Qualitative Research Methods
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Lecture 43
Understanding Social Programs through Evaluation.

Welcome back to the NOC course on qualitative research methods, my name is Aradhna Malik and I have been helping you with this course and we are coming to the end of this course, these are the last few lectures. Now so we discuss the whole bunch of things and you know I've seen some feedback and we were gone through a lot of things in this course, now what we are going to do today is, we are going to talk about the implications of whatever we have studied, the applications of what we have studied to the social world so let's move on with it.

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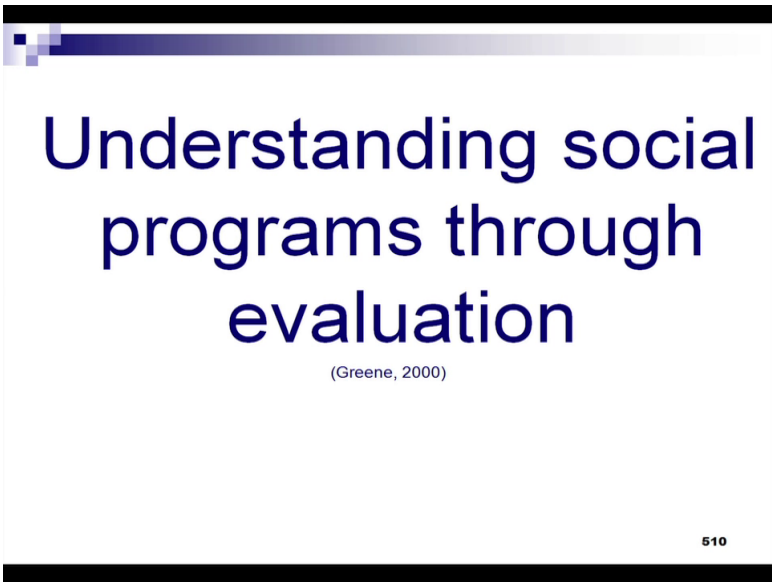

Today we are going to talk about in this lecture, we will try and understand how social programs can be understood through qualitative evaluation and how qualitative research applies to the evaluation of social programs, it's very, very important in this day and age especially in our country, it is such an important thing you know the government is investing heavily in the development of India.

The government is investing heavily in the alleviation of the daily life situations of the rural country, especially people living in rural areas through a whole lot of social programs, so it will be helpful for us to understand how whatever we have studied till now applies to

understanding the social programs, to evaluating them, to making them better and to making the more fruitful.

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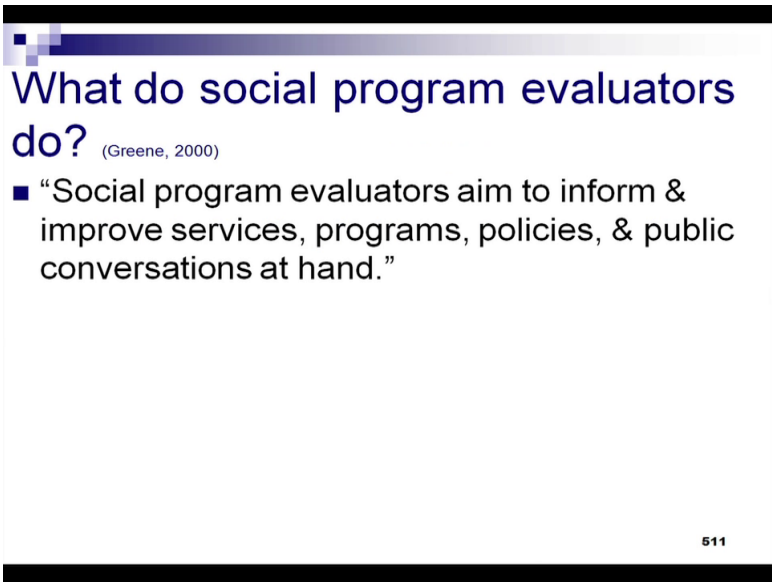

What do social program evaluators do? "Social program evaluators aim to inform and improve services, programs, policies and public conversations at hand." Social program evaluators try and you know they engage in participatory action research, we talked about participatory action research, they go into the field, they find out what is required, they do what is required.

They get feedback from the field, they bring it back and then discuss amongst themselves, get the opinion of experts, analyze whatever they have seen and heard and observe and then they improve on the current processes and they go back and implement these changes, these improvements in the field, in an attempt to make their work better, in an attempt to see to improve the way social programs are progressing, so that is what they do.

