

Title:

To what extent is case study a method of research or merely a focus for research?

Abstract

The terms used in this assignment are not clearly defined in the literature. In the first part I thereby attempt to define the relevant terms first before discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the case study, providing three examples.

Case studies are often criticised for their lack of scientific rigour. These criticisms are addressed and discussed.

Since generalisability is one of the key problems of case studies, this assignment argues that the question rests on the type of generalisation they can provide and that generalisation is not always a desirable aim but if it is, a mechanism should be found to give easier access to those case studies.

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Omnis enim, quae ratione suscipitur de aliqua re institutio, debet a definitione proficisci, ut intellegatur, quid sit, de quo disputetur.

Cicero, De officiis I, 7

(Every sensible instruction about an object has to start with its definition to make it clear what is being talked about.)

1. Introduction

Of the seventeen definitions of the word “method” in The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) there is none that is useful for the purpose of this paper. They are either irrelevant or too general. The term “focus” shows a similar picture. The dictionary does not recognise it in the context of the title of this paper. Unfortunately, this is reflected in the literature on the subject of the “case study”. I have not found the term ‘focus’ in the literature in the sense implied in the title (as opposed to method).

Different authors use the term “method” in this context differently. Many publications include this term in their titles, regardless of the content, i.e. whether the publication is concerned with ethnography, education, political science or sociology in general. For instance: (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000); (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000). This gives the impression that the general consensus is that the case study is a method. However, there are dissenting voices.

In the literature there is no distinction between “method” and “focus” but there is criticism of the “case study method” and what is available does not cover the subject exhaustively and leaves room for further discussions.

Some others consider the case study to be a distinct research paradigm (Gomm et al., 2000). This also draws criticism: “...case study evaluation would appear to be a ‘paradigm’ with none of the requisites of a paradigm – agreed subject-matter, methods, theories or exemplars. (Atkinson & Delamont, 1985: 206)

“Method” is uncomfortably general as a scientific term. In this context it is even more confusing that the literature frequently states that “the case study uses several methods”. Some Canadian writers with their proximity to the French culture suggest that the case study is an “approach” since in French sociology it is described as a “monographic approach” e.g. (Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993). The term ‘approach’ is usually used to depict some broader degree of flexibility that gives a widespread appeal and allows a broader range of techniques to be developed under not too rigid a theoretical umbrella. They also have an ingenious solution to the problem. They state that the case study is a method because “ the term ‘case method’ suggests that it is indeed a method” (ibid.).

The literature is far from conclusive and the debate continues.

2. Definition

To avoid misunderstandings, a clear definition of the terms “method” and “focus” is needed. Method, as implied in the title of this paper, is seen as a ‘holistic’ tool of the researcher who uses different elements of the case study to describe the case thoroughly, e.g. observation, video recording, interview etc. These elements are not seen as independent and discrete entities, but as part of the homogeneous whole. They are not seen as triangulation tools used to verify other parts of the case study.

The alternative view is that a case study is a “focus” or site in which to conduct research, using a multitude of methods (sic!) to enhance the trustworthiness of the

study by triangulation. I suspect that this is meant in most of the literature on case studies in education and that this causes the confusion.

“Conflicting precedents exist for any label. It is important for us to recognise that others will not use the words or the methods as we do” (Stake, 1995). Scientific life would be much easier if the jargon were precise and unambiguous. On the other hand, the existing situation encourages scholars to examine closely what other scholars mean.

Because of the uncertainty of what is meant with this term, it is probably best for the individual writer to explain at the beginning of his work what the word “method” means to *him/her*. Cohen et al. give a good example of this (Cohen et al., 2000: 44)

It is my intention to discuss in this paper the problem which arises from this confusion, and it is the latter of these terms which will be discussed in greater detail to establish its relevance to educational research.

