complete, literal, description of the entity being investigated' (pp. 29–30). Such studies may be longitudinal and study the ways in which many variables affect each other. The intent of heuristic case study is to increase understanding of the case: 'They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known' (p. 30).

Within the three types of case study, Merriam describes several designs borrowed from other disciplines and often used in education research: **ethnographic**, **historical**, **psychological** and **sociological**. Ethnographic case study tends to focus on institutional culture or particular groups, teaching methods, or behaviours, whereas historical studies are usually descriptive, tracing the development or evolution of such phenomena over time. Psychological case studies focus on a single person, whereas sociological studies address the larger social structure and its effects on individuals (Merriam, 1998: 34–7). Merriam also describes case studies based on the intent of your research: **descriptive**, **interpretive**

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or **evaluative**. In these scenarios, the methods of inquiry and analysis depend on what your purpose is for conducting the study (pp. 38–39).

**Robert Stake** does not characterize case study as method but instead as an object of choice with regard to the particularity to be studied. He sets out to shape the case as a portrayal that highlights its uniqueness while it encourages the readers of the case to a new understanding of their own context and processes. His work is accessible and thoughtful and can help to develop a deeper understanding of case study and so is one of our recommendations for further study. Unlike Yin (2009), he draws upon a broad social science approach which is based strongly on qualitative methods and ways of thinking obtained from ethnography and biography. He likens case study to creating a work of art:

Finishing a case study is the consummation of a work of art ... it is an exercise in such depth, the study is an opportunity to see what others have not yet seen, to reflect the uniqueness of our own lives, to engage the best of our interpretive powers. (Stake, 1995: 136)

Stake's emphasis on the qualitative and the interpretation of the case contrasts sharply with Yin's (2009) scientific approach and highlights the different approaches that can be taken to defining case study, exploring how it can be carried out and how it can be understood. This can seem puzzling to researchers wanting to learn about case study but what is heartening about Stake's writing is that he emphasizes the need for each researcher to define case study anew bearing in mind what he/she has learned about possible manifestations of the case.

### Activity 1.2



**Review the views of case study illustrated so far and assess the extent to which they are similar and in what ways they differ.**

- How helpful are these forms of case study?
- Which would you choose to draw upon and why?

**Andrew Pollard's** focus during the 1980s and 1990s was on using case study as a longitudinal strategy, intent on capturing the nature of learning. It is Pollard's complex, longitudinal studies that, in our view, helped to pave the way for modern case study work in educational settings as

he worked with parents, pupils and teachers, in schools and at home and using multiple forms of data collection to understand the complexity of the world inhabited by young people. He talks about the evolution of his approach to longitudinal case study:

I thought it was rather strange that sociology didn't bother itself with learning per se. I thought what would it look like if there was a more sociological account of learning. My Masters and PhD were done part time when I was teaching in schools so in a way working in a school and having long term relationships with people in them was how I felt comfortable and I felt that one got a kind of knowledge that wasn't available from more detached methods. And since I wanted to understand the social influences on learning which you would expect to be holistic, complicated and multi-layered, so it seemed to me that getting close to community and families was a necessary part of looking at that issue. (Andrew Pollard in conversation, 2011)

Unlike Stenhouse's original stance, Pollard embraces ethnography as his basis for case study. In his account of case studies of pupils aged 4–7 years, Pollard made use of multiple perspectives (teachers, parents and pupils) as well as multiple forms of data collection over three years in a longitudinal study. In addition to the longitudinal nature of his case studies, he also constructed a complex range of data collection tools that would allow him to produce very rich accounts of children's learning and social world: classroom field notes, classroom photos, video recordings in the classroom, playground field notes and video recordings, pupil work, pupil interviews, review of friendship groupings, teacher interviews, teacher documents, school event field notes, school documents and head teacher interviews. Data collection took place on a cyclical basis across three years. For new researchers, we wouldn't recommend such a complex range of data collection but it is an approach that can inspire others to think creatively about what might be included. Pollard's background in teaching as well as academia and his support for the idea of the reflective practitioner and practitioner researcher, reinforce his understanding of the complexities of schools and learning. His case study work uses this understanding to construct and interpret rich case studies that can inform our own perspectives on learning.

