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APPROACHES TO RESEARCH

It is perfectly possible to carry out a worthwhile investigation without having detailed knowledge of the various approaches to or styles of research, but a study of different approaches will give insight into different ways of planning an investigation, and, incidentally, will also enhance your understanding of the literature. One of the problems of reading about research reports and reading research reports is the terminology. Researchers use terms and occasionally jargon that may be incomprehensible to other people. It is the same in any field, where a specialized language develops to ease communication among professionals. So, before considering the various stages of planning and conducting investigations, it may be helpful to consider the main features of certain well-established and well-reported styles of research.

Different styles, traditions or approaches use different methods of collecting data, but no approach prescribes nor automatically rejects any particular method. Quantitative researchers collect facts and study the relationship of one set of facts to another. They use techniques that are likely to produce quantified and, if possible, generalizable conclusions. Researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned to understand individuals' perceptions of the world. They seek insights rather than statistical perceptions of the world. They doubt whether social 'facts' exist and question whether a 'scientific' approach can be used

when dealing with human beings. Yet there are occasions when qualitative researchers draw on quantitative techniques, and vice versa.

Classifying an approach as quantitative or qualitative, ethnographic, survey, action research or whatever, does not mean that once an approach has been selected, the researcher may not move from the methods normally associated with that style. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses and each is particularly suitable for a particular context. The approach adopted and the methods of data collection selected will depend on the nature of the inquiry and the type of information required.

It is impossible in the space of a few pages to do justice to any of the well-established styles of research, but the following will at least provide a basis for further reading and may give you ideas about approaches you may wish to adopt in your own investigation.

Action research and the role of practitioner researchers

Action research is an approach which is appropriate in any context when 'specific knowledge is required for a specific problem in a specific situation, or when a new approach is to be grafted on to an existing system' (Cohen and Manion 1994: 194). It is not a method or a technique. As in all research, the methods selected for gathering information depend on the nature of the information required. It is applied research, carried out by practitioners who have themselves identified a need for change or improvement, sometimes with support from outside the institution; other times not. The aim is 'to arrive at recommendations for good practice that will tackle a problem or enhance the performance of the organization and individuals through changes to the rules and procedures within which they operate' (Denscombe 2002: 27).

Lomax (2002: 124) provides a series of useful questions for action researchers under the headings of purpose, focus, relations, method and validation. Under the 'purpose' heading, she asks:

- Can I improve my practice so that it is more effective?

- Can I improve my understanding of this practice so as to make it more just?
- Can I use my knowledge and influence to improve the situation?

Under 'method', she asks whether the action researcher can collect 'rigorous data' which will provide evidence to support claims for action. These and similar questions can serve as a starting point for action research but when the investigation is finished and the findings have been considered by all participants, the job is still not finished. The participants continue to review, evaluate and improve practice. The research involves 'a feedback loop in which initial findings generate possibilities for change which are then implemented and evaluated as a prelude to further investigation' (Denscombe 1998: 58). It implies a 'continuous process of research' and 'the worth of the work is judged by the understanding of, and desirable change in, the practice that is achieved' (Brown and McIntyre 1981: 245).

There is nothing new about practitioners operating as researchers, but as in all 'insider' investigations, difficulties can arise if dearly-held views and practices of some participants are challenged, as can happen if the research evidence appears to indicate that radical changes must take place if progress is to be made. Denscombe reminds us that:

> Because the activity of action research almost inevitably affects others, it is important to have a clear idea of when and where the action research necessarily steps outside the bounds of collecting information which is purely personal and relating to the practitioners alone. Where it does so, the usual standard of ethics must be observed: permissions obtained, confidentiality maintained, identities protected.
>
> (Denscombe 1998: 63)

Of equal, or perhaps even greater importance is that before the research begins, everyone involved must know why the investigation is to take place, who will see the final report, and who will have responsibility for implementing any recommended changes.

Case study

Even if you are working on a 100-hour project over a three-month period, the case study approach can be particularly appropriate for individual researchers because it provides an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth. Of course, not all case studies have to be completed in three months, or even three years. For example, Korman and Glennerster's (1990) study of what led to the closure of a large mental hospital took seven and a half years to complete. Sadly, you will have to wait until you are head of research in your hospital, local authority, university or government department before you will be in a position to undertake and to obtain the funding for such a venture, so for the time being, be realistic about the selection of your case study topic. Yin reminds us that 'case studies have been done about decisions, about programmes, about the implementation process, and about organizational change. Beware these types of topic – none is easily defined in terms of the beginning or end point of the case.' He adds that 'the more a study contains specific propositions, the more it will stay within reasonable limits' (Yin 1994: 137). Good advice and worth following.