2. 1. The holistic method

Ethnographers are a good example for researchers that use the holistic method. They collect data from a number of people in a particular situation to “find out” what is happening there to add to knowledge. (A case study of this type can, of course, also involve only one person as “the case”.) This is knowledge in its own right without the pretence that through this newly gained knowledge similar parallel or future events can be predicted, although the founder of sociological fieldwork and of the case study in France, Frederic Le Play, attempted to generalise from the family

(the case) to the population in general (Hamel et al., 1993: 5). He was severely criticised for this. In this kind of case study there is the so called N=1 factor, i.e. the reliance on a single case – and this makes it difficult to maintain falsifiability criteria (Popper) and generalisation becomes impossible (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). To expect generalisation in studies of this kind is due to a misunderstanding. The case is of primary interest and generalisation is normally not attempted. In other words, the “finding out” part of research is the only object. The second part, the “helping”, is neglected in the sense that the influencing of future events through intervention based on the finding of the case is not envisaged. Case study is descriptive (Yin, 1994)/ intrinsic (Stake, 2000: 3). These terms refer to a particular situation for its own sake and irrespective of outside concerns (Bassegy, 1999). The case is examined because it is there and we are interested in it because it adds to knowledge, not because it is a vehicle to understand other cases or some general problem (Stake, 2000: 3).

Although the researcher uses several tools within this method, these tools are there to complement each other and are part of the whole. They add to knowledge but they are not “in competition” with each other to give the study validity and to arrive at the same (or similar) result. (The narrower question of validity is not of interest here – it was the subject of an earlier assignment).

With this method attempts to generalise are rarely made.

2. 2. Focus

In education, for instance, the objective is often different. Research here is about finding out and helping others. In other words, the researcher has not only the enhancement of knowledge in mind, but also has to consider that others might act on his research findings in the belief that his research also enhances practice. A classic example for this is classroom research. In order to help others, the researcher has to be more specific, he has to establish foci. The classroom as a bounded system is a focus which is normally formed by circumstances (powers) outside the researcher's influence, but within this system the researcher can establish different foci he wants to research while ignoring other aspects of the bounded system. This decision is his alone. Although there are certainly instances when the researcher is only interested in the case per se, more often than not classroom research is carried out to influence others. Validity takes on an additional dimension and this takes the form of triangulation. When the study is seen as a focus or site in which to do research with all the tools available, these tools are then (also) employed to strengthen the validity/trustworthiness of the study. Within the case study the triangulation tools become independent research entities in their own right and are no longer only seen as means to add to knowledge but also as individual evidence gathering tools which display their greatest strength when they are able to confirm each other's findings. This then puts the analysis of the research findings on a firm foundation. This type of case study is explanatory (Yin, 1994)/ instrumental (Stake, 2000: 3). It is an instrument to understand issues beyond one particular case by using one or more particular situation in order to try to understand an outside concern (Bassey, 1999: 29). It is also eclectic in that it draws on a variety of tools to collect data.

With this kind of case study research generalising is more often attempted.

3. The case study

The debate around the terms “method” and/or “focus” is based on misunderstandings and/or individual definitions, i.e. a clear definition that all scholars can agree on does not exist. What is a method for one scholar is a hotchpotch of research tools for others. In order to understand the issue of method/focus in case study research, one has to find a valid definition of the term “case study” first. Reagan and Becker (1992) point out that it is not even easy to find out what a case is, and it is not always clear what a case study is a case of (cited in (Faltis, 1997: 150)). Atkinson and Delamont make the rather scathing remark that the unit of analysis (case) can, in practice, mean just about anything (Atkinson & Delamont, 1985: 206). To prove their point they cite a definition by Stake (1980: 64): “The case need not be a person or enterprise. It can be whatever ‘bounded system’ (to use Louis Smith’s term) that is of interest. An institution, a program, a responsibility, a collection, or a population can be the case.” This definition immediately begs the question what a ‘bounded system’ is. The answer is essential since without it a ‘case’ can not be established. As Atkinson and Delamont (ibid.) write: “Natural occurring ‘systems’ are not self-evidently ‘bounded’. Their boundaries are matters of *construction*, by actors and analysts”. They continue by questioning the term ‘instance in action’ (the opportunity for a case study) on similar grounds, i.e. that this is a notion of “as if the world were populated by ‘cases’ whose status and existence were independent of methodological and theoretical concerns”. Unfortunately, they

do not take this argument to its logical conclusion, namely that it is often the researcher who determines these boundaries. If the case with all its facets is a 'construction', the question has to be: who constructs? The answer that it is actors and analysts (see above) is vague (an accusation the authors level at 'case researchers'). Cohen et al. cite Nisbet (1984: 72) that "a case study is a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle" and Adelman et al. (1980) that it is the study of an instance in action. The instance is of a bounded system, e.g. a child, a clique, a class, a school, a community (Cohen et al., 2000: 181). Again, these are definitions that embrace everything and it is left to the reader to find limits to these definitions. However, if the case study is a research tool (which is not contentious), it could logically be argued that it is the researcher who determines what a case is, *provided other researchers/scholars/readers of his report agree with him*. In other words, a case is a case if there is consensus that it is a case. If one form of triangulation is that other scholars scrutinise the research project (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989: 106) (and agree that the researcher did indeed examine a 'case'), validity would be enhanced.