As a former primary teacher himself, he was concerned that the changes in education policy of the 1980s in England had led to an emphasis on accountability without a real understanding of classrooms and learning. His aim in generating longitudinal case studies was to, 'identify and trace the major social influences on children's approach to classroom learning' (Pollard with Filer, 1996: xi). Practitioner research, we would argue,



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progresses naturally from the work of people like Andrew Pollard, focusing on understanding the complexities of the individuals, variables and interactions that are essential components of education communities and institutions. He also points the way forward in building longitudinal studies (which we will look at in more detail in the following pages) as a means of enhancing understanding and quality in the research process.

### What kind of case study?

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#### Contested concepts of case study – method, genre or approach?

In the Social Sciences Yin – (1983) and Stake (1995) – and in education-specific work, notably Andrew Pollard (1987, 1996), case study has evolved as an approach to research which can capture rich data giving an in depth picture of a bounded unit or an aspect of that unit. However, confusingly, in many research methods texts, you may find some subtle and not so subtle differences with regard to the nature of case study and whether it is a method, methodology or research design. Work by Van Wynsberghe and Khan (2007) point out that case study is not prescriptive in its structure, content and data collection tools and so can't be defined in these terms. We would instead argue that case study should be seen as an **approach to research** or, as Elliott and Lukeš (2008) argue, as a **genre**, that aims to capture the complexity of relationships, beliefs and attitudes within a bounded unit, using different forms of data collection and is likely to explore more than one perspective. **Case study as a research genre** could then be defined as a way of **framing** a particularity (bounded unit), providing **guiding principles** for the research design, process, quality and communication (Swales, 2004).

Debate is on-going about whether case study can be characterized as method, strategy, approach or genre but it is important to be aware of the nature of this debate and where you may decide to locate your own work. If you wish to delve into the nature of these debates and differences in more detail, explore the reading list at the end of this chapter. However, in the end, having read the varied and, at times, conflicting ideas about case study, you must clarify what **you** believe case study to be, to establish the guiding principles for your work and to justify this to yourself and future readers.

At times, it can seem as if research students grasp for some kind of coherence for their work by calling it a case and hoping that this will provide a way of holding everything together without real thought as to the nature of the case. Choosing case study should be done thoughtfully and carefully as a result of reflecting on your research aims or purposes



and your research questions. To begin with, our intent is to discuss some essential aspects of the kinds of case study that might be possible and, in doing this, to give you the opportunity to reflect on your reasons for choosing this approach to research.

### Key elements of case study:

- Case study as Research Genre
- Bounded unit – a person, a group, an institution or organization
- Located within personal, professional, local and national communities
- Involves interactions, communications, relationships and practices between the case and the wider world and vice versa
- Focus on collecting rich data – capturing the complexity of case
- Data may be collected over extended periods with repeated collections or may be collected during an intensive but short period of time
- Requires spending time within the world of those being researched
- Uses a variety of data collection tools (interviews, observations, reflective journals and others) and different perspectives (child, teacher, parent, researcher) to provide depth
- Employs two or more forms of data collection tool and/or two or more perspectives. This helps to triangulate the data and reinforces the legitimacy of the conclusions drawn.

### Activity 1.3



- To what extent does the above list reflect your existing ideas around case study?

### Intrinsic versus instrumental (or delimited)

Frequently, you will come across case study definitions that describe the case as a bounded unit that captures the essential notion of coherence and limitations. However, if we are looking for clarity on what this actually means and how we might fine-tune our thinking around case studies, we need to look at Robert Stake's work (1995) as he begins to grapple with the differing nature and purposes of case study work in the Social Sciences. He divides case study into two main forms, *intrinsic* or *instrumental*; where *intrinsic case study* attempts to capture the case in its entirety and the purpose of the research is to understand more fully the person,

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department or institution that makes up the case. *Instrumental*, on the other hand, focuses on an aspect, concern or issue of the case. In many ways, a full school inspection or accreditation visit could be thought of as an attempt to capture the case (the school) through the use of analysis of policies and resources, observations, interviews and questionnaires.

### Activity 1.4



Reflection points:

- What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the above intrinsic approach to case study generation?
- What is its purpose? How might this affect participants' responses? Whose views are missing?
- In what ways will the different approaches to collecting data affect the responses given?

