**Specialized Knowledge Area Module VII**

**Research Case Study in Education**

**Introduction**

Change processes characterize the events of our daily lives. We see change occurring within ourselves, our family members, our colleagues, and the organizations in which we participate. Many of these changes appear to be the result of planned interventions, while other changes seem to be unplanned and the consequence of environmental forces beyond our awareness and control. Theoretical accounts and attempts at planned change at the individual, group, and institutional level represent the subject matter of most professional fields. Education is a field concerned with systematic changes in individuals and groups that lead to the achievement of new and more complex skills and knowledge. The case study represents a method by which educators often demonstrate their proficiency in applying change principles to solving significant unresolved problems in the field.

Case studies in educational research take a variety of forms. There is no single specific technique. A case study is a method of exploring the processes and dynamics of educational practice. Case studies typically involve both an historical approach and systems analysis in an effort to view the social unit being studied, whether a college dormitory, an elementary classroom, a technical college placement service, or a university department, as an integrated whole. Within the case study method, a variety of materials may be used including personal documents, life histories, intensive interviews, questionnaires, statistical records, rating scales, and others.

The challenges involved in use of the case approach relate to the variety of specific tools that may be necessary for use in gathering data and to the need for the investigator to control them. A basic concern is always the researcher's application of the method. The intensive nature of case investigation may lead the investigator to feel so certain about the data that she or he is led to over-generalize. Researchers must keep in mind that, even in the case study, one still has the job of clearly defining and formulating the problem, devising and using accurate tools for the gathering of data, and analyzing and presenting research findings as objectively as possible.

Case study research involves in-depth examination of a few people, an organization, or a group over a specified time period in a natural setting. Case studies are intensive observations of specific groups or settings within a clear boundary. These intensive observations may be
relatively short, a few days, or relatively long, many months. For example, an elementary school serves a particular neighborhood. A case study researcher, intent on discovering school effectiveness in serving its neighborhood, may study the school for a month by visiting it on a daily basis; by interviewing administrators, instructional staff, support staff, and students; by reviewing past records; by talking with parents and other community members. Another case researcher might study a specific department in a university or college in much the same way to find out what decision-making processes are most viable in that setting. The goals of such research, like most other social science based research, are: 1) illustration; 2) concept and hypothesis development; 3) hypothesis testing; 4) prediction or postdiction; 5) methodological testing or refinement; 6) evaluation, and may also include 7) implementation of change actions.

**Conceptual Background**

How do recent immigrant families interface with schools in a large urban setting? How do special education students experience the process of being mainstreamed in regular classes? What social processes and perceptions surround teenage pregnancy in inner-city, suburban or rural environments? How are critical thinking, multicultural understanding, and global awareness included in general education programs for undergraduate college students?

These are examples of questions that require more than surveys and structured interviews to be answered. To fully understand mainstreaming, for example, we might spend time watching mainstreamed students go through their daily routines, talking with special and regular education teachers about specific children, checking on assessments and examinations of these children, reading district policy and federal and state law, and perhaps talking with the children and their parents.

Case study research is intended to explore important social phenomena by immersing the investigator in the situation for extended periods. The act of case study research is intended to produce information on a given setting in its full richness and complexity. In general, the case study researcher begins with only tentative hypotheses that she or he informally tests as events unfold. The description of events, impressions, surprises, and the hypotheses that emerge from the hours or months the researcher spends in a single classroom or educational institution is the raw material of case study research.

**Criteria for Assessment**

Assessment of this knowledge area will be based upon demonstrated competence in the theory and practice of case study research in education. In carrying out a case study, you will be evaluated on your understanding of a critical issue or question, overview of the research concerning the issues or question, usefulness of the knowledge to your professional area, and the integration of the case study into the larger body of case study research in education.
Your individual objectives and needs and the expectation of assessors and advisors will determine the specific requirements. Documentation of your competence is required and will include written papers, but other forms of documentation, such as audio or video presentations, may be considered through consultation with your assessor.

**Breadth Component**

Using a bibliography that you have created, address in writing each of the items listed below.

1. Define, compare, and contrast various types of case study methodology as they are employed in educational research.

2. Analyze general and specific theories underlying the use of case study approaches.

3. Evaluate various disciplinary approaches to case study research.

4. Identify and evaluate several case studies which exemplify different case study methodologies

**Depth Component**

Address in writing items 1, 2 and 3 below.

1. Define the method or methods that you wish to employ in your case study (see Application of Knowledge). Discuss the advantages, benefits, and limitations you foresee in using this methodology (or these methodologies) in relation to the issue or question that your case study will investigate.

2. Prepare an annotated literature review of no fewer than 15 sources that interprets and synthesizes what has been published about the issue or question that will be investigated in your case study and the method or methods that you have chosen to employ. You may wish to include dissertations that either use the same case methodology, or address the same or similar issues or question.

3. Identify and describe the means (product) through which you will report on the conduct and outcomes (findings) of your case study.


Application Component

1. Conduct a case study. Choose a bounded setting and an appropriate period of time using the methodology(ies) previously identified for your study.

2. Report on the conduct and outcomes of your case study using the means you have identified in item 3 under Depth of Knowledge.

3. Demonstrate your ability to apply what you have achieved in this KAM by writing a journal article or conference paper reporting on your case study. In general, such articles and papers consist of an abstract, an introduction, a methods section, a results section, a discussion section, and references.

You will need to describe how you selected the topic for your case study, collected appropriate background and supporting information, and analyzed the data. You may appropriately include a description, from a theoretical perspective, of how and why the problem or problems you are examining came about as well as a description of your philosophical assumptions and the social theories to which you subscribe as a scholar practitioner functioning in your particular setting. In this regard, it may be helpful to focus on your role and the types of problems that typically confront you in your institutional setting.

1. The questions that follow may be useful to you in preparing to write the article or paper.

2. What were the socio-economic conditions relative to the setting of your case study?

3. How did group composition and institutional settings influence the behavior of the people you observed?

4. Have your knowledge, skills, and background experiences aided or hindered you in doing this study?

5. What ethical and moral considerations have you grappled with as the result of doing this case study?

Suggested Readings

Learning resources specific to KAM VII relate primarily to case study methodologies and application. A KAM VII learning resources bibliography, which is updated periodically, may be accessed via the Walden Information Network. Titles and authors listed are meant only to provide examples of the literature that you should review. These sources should be augmented with recent journal articles, dissertations, and monographs of your own selection. The bibliography that you compile should take into account the requirements listed for the breadth,
depth, and application components of this KAM and should receive the review and consent of your assessor.
Suggested Bibliography