If something is not unambiguously defined, it leaves room for individual definitions. This is an unsatisfactory affair but this disadvantage can be overcome. When the researcher sets out to conduct a case study, he/she is well advised to begin his research report with a clear definition of what *he/she* thinks a case study in this context is. Their readers will then examine their report in this light.

3. 1. Three examples of case studies

3. 1. 1. Luria

- A. R. Luria, a Russian psychologist, conducted a case study from 1920 to 1950, studying a newspaper reporter, best known as 'S' (Luria, 1969). This man had an unbelievable power of imagery. This study is probably the most quoted in the literature concerning the enhancement of memory and is presented as an example that could be followed by others, if his techniques were adopted. To quote a writer: "S's capacity might sound fantastic, but he was using abilities common to us all" (Russel, 1979: 134). This suggests generalisation, but Luria never made that claim and one wonders whether the people who cite examples from his book have actually read it or copied from each other. Apart from "S's" isolated skill described by Luria, he was a 'dimwit' and his powers were quite abnormal. He had a capacity for eidetic imagery that bordered on the insane. Luria's case was certainly one that warranted examination but it is also a clear example of a case that could not lead to any attempt to generalise. It was no guide or help for others.

3. 1. 2. William F. White

“Street Corner Society (1943/1955), by William F. White, has for decades been recommended reading in community sociology. The book is a classic example of a descriptive case study. Thus it traces the sequence of interpersonal events over time, describes a subculture that had rarely been the topic of previous study, and discovers key phenomena - such as career advancement of lower income youths and their ability (or inability) to break neighbourhood ties.

The study has been highly regarded despite its being a single case study, covering one neighbourhood (“Cornerville”) and a time period now more than 50 years old. The value of the book is, paradoxically, its generalisability to issues on individual performance, group structure, and the social structure of neighbourhoods. Later investigators have repeatedly found remnants of Cornerville in their work, even though they have studied different neighbourhoods and different time periods” (Yin, 1994: 4)

This is an ethnographic case study that would normally be seen by most researchers as not conducive to generalisation simply because it is a single one, hence the term ‘paradoxically’ by Yin. Nevertheless, there are obviously elements in this case study that raise the possibility that its findings *may* be transferable to other situations.

2. 1. 3. Classroom research

I conducted a case study, involving several classes, using the same research methods to investigate the same phenomenon (the introduction of a teaching method new to the learners). The findings confirmed each other and the possibility exists that similar situations in other locations could produce similar results. The investigation was initiated exactly for the purpose of finding out if the intervention in the classroom was successful and if this then could be of help to other teachers and learners i.e. since there were multiple cases within the case study, there was an in-built attempt of generalisation/transferability. This kind of case study would be a candidate for inclusion in the archive(s) as described below.

It is probably useful to see case studies as located on a continuum. On the far left there are case studies that allow no generalisation, but the more the case study moves on the continuum to the right, generalisation and transferability can become more and more a possibility. On the far right there are the case studies that instil reasonable confidence that generalisation can be attempted but there will never be case studies that can be used to assert that their findings lead to strict replicability and absolute generalisation to a wider population.

3. Criticism of the case study

There is no shortage of criticism of the case study. Most of these objections to it centre around the external validity/reliability problem. It is claimed that the findings

of case studies are not generalisable to comparable settings or cases (Faltis, 1997: 149). Another researcher might come to a different conclusion (Anderson, 1998: 159). Or – the extent to which generalisability or external validity is possible will relate to the extent to which a case is typical or involves typical phenomena (ibid.). This is not a satisfactory statement since the question of typicality is extremely difficult to answer and it can be argued that it is precisely one of the tasks of a case study to establish typicality. Yin warns against “falling into the trap of trying to select a ‘representative’ case or set of cases” (Yin, 1994: 37). This notion that case studies do not lend themselves to generalisation is often seen as giving them low scientific value. “If studies are not explicitly developed into more general frameworks, then they will be doomed to remain isolated one-off affairs, with no sense of cumulative knowledge or developing theoretical insight” (Atkinson & Delamont, 1985: 39).