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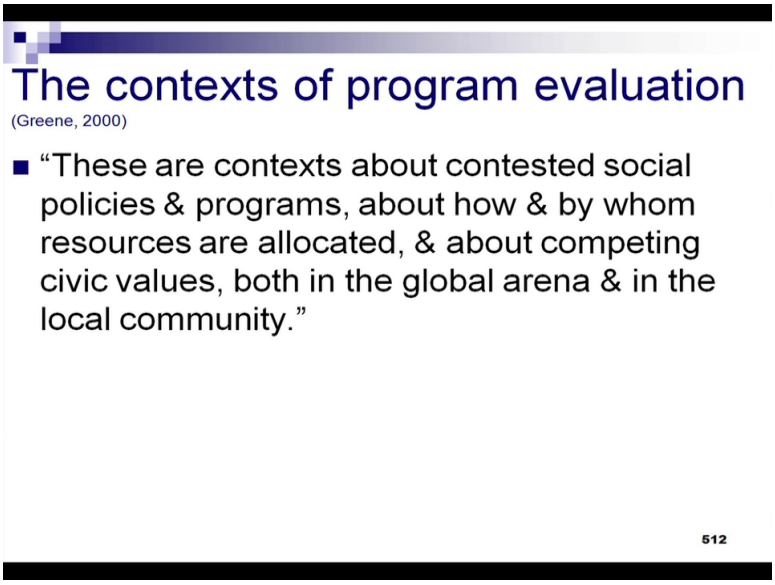

The contexts of program evaluation: "these are contexts about contested social policies and programs, about how and by whom resources are allocated and about competing civic values both in the global arena and local community." These are the context where you know it is difficult to hold somebody accountable, if these are context in which you know a very fine line has to be drawn between two competing Paradigms.

For example you know one needs to start something new, one needs to introduce new policies and programs but critics say that till you have improved, till you have reached a certain level of implementation with the programs that are currently going on, why should you invest anything into something new and the governments say well we can't really you know we are trying to improve whatever we have going on.

But it is also important to look forward, it is also important to invest part of what we have in something new and then maybe the fruits of our labor from investing something investing in something new, can later be fed into improving what is already ongoing which will take up a lot of time and energy.

So that is where you know these are competing values, should I just sit and use all my resources to improve something that is already going on, for example health, health care now the government has set up these hospitals everywhere, the whole country's network with these healthcare facilities and in many places unfortunately in rural areas, we don't have staff or we are understaffed, I should say we don't have stuff, we are understaffed in some areas.

We have in some areas we have equipment that people don't know how to use, in some areas the hospitals are located in areas which are difficult for people to reach; now these are real problems, the government did whatever it could, and they assessed the situation and gave us this facilities. Now they are also trying to set up newer hospitals in areas that were not reachable areas, there also trying to add to the facilities that are already there in the current hospitals.

And maybe some people would say well why don't you first improve the infrastructure you have, why don't you first fully staff this hospitals instead of setting up new hospital and we say yes that is a very valid concern, but we also need to look forward, we need to have Super Specialty hospitals in rural areas, in smaller area, in hard to reach areas, we also at the same time, we also need to improve the primary care health facilities within the country.

So we have to divide things we can't just focus on one and completely neglect the other and that is precisely what we are talking about in the slides, we are talking about competing policies and programs, competing civic values, who decide what to allocate? How much too allocate?

Who decide on what basis you know we will allocate a certain proportion to all? or how do we make this decision, is not who decides what is, how these decisions are made and that is what social programs, social program evaluators facilitate okay.

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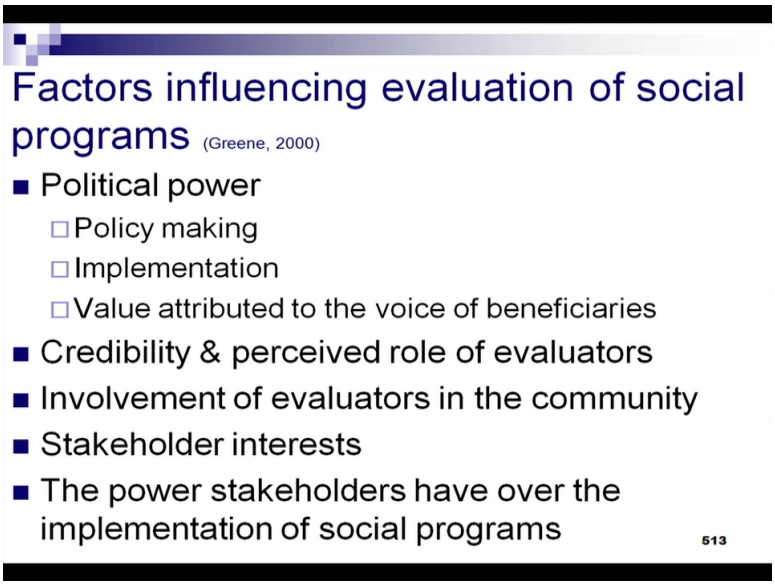

