

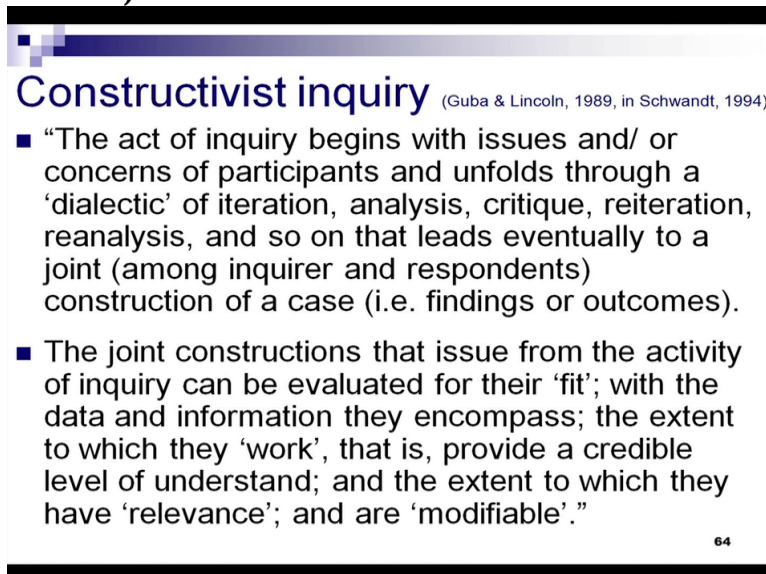
Qualitative Research Methods
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Lecture 10
Property of Constructions

Welcome back to the NOC course titled qualitative research methods, My name is Aradhna Malik and I teach at the Indian Institute of Technology in Kharagpur, West Bengal, India, and I'm helping you with the course and in the previous lectures as we have dealt with different aspects of qualitative research, we discussed what it means to conduct qualitative research, we are now in the process of discussing the Paradigms that we can use in order to conduct qualitative enquiry.

So, in the previous lecture we started on constructivism as a paradigm of qualitative enquiry and in this lecture we will take that discussion forward.

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Constructivist inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, in Schwandt, 1994)

- “The act of inquiry begins with issues and/ or concerns of participants and unfolds through a ‘dialectic’ of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis, and so on that leads eventually to a joint (among inquirer and respondents) construction of a case (i.e. findings or outcomes).
- The joint constructions that issue from the activity of inquiry can be evaluated for their ‘fit’; with the data and information they encompass; the extent to which they ‘work’, that is, provide a credible level of understand; and the extent to which they have ‘relevance’; and are ‘modifiable’.”

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Now this is again from the book, by, from the book title handbook of qualitative research and constructivist enquiry is the active, in constructivist inquiry “The act of enquiry begins with issues and or concerns of participants and unfold through a ‘dialectic’ of iteration, analysis, critique reiteration, reanalysis and so on that leads eventually to joint (among inquirer and respondents) construction of a case (i.e. findings or outcomes)” and this very long, very complicated sentence means that when we talk about constructive enquiry or enquiry from a constructivist paradigm we are not talking about the one single piece of truth.

We are talking about inquiry, we are talking about the outcomes of inquiry been jointly constructed by the inquirer and the inquired and context in which the inquiry is situated and the history that it brings along with it and you know and, this whole discussion is what really helps us to come up with answers. It's not just a one-stop you know cause and effect relationship or one test and one response kind of relationship.

In and through discussion, in and through conversation, in and through negotiation of ideas and to and fro motion of ideas, we come up with an understanding of what the outcome of the enquiry should be. So, the outcome is jointly constructed, the enquiry itself is jointly constructed, what are you trying to find out, that is constructed or that is understood by this constant exchange of Ideas.

What is it that we should try to find out, What is known, What needs to be known as discovered in and through a discussion between the enquiry and the enquired and the context in which the enquiry takes place and that is why we call it constructivism, every little bit of negotiations adds to this final meaning that we come up with. Okay.

