

Methods in Case Study Research for School Library Media Evaluation

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Document 9: Guidelines for Doing a Field-Observation Case Study

One Set of Guidelines for Doing a Field-Observation Case Study¹

I. ANTICIPATION

Review or discover what is expected at the outset in the way of a case study.
Consider the questions, hypotheses, or issues already raised.
Read some case study literature, both methodological and exemplary.
Look for one or more studies possibly to use a model.
Identify the “case.” Was it prescribed, selected to represent, or merely convenient?
Define the boundaries of the case (or cases) as they appear in advance.
Anticipate key problems, events, attributes, spaces, persons, vital signs.
Consider possible audiences for preliminary and final reporting.
Form initial plan of action, including definition of role of observer on site.

II. FIRST VISIT

Arrange preliminary access, negotiate plan of action, arrange regular access.
Write an agreement indicating obligations for observer and for principal.
Refine access rules with people involved, including library media specialist, teachers, etc.
Discuss real or potential costs to school and district, including opportunity costs.
Discuss arrangements for maintaining confidentiality of data, sources, reports.
Discuss need for persons to review drafts to validate observations, descriptions.
Identify information and services, if any, to be offered hosts.
Revise plan of action, observer’s role, case boundaries, issues, as needed.
Meet with documenter.

¹ Adapted from: Stake, R.E. (1995). The art of case study research (pp. 52-53). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

III. FURTHER PREPARATION FOR OBSERVATION

Make preliminary observations of activities. Practice, if needed, with familiar library.
Allocate resources to alternative spaces, persons, methods, issues, phases, etc.
Identify informants, including the documenter, and sources of particular data.
Select or develop instruments or standardized procedures, only if essential.
Work out record-keeping system, files, tapes; coding system; protected storage.
Rework priorities for attributes, problems, events, audiences, etc.
Look at building survey data including collection maps and logs.

Building Level Case Study

Sources of Data

Essential

1. Principal
2. Library Media Specialist
3. Members of School Library Power Advisory Committee
4. Technology and computer specialist
5. Teachers
 - A select group (at least 3) identified as active Library Power teachers
(The teachers interviewed should be representative of the existing grade ranges.)
 - At least some who are not active, or those who are more passive, Library Power teachers
 - A few teachers selected at random
 - {The number of teachers to be observed and interviewed in each of these categories will depend on the size of the faculty. Teachers should be selected to be interviewed in order to get a representation of what teachers at the school think and have done. More than the “converted” teachers should be sought.}
6. Students (informal)
 - In the library or media center setting—groups or individuals
 - In the classroom setting—groups or individuals
7. Library Power school plan, proposal or request for funding, budgets, and reports
8. Collection information, inventory, maps, software, and evidence of change over time
9. Library weekly, monthly, and/or yearly schedule
10. Library rules and library manual (if it exists)

11. Documents used by the librarian to gather information from teachers and others
12. School documents such as organization chart, demographics, and improvement plans
13. School instructional program priorities and themes
14. List of school professional development activities and relationship to library
15. Observations of library media center and classrooms
16. Observations of teacher/librarian cooperative or grade level planning meetings
17. Observations of audiovisual equipment and computer use

Helpful

1. Parents
2. Custodian
3. Librarian of neighborhood public library
4. Library assistants and volunteers
5. Assistant principal
6. Newsletters from public education fund or district with articles about school LP program
7. Listing of pull-out programs and other instructional programs operating within the school
8. Community leaders who have direct involvement with school LP program
9. School reports on reading achievement data and other relevant student outcomes
10. Relevant district documents for contextual information
11. Observation of computer lab or room
12. Observations of professional development training on LP
13. Observations of hallways and walls for evidence of library involvement
14. Observations of classroom library collections (if they exist)
15. Visit to teachers' lounge

Report Outline

- I. Cover page listing title, name of author and date
- II. Disclaimer
- III. Table of Contents
- IV. Introduction
- V. Methodology
- VI. Contextual Information
 - A. Community
 - B. School
 1. Demographics
 2. Other reform efforts
 - a. Duration and priority
 - b. Link to Library Power

- VII. Description of Library Power as Applied in School
 - A. Operation
 - 1. Vision and Goals
 - 2. Library Power Team and Key Players
 - 3. Involvement of Others—Parents, etc.
 - B. Library Media Center
 - 1. Facilities
 - a. Before
 - b. Current
 - 2. Collection
 - a. Relation to Curriculum
 - b. Student Use
 - c. Teacher Use
 - 3. Flexible Scheduling
 - 4. Use of Technology
 - C. Instruction
 - D. Student Learning
 - 1. Indicators
 - 2. Linkage to Library Power
 - E. Librarian and Teacher Collaboration
 - F. Professional Development
 - 1. For Building Level Team
 - 2. For Librarian
 - 3. For Teachers and Others
 - G. Institutionalization
- VIII. Conclusions
- IX. Reflections
- X. Author's Biography