Case studies may be carried out to follow up and to put flesh on the bones of a survey. They can also precede a survey and be used as a means of identifying key issues which merit further investigation, but the majority are carried out as free-standing exercises. Researchers identify an 'instance', which could be the introduction of a new way of working, the way an organization adapts to a new role, or any innovation or stage of development in an institution. Evidence has to be collected systematically, the relationship between variables studied (a variable being a characteristic or attribute) and the investigation methodically planned. Though observation and interviews are most frequently used, no method is excluded.

All organizations and individuals have their common and their unique features. Case study researchers aim to identify such features, to identify or attempt to identify the various interactive processes at work, to show how they affect the implementation of systems and influence the way an organization functions. These processes may remain hidden in a large-scale

survey but could be crucial to the success or failure of systems or organizations.

Critics of case study

Critics of the case study approach draw attention to a number of problems and/or disadvantages. For example, some question the value of the study of single events and point out that it is difficult for researchers to cross-check information. Others express concern about the possibility of selective reporting and the resulting dangers of distortion. A major concern is that generalization is not always possible, though Denscombe (1998: 36–7) makes the point that 'the extent to which findings from the case study can be generalized to other examples in the class depends on how far the case study example is similar to others of its type'. He illustrates this point by drawing on the example of a case study of a small primary school. He writes that:

> This means that the researcher must obtain data on the significant features (catchment area, the ethnic origins of the pupils and the amount of staff turnover) for primary schools in general, and then demonstrate where the case study example fits in relation to the overall picture.
>
> (1998: 37)

In his 1981 paper on the relative merits of the search for generalization and the study of single events, Bassey preferred to use the term 'relatability' rather than 'generalizability'. In his opinion

> an important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision making to that described in the case study. The relatability of a case study is more important than its generalizability.
>
> (Bassey 1981: 85)

He considers that if case studies

> are carried out systematically and critically, if they are aimed at the improvement of education, if they are relatable, and if by publication of the findings they extend the boundaries of existing knowledge, then they are valid forms of educational research.
>
> (p. 86)

Writing about an education case study in 1999, he amends or rather adds to his 1981 thoughts. He recalls that

> Previously I had treated the concept of generalization (of the empirical kind, that is) as a statement that had to be absolutely true. This is the sense in which physical scientists use the term. It is the basis of their concept of scientific method . . . in which a hypothesis stands as a generalization (or law) only if it withstands all attempts at refutation. I argued that there were very few generalizations (in this absolute sense) about education – and even fewer, if any, that were useful to experienced teachers.
>
> (Bassey 1999: 12)

He makes it clear that he still holds to this view as far as scientific generalizations (of the absolute kind) are concerned but now acknowledges there can be two other kinds of generalization which can apply in the social sciences, namely statistical generalizations and 'fuzzy' generalizations:

> The statistical generalization arises from samples of populations and typical claims that *there is an x per cent or y per cent chance that* what was found in the sample will also be found throughout the population: it is the quantitative measure. The fuzzy generalization arises from studies of singularities and typical claims that *it is possible, or likely, or unlikely that* what was found in the singularity will be found in similar situations elsewhere: it is a qualitative measure.
>
> (p. 12)

The pros and cons of case study will no doubt be debated in the future as they have been in the past. It's as well to be aware of the criticisms but, as I said at the beginning of this section, case study can be an appropriate approach for individual researchers because it provides an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth. You will have to decide whether or not it suits your purpose.