The factors influencing evaluation of social programs: the first one is political power, that is number one, policy making and within political power we have policymaking, we have implementation, we have value attributed to the voice of the beneficiaries, which means that the people who are making these policies have the power in their hands, they are the ones who are equipped, who are empowered, who are knowledgeable or who have the how to develop this policy, they have the information that the required to make these policies.

Then they are also the ones you know that there are people who are equipped, who are empowered to implement this programs, so they are the ones who has the power. Then the value attributed to the voice of the beneficiaries, that also add to the political power that ultimately influences how social programs are evaluated, after all people who we are doing all this for, should also tell us or should also be heard to find out whether what we are doing is of used to them or not.

So it is very, very important to give a voice to the beneficiaries, it is also very important to find out what people who are actually being affected by this programs feel. Credibility and perceived role of evaluators, are evaluators qualified? Are there what are they doing as evaluators? Are the assessing for the sake of assessing only and writing reports and being done with that or are they going to do something about it?

So that also affects how social programs are evaluated or and also how you know these programs are, the evaluation that comes from these programs is incorporated into further

program implementation okay. Involvement of evaluators in the community, now we are talking about participatory action research, if the evaluators are actually participants in the community.

The evaluation will be much richer, because they are also stakeholders in the program implementation, they are also being affected by the program implementation, either they are being affected as beneficiaries or they are being affected as the implementers or they are being affected as observers, but they are being affected, so it just depends on how much is state they have in the actual programs.

Then the stakeholder interests what to people want? Are we giving them what they want? The power stakeholders have over the implementation of social programs. Many times stakeholders actually convey, they have the voice of or they have the power to let the implementers and policymakers know what they want and their voice is really heard, so all of this influences how social programs are evaluated.

If I have a stake in the program then I will evaluate it very differently as opposed to, if I am just supposed to write a report and submitted to the government without really feeling the pinch or getting the benefit from that social program. So I'm not seeing everybody does it but my perspective will be different, if emotions are involved I will and it could go the other way also.

If my emotions of very heightened with the program evaluation then I may not be able to write an objective report, I may not be able to write a balanced report. So the way the program is evaluated depends on a lot of things, who we are? Whether we are trained? Whether we are able to do it or not? Okay.

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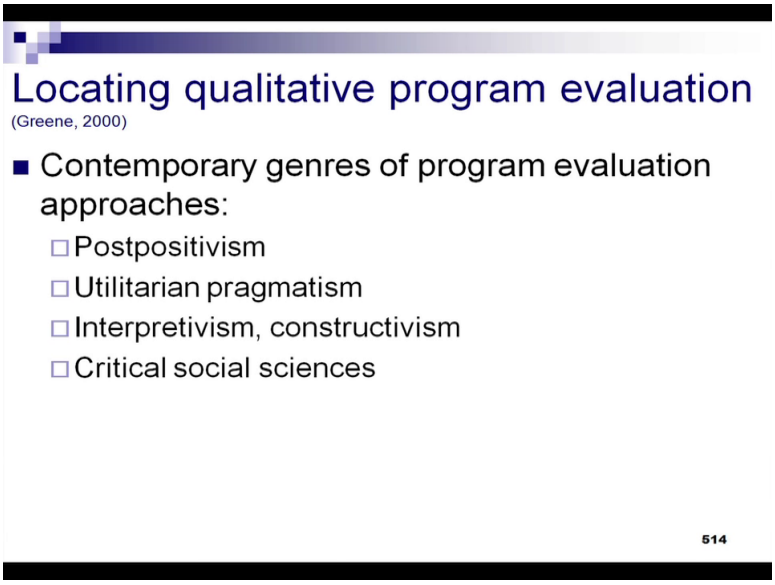

How does a qualitative program evaluation fit into all this some contemporary genres of program evaluation approaches: are postpositivism, Utilitarian pragmatism, interpretivism and constructivism and Critical Social Sciences. Let us look at each one of these.

