

Education Review

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Stake, R., & Visse, M. (2025). *Researching care with case studies*. Routledge.

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Researching Care with Case Studies brings together Stake's foundational work in qualitative research and Visse's insights from care studies, resulting in a timely contribution that will not only resonate with readers concerned with studying care, but also those more broadly interested in deepening their understanding of how to do case study research. Throughout the 10-chapter text, they examine the ways case studies can deepen understandings of care, layering explorations of what it means to care and be cared for with methodological guidance and vivid examples drawn from case studies. "In this book, we wonder what we may do to better understand care. On the docket: instrumentally researching with 'cases'" (p. 2).



In the first two chapters, Stake & Visse conceptualize care as both an object of study and an interpretive lens. They draw from the interdisciplinary field of care studies to describe the notions of care that inform their approach. As a practice, care-giving encompasses the ways we provide for and nurture others and how we embody notions of well-being. As a lens, care is a way of looking that emphasizes learning from the ordinary activities, routines, and concerns that constitute care's contextual complexities. They remind their readers, "Cases are examples, showing us real-life practices and how people experience and respond to events, happenings, and problems in these practices" (p. 3). Here and throughout the book, Stake & Visse provide a compelling rationale that case study research is particularly well-suited for the study of care in all its varied manifestations.

In Chapter 3, the authors provide an overview of case study research, defining a case study as the study of experience in context. While this discussion will be appreciated by those long acquainted with case study research, those new

to the approach may find particular value in clarifying key aspects of the approach. For example, novice case study researchers frequently ponder the distinction between instrumental and intrinsic case studies. Even though “such a classification is not something to make a big fuss about,” Stake & Visse explain that instrumental case studies study a case to gain a deeper understanding of something else (in this book that “something else” is care) (p. 23).

Each of the remaining chapters focuses on one of the following practical aspects of case study research: designing a case study, experiential orientation, objectivity and subjectivity, field work, data analysis, and writing the report. Each chapter also includes a powerful example case study selected to illustrate the concepts discussed. Stake & Visse provide critiques that invite readers to think through the examples with them. Although each chapter foregrounds a central idea, critical concepts and elements recur throughout, reflecting the ways the connections between them are experienced in the process of doing case study research.

In Chapter 4, a set of considerations to guide design is provided. Stake & Visse’s guidance on formulating a central research question and sub-questions is coupled with helpful examples. They discuss the ways issues drive the study, and how issues emerge and come into sharper focus as a researcher learns more about the case. The report provided in this chapter illustrates how issues were used as a conceptual structure for a case study of a juvenile detention center.

In Chapter 5, the authors establish the need for experiential accounts of care. “Measurement is more likely to seek reconfirmation of findings. Experience is more likely to be happy with nuance and uniqueness” (p. 47). This chapter features an example of an experiential account, portraying the complex story of a man caring for his wife. The case illustrates how features of case study research—particularity, experience, and context—have special value for understanding care. The relationship between the researcher and the case is woven throughout the story, providing insight into the intersubjective experience of making sense of care.

In Chapter 6, Stake & Visse assert that although the idea of objectivity often pleases editors and dissertation committees, gaining understanding of real-world personal experiences requires a more subjective process: “Meanings are human constructions. Without subjectivity, some are grossly incomplete, formulaic.” However, they point out, subjectivity in case study research does not equate with relativism. They note that case study research “is a proactive demonstration of care, characterized by attentive listening, responsiveness, and a deep commitment to understanding the intricacies of the case” (p. 59). Recognizing that studying care in this way involves entering the spaces of personal experience, the authors explore ethical considerations for diminishing intrusion into personal privacy and providing protection from emotional harm. Stake’s case study of training at the U.S. Veteran’s Benefits Administration shows readers what a good case study “write-up” looks like, highlighting Stake’s role as interpreter and the ways he used redundancy to support his assertions.

Chapter 7 is focused on field work. Stake & Visse point out that for many case studies, “the most meaningful data-gathering method will be observation of the case in its usual and unusual activities” (p. 33). From the start, researchers gather vignettes and patches they can assemble to portray the story of the case. The authors use the term *vignette* to refer to short descriptive notes that convey what was observed in ways that provide a sense of vicarious experience for readers. *Patches* is a term they use for observations or other artifacts that are particularly poignant. Although interviews “are often less likely than observation to dig into the reality of care,” field work typically involves informal conversations and more formal interviews with people involved in the case to capture their words, emotions, and testimonies (p. 33). The chapter concludes with a case study of a children’s ward in a hospital. The example includes the researcher’s reflection on using observations to create rich vignettes and then using the vignettes to guide interviews with medical personnel on the ward.

In Chapter 8, Stake & Visse focus on the process of connecting data to the issues so as to convey to an audience what was learned. They refer to this process as “analysis” or “assembling” (p. 93). “From the beginning, incoming pieces need to be mapped and connected, reconnected and reconfigured as problems come into focus and the search for understanding takes twists and turns” (p. 94). The authors distinguish between coding and holistic interpretation. Although they support the use of *in vivo* coding, they caution against relying heavily on coding. Stake & Visse explain that the researcher’s interpretation should be the primary guide in assembling the data and constructing a presentation of the case. “There is no blueprint, but you need to describe what you did” (p. 97). The case study report presented in this chapter focuses on understanding the high school experience of one student with multiple disabilities. Stake & Visse highlight the ways the researcher addressed *validity*, a term they use to indicate the quality of a case study. Throughout the text they describe ways to validate, including keeping a methods notebook that chronicles the methodological decisions made along the way, decentering, and seeking multiple perspectives and counterclaims. They describe redundancy as a major strategy: using multiple data sources to confirm or contradict interpretations; looking for repetition of happenings or expressions; looking for contrary findings; making assertions backed by multiple observations.