Survey

It would be nice to have a clear, short and succinct definition of 'survey' but as Aldridge and Levine (2001: 5) point out, 'Each survey is unique. Therefore, lists of do's and don'ts are too inflexible. A solution to one survey may not work in another.' Moser and Kalton (1971: 1) agree that it would be pleasant to provide a straightforward definition of what is meant by a 'social survey' but make it clear that 'such a definition would have to be so general as to defeat its purpose, since the term and the methods associated with it are applied to an extraordinarily wide variety of investigations . . .'. They continue by giving examples of the range of areas which might be covered by a survey:

> A survey may be occasioned simply by a need for administrative facts on some aspects of public life; or be designed to investigate a cause–effect relationship or to throw fresh light on some aspect of sociological theory. When it comes to subject matter, all one can say is that surveys are concerned with the demographic characteristics, the social environment, the activities, or the opinions and attitudes of some group of people.
>
> (Moser and Kalton 1971: 1)

The census is one example of a survey in which the same questions are asked of the selected population (the population being the group or category of individuals selected). It aims to cover 100 per cent of the population, but most surveys have less ambitious aims. In most cases, a survey will aim to obtain information from a representative selection of the population and from that sample

will then be able to present the findings as being representative of the population as a whole. Inevitably, there are problems in the survey method. Great care has to be taken to ensure that the sample population is truly representative. At a very simple level, that means ensuring that if the total population has 1000 men and 50 women, then the same proportion of men to women has to be selected. But that example grossly oversimplifies the method of drawing a representative sample and if you decide to carry out a survey, you will need to consider what characteristics of the total population need to be represented in your sample to enable you to say with fair confidence that your sample is reasonably representative.

In surveys, all respondents will be asked the same questions in, as far as possible, the same circumstances. Question wording is not as easy as it seems, and careful piloting is necessary to ensure that all questions mean the same to all respondents. Information can be gathered by means of self-completion questionnaires (as in the case of the census) or by an interviewer. Whichever method of information gathering is selected, the aim is to obtain answers to the same questions from a large number of individuals to enable the researcher not only to describe but also to compare, to relate one characteristic to another and to demonstrate that certain features exist in certain categories.

Surveys can provide answers to the questions What? Where? When? and How?, but it is not so easy to find out Why? Causal relationships can rarely, if ever, be proved by survey method. The main emphasis is on fact-finding, and if a survey is well structured and piloted, it can be a relatively cheap and quick way of obtaining information.

The experimental style

It is relatively easy to plan experiments which deal with measurable phenomena. For example, experiments have been set up to measure the effects of using fluoridated toothpaste on dental caries by establishing a control group (who did not use the toothpaste) and an experimental group (who did). In such experiments, the two groups, matched for age, sex, social class, and so on were

given a pre-test dental examination and instructions about which toothpaste to use. After a year, both groups were given the post-test dental examination and conclusions were then drawn about the effectiveness or otherwise of the fluoridated toothpaste. The principle of such experiments is that if two identical groups are selected, one of which (the experimental group) is given special treatment and the other (the control group) is not, then any differences between the two groups at the end of the experimental period may be attributed to the difference in treatment. A causal relationship appears to have been established. It may be fairly straightforward to test the extent of dental caries (though even in this experiment the extent of the caries could be caused by many factors not controlled by the experiment) but it is quite another matter to test changes in behaviour. As Wilson (1979) points out, social causes do not work singly. Any examination of low student attainment or high IQ is the product of multiple causes.

> To isolate each cause requires a new experimental group each time and the length and difficulty of the experiment increase rapidly. It is possible to run an experiment in which several treatments are put into practice simultaneously but many groups must be made available rather than just two . . . The causes of social phenomena are usually multiple ones and an experiment to study them requires large numbers of people often for lengthy periods. This requirement limits the usefulness of the experimental method.
>
> (Wilson 1979: 22)

So, experiments may allow conclusions to be drawn about cause and effect, *if* the design is sound, but large groups are needed if the many variations and ambiguities involved in human behaviour are to be controlled. Such large-scale experiments are expensive to set up and take more time than most students working on 100-hour projects can give. Some tests which require only a few hours (e.g. to test short-term memory or perception) can be very effective, but in claiming a causal relationship, great care needs to be taken to ensure that all possible causes have been considered.

It is worth noting at this point that there can be ethical issues associated with experimental research. Permission to conduct the

research must be obtained from the heads of institutions or units concerned and from the participants themselves. All must be fully informed about what is involved. Proposals may have to be considered by ethics committees and/or research committees in order to ensure that subjects of the research will not be harmed by it. Particularly if children are involved, permission to participate must be sought from parents.