On the other hand, an instrumental case study is concerned more with a key focus or concern about the case. For example, the case studies of four distinct schools detailed in Table 1.1 were concerned with the ways in which teachers, parents and young people understood and experienced the concept of ability.

Table 1.1

Comprehensive schools – all comers normally drawing on children from local catchment area (surrounding area)	Independent schools (private – education paid for by parents)
<p><b>St Thomas's High School</b> Mixed SES (<b>Socio-economic status</b>) of pupils Faith school (Roman Catholic) Limited success in external high stakes testing taking place around ages of 16 and 17 years old</p>	<p><b>Longhurst</b> Informal interview of pupils and parents for entry Comparatively new Success in external high stakes testing across a broad range of grades from top to pass</p>
<p><b>Macdonald High School</b> Mixed SES but increasingly middle class Non-denominational High degree of success in external high stakes testing</p>	<p><b>Merchant</b> Selection formal/by assessment of ability Long established High degree of success in external high stakes testing achieving high proportion of top grades</p>

**Activity 1.5****Reflection point:**

- What do you think the challenges might be in trying to explore a concept like ability? Has the bounded unit been identified clearly?

An instrumental case study is likely to be the form that most practitioner researchers choose as the focus for research since the purpose of such work usually concerns an aspect of the case rather than the desire to capture the case in its entirety. It is usually built around aspects of teaching and learning, implementation of policy, curriculum development or issues of personal and professional relevance. Making this preliminary decision is key to beginning to take ownership of this approach to research but although this gives us the opportunity to consider the key broad divisions of case study, there is still scope for refining the case study model that you may wish to employ and this will be explored in the next section. First, however, it is helpful to compare the differences that this initial choice might involve and the implications for research. The following tables suggest what a holistic case and an instrumental case might look like.

Table 1.2

**Intrinsic case study**

Here, the case study is the school

Aim – capturing, as far as possible, the case in its entirety

Reading and reflection may lead to preliminary questions.

What do we need to know to understand this school and its values and principles?

- Key influences on policy? Internal/external
- Ethos/climate?
- Key decision-makers?
- What are the differing perspectives on school experiences (SMT/administrators, teachers, pupil and parents)?

**Some core research questions might be:**

- What are the key policy documents in place at the school?
- How do they connect with or disconnect from policy at local and national levels?
- What is the nature of any institutional identity? Ethos and values?
- Who are the key decision-makers in this school?
- How are policies enacted/implemented at school and classroom level?

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### Activity 1.6



- Consider the main aim and research questions in Table 1.3 and critically evaluate how helpful these would be. Would you try to change these? Why?

Table 1.3

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#### Instrumental or delimited case study

##### Case = school but this is an investigation of an aspect of the school

Aim – in what ways, if any, have there been changes to teaching and learning as a result of the introduction of curriculum reform in a specific school or school district?

##### What/who could provide data?

- Key informants – responsible for curriculum innovation – generation of new policies
- Teachers – responses to curriculum reform and impact on practice – shadowing
- Teachers observed in classrooms
- Pupil experiences and reflections

##### Some core research questions might be:

- How have the senior management team in the school responded to the curriculum reform at a policy level?
- What do the SMT/Administrators believe are the key aspects of the reform in relation to teaching and learning?
- In what ways, if any, have teaching and learning changed in response to the curriculum reform?
- What challenges and issues have arisen in relation to this curriculum innovation?

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- Now reflect upon an issue or problem which concerns you and which might be a starting point for a research project. What kind of case might be appropriate? Intrinsic or instrumental?
  - Use the headings and suggestions in the tables above to consider how these might begin to be shaped in relation to your own topic.

## Case study models – beyond intrinsic and instrumental

We have discussed a number of case study models previously and will continue to do so throughout this book. Here we begin to outline some case study models that might prove particularly helpful in education settings and how these can be defined and utilized to aid the research process. The following models provide a helpful starting point and we will discuss each in turn.

- **Reflective case study**
- **Longitudinal case study**
- **Cumulative case study**
- **Collective case study**
- **Collaborative case study**

### Reflective case study

A reflective case study can be defined as one where the researcher is emphasizing a personal evaluative component in the form of reflective commentaries or expanded field notes or journals which engage with the topic and the researcher's feelings, issues and reflections on experiences and interactions. An example of this would be the individual teacher who wishes to consider an aspect of his or her own practice in order to understand more fully the issues or problems around behaviour in the classroom and who wishes to utilize research to enhance his or her own practice. This goes beyond simple reflection in both its more purposeful aim and in the scope of the data collection involved.

