Lecture 44
Understanding Social Programs through Evaluation (Contd.)

Welcome back to the NOC course on qualitative research methods, my name is Aradhna Malik and I am helping you with this course, we were talking about understanding social programs through qualitative, through evaluation, so we did a few things and I am going to just go through them, if you can just focus on this, we were talking about this and we talked about what social program evaluators do, we did all of this you know we talked about different Paradigms from which we approach social program evaluations.

So, we talked about the different Paradigms, we talked about post positivism, we talked about utilitarian pragmatism, we talked about interpretivism and constructivism, we talked about critical Social Sciences, now please try and finish this discussion.

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The logic will discuss, the logic of justification for evaluation that are conducted qualitatively the first point here is constructivism "constructivist inquirer seek to understand contextualized meaning to understand the meaningfulness of human actions and interactions as experience and as construed by the actors in a given context."

Constructivist try to find out what people really saw, they try and understand things for from the perspective of those affected, not from the perspective of the planners, not from the perspective of the funders, but from the perspective of the people who were in the context that was being evaluated.

Very, very important things you know, we go in as social welfare professionals and as social program implemented we go in and we try and do a whole lot of things you know we try and take our programs to the field, we try and take our programs to, we think about the best possible alternatives but sitting in a flash offices, sitting in a different context we may not know what is required by the people and this is this going back to the example, I gave you in the previous class.
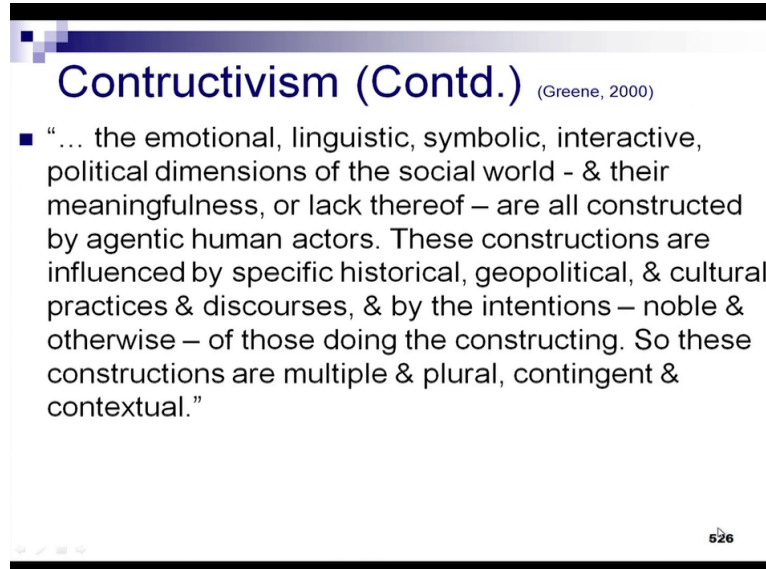
We did not know as very bubbly, cheerful very, very enthusiastic students, we had no idea about the problems the orphanage official were facing in the orphanage, so you know we went in and they said well fine you're here thank you very much for coming, please close your books, please don't look at your plans, you if you want to work here, we need your help with this particular thing, we don't want you to come and clean our orphanage, we have people.

We said okay, we will clean your orphanage, no, no, nothing doing, we said will do this, we will design new activities, they said first you let us take care of the old activities, just help us relax, just help us get a break for our meals, so that is what we did and when we did that, they were able to do the job better and ultimately the quality of service that the orphanage was giving to its beneficiaries, which is the children that were there became very, very good, because people really had the time to do what they were hired to do. Okay.

So that is what we do, so constructivism to find out what is going on and tries to see things from the perspective of a beneficiary, so going back to that example to the beneficiaries were the staff in that orphanage and the children and that orphanage and both of them benefited because we were adaptable, because we changed our plans, both parties benefit it, may be the people who funded our effort did not, it was a self funded thing, so it didn't really matter.

Of course there was an organization that that organized these trips and that coordinated all the efforts, so I am there was something, but it was a self financed trip and that was really, really good, because everybody ended up benefiting from that effort.

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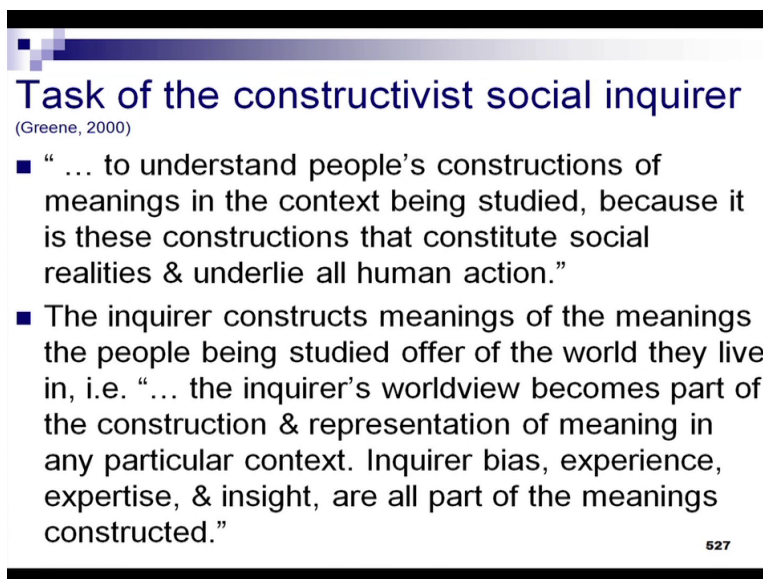

So constructivism is "the emotional, linguistic, symbolic, interactive, political dimensions of the social world and their meaningfulness or lack thereof – are all constructed by agentic human actors. These constructions are influenced by specific historical, geopolitical and cultural practices and discourse and by the intentions – noble and otherwise of those the constructing. So these constructions are multiple and plural, contingent and contextual."

How we interpret a situation depends on all of these factors on where we are coming from? What we have been trained to do? How we collect data? What we collect? What we threw out? Where we assimilate data? And all of that is influenced by our stake in the process are participants? Are we outsiders? Are we the observers? Are we researchers?

Getting all this information to write our PhD's, what do we want from understanding these situations, where do we stand in that situation? So and we realize a constructivist say that everybody will have a different perspective of the same situation and it's okay to have so many perspectives.

Task of the constructivist social inquirer is "to understand people's construction of meaning in the context being studied, because it is these constructions that constitutes social realities and underlie all human actions." The task of the social enquiry is to understand how different people understand the reality is within the context and inquirer construct meaning of the meanings of the people being studied offer of the world they live in, i.e.

"the inquirers worldview becomes part of the construction and representational meaning in any particular context. Inquirer bias, experience, expertise, and insight are all part of the meanings constructed."
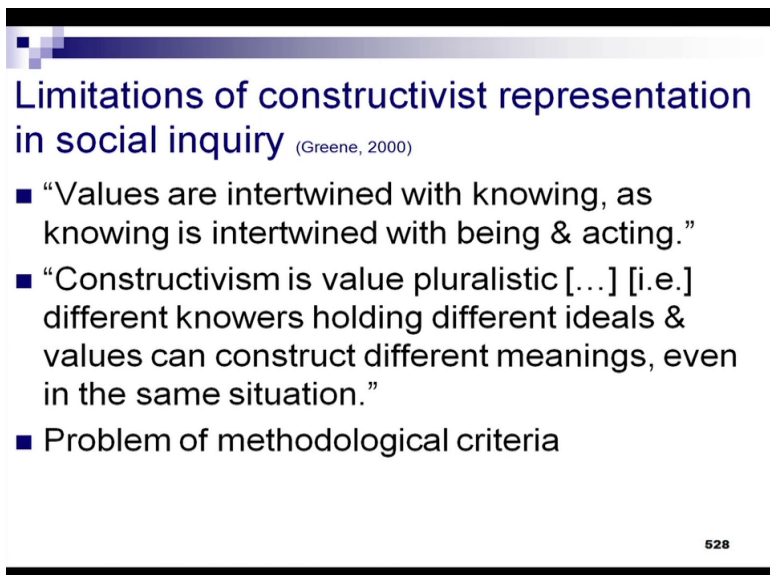
I am trying to understand what you have understood of my efforts, so one: level of understanding is your understanding is participant in the process, you express your understanding of the process that you are a part of, so that already this filters you have taken something, you've left out something else, you take that one is your experience, the next level is your expression, there is a gap between the two, what you want to tell me.

What you really felt, what you want to tell me and then above that is my reception of what you have told me and that passes, you told me something but that also passes through my filters how have I been trained do my research. Or maybe should be like this, so you in a situation you are passing something down, then you expressing it then I am receiving it and then it is passing through my filters and I am choosing to take something.

And throw out something else, I am ignoring something, so it is a meaning making of meanings that I have understood. You have made some sense of the situation, you are in as a participant, as a researcher, I am trying to make sense of your sense making out the situation and that is what constructivism is.

And we understand that and all of this something maybe lost and that's okay, inquiry bias comes in and experience comes in, how have I been trained to collect data, where does my interest lie, inside what can I see