Cohen et al. (2000) particularly object to the principle of 'manipulating' human beings. They write that:

> Notions of isolation and control of variables in order to establish causality may be appropriate for a laboratory, though whether, in fact, a social situation ever *could become* the antiseptic, artificial world of the laboratory or *should become* such a world is both an empirical and moral question . . . Further, the ethical dilemmas of treating humans as manipulable, controllable and inanimate are considerable.
>
> (Cohen et al. 2000: 212)

Quite so, though ethical issues have to be considered in all research, regardless of the context. If you decide you wish to undertake an experimental study, ask for advice, consider any implications and requirements – and be careful about making claims about causality.

Ethnography and the ethnographic style of research

Brewer defines ethnography as

> The study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by methods of data collection which capture their social **meanings** and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally.
>
> (Brewer 2000: 6)

Ethnographic researchers attempt to develop an understanding of

how a culture works and, as Lutz points out, many methods and techniques are used in that search:

> Participant observation, interview, mapping and charting, interaction analysis, study of historical records and current public documents, the use of demographic data, etc. But ethnography centers on the participant observation of a society or culture through a complete cycle of events that regularly occur as that society interacts with its environment.
> (Lutz 1986: 108)

Participant observation enables researchers, as far as is possible, to share the same experiences as the subjects, to understand better why they act in the way they do and 'to see things as those involved see things' (Denscombe 1998: 69). However, it is time-consuming and so is often outside the scope of researchers working on 100-hour projects or on fixed-time Master's degrees. The researcher has to be accepted by the individuals or groups being studied, and this can mean doing the same job, or living in the same environment and circumstances as the subjects for lengthy periods.

Time is not the only problem with this approach. As in case studies, critics point to the problem of representativeness. If the researcher is studying one group in depth over a period of time, who is to say that group is typical of other groups that may have the same title? Are nurses in one hospital (or even in one specialist area) necessarily representative of nurses in a similar hospital or specialist area in another part of the country? Are canteen workers in one type of organization likely to be typical of all canteen workers? Critics also refer to the problem of generalization, but as in the case study approach, if the study is well structured and carried out, and makes no claims which cannot be justified, it may well be relatable in a way that will enable members of similar groups to recognize problems and, possibly, to see ways of solving similar problems in their own group.

The grounded theory approach

The grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis was developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s during the course of a field observational study of the way hospital staff dealt with dying patients (1965, 1968). So what does it involve? Strauss (1987) tells us that

> The methodological thrust of the grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis is toward the development of theory, without any particular commitment to specific kinds of data, lines of research, or theoretical interests. So, it is not really a specific method or technique. Rather it is a style of doing qualitative analysis that includes a number of distinct features, such as theoretical sampling, and certain methodological guidelines, such as the making of constant comparisons and the use of a coding paradigm, to ensure conceptual development and density.
>
> (Strauss, 1987: 5)

He defines *theoretical sampling* as

> sampling directed by the evolving theory; it is a sampling of incidents, events, activities, populations, etc. It is harnessed to the making of *comparisons* between and among those samples of activities, populations, etc.
>
> (p. 21)

The theory is not prespecified. It emerges as the research proceeds (hence 'theoretical' sampling).

Over the years, there have been some adjustments to the original 1960s' approach to grounded theory, but the principles remain much the same, which are that theory evolves during actual research by means of the analysis of the data.

Punch considers that

> grounded theory is best defined as a research strategy whose purpose is to generate theory from data. 'Grounded' means that the theory will be generated on the basis of data; the

> theory will therefore be grounded in data. 'Theory' means that the objective of collecting and analysing the research data is to generate theory. The essential idea in grounded theory is that theory will be developed inductively from data.
>
> (Punch 1998: 163)

At first sight, this seems straightforward enough, but as Hayes makes clear,

> The process of conducting grounded theory research isn't just a matter of looking at the data and developing a theory from it. Instead, it is what researchers call an **iterative** process – that is, a cyclical process in which theoretical insights emerge or are discovered in the data, those insights are then tested to see how they can make sense of other parts of the data, which in turn produce their own theoretical insights, which are then tested again against the data, and so on.
>
> (Hayes 2000: 184)

She continues by reminding us that

> The theory which is produced using a grounded theory analysis may sometimes be very context-specific, applying only in a relatively small number of situations; but because it is always grounded in data collected from the real world, it can serve as a very strong basis for further investigations, as well as being a research finding in its own right.
>
> (p. 184)

Most grounded theory researchers will begin with research questions but they do not start with a hypothesis, nor do they begin their investigation with a thorough review of the literature relating to their topic. They build up theory from their data and they do not wait until all data are collected before they begin the analysis stage. Instead, analysis takes place as the data are collected. The researcher examines the findings of an interview or of participant observation and then proceeds to the analysis of those findings before any other data are collected. As the research proceeds, there will be more data collection and more analysis and

so on until 'theoretical saturation' is reached, which is the stage at which 'new data are not showing any new theoretical elements, but rather confirming what has already been found' (Punch 1998: 167).