Researchers criticising case study research often cite the lack of scientific rigour and that there are too many case studies conducted sloppily with consequent doubtful findings and conclusions (Yin, 1994: 9). Since the term ‘method’ in itself implies scientific rigour, denial of it also means the denial of the accolade ‘method’. It is noticeable that the advocates of case study research who refute these (and related) criticisms do so frequently with underlying desperation in their writings. From this one can deduce that they suspect that there many ‘researchers’ who see case *study* research as a research method where ‘anything goes’. This is not conducive to the reputation of case study research. If one looks deeper into the criticisms of case study research, one finds that the criticisms are mainly directed at case study *researchers* rather than the method itself and give the impression that they see these criticised researchers as the rule rather than the exception, *e.g.* (Atkinson & Delamont, 1985). It is the lack of scientific rigour in the researchers that make case

studies frequently unreliable. The skill of the researcher is essential but it also needs the individual intuition and dedication that turns a case study into an art form.

All advocates of case study research refute these criticisms on various grounds, a full discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper, but one of the major issues (generalisation) – and a possible answer - will be discussed below.

4. Generalisability/transferability

Generalisability in the scientific sense usually refers to applying the results of one piece of research to another population. In experiments (and surveys) the participants are chosen by random sampling. This is not possible and often not desirable in case study research and when using the term here it should be made absolutely clear that it is not used in the above sense.

In case study research the argument is put forward that generalising is not statistical (as in surveys) but logical, theoretical or analytical. (Mitchell, 2000: 165-186). Stake calls this 'naturalistic generalisation (Stake, 2000: 19-26). Others do not make this sharp distinction and claim that generalisations based on surveys and case studies do not differ (see below) (Schofield, 2000: 69-97).

Transferability is the construct corresponding to external validity or generalisability in conventional quantitative research (Robson, 1993: 404). In the literature on qualitative research generalisability and transferability are frequently used interchangeably. Generalisation refers to applying of the research findings to a wider population; the notion of transferability is narrower. Transferability facilitates the 'transfer' of findings from one setting to another on the basis of 'fit'. (Lincoln & Guba,

2000: 27-44). “Transferability” is less ambiguous than “generalisation”. It could be defined as a tool to apply the findings about one case to a second one (or more) which is considered to be sufficiently *similar* to the first to warrant that generalisation (Kennedy, 1976) cited in Robson (1993). The onus thus shifts to the person interested in making such a transfer to make that decision (*ibid.*). This makes the case study eminently usable for classroom research (see below), but it can only be done if the original researcher has provided sufficient information to enable other researchers to make that decision. This is done by making the research project reliable e.g. giving careful attention to its design and ‘thick’ description. Of course, the researcher should not only be interested in similarities but also in occurring differences (Donmoyer, 2000: 45-68).

Despite the distinction between the two terms as described above, ‘generalisation’ is the term mostly used in literature; it is also used here.

It is rare now that writers state unambiguously that interpretative researchers are not interested in generalisation. This is being replaced by terms/phrases like ‘does not readily permit generalisation’ (Anderson, 1998: 152); ‘a certain amount of generalisation is possible in case study’ (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989: 326) etc. The assumption that qualitative researchers are not - or rarely – interested in generalisations stems from the mistaken belief that the sociologists from the beginning (e.g. Thomas & Znaniecki, Malinowski) were not interested either, thereby setting precedents. This has been disputed (see Ch. 1).

Atkinson & Delamont write that “it is simply not true that the traditions of qualitative research from which case study research draws inspiration, eschews generalisation” (Atkinson & Delamont, 1985: 215).

Nevertheless, “generalisation” still has the odium that it allows no leeway. Either things are generalisable (and this means they withstand all attempts at refutation (Bassey, 1999: 12) or they are not. Therefore the term is not eminently suitable for qualitative research. It either remains ambiguous which means that idiosyncratic definition has to precede its use, it has to be replaced (hence the attempt with “transferability”) or it has to be prefaced by a defining adjective.