#### Activity 1.7



##### Example case

*Annie (newly qualified high school teacher 24 years old). Annie had decided that she wanted to explore alternative approaches to behaviour in the classroom. Her experience up to that point had involved observing the modelling of mentors during her pre-service teaching and these had been predominantly focused on punishment and reward systems which had tended to emphasize punishment for wrongdoing.*

*(Continued)*

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*(Continued)*

*She hasn't found these very helpful and has a problem with two of her classes because of discipline problems.*

- If you were Annie, what might you try to do?
- A reflective case study is built around your own practice as you attempt to research and introduce alternative approaches – what could be involved in a reflective case study on your practice?

Since case study has at its heart the importance of rich data collection, encouraging a deeper understanding of the issues, additional forms of data collection would be used to also include different perspectives on the issue and practices. So while in this particular model of a case study, the reflections of the researcher lie at the centre of the work, interviews with children and videotaping of practice could provide additional sources of evidence. To enhance this further, videotaping could be viewed by both the researcher and the children as a basis for interview or could include a colleague viewing the tape with the researcher to encourage deeper reflection and understanding.

### **Key aspects of reflective case study**

- Researcher/practitioner becomes the central point around which the research is built drawing on reflective journals/commentaries and other forms of data collection. Other tools such as video and or audio-taping can encourage self-reflection and shared reflections and of course peer observation
- Building different kinds of evidence
- Can be conducted over a concise, contained period of time such as a term or can be extended to provide a deeper understanding of the developmental nature of the reflections (i.e. longitudinal)

### **Challenges**

- Personal biases
- Need for additional perspectives to balance the researcher focus
- Drawing on/juggling different forms of data collection
- Ethical issues in relation to colleagues and pupils

### **Longitudinal case study**

A longitudinal case study is one which is carried out over an extended period of time which may involve the need to understand a process across

an academic year, over the length of a project or longer. This gives you the opportunity to build an overview as well as a deeper understanding of the **changes** that might be occurring. This emphasis on change may lead to a focus on your own practice (individual) or pupils (a group or cohort) or the evolution of strategic objectives (in relation to policy or curriculum). Whichever is the focus, it is important to remember that in order to do justice to the concept of case study, careful thought has to be given to the variety of data collection tools used and the importance of exploring different perspectives. Andrew Pollard talks about his view of his longitudinal case studies suggesting a fluid and responsive approach to case study conduct as well as the challenges and intensity of longitudinal work in particular:

This wasn't the same as a cross-sectional ethnography where you go in to collect your stuff and come out. If you stay in and expect to be there for some time ... it's very intensive and you may need to change and adapt as you progress ... case study is very dynamic. And an awful lot depends on the relationships with people and I think that is very important ... with any kind of relationship, it's to do with reciprocity, respect and so I think because I was authentically very interested in these children, I think that resonated and I think that I was able to gain their trust. The parents and children got something back from it and I think that maybe helped in enabling it to be carried forward. (Andrew Pollard in conversation, 2011)

These elements mentioned by Andrew, reciprocity, respect and trust, are important aspects of any research but, perhaps, particularly in a longitudinal study. The focus of the study was of interest to all – children and their learning – but there was also a need to build up relationships where the researcher was trusted with the words and thoughts of participants.

So far, we have focused on a qualitative approach to research and data collection where the priority has been in relation to understanding beliefs, opinions and teaching practice. Longitudinal research often makes use of blended or mixed methods and you might also want to consider making use of measured data of some kind (quantitative research) as this can help to provide you with measurement of different kinds of performance at different points in any change process. This can lead to the generation of tasks/questions given at the beginning of the research process to ascertain competence in skills and knowledge, etc., and administered again at the end. A simple descriptive comparison can then be made. However, if you wish to enhance your understanding of the quality and nature of any quantitative change, you may need some basic courses in statistics. There are multiple resources available on the internet, some of which are listed at the



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end of this chapter. We would like to draw your attention to free resources available via the BERA website which provides the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of how this might help to further enhance your work and ultimately your conclusions.