Miles and Huberman have some reservations about the principle that coding and recording are over when the analysis appears to have run its course, when all the incidents can be readily classified, when categories are 'saturated' and sufficient numbers of 'regularities' have emerged. They warn us to 'be careful here' because

> Fieldwork understanding comes in layers; the longer we are in the environment, the more layers appear to surface, and the choice of when to close down, when to go with a definitive coding system or definitive analysis can be painful. That choice may be dictated as much by time and budget constraints as on scientific grounds. When those constraints are relaxed, saturation can become a vanishing horizon – just another field trip away, then another . . .
>
> (Miles and Huberman 1994: 62)

Glaser (1992) has also expressed some concern at the way grounded theory has developed over the years, in particular the development and use of computer-assisted code and retrieval software which claims to generate theory on grounded theory lines. He considers that more subtle procedures are required in order to tease out the layers of meaning which emerge, and this cannot be achieved by any narrow analytical procedures.

The analysis of grounded theory data is, to me at least, quite complex. It requires the researcher to identify concepts, codes, categories and relationships in order to bring order to the data, and the time taken to become skilled at identifying and applying them is considerable. I confess that I find the level of abstraction and the language used which appear to be implicit in grounded theory difficult to absorb. However, that is no more than my perception of the difficulty of teasing out those layers of meaning. Many colleagues and former students whose views I respect and who have successfully completed research based on a grounded theory approach disagree with me. They tell me that the

computer software can cope with the layers and the complexity perfectly well. So, all I can say is that before you decide to commit yourself to a grounded theory approach, read as widely as time permits and, as always, take advice before you finally decide how to proceed.

Narrative inquiry and stories

It is only relatively recently that I have become interested in the use and interpretation of narratives and in particular the acceptance of stories as valuable sources of data. Stories are certainly interesting and have been used for many years by management consultants and others who present examples of successful (and unsuccessful) practice as a basis for discussion as to how successful practice might be emulated and disasters avoided. What has always taxed me has been how information derived from storytelling can be structured in such a way as to produce valid research findings. It took an experienced group of postgraduate and postdoctoral students who had planned their research on 'narrative inquiry' lines to sort me out and to explain precisely what was involved. I was not even sure what narrative inquiry actually meant and so, always believing the best way to find out is to ask an expert, I asked one member of the group, Dr Janette Gray, to tell me. She wrote as follows:

> It involves the collection and development of stories, either as a form of data collection or as a means of structuring a research project. Informants often speak in a story form during the interviews, and as the researcher, listening and attempting to understand, we hear their 'stories'. The research method can be described as narrative when data collection, interpretation and writing are considered a 'meaning-making' process with similar characteristics to stories (Gudmunsdottir 1996: 295). Narrative inquiry can involve reflective autobiography, life story, or the inclusion of excerpts from participants' stories to illustrate a theme developed by the researcher. A narrative approach to inquiry is most appropriate when the researcher is interested in

> portraying intensely personal accounts of human experience. Narratives allow voice – to the researcher, the participants and to cultural groups – and in this sense they can have the ability to develop a decidedly political and powerful edge.
>
> (Gray 1998: 12)

Colleagues to whom I had earlier spoken and who had successfully adopted a narrative inquiry approach to one or more of their research projects had always made it clear that stories were not merely used as a series of 'story boxes' piled on top of one another and with no particular structure or connecting theme. The problem I had was in understanding how such structures and themes could be derived. Jan's explanation was as follows:

> All forms of narrative inquiry involve an element of analysis and development of theme, dependent on the researcher's perspective. Stories share a basic structure. The power of a story is dependent on the storyteller's use of language to present an interpretation of personal experience. The skill of the narrative researcher lies in the ability to structure the interview data into a form which clearly presents a sense of a beginning, middle and an end. Even though the use of story as a research tool is a relatively new concept in the social sciences, historically story has been an accepted way of relating knowledge and developing self-knowledge. One of the major strengths of such a means of conducting inquiry is the ability to allow readers who do not share a cultural background similar to either the storyteller or the researcher to develop an understanding of notices and consequences of actions described within a story format. Narrative is a powerful and different way of knowing . . .
>
> Data collection for narrative research requires the researcher to allow the storyteller to structure the conversations, with the researcher asking follow-up questions. So a narrative approach to the question of how mature-age undergraduates perceive their ability to cope with the experience of returning to study would involve extended, open-ended interviews with mature-aged students. This would allow the students to express their personal experience of the problems,

> frustrations and joys of returning to study. It might also involve similar 'conversations' with other stakeholders in their education – perhaps family members; their tutors and lecturers – to provide a multiple perspective of the context of the education of mature-aged undergraduates.
>
> (Gray 1998: 2)

Jan added that 'the benefit of considerate and careful negotiation will be a story allowing an incredibly personal and multi-faceted insight into the situation being discussed'. I am sure this is so. I have become convinced of the value of this approach and that stories can in some cases serve to enhance understanding within a case study or an ethnographic study. However, narratives can present their own set of problems:

> Interviews are time-consuming and require the researcher to allow the storytellers to recount in their own way the experience of being (or teaching) a student. This may not emerge in the first interview. Until a trust relationship has developed between researcher and storyteller, it is highly unlikely that such intimate information will be shared. Such personal involvement with the researcher involves risks and particular ethical issues. The storytellers may decide they have revealed more of their feelings than they are prepared to share publicly and they may insist either on substantial editing or on withdrawing from the project.
>
> (Gray 1998: 2)

Problems of this kind can arise in almost any kind of research, particularly those which are heavily dependent on interview data, but the close relationship needed for narrative inquiry can make the researcher (and the storyteller) particularly vulnerable.

The fact that the narrative approach carries with it a number of potential difficulties, particularly for first-time researchers, and researchers operating within a particularly tight schedule, certainly does not mean that it should be disregarded when considering an appropriate approach to the topic of your choice. Far from it – but as is the case with all research planning, I feel it would be as well to discuss the issues fully with your supervisor

before deciding what to do, and if possible to try to find a supervisor who is experienced, or at least interested, in narrative inquiry.

Which approach?

Classifying an approach as ethnographic, qualitative, experimental, or whatever, does not mean that once an approach has been selected the researcher may not move from the methods normally associated with that style. But understanding the major advantages and disadvantages of each approach is likely to help you to select the most appropriate methodology for the task in hand. This chapter covers only the very basic principles associated with different styles or approaches to research which will suffice – at any rate until you have decided on a topic and considered what further information you need to obtain.

Further reading is provided at the end of this chapter. As far as possible, I have tried to indicate books and journals which should be available in academic libraries or on the World Wide Web. However, always consult the library catalogue. If there is an online facility, the librarian will show you how the system operates. Then take advantage of what the library has in stock or is able to obtain from another library, preferably without cost.

Further reading

Aldridge, A. and Levine, K. (2001) *Surveying the Social World: Principles and Practice in Survey Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bassey, M. (1981) 'Pedagogic research: on the relative merits of the search for generalisation and study of single events', *Oxford Review of Education*, 7(1): 73–93. Also reproduced as Chapter 7 in J. Bell, T. Bush, A. Fox et al. (eds) (1984) *Conducting Small-scale Investigations in Educational Management*. London: Harper & Row.

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

Bassey, M. (2001) 'A solution to the problem of generalisation in educational research: fuzzy prediction', *Oxford Review of Education*, 27(1): 5–22.

Bassey, M. (2002) 'Case study research', Chapter 7 in M. Coleman and A.R.J. Briggs (eds) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Bell, J. and Opie, C. (2002) *Learning from Research: Getting More from Your Data*. Buckingham: Open University Press. Part 5 discusses the way Tim Chan planned and carried out a survey of student evaluation of teaching effectiveness (SET) as part of his doctoral research (Chan 2000). If you are considering an experiment, then you may wish to consult Part 3 which discusses how Lim Cher Ping structured his experimental research into the effectiveness of a computer-based learning program (Lim 1997).

Bowling, A. (2002) *Research Methods in Health: Investigating Health and Health Services*, 2nd edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press. See pp. 410–15 for an account of action research.