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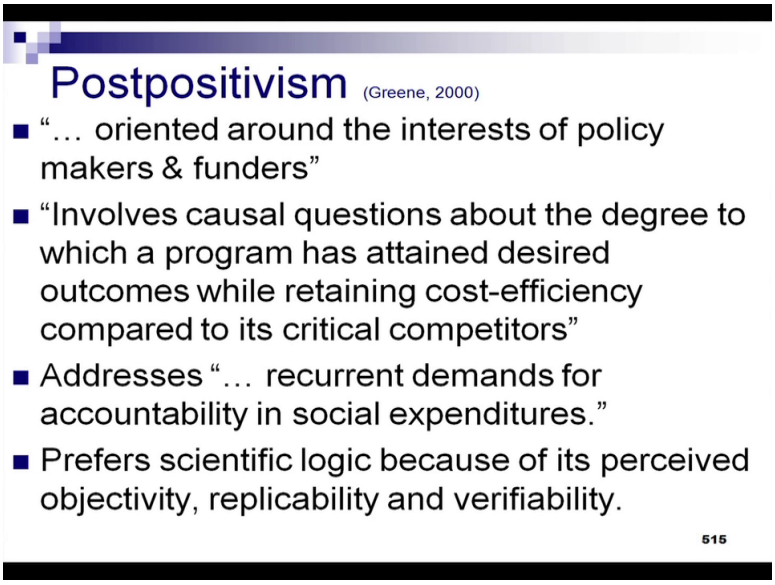

Postpositivism is "oriented around the interest of policy makers and funders", postpositivism looks at what policy makers and funders want. "It involves causal questions about the degree to which a program has attained desired outcomes while retaining cost-efficiency compared to its critical competitors".

So postpositivism involves the degree to which or how the outcomes have influenced the questions or you know whether there is a cause and effect relationship between the questions that were asked and the outcome that has been produced.

It addresses “recurrent demands for accountability in social expenditures.” So when we spend so much of money, when will look at, when we evaluate programs from a postpositivist’s point of view, we try to find out whether the money that we used for these programs was actually used properly or not.

It prefers scientific logic because of its perceived objectivity, replicability and verifiability. So it is focused on logical explanation of how things were done, whether they were done right or wrong, the evaluation is very, very logical in this sense and evaluation is replicable and verifiable okay.

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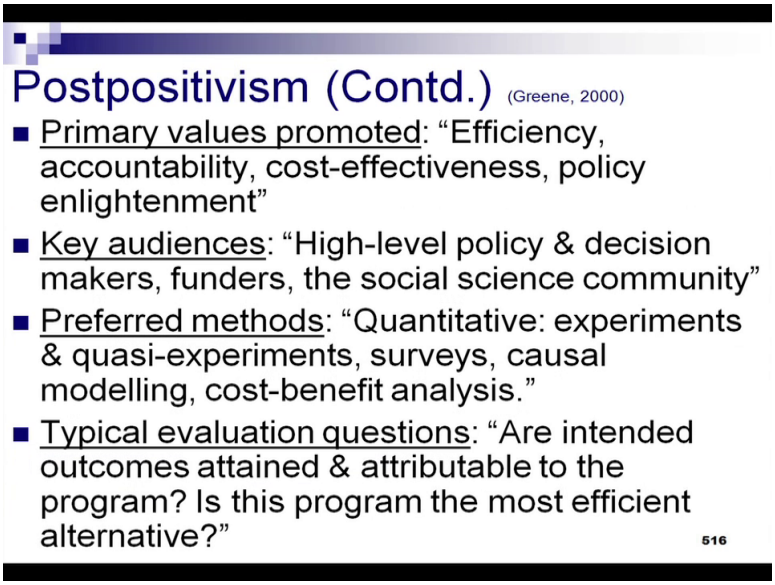

The primary values that are promoted “efficiency, accountability, cost-effectiveness and policy enlightenment”, the policies need to be such that according to evaluate programs and policies from postpositive point of view, we want evaluate the, policies to be ironclad we want them to be very systematic, very logical and we want to be able to, very clearly see a cause and effect relationship.

The key audiences in this case are the people who we write these evaluations are “the high-level policy and decision makers, the funders and the social science community” because there for the research depends on such valuation. Preferred methods are “quantitative: experiments and quasi-experiments, surveys, causal modeling, cost-benefit analysis.” plus minus one thing meaning to another, so the preferred method of evaluating social programs, from the post positivist point of view is quantitative.

