

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to the Student Hub Live event for early childhood studies. This session deals with case studies, a key method that you're going to get to grips with in your studies in early childhood. Now we've asked whether or not you are familiar with case studies as a method, yes or no. You might be familiar with case studies but aren't aware of them as a method. And in that case, put something in the chat about maybe what case study means to you, or in fact what methods mean to you.

So I'm joined by Natalie and Sue, and we're going to talk about what case studies are. So Sue, I wonder if you could sort of briefly outline what we mean by a case study.

SUE CALLAN: Yeah, so in terms of research actually a case study is a recognised method of investigating an individual or a group or a situation over time. Basically that's it. So if people might be familiar with Robert Winston's programme, *Child of our Time*, that is a case study. He's featured a cohort of children born in 2000 and we've seen how they developed over time. So we use similar kind of approach to learning and teaching in our module. We have a case study, but Natalie's going to talk about our particular child a bit later on.

KAREN FOLEY: Now I've been talking to Menna about mud play. Is that a case study?

SUE CALLAN: Yes, actually Menna's chapter is a really good example of a case study in action in that Menna started off part of the session by talking about her earlier experiences of playing outdoors and how that has influenced what she sees as important and significant to play. And the chapter itself is a reflective piece of work because Menna has looked at pioneers of play, theories of play, and what people have said about the types of play that children have needed. She's observed practise in her setting. She's represented the child's experience and the child's responses to that in order to come up with a wonderful mud kitchen. And that has itself precipitated Menna's further research. So it's a really good reflective case study in action.

KAREN FOLEY: Natalie, I wonder if you could tell us about what case study means to you, because I mean Sue's mentioned that it's a very in-depth study, sometimes over time, perhaps not always over time as well. But as a method, what do you say one of the strengths of it are compared to other things like maybe empirical studies or other forms of research that we often rely on?

NATALIE So with case study you get to really understand what's perhaps happening in a situation. So
CANNING: it's not just seeing a snapshot of time. It's understanding all of the different things that contribute to perhaps looking at snapshots of time. So you're thinking about the different contexts that supports children in a case study situation. So what are the things that are contributing to the way in which that child plays or acts within a certain situation, and what does that kind of mean for them? So it's not just about then looking at the child but all of the other things that influence that child. So for example the parents, grandparents, the different settings that perhaps that child has access to.

And building up that kind of knowledge and understanding of one particular child as a case study means that then you can think about the different learning that happens within the module in relation to that child. So if you haven't got any other experience to draw on, you can draw on the different case studies and think, well, what's it like for that child? What does that mean for that child? And throughout the module materials, there's lots of different case studies, not just from the UK but also from other countries as well, to give an overview really of different experience of children's play and creativity in lots of different contexts.

KAREN FOLEY: So it again has very, very rich sources of data, and also linking back to the sociocultural perspective that you were talking about earlier about considering things within their context at that time. So a case study gives you those various aspects that you can look at in more detail.

NATALIE Exactly, yes.

CANNING:

So one of the case studies that runs through the module is Ethan. Could you tell us about how this came about and why you've decided to include a case study with lots of material about Ethan doing certain things in different contexts? And then we'll maybe look at a little video.

NATALIE Yeah, sure. So Ethan is four years old. And he attends a childminder, but he also attends a
CANNING: playgroup. He's also looked after by his grandparents. And they have lots of diverse interests such as a church group and a singing group which he also goes along and attends. And all of those things give a rich experience for him. And we follow Ethan through the different blocks of study on E110. and you see him in lots of different contexts and learn a little bit about him, his personality, what he likes to do, what he doesn't like to do. And also you hear from his extended family about what they think about him and about the experiences that he's gaining. So you get a real insight into him as a child, but also those experiences that he has been able

to access and how that is really shaping his own childhood and his own ideas and values and what he likes to do and what he doesn't like to do. And that really helps to have a rounded view of Ethan as a child.

KAREN FOLEY: Now you've got a lot of audiovisual material where there were these videos of Ethan within the module. How do you encourage students to learn from that? Do you give them questions that they might look at before watching a video so that you're almost directing them to focus on different aspects?

NATALIE CANNING: That's right. So usually we ask students to watch the video first, and then there will be an activity based on that video. So it will be either some questions or some things that link the video to perhaps the chapter that they've been reading in the module materials so that they can see the development of the linking of the theory and the practise together. It might be some more interactive things where they have to make a contribution onto the tutor group forum. So they share their ideas with other students about different case studies that they've seen or different videos that they've seen. So we use a variety of ways so that it's not just about watching the video, it's actually about engaging with what students are seeing on the video. And that helps develop their learning.

SUE CALLAN: And promoting their reflection actually. That's the key thing about the activities.

KAREN FOLEY: So should we show students a brief video? What would you like to say about it.

NATALIE CANNING: Yeah so this video is Ethan. He's at playschool and he's building a tower. And it's quite interesting just to watch sort of how he's positioning himself within that situation with the other two children that are involved and kind of what he's-- you can see his kind of thought process as you're actually watching that video about what he intends to happen.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, let's see the video. You can guide us through if you wish.

NATALIE All right.

CANNING:

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

NATALIE CANNING: So here Ethan's kind sitting a little bit back but he's trying to have a conversation with the two little girls. And they're perhaps more interested in building the tower than engaging in

conversation with him.

SUE CALLAN: He's picking up the bricks and he's sending out those play signals, Natalie, isn't he?

NATALIE Yes, yeah. He's kind of figuring out, how can I get in on this but without kind of taking over or
CANNING: upsetting those other two children. He wants to be involved but he's not quite sure how to.