Other Specifications

1. Use the terms library and librarian.
2. Use pseudonyms for building level people and include a separate key to names.
3. Refer to school as school 1, 2, or 3, as assigned.
4. Include background information on librarian and principal including years in current position, years' experience, years in education, degrees/certification, race gender.
5. Include building demographic information including number of students, number of teachers, proportion of special needs students, distribution by race/ethnicity and sex, grade range, special programs, indicator of economic condition of student body (i.e., percent on free or reduced lunch program), and instructional programs.
6. 1 ½ space, 11 point font, 20 to 30 pages.

IV. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTUALIZATION

Reconsider issues or other theoretical structure to guide the data gathering.
Be clear what is needed by the evaluation and what needs to be understood.
Sketch plans for final report and dissemination of findings.
Identify the possible “multiple realities,” how people see things differently.
Allocate attention to different viewpoints, conceptualizations.

V. GATHER DATA, VALIDATE DATA

Make observations, interview, debrief informants, gather logs, use surveys, etc.
Keep records of inquiry arrangements and activities.
Select Vignettes, special testimonies, illustrations.
Classify raw data; begin interpretations.
Redefine issues, case boundaries, renegotiate arrangements with hosts, as needed.
Gather additional data, replicating or triangulating, to validate key observations.

VI. ANALYSIS OF DATA

Review raw data under various possible interpretations.
Search for patterns of data (whether or not indicated by the issues).
Seek linkages between program arrangements, activities, and outcomes.
Draw tentative conclusions, organize according to issues, organize final report.
Review data, gather new data, deliberately seek disconfirmation of findings.

VII. REPORTING

Describe extensively the setting within which the activity occurred.
Consider the report as a story; look for ways in which the story is incomplete.
Draft report and reproduce materials for review by evaluation team.
Submit draft of report by April 1, 1996.
Help reader discern typically and relevance of situation as base for generalization.
Revise and submit final report and materials to evaluation team by June 1, 1996.



DRAFT Sample of Case Report Conclusions

Library Power has been successfully implemented in School Systems. The program has expanded to over half of the schools in the district and was continuing to expand even into its fourth year. Many factors have contributed to the success of the Library power in

Rich Town. The one central factor is the strong and consistent leadership that had been provided by the Library Power director working closely with the executive director of VIPS, the district's library supervisor, and the assistant superintendent. From their initial planning for the grant, this group was critical for providing a very clear vision as to what the program should be and what were the expectations for schools in the program.

Students in Rich Town are reading more, using libraries more effectively, and engaging in more thematic units. Teachers are doing more collaborative planning with each other and the librarians. Librarians have become more central to the instructional programs at schools. The collection at school libraries have been weeded and replaced by more modern books. Libraries have become inviting places to be and more conducive to instructional activities. The circulation process in many of the libraries have become automated giving librarians more data to monitor the volume and books being circulated.

Many factors have contributed to the success of Library Power in Rich Town. One has been a very extensive professional development program. Another has been accountability and high expectations. Schools had to go through a process to join Library Power. Schools were visited by a review team as a part of the initial evaluation for joining the program. School teams, including the principal, were held accountable for fulfilling the requirements of the contract. A broad base of support was generated at the beginning of the program and continued to be generated throughout its existence. This support came from the community, school board, universities, and those in the district. Plans were made from the very beginning for reaching all elementary schools in the district, a goal that was attained.

About half of the schools had effectively implemented the components of Library Power and were well on their way. The other schools were still struggling and in need of more individual attention. How the required attention would be provided was somewhat in question along with how the program would be sustained administratively. Enough people within the district had become informed about flexible scheduling, collaborative planning, collection updating, and other components of Library Power that these would be sustained into the future. The normal transfer of administrators, librarians, and teachers help to serve to spread Library Power across the district. But the continuation of the position of the Library Power director was in question. Having someone in charge was demonstrated as essential for the program because of the many details required by the program. Work still needed to be done to help those schools that were still struggling, to design professional development experiences for mature Library Power schools, to continue to provide introductory experiences for new school faculty members, and to keep the program's agenda on the district's agenda.

References

Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis. A sourcebook of new methods*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

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Zweizig, D.L., Hopkins, D.M., Webb, N.L., & Wehlage, G. (1999). *Lessons from Library Power enriching teaching and learning. Final report of the evaluation of the National Library Power Initiative*. Englewood, CA: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.