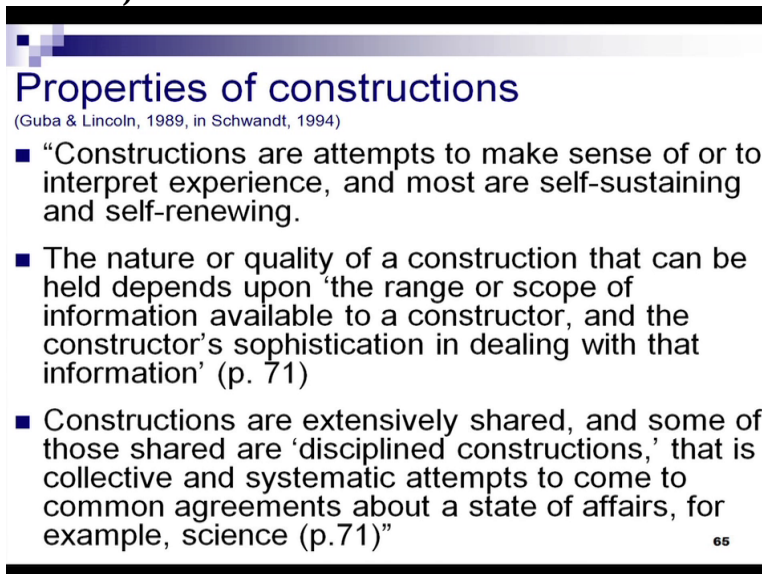
So”The joint constructions that issue from the activities of the enquiry can be evaluated for their fit with the data and information they encompass”. So, it’s not only an understanding but it is also the situatedness of that understanding within the context that has been understood. Once we say, okay, this is would have understood out of this context, does my understanding of that context really fit into that context?

Is it really related? Or is it been seen from the perspective of an outsider? So, it’s the fit within the context, not the fit onto a context. That you know, I don't care what the context is, this is what I understood and my understanding holds good. That is not the way we do it. It is connected with the context. Then, so,” The joint constructions that issue from the activity of enquiry can be evaluated for their ‘fit’ ; with the data and information they encompass; the extent to which they ‘work’, that is, provide incredible level of understanding”.

I'm sorry for the spelling mistake “And the extent to which they have ‘relevance’; and are ‘modifiable’.” So, you know how well do these things fitting, when if and when we can modify them depending on the needs of the context. So it is flexible the understanding is

flexible its plastic like we discussed last time and it is this fitting into the context that is an important element of constructivism.

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Properties of constructions
(Guba & Lincoln, 1989, in Schwandt, 1994)

- “Constructions are attempts to make sense of or to interpret experience, and most are self-sustaining and self-renewing.
- The nature or quality of a construction that can be held depends upon ‘the range or scope of information available to a constructor, and the constructor’s sophistication in dealing with that information’ (p. 71)
- Constructions are extensively shared, and some of those shared are ‘disciplined constructions,’ that is collective and systematic attempts to come to common agreements about a state of affairs, for example, science (p.71)”

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Properties of constructions: Some properties that we look for when we are talking about or when we are enquiring from a constructivist perspective the first one is “Constructions are attempts to make sense of to interpret experience and most are self-sustaining and self-renewing.” So, it's a reflexive activity when we talk about constructions we are talking about a dialogue between the enquired and the inquirer.

And it is in and through dialogue, it is in and through reflection, it is in an through and assessment of the fit of the ideas within the situation, that the concept or that is, the sense making takes place. So you send out an idea and you say this is what I have understood about what is happening in this situation and the inquired says no that is not correct 50% of what you said is correct.

The other 50% is incorrect and this is how I would like to see it from the perspective of a person who is experiencing this phenomenon and you say but from an objective perspective I see these things happening across the board across so many different contexts. So, this is what I am interpreting and the other person gets your understanding and so it's in and through dialogue in and through this is negotiations meaning that we come to a joint understanding of what an experience is like. Okay.

And it's a reflexive activity we reflect on every response we get from the context of the inquired and these meanings are self sustaining, that it is, this the end result is not what is sustained, it is the process that is put in place to understand the end result that is sustained. So, the end sense the ultimate sense may not really be the ultimate, it is not the ultimate meaning but it is the process that is put in place to understand that meaning that eventually become self renewing and self sustaining and that process becomes automatic.

It feeds into itself. Then, the nature or quality of a construction that can be held depends on 'the range or scope of information available to a Constructor and the constructor's sophistication in dealing with that information'. How comfortable or How well versed is the constructor with understanding, what is be understood. How comfortable, how sensitive the constructor of the meaning, how sensitive is the inquirer of the situation to the situation itself.

To the signals coming from the situation, how a depth is this person at dealing with the different amounts of data or that the quantity and the quality of the data that one is receiving from the environment that one is studying and that in turn leads to what is filtered out, what does and does not make sense. And that is true even for quantitative research, but, in quantitative research it's not a continuous, you know, if it's a discrete series.