Bassey (1999) has introduced the concept of ‘fuzzy generalisation’, borrowing from the expression ‘fuzzy logic’. At the root of this concept lies the realisation (as others have realised) that it is indeed impossible to attempt to generalise qualitative research findings in the way it is done with experiment findings. First, he agrees with Yin (1994) that generalisation is possible by conducting multiple case studies, examining the same phenomenon with different populations and/or different locations. Secondly, he argues that qualitative generalisation has certain characteristics which he calls ‘fuzzy’, by which he means that an element of uncertainty has to be accepted. He compares this with statistical generalisation “which can achieve results like ‘there is an x per cent or y per cent *chance* that what was found in the sample will also be found in the population. Fuzzy generalisations arise from studies of singularities and typically claim that is possible, or likely, or unlikely that what was found in the singularity will be found in similar situations elsewhere. “The former is a quantitative measure, the latter a qualitative one” (Bassey, 1999: 12). This is of course true but it is not clear from this argument why the second of these types of generalisations can be called ‘fuzzy’ and the other not. Uncertainty is in both of them (the word ‘chance’ (above) should cause caution). Some election polls in the past bear witness to this. When Bassey uses the terms

'fuzzy generalisation' (tentative) and 'fuzzy proposition' (more tentative), he refers to qualitative generalisation. He states that 'fuzzy' generalisation can be achieved by studying singularities; in the same sentence he then refers to *the* singularity leading to fuzzy generalisation (Bassey, 1999: 12). This needs clarification. It would be a bold statement if it was his intention to imply that fuzzy generalisation is possible from one case study. The 'fuzziness' would become too large an element to give meaning to the generalisation. However, the term 'fuzzy generalisation' deserves to be adopted.

Fuzzy generalisation is the result of uncontrollable independent variables. These variables render the task of the positivist researcher impossible. For the qualitative (and here the case study) researcher these uncontrollable variables are an accepted fact. In the settings of case studies, variables do not operate simultaneously and independently. Nor do they operate in concert. Case studies examine processes and see variables as working at different points in time "....as events unfold" (Becker, 2000: 223-233). Existing variables might even be unknown to the researcher (stress at home, illness etc.). One could expand on Bassey and suggest that fuzzy variables make generalisations fuzzy or that ".....generalisations are about a process, the same no matter where it occurs, in which variations in conditions create variations in results. That's actually a classier form of generalisation anyway" (Becker, 1990: 240.) The issue of uncontrolled variables and the time factor has implications for the form the analysis of the findings of a case study takes. Since there are changes over time within the case study (the process), Becker advocates the use of (detailed) narrative analysis as an appropriate means to capture this process (Becker, 2000).

For teachers interested in progress, research findings without relevance to *their* classroom can make interesting reading but are of limited value to their practice.

4. 1. Case studies in archives

There is one classroom researcher, (Tripp, 1985), who has given the teachers and their needs some thought and published an illuminative article about them. He acknowledges that case studies are 'notoriously immune to generalisation' but that 'a theoretically based public body of knowledge is essential to progress of scientific understanding'. The situation at the time of his writing (1985) was that such an easily accessible body of knowledge did not exist. No improvement has occurred since then, as far as I am aware, although he hoped (in vain) that such an enterprise would be possible by the end of the 80s. It is difficult, if not impossible for a teacher to find a case study that is relevant to a particular problem in his classroom. Research papers are diffused through a multitude of publications and selection is an insurmountable problem for the uninitiated. This is the more deplorable since the authors publish their articles precisely because they think they might be useful to others and many studies are being published by practising teachers for practising teachers. He credits Stenhouse (1978) with having suggested the establishment of case study archives along the lines of those of historians. His own role model is that of the legal profession. In law the facts of the case and the arguments are thoroughly documented. Lawyers refer back to a particular case to suggest that there are different examples of similar situations (or similar examples in different situations) and that these have relevance to the present case. Similarities *might* cause similar outcomes. It is essential that *all* cases are cumulated to form an archive which constitutes precedential law. Tripp suggests case study banks (archives) with index systems in educational settings to make research findings available to teachers to give them the opportunity to apply them to their classrooms according to their needs.