If I say if you know A + B should be equal to C, it cannot be C and X and Z at the same time that is what we are trying to find out from this. Typical evaluation questions “are intended outcomes attained and attributable to the program? did we get what we invested into it or not, is this program the most efficient alternative or are there better alternatives? In which the outcome to input ratio is higher, okay.

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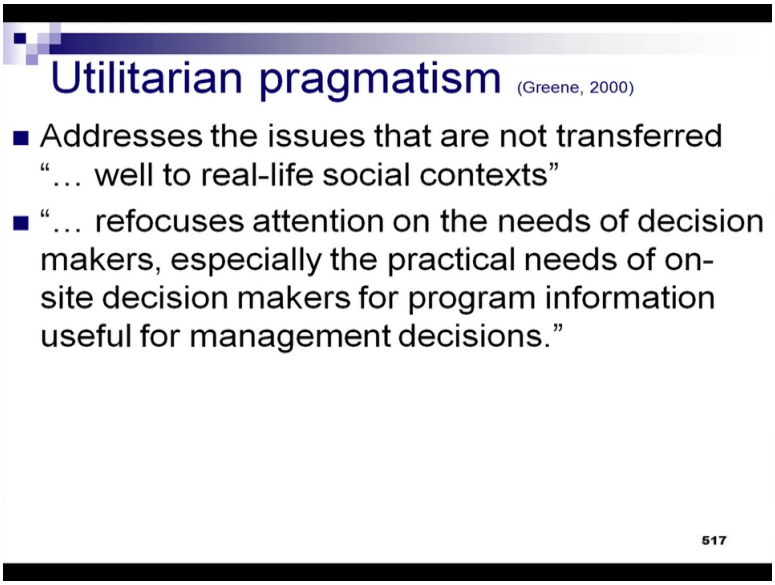

Utilitarian pragmatism: Addresses issues that are not transferred “well to real life social contexts”, if “refocuses the attention on the needs of decision makers, especially the practical needs of on-site decision makers for program information useful for management decisions.”

When we talk about utilitarian pragmatism, we are talking about the practical application of things, which may not be a plus minus game, sometimes the practical application of things requires or inherently bills waste into it. So the cost benefit relationship may not be very sound, but it is implemented and the effects are much more visible later okay.

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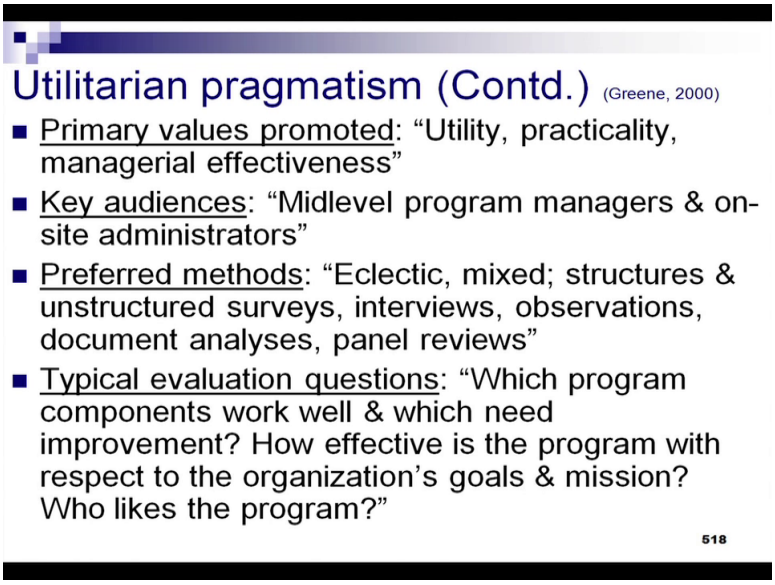

Primary values that are promoted: are "utility, practicality and managerial effectiveness", even if the cost benefit ratio is not very high as long as the people who are benefiting from it, feel good about it, it is good, as long as the people who are stakeholders in the process, feel that it is of used to them it is all right.

Now the key audiences here are "midlevel program managers and on site administrators", a friend of mine once told me that when you implement a program, when you do something you must account for or you must build at least 10 to 20% wastage in that program, that is what he told me, this is somebody who has been doing a lot of social program work, this is somebody who has been out in the field for a long time and she said everything doesn't happen on plus minus.

If you spend 5 hours in the field you may need to spend 2 out of those 5 hours just building rapport with people, it's not about giving them something, letting them do something, going into the field you know building a road and coming out, you may need to build a rapport with the people in the community, you may need to just sit put your things aside, sit and talk to the people in the community, I will give you a personal example at this point.