If I draw an analogy to mathematics, it's like this is different data points. And here in qualitative research, we take a continuous flow of data and we try and make sense of the way the data is flowing in relation to whatever we do not take as well. In quantitative research with, we completely disregarded whatever we have not included in most cases.

Of course, there are, you know, different ways in which we can do that but we are looking at it discrete collection of data points as compared to that in qualitative research, we are looking at a continuous flow of data points and sub points and sub points and its like this bridge of Information and the quality of interpretation depends on the ability of the enquirer to understand this flow of information. Okay.

Then constructions are extensively shared, and some of those shared are 'disciplined constructions,' that is collective and systematic attempts to come to common agreements about a state of affairs, for example, science(p.71)" So, Science is also, you know, Science

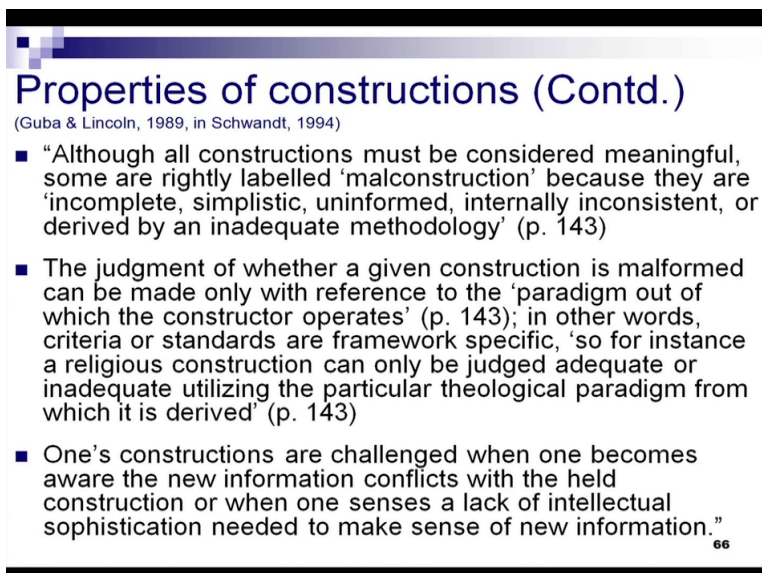
can also adopt a constructivist paradigm where meanings are constructed interpretations are constructed with the consensus of those involved with the consensus of those who are, okay.

With the participation of those who are able to understand the data that is generated and the information that is extracted out of that data. So, a systematic construction is applied even in science, but, constructions need to be extensively shared in order for constructions to become constructions. It is a joint construction of meaning; it's not my soul interpretation, unless somebody other than the enquirer is involved.

We can't call it as construction of meaning. Okay, that would just be a creation of meaning, when you're talking about construction, we are talking about the team work here. We are talking about people contributing to whatever is being built and some of those shared and disciplined construction, systematic constructions, common agreements that are arrived at by means of well established, well tested processes, methods that are replicable, that are verifiable, are then adopted in science.

So, construction happens with the help of all of the stakeholders that are involved in the process.

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Properties of constructions (Contd.)
(Guba & Lincoln, 1989, in Schwandt, 1994)

- “Although all constructions must be considered meaningful, some are rightly labelled ‘malconstruction’ because they are ‘incomplete, simplistic, uninformed, internally inconsistent, or derived by an inadequate methodology’ (p. 143)
- The judgment of whether a given construction is malformed can be made only with reference to the ‘paradigm out of which the constructor operates’ (p. 143); in other words, criteria or standards are framework specific, ‘so for instance a religious construction can only be judged adequate or inadequate utilizing the particular theological paradigm from which it is derived’ (p. 143)
- One’s constructions are challenged when one becomes aware the new information conflicts with the held construction or when one senses a lack of intellectual sophistication needed to make sense of new information.”

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“Although all Constructions must be considered meaningful, some are rightly labeled ‘malconstruction’ because they are incomplete, simplistic, uninformed, internally inconsistent, or derived by an inadequate methodology’ (p.143).” So, construction may not always be acceptable if thorough groundwork has not been done. If the interpretation is loose,

if the people, concerned people, who can, who have the expertise to comment on the way the construction has happened or the people who are affected are able to see this gap then the Constructions are called malconstructions.

They are rightly labeled as malconstruction because oversimplification is not a construction. Having a large number of stakeholders agree to an oversimplification is not a construction unless thorough enquiry takes place, unless there is consistency in the manner in which these Constructions or are in which these meanings are constructed and the constructions are interpreted in light of the context they are a part of, and in light of the context they fit into, they cannot be labeled as constructions, they are labeled as malconstructions.