### Key aspects of longitudinal case studies

- Investigating processes and changes
- Dynamic rather than static data
- Core questions and fluid questions
- Linking present, past and future
- Use of cohorts to explore groups and processes in social context and in relation to key events/policies
- Relationships built on trust and respect

### Challenges

- Need for continuous effort and persistence
- Need for flexibility/adaptability in the face of the unexpected
- Loss of interest from those involved or movement away (attrition)
- Recognizing possible change occurring naturally
- Bringing the research to a conclusion and sharing the findings with participants

Already it can be seen that there may be overlap between these different approaches to case study. The important element here is that you should be actively making choices about the foundation for your case study and its main emphasis. In writing about your choices, you can then begin to describe the core form of the approach you have chosen as well as the influences of any other models.

### Activity 1.8



- Which of the above case study approaches would be your preferred choice and why?
- How important would it be for you to include measured (quantitative) elements as well as qualitative (beliefs, opinions, reflections)?

### Cumulative case studies, collective case studies and collaborative case studies

Some might argue that the above models of case study – cumulative, collective and collaborative – overlap substantially and that it is unnecessary to separate these. However, while acknowledging the similarities and overlap, we wish also to highlight possible distinctions. First, let's consider the similarities: all three models rely upon the generation of case studies built around the same theme or focus of some kind, for example a new curriculum innovation. The strength of such an approach by individuals or groups within and across institutions lies in the building of data which carries weight because it brings with it the richness of an in-depth case study with a diversity of social contexts and diversity of pupil, parent and teacher groups. The combination of depth and breadth helps to substantiate claims and conclusions. Key aspects of each model are summarised in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4

Cumulative case studies	Collective case studies	Collaborative case studies
Key aspects – Building case studies which replicate and/or develop existing case studies to build a cumulative body of evidence to draw upon with regard to a particular phenomenon or development.	Key aspects – Working separately (and possibly asynchronously) and with a similar general purpose, e.g. a specific curriculum innovation. The evidence provided may vary in approach and quality but may still provide insights concerning this particular innovation.	Key aspects – Working in conjunction with colleagues within/across institutions with shared purpose, and approaches to data collection to generate evidence which is more substantial and grounded in different contexts.

#### Activity 1.9



- To what extent do you agree with the definitions of cumulative, collective and collaborative case study as set out in Table 1.4?
- What challenges would you face in trying to carry these out?
- When working with others, who owns the data? How can agreement be reached about the interpretation and conclusions to be drawn?
- Are there ethical issues to deal with?

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### Summary

The Case study genre provides rich and in depth pictures, drawing on different kinds of data collection – interviews, observations, questionnaires, video, audio taping, web-based discussion and different viewpoints (teachers, pupils, parents, other staff, other agencies). There are added benefits when developed as a longitudinal case study to capture change processes.

Table 1.5

Main forms of case study	Intrinsic (or holistic) versus instrumental (or delimited)
Refining your model	Reflective, longitudinal, cumulative, collective or collaborative
Purpose	<i>Describing</i> the case or aspect of the case <i>Investigating</i> a problem or issue <i>Understanding</i> processes and interactions See Yin and Merriam earlier in Chapter 1 for alternative modes of purpose

### Suggested further reading

Pollard, A. with Filer, A. (1996) *The Social World of Children's Learning: Case Studies of Pupils from Four to Seven*. London: Cassell.

Pollard's work has particular relevance for educationalists as he illustrates the depth of understanding that can be achieved through the use of case study and particularly when used over an extended period (longitudinal).

Stake, R.E. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book takes a comprehensive journey through case study use in the social sciences. Stake provides further examples of case study although not necessarily in relation to education. He also suggests further activities and questions in relation to research and case study which help to enhance understanding.

### Websites

[www.bera.ac.uk](http://www.bera.ac.uk) – BERA British Educational Research Association – online resources. For brief introductions to methods.

[www.methodspace.com](http://www.methodspace.com) – Sage online resources and possibilities for engagement on a variety of methods issues.

## Extension reading

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Bassey, M. (1999) *Case Study Research in Educational Settings*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

This text is specifically prepared for those wanting to extend their understanding of case study in relation to education. It provides rich case study examples and delves into issues surrounding the difficulties in trying to generalize from case study work.