Many years ago in the year 2001 in the summer I went to Romania for three week internship at an orphanage with a bunch of other students and we were group of students and we went to an orphanage and we went without lofty plans and you know this was one of the very few orphanages that had opened its doors to foreigners, so it was nice of them, this was in a place called Iasi, IASI spelt as a Iasi, pronounce as Iasi, this is in Romania.

So we went there and this was such an enlightening experience, as far as the program implementation is concerned we went to the plans we said okay we are going to spend 8 hours there, will spend 4 hours in the morning, go for an for lunch for an hour, go pack spend 4 more hours, guess what we went there we should our plans to the administrator and she said close your books, what? She said close your books.

We do not need you, outsiders, students one from India, one from France, one from England, one from Japan, coming and telling us there is one lady from Sweden, she said we don't want you people coming in telling us, what how we need to do a work better, do you know what we are facing? We said no. She said what we need you to do is, we need you to spend time with these children, this was an orphanage, the caretakers overworked.

So she said you spend time with the children and we will tell you what help us with what we are doing and that will be enough service for us and we said okay. So initially some of us had not done this, we were confused, we said what we are here to do something substantial, we have to submit a report and she said with you write whatever you want in the report, but we need you to sit and spend time with children.

So they were six of our students sanding, we had to host students, each of us was adopted one to two kids and all we did was play with these children, these children needed our time, they needed hands on affection, some of the children were abandon, some of them were orphans, they did not have family, they did not a people to love them, so we went, we gave the time, we gave them affectionate, in the process those of us who knew how to help disabled children, we help them.

There is a boy who can't walk properly, which he had polio and then it's been so long you know this example just came to mind, so we help the child, we would just do is exercises with him the whole day, that was what was really required, now that was utilitarian pragmatism, a social program with the utility for the beneficiaries really got our time and we give children time.

So the workers in the orphanage could do what they had been hired for, they were understaffed, and overworked, so we give them some respite, with the result the overall

performance of that often is improved, why? because they were doing their work we were just helping take away the time or we were just filling in the time that they wanted to spend with the children that they could not, that was not part of their job description, so that is how our time was very fruitfully utilized.

This is what this means the cost benefit analysis would have yielded probably a negative ratio, but here the benefit at your son is got out of our work was tremendous, we spend three weeks there it was amazing for everybody, okay primary values promoted utility, practicality, managerial effectiveness. The Key audiences are mid level program managers and on site administrators.

The preferred methods of “eclectic, mixed, structures and unstructured surveys, interviews, observations, document analyses and panel reviews.” The typical evaluation questions are “which program components work well and which need improvement? How effective is the program with respect to the organizations goal and mission? Who likes the program? Now the example that I just gave you, which program components work, plans do not work.

Onsite thinking and creativity work, you go there you assess the situation and then if you need to plan you only plan for the day, making a plan ahead of time for three weeks does not work, will not work okay, so how effective is the program with respect to the organizations goals and mission, maybe from the perspective of the organization that had sent us there this was not there primary agenda, the agenda was to serve the community.

So we say serve the community, to my memory if I remember correctly they that was not very clearly detailed, so we just have to serve the community, the community said we need to be served this face, we said okay, here is our server, so we adaptable, who likes the program? The kids loved us, the children in that orphanage loved us, because we were just sitting and playing with them and you know we adapted what we had planned to do to bear needs.

So they were happy, they could do their works for the overall output was great and that said into our reports, so that is how we did things, okay.

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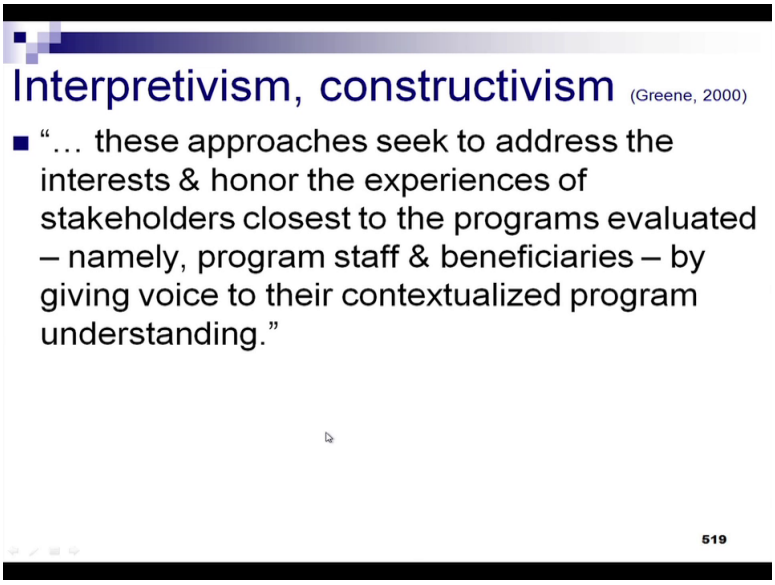