This collection of case studies would then be available to be examined if the teacher encounters a particular problem and wants to find out whether (and how) this problem has been described before and how others have dealt with it. They can then try to transfer these findings to their own classroom. For this to happen, the reports of the case studies have to show carefully and clearly the salient features of the case. These features and findings of the cases would appear in the index. This would enable the teachers to find relevant case studies and help them to decide whether there is a case study whose findings can be applied to their problem. According to Tripp, there are two categories of salient features to achieve this. Comparable features (e.g. every classroom case study giving sex, age, ability and socio-economic status of the pupils, an account of the teaching facilities in the classroom and the teaching style of the teacher) and comprehensive features (particular circumstances which are judged relevant to the events observed etc.). When a sufficient number of cases have been collected (Tripp suggests several thousands), teachers have a wealth of vicarious experience they could act on. Ideally, teachers would then document their own experience and add it to the archive. He does not elaborate on this point but I would suggest that this adding to the archive is achieved by publication. This would act as a quality filter. Otherwise the archive could become unwieldy very quickly. Tripp cites Stenhouse (1977) who pointed out that with the present system (then and now) there is the danger that only outstanding case studies and/or well known writers achieve widespread diffusion and are readily accepted as representatives of a particular situation or problem. Any users of research would subscribe to this warning. An archive of the kind envisaged would diminish this danger. "The monuments would not remain in splendid isolation, but surrounded by lesser works".

This is an eminently sensible suggestion. Maybe one day somebody is going to make use of modern computer technology and compiles such a bank. It would be of invaluable help to the teacher. This would be research truly 'helping'. It would neatly combine the notions of fuzzy generalisation and fuzzy proposition (see above) in the sense that the teachers reach their own conclusion about the generalisability of the case study and then can make use of the researchers propositions if their case warrants this.

5. Conclusion

When examining the literature on case study research, the impression prevails that there is still an amount of insecurity. This is reflected in the plethora of terms that either mean the same or are only gradually different. Bassey compares some of these terms but refuses to be drawn into a valid interpretation. Moreover, he questions whether the authors of these terms have themselves fully understood their own terms. (Bassey, 1999). Over time one has to hope for jargon Darwinism, i.e. that only those terms survive that are accepted by the majority because of their relevance and clarity and that others vanish. The term 'case study method' is a good example of this. Whatever the argument might be why case study is possibly not a method, the term has firmly taken root and is here to stay. Excepting this, one has to establish what different elements are there *within* this method. One can, for instance, legitimately ask what a case study focuses on and who determines this. It has also to be established, before conducting case studies, what kind of case study is envisaged

(see (Eckstein, 2000). The onus to avoid ambiguity is on the researchers. The thicket of terms demands that they define clearly what the purpose of their research is and what the methods they are using are. If this is not done in sufficient detail, the readers have no choice but to apply their own interpretations to these terms. (This puts a different complexion on the term 'interpretive'.) A case study is not a straight forward affair. Somebody once remarked that education is like a butterfly and not like the path of a bullet (the name of the author has escaped me). Another analogy is that education confirms modern physics in that it shows that the shortest distance between two points is not necessarily a straight line. Case studies reflect this. (One can be forgiven for thinking that, in the light of past and present discussions about the merits and properties of the case study and the terminology, the analogy of the 'chaos theory' or the Tower of Bable syndrome, could be appropriate.)

To answer the question in the title directly: the conclusion I have arrived at is that distinction between the terms 'method' and 'focus' is not helpful since this adds to the confusion. The case study should be described as a method, but before the method can be applied, the focus of research has to be defined by the researcher. The concept of generalisation has been given some room here because only once the focus has been established, the issue of generalisation can be addressed. It could also be argued that generalisation *is* a focus. A classroom researcher who wants to find out and help (maybe by an element of intervention within the case study) does so with generalisation in mind from the beginning.

Generalisation (another term that has taken root to the detriment of others) (see Ch. 4) in educational case study research has become an accepted goal where appropriate, although it is this concept that triggers most of the criticism about case study research and has therefore occupied some room here. For findings that allow

generalisation to become useful in education, they have to be diffused beyond the relatively small band of specialists in educational research. Practitioners have to be given a mechanism to keep abreast of educational development. The only reason that makes the idea of an archive baffling is that it does not exist yet. There is the real danger that the debate about educational research is bypassing the very people this debate should be directed at: the teachers. Modern technology makes it feasible to avail the teacher of this opportunity. For this assignment, the Internet was used to browse in libraries in three different countries. Teachers could in the future easily browse in the Internet to find a tentative answer to their problem thousands of miles away. One of the side effects would be that they will be acquainted with different research methods, among them the case study method which is eminently suitable for the classroom. Their interest in research could be triggered and, eventually, they might contribute to our knowledge. In other words, a case study archive could contribute to the democratisation of research.

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