The judgment of whether a given construction is malformed can be made only with reference to the 'paradigm out of which the constructor operates'. So, the constructor has to first define with paradigm that the constructor is using to arrive at this Constructions. Whether it is positivism, post positivism, interpretivism, constructivism, critical theory, feminist theory, what is the constructor where is the constructor coming from.

What is the goal of enquiry needs to be defined and within the definition of the goal of the enquiry, then the Constructions can be, you know, brought to life. In other words, criteria or standards are frameworks specific 'so for instance a religious construction can only be judged adequate or inadequate utilizing the particular theological paradigm from which it is derived'. Constructions are framework specific, they are criteria specific, on what grounds are reconstructing this meaning needs to be put out in black and white.

As an observer of a situation that I do not understand, I cannot completely take that interpretation out of context and constructor meaning. That is exactly what I have been repeating again and again, that interpretations are fit into the context of the inquired. They are not fit onto, they are not superimposed, they are juxtaposed, and they are blended into the context of the inquired. And they become the extensions of the enquired.

So, they become meanings that also add to the existence of what has been enquired and that is an assumption that is something that one learns to accept, when one is conducting qualitative enquiry. One's constructions are challenged when one becomes aware the new information

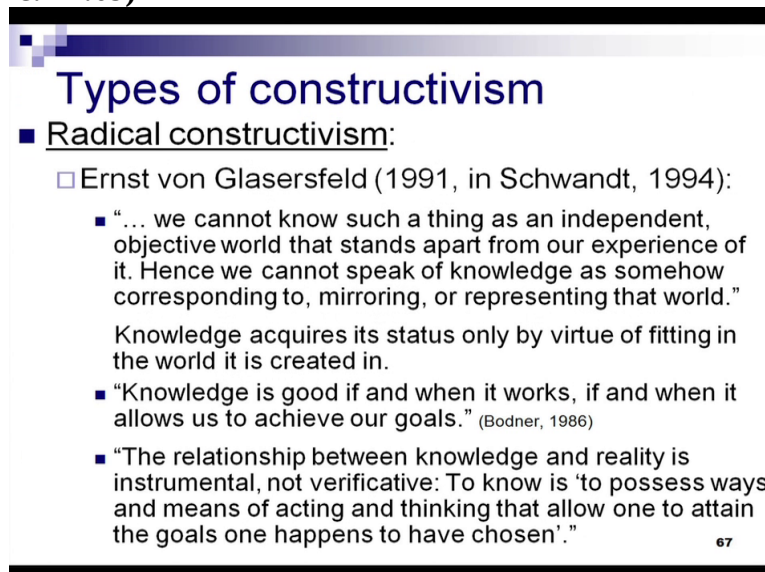
conflicts with the held construction or when one senses the lack of intellectual sophistication needed to make sense of new information.

So, we realize that, we may not be arriving at the absolute truth and when we talk about the properties of constructions we should be ready for our constructions to be challenged, to be question for our assumptions, to be question for our criteria, for the criteria that we have used to arrive at these constructions, to be questioned and when new information is brought to light the flavor of the context that one has constructed a meaning in changes.

So a new information comes up, the construction that has been shared or that has been brought to light, that has come to life is again, is liable to be challenged. it may or may not be challenged but there is a possibility that this construction meaning may be challenged in light of the new information that comes up and that is alright. Okay,

So, when one tries one's best but at the same time is not able to come up with the most appropriate, most appropriate construction meaning at that time the construction is likely to be challenged and its okay, that cannot be termed as a malconstructions. That is where we draw the line, when one lacks intellectual sophistication to arrive at an appropriate construction. It can't be labeled as a malconstruction, it may just not be the right fit, and it can be challenged. Now these are, you know, some of the properties that constructions have.

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Types of constructivism

- Radical constructivism:
 - Ernst von Glasersfeld (1991, in Schwandt, 1994):
 - "... we cannot know such a thing as an independent, objective world that stands apart from our experience of it. Hence we cannot speak of knowledge as somehow corresponding to, mirroring, or representing that world."
 - Knowledge acquires its status only by virtue of fitting in the world it is created in.
 - "Knowledge is good if and when it works, if and when it allows us to achieve our goals." (Bodner, 1986)
 - "The relationship between knowledge and reality is instrumental, not verificative: To know is 'to possess ways and means of acting and thinking that allow one to attain the goals one happens to have chosen'."