Interpretivism and constructivism "these approaches seek to address interest and honor the experiences of stakeholders closest to the program is evaluated – namely, program staff and beneficiaries - by giving voice to their contextualized program understanding." So when we evaluate programs from the interpretivist perspective, we can understand how the stakeholders are interpreting, how they are feeling, what they are feeling about the program.

The one before this was the practical applicability, who is happy? Now we saying we are just trying to find out how these people feeling.

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Primary values promoted "pluralism, understanding, contextualism, personal experience", so what are we trying to promote, we say okay within a particular context one thing that may not work in one context will work in another context because the demands of different. Key

audiences are “program directors, staff and beneficiaries”, we are trying to see things from different perspective, and we are trying to understand what is going on? Why it is going on? And you trying to evaluate the programs from their perspective.

Need not necessarily be immediately beneficial, is it solving whole problems? Is it giving a something new to think about? Is it distracting us from our current problems? So that we get some respite, while we you know we will get a break from trying to solve problems and then go back to those problems, what is this program doing. Preferred methods are “qualitative now we are getting somewhere the methods in this are qualitative, case studies, open ended interviews and observations, document reviews and dielectrics.

We are only trying to find out what is happening, so we go into the community and we try and talk to people try and understand what they felt, so this is qualitative completely. Typical evaluation questionnaire, “how is the program experienced by various stakeholders? In what ways is the program meaningful? And that is where qualitative research comes in we try and get this descriptive data.

We come back to analyze it and we say within this context this is what makes sense, within that context that is what made sense, they may not be a very simple formula to understand the cause and effect relationship in the situations, but this is really helping the community, so that's where qualitative explanations will come in.

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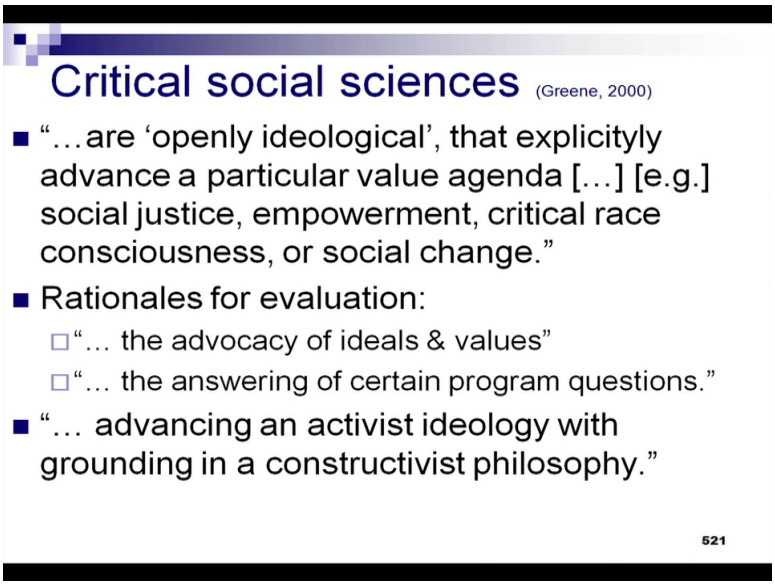

Critical Social Sciences "are openly ideological that explicitly advanced a particular value for agenda, for example social justice, empowerment, critical race, consciousness or social change." Rationales for evaluation are "the advocacy of ideals and values" and "the answering of certain program questions." And advancing activist ideology with grounding in a constructivist philosophy." We are trying to look at everything from an ideological point of view.

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The primary values promoted are "emancipation, empowerment, social change, egalitarianism, critical enlightenment" with everything from a very, very, very, very focused, very powerful microscope, we put everything under a very powerful microscope and we say okay, is this really contributing to the business, can we see something else which is not really

visible, so we critically evaluate, ideologically evaluate from the point of view of what a program should do in the long run. When we talked about ideology, we are talking about the higher goes.

So key audiences here are “program beneficiaries and their communities, the activists.” Preferred methods are participatory, action oriented, stakeholder participation in evaluation agenda setting, data collection, interpretation and action, these are the methods, this is purely qualitative and the evaluation questions are in what ways are the premises goes for activities of the program serving to maintain power and resource inequalities in the context.