KAREN FOLEY: I'm sure he's thinking, should I push the tower over?

[LAUGHTER]

So what is the corresponding activity then that links with this video?

NATALIE So it's thinking about how observing what Ethan is doing. He's kind of now-- he doesn't want
CANNING: that tower to fall. But you'll see in a minute how he changes his mind there--

[LAUGHTER]

--as it gets higher. So it's about sort of your observation skills and thinking about really what Ethan is doing and how he is interacting with those other two children. So the actually building of the tower is not the most significant part here. It's more about his relationships, how he's building these relationships with those other two children. You see how he's making eye contact with them, how he's smiling with them, how he wants to talk with them. But also he sat a little bit back as well, so he's not completely engaged in that, and thinking about how he's negotiating those social situations with those other two girls.

KAREN FOLEY: And we can't hear what Ethan's saying because we're listening to us right now, but how significant is that in terms of what language might be happening in the setting?

NATALIE Yep, so language is important and he does have good language skills. But you can see there
CANNING: kind of like his intention of knocking that tower down is something that he really wanted to do.

[LAUGHTER]

KAREN FOLEY: I did suspect that that was the case, typical.

NATALIE Yeah, but it's also about kind of those nonverbal cues that he's giving out to observing that
CANNING: video and how he's kind of-- for an adult observing that, it's kind of thinking about then how you might support him in building on those relationships with those two children and how you

might perhaps set up perhaps an activity where all of those children could engage in again. It might be perhaps using those same bricks again if that seemed to be the focus of that activity, but also sort of how he negotiates those relationships with other children.

KAREN FOLEY: So when using a case study like Ethan, how do you guide students through picking up on certain aspects that are important to perhaps the research question or the area of focus? Because it must be so easy to sort of miss things or to focus on the wrong things if, for example, you're just interested in a dialogue. Like I thought, I bet he's going to knock it down. I might have missed all of the other queues and you may have been prompting me to think about something different. So how do you use case studies in terms of a framework to really focus on the research question that you're trying to consider?

NATALIE CANNING: Well in the module material books, each chapter within the book has a focus. So it's about a subject. And so therefore when students are reading that chapter within that, they outline all of the different theory and some of the relevant research that relates to that. And then alongside that there are case study examples of practitioners and children who are experiencing the same kind of things that we're talking about within those chapters. And the AV material, the online activities that students are directed to after they have read the chapter, they then build and support that as well.

So there is always a focus on the particular thing, the learning outcome, the teaching point that we're making within the module materials is reflected then in the case study material that we're showing. So there may be other thing-- obviously there's multiple things going on. But we're directing them particularly to a focus when they watch the video and then they complete the activity.

SUE CALLAN: And that's where students come into the learning community on the forums or visit tutorials that those themes and those particular issues can really be signposted and highlighted to them so that they're not going in the wrong direction.

KAREN FOLEY: So you and I were talking about reflection earlier, and I wonder if we could sort of link this whole idea about how case studies support reflection.

SUE CALLAN: Well actually that video is a good idea because your immediate response was, he's going to knock it down. And actually we could see that by the end of it, that's what actually happened. But with the materials suggesting to you that you might want to look for other things, like body

language and the way he signals that he wants to be part of the activity, it's encouraging you to kind of challenge that essential assumption and see how the dynamics of the interaction work out. So for practitioners or for people who are learning about play, the notion that the case study enables you to kind of just step back and observe to learn, because you will learn from what the children are doing.

If you intervened with that because you could see Ethan was intending, perhaps, to knock the tower down, you could make an intervention that actually prevented him having the conversation with the children, having that relaxed little bit in the middle where they were contemplating the possibilities of what was going to happen. So that's where the reflection happens really.

KAREN FOLEY: But Natalie you mentioned that you would guide students. So there might be an activity or questions that would follow a case study to encourage them to reflect, I guess, on their own. But how important is it then that students might reflect together in groups? Is part of this whole idea of reflective practise to shift perceptions and to recognise points of view that may not have been your within a group-based setting?

NATALIE
CANNING: Yeah, so I mean we use the tutor group forums, and we also use the learning events that happen all over the country.

KAREN FOLEY: So that's the tutorials?

NATALIE
CANNING: That's the tutorials, yeah. So all of those things promote active discussion. What did you think of? How did you interpret that? And so people can share their ideas and things that they saw. And that helps learning generally, but it's also thinking about individual learning journeys and personal development as well, so thinking about where you're kind of at the beginning of the module. And the module reminds you of all the way through to think about where they want to - think about their learning and where they've been, where they are now, where they want to be in the future. So you're sort of always thinking about those reflective elements within the reading that they do and the activities that they do as well.

SUE CALLAN: And of course the case study ultimately is scaffolding people's ability to understand what the assignments are about. But it also gives them the materials and the ideas that enable them to actually write in a deeper way and show their knowledge and their learning rather than just describe what's going on in the video. Because we've all seen the video so we don't need to describe it, if that makes sense. So the case studies are fairly fundamental in actually bringing

everybody into the module, enabling everybody with a diverse range of experience to access the module and make the module requirements, because we're all looking at the same material.

KAREN FOLEY: Wonderful. Well thank you very much. It's all coming together very nicely. We're going to have a conclusion to this session in just a minute. But before we do that, we're going to show you a quick other video about a campus tour and where we look at Walton Hall. And we'll be back to conclude with all three of our panellists in just a minute. Stay with us.

[MUSIC PLAYING]