Chapter 9 focuses on writing the case study report, providing guidance on everything from writing the title to structuring the report and writing evocatively. Some of Stake & Visse’s advice, if followed, may require unlearning some tropes of academic writing. For example, they urge researchers to create a caring relationship with their readers, avoiding jargon so that the report is inclusive and accessible. They point out that starting with a vignette rather than a traditional introduction indicates that “personal experience will be treated as evidence” (p. 110). Rather than conveying certainty, they suggest the report reflect multiple, diverse perspectives on care, honoring ambiguities and generating questions for the reader. The authors “join a small portion of the research community which says, don't include recommendations. Let readers reflect on those themselves” (p. 118). The example in this chapter presents the case of a mother of a child with autism. They highlight the construction of the

report, which began with a narrative vignette followed by a theme-by-theme presentation of findings that interwove participants' words with descriptions and critical dialogue between the data and existing theory.

In Chapter 10, Stake & Visse invite readers to engage with one last case study report, which sparked their commentary on case study research's relationships with phenomenology, action research, and advocacy. Earlier they pointed out that case study's interest in studying living things communicating and behaving in particular places and times reflected more an ethnographic than a phenomenological intent. Here they reflect on case study's interest in phenomenological understandings of lived experience. Yes, case study is a many-splendored thing, with rich phenomenological and ethnographic roots. Like care, it is "known by many, and sometimes misunderstood" (p. 1). Ultimately, they remind: "Your focus and ours in this book has been care. Care taken, case by case" (p. 142).

At one point, alluding to Stake's (1995) landmark text *The Art of Case Study Research*, the authors tell readers this book about case study has "more or less" already been written (p. 17). However, their considerations are as important in the arena of qualitative research today as they were decades ago, when case study research was breaking ground as a way to "gather and present experiential findings and interpretations" (p. 17). One of the most powerful contributions the authors make is showing what it looks like when case studies are done well during a time when "most scholars still prefer a measurement base over an experience base" (p. 47). Stake & Visse's focus on care makes this work particularly timely and relevant: "Care is the recognition of pain and promise of recovery. Or, slightly more general, the recognition of needs, and the promise of responding to needs" (p. 48). Ultimately, Stake & Visse achieved what they set out to do. They show how instrumental case study is a particularly good way to study the relational, embodied, contextual, and value-driven practices of care.

Reference

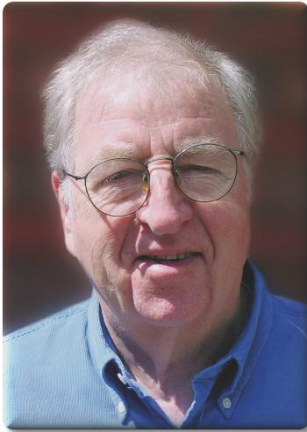
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About the Reviewer

Jolyn Blank (PhD) is an associate professor of early childhood education at the University of South Florida. Her scholarship focuses on the relationship between teacher learning and school contexts and the educational potential of play and aesthetic experiences for young children. She teaches courses in early childhood education and qualitative case study research. Her community-engaged scholarship intersects teaching, research, and service to pursue avenues of inquiry that address critical problems of practice in early childhood education. Her research has been published in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, and *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*.



About the Book Authors



Robert E. Stake, born December 18, 1927, in Adams, Nebraska, is professor emeritus of education at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. After earning a PhD in Psychometrics at Princeton University in 1958, he assumed the position of assistant professor of educational psychology at the University of Nebraska, which he held until moving to the University of Illinois in 1963. He became Associate Director of the Illinois State Testing Program. The testing program was absorbed by the Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation (CIRCE) in 1969. There he served as Co-Director and subsequently in 1975

as Director of CIRCE until his retirement in 1998. He has been a leader in development of program evaluation methods for decades. Among his many contributions are the 2010 book *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work*, *The Art of Case Study Research* in 1995, and *Measuring Education: The Countenance of Bob Stake*, 2024. Stake was the recipient in 1988 of the Lazerfeld Award from the American Evaluation Association and an honorary doctorate from the University of Uppsala in 1994. He also received an honorary doctorate from the University of Valladolid, Spain, in 2009. In 2007, Stake received a Presidential Citation from the American Educational Research Association “for his significant contribution to qualitative methodology, to the theory and practice of evaluation.”

Merel Visse is an associate professor and Director of Medical & Health Humanities at Drew University. She earned the PhD degree in Philosophy of Medicine at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Prior to 2019, she spent more than a decade as a faculty member at the University of Humanistic Studies in the Netherlands, working with the Care Ethics Group. Dr. Visse also serves as the co-editor at *Visual Arts Research*, a University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana publication. She works in the interdisciplinary fields of care ethics, care theory and qualitative and artistic inquiry. Her research, writings and teachings revolve around connecting the arts with central insights of care. Insights such as relationality, affectivity, precariousness, responsibility, embodiment, vulnerability and (inter)dependency, and political theory on care. Merel’s work builds bridges between the everyday lived experiences of people and the socio-political realm of public issues. She follows a dialectic approach to research that is both responsive and critical. Care research is not only seen as a deliberate act of analysis in order to produce knowledge, but also as an event that requires a praxis of unknowing by living one’s questions real time.



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