When we talk about critical theory, we are talking about identifying inequalities and addressing them and that is precisely what search program evaluations do, Are be able to identify those, so we break up its first decide, how what with what idea in mind are we evaluating it, what are we going to do this evaluation, how are we going to use it and that will help us determine the paradigm from which we approach our evaluation and then that will help us find out what kinds of tools, we use for evaluation, who's going to be benefited, etcetera.

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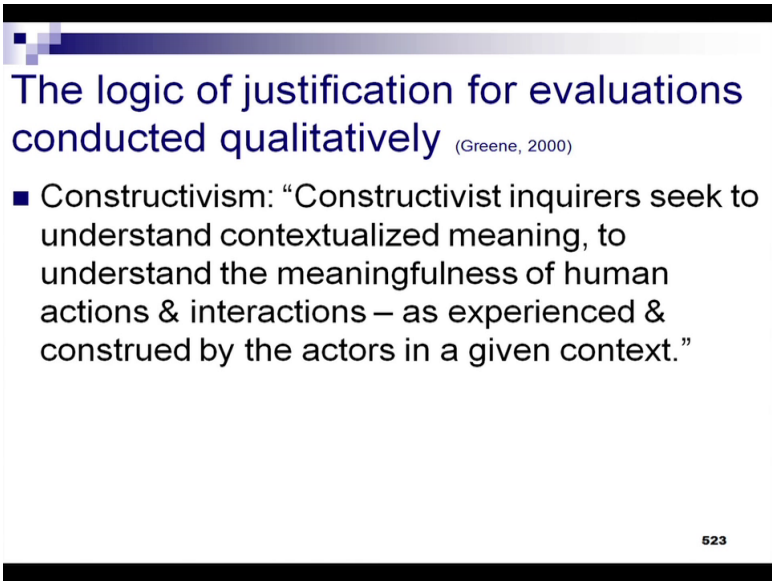

The logic of justification for evaluations conducted qualitatively. Constructivism: “constructivist inquirers seek to understand contextualized meaning to understand the meaningfulness of human actions and attractions - as experienced and construed by the actors in a given context.” So we are talking about contextual understanding of meaning, we try and presents the meanings in contextualized manner.

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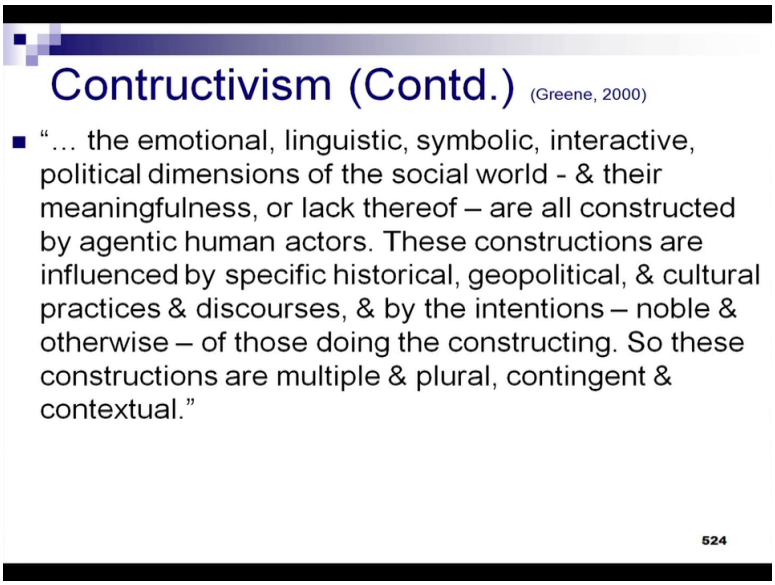

Constructivism is "the emotional, linguistics, symbolic, interactive political dimensions of the social world, we've already talked about constructivism and their meaningfulness or lack thereof are all constructed by agentic human actors. These constructions are influenced by specific historical, geopolitical and cultural practices and discourses and by the intentions noble and otherwise of those doing the constructing.

So these constructions are multiple and plural, contingent and contextual." We look at them within the context, I'm not going to go through it because we discussed these terms ad nauseam, the task of the constructivist social inquirer, just a second let me see how much is left probably have to get it spill over okay, so maybe we can stop this discussion here at critical social sciences, that's all we have time for today in this lecture, we will discuss the dress to wait in the next lecture, thank you very much for listening.