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Now let's go to the types of constructivism, the two broad categories of constructivism a radical constructivism and social constructionism. Radical constructivism was referred to, the

Schwandt has referred to the work of one blizzard and he says that we cannot no such a thing as an independent objective world that stands apart from our experience of it. Hence, we cannot speak of knowledge and somehow corresponding to mirroring or representing the world.

Knowledge and again at the expense of repeating myself, when we talk about radical constructivism ,we are talking about knowledge acquiring it status only by virtue of fitting in the world it is created, in a meaning that is taken out of context loses its strength. It loses its grounding, it loses its robustness. Knowledge is knowledge only when it can be fit into when it can be connected to the context from which it was derived and when it can be connected to, when it can form an extension of the context that it was derived.

The second aspect of radical constructivism is that, “Knowledge is good if and when it works if and when it allows us to achieve our goals”. Otherwise knowledge really has no meaning. So, according to the tenets of radical constructivism, knowledge is knowledge only when it can be used. Knowledge for the sake of newer versions, newer definitions, newer ways of understanding has no meaning, unless the those newer ways of understanding can result in action that can fit in with the context, that this new knowledge is derived them.

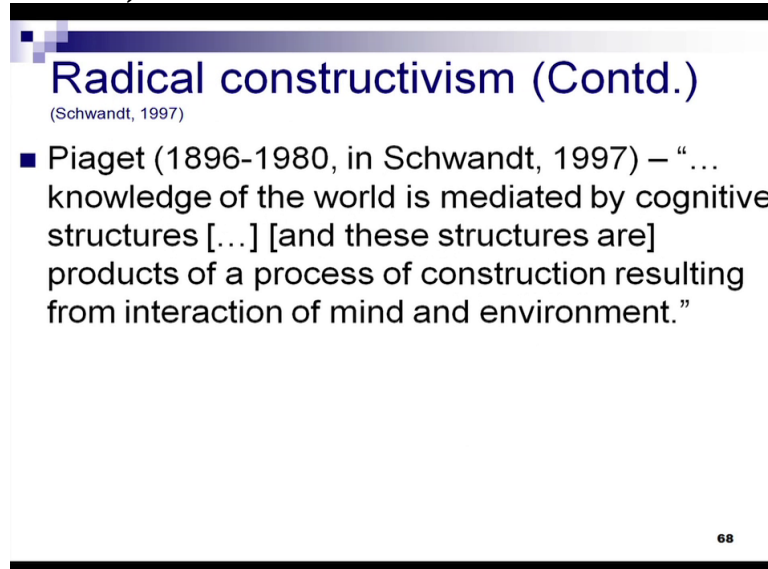
“The relationship between knowledge and reality is instrumental, not verificative:” there is no need to, you know, to a relationship is not to verify the relationship or the purpose of this relationship, is not to verify something that already exists. The purpose of this relationship between knowledge and reality is to do something about the reality, from which the knowledge was derived its instrumental, something needs to be done.

It’s action oriented. To know is to possess ways and means of acting and thinking that allow one to attend the goes one happens to have chosen. we know something so that we can go and achieve some goals otherwise knowing something for the sake of knowing, may lose its value and in today's day and age where we browse the Internet for information that we don't really need, you know, that is defined these tenets of radical constructivism of knowledge creation.

Why do we create knowledge? We create knowledge so to benefit some people. Now again the theorist would say, or the people who come up with different interpretations, Idea generation for example, may not really fit into radical constructivism, and that is all right,

radical constructivism may not be able to explain the whole idea of brainstorming, but then brainstorming for what purpose? If there is no purpose if we are just coming up with newer ideas that may or may not be implemented at some point go less ideas then really has. It loses the value it could have had if it has resulted in some action, at some point in time that is what radical constructivism says.

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Radical constructivism (Contd.)
(Schwandt, 1997)

- Piaget (1896-1980, in Schwandt, 1997) – “... knowledge of the world is mediated by cognitive structures [...] [and these structures are] products of a process of construction resulting from interaction of mind and environment.”

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Piaget also spoke about radical constructivism and Piaget is best known for the work on Children and knowledge creation in children and so intellectual cognitive development of children, theories of cognitive development of children, and so from that perspective, Piaget has been referred by Schwandt and according to this “knowledge of the world is mediated by cognitive structures and these structures are products of a process of construction resulting from interaction of mind and environment.”

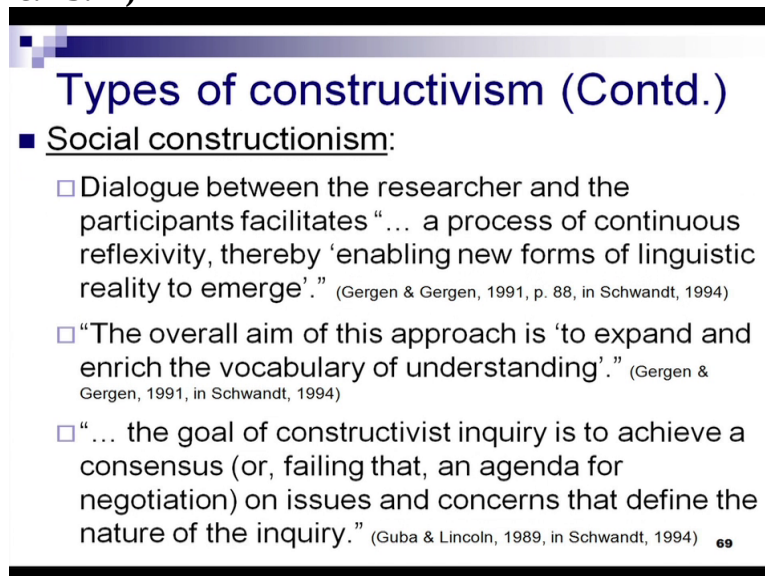
So, Piaget also talks about constructivism, what are we interpreting, we are situating ourselves in the reality, we live in we are not randomly trying to understand things that may or may not exist. Sitting here I could philosophize about a pink elephant that flies over IIT Kharagpur, that doesn't make sense, So I am trying to understand, What would happen if an elephant walk through IIT Kharagpur and there is a reality that needs to be understood.

Here we are deriving our understanding of various structures, through the context free and understanding our environment through what we receive and how our brain processes what we receive and how our brain processes what we take out of what the environment gives us.

What we understand and that knowledge creation is, then you know, it is a process of construction in here; it may not be a process of construction with many stakeholders.

But we are constructing meaning out of the reality, we live in and that is how it is connected to reality and it's not really out there not really connected to whatever we know, it is connected to the world that we live in it, is connected to the world we understand. So this is the knowledge of the world is mediated by cognitive structures the processes that take place in our mind, through which we make sense of the world around us.

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Types of constructivism (Contd.)

- **Social constructionism:**
 - Dialogue between the researcher and the participants facilitates "... a process of continuous reflexivity, thereby 'enabling new forms of linguistic reality to emerge'." (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p. 88, in Schwandt, 1994)
 - "The overall aim of this approach is 'to expand and enrich the vocabulary of understanding'." (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, in Schwandt, 1994)
 - "... the goal of constructivist inquiry is to achieve a consensus (or, failing that, an agenda for negotiation) on issues and concerns that define the nature of the inquiry." (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, in Schwandt, 1994) 69

Social constructionism : Social constructionism refers to "Dialogue between the researcher and the participants that facilitates a process of continuous reflexivity, thereby enabling new forms of linguistic reality to emerge" So, this is what I was talking about before we went on to radical constructivism, social constructionism refers to the import from the people who can be affected by the knowledge that is going to be created.

And together with reason with the people who are giving us inputs, together you know, with this collection of inputs that help us arrive at a meaning which will be accepted by a larger number of people and that is called social constructionism. Process of continuous reflexivity, so going back and forth with ideas, improving on modifying whatever we know, by enabling new forms of linguistic reality.

Social constructionism is primarily it is facilitated by language, what we say, how we set, how the words we use are interpreted by people around the overall aim of this approach is to expand and enriched vocabulary of understanding I gave you an example of snow in one of

the previous classes, how a person who has experienced snow is able to explain the concept of Snow to a person who has never experienced snowfall.

Vocabulary is enriched by this, number of Ideas back and forth between the people who are in that social reality and we construct a common meaning. The goal of constructivist enquiry is to achieve a consensus or feeling that an agenda for negotiation on issues and concerns that define the nature of the enquiry. So, the goal of such enquiry is to help everybody involved accept the meaning that is going to be created jointly or at least start a discussion.

So constructivism essentially deals with what we are doing in and through communication to create a meaning. Radical constructivism is instrumental, it is connected, it is very well connected with reality. Social constructionism deals with the inputs from all concerned inputs from the people who are going to be affected by that meaning, so, this is what this is another paradigm of inquiry. We'll talk a little bit more about constructivism in the upcoming lectures. Thank you very much for listening