Brewer, J.D. (2000) *Ethnography*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Casey, K. (1993) 'The new narrative research in education', *Review of Research in Education*, 32: 211–53.

Clough, P. (2002) *Narratives and Fictions in Educational Research*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. Peter Clough provides interesting 'fictional' stories which demonstrate the use of narrative in reporting research, and discusses the potential merits and difficulties of such an approach.

Cohen L. and Manion, L. (1994) 'Case studies', Chapter 5 in *Research Methods in Education*, 4th edn. London: Routledge.

Darlington, Y. and Scott, D. (2002) *Qualitative Research in Practice: Stories from the Field*. Maidenhead: Open University Press (first published in 2002 by Allen & Unwin, Australia). Chapter 1 considers issues relating to quantitative and/or qualitative methods.

Denscombe, M. (1998) *The Good Research Guide for Small-scale Social Research Projects*. Buckingham: Open University Press. Chapter 2 provides a clear account of the advantages and limitations of case study. Chapter 3 deals with experiments, Chapter 4 with action research and Chapter 5 with ethnography. Helpful checklists are provided at the end of main sections.

Denscombe, M. (2003) *The Good Research Guide*, 2nd edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press. Part I, 'Strategies for social research' considers a number of approaches, including survey, case studies, Internet research, experiments, action research, ethnography, phenomenology and grounded theory. Checklists are again provided.

Fogelman, K. (2002) 'Surveys and sampling', Chapter 6 in M. Coleman and A.R.G. Briggs (eds) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Goodson, I.F. and Sikes, P. (2001) *Life History Research in Educational Settings: Learning from Lives*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. This book explores reasons for the popularity of life history research in education, though many of the examples they consider are likely to have similar application to researchers in other disciplines.

Hammersley, M. (1989) *The Dilemma of Qualitative Method*. London: Routledge. On pages 172–7 and 198–204, Hammersley provides a well-argued critique of grounded theory, discusses its relationship to earlier studies of analytic induction and considers some of the criticisms sometimes levelled at Glaser and Strauss's (1967) approach. Quite a hard read but worth the effort.

Hammersley, M. (1990) *Classroom Ethnography: Empirical and Methodological Essays*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Hart, E. and Bond, M. (1995) *Action Research for Health and Social Care*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Hayes, N. (2000) *Doing Psychological Research: Gathering and Analysing Data*. Buckingham: Open University Press. Chapter 3, 'Experiments', provides useful information about causality in experiments.

Lomax, P. (2002) 'Action research', Chapter 8 in M. Coleman and A.R.J. Briggs (eds) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Lutz, F.W. (1986) 'Ethnography: the holistic approach to understanding schooling', in M. Hammersley *Controversies in Classroom Research*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press. This is an excellent chapter which relates mainly to ethnographic research in education, but which has valuable advice about any type of qualitative research. The book is rather old now, but I hope will still be on the shelves of academic libraries or accessible via the Internet.

May, T. (2001) *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*, 3rd edn. Buckingham: Open University Press. See particularly Chapter 5, 'Social surveys: design to analysis'.

Moser, C.A. and Kalton, G. (1971) *Survey Methods in Social Investigation*, 2nd edn. London Heinemann. This book is rather old, but if there is a copy in your library, it is still worth consulting.

Opie, C. (2004) Chapter 5, 'Research approaches', in C. Opie (ed.) *Doing Educational Research*. London: Sage. This chapter considers case study, action research, experiments and grounded theory and includes interesting quotations from students' experiences.

Polit, D.F. and Hungler, B.P. (1995) *Nursing Research: Principles and Methods*, 5th edn. Philadelphia: Lippincott Company. Small but useful section on case study on pages 200–3.

Punch, K.F. (1998) *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and*

Qualitative Approaches. London: Sage. Pages 68–76 discuss some of the difficulties in designing experiments and give examples of a range of experiments and quasi-experiments. Pages 162–73 and 210–21 include excellent sections on the meaning and analysis of grounded theory.

Punch, K.F. (2003) *Survey Research: The Basics*. London: Sage. This 'How to' book is aimed at new researchers and is concerned mainly with small-scale quantitative surveys. Very useful.

Roberts, B. (2002) *Biographical Research*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. Chapter 6 considers oral history; Chapter 7 deals with narrative and in particular narrative analysis; Chapter 9 concentrates on ethnography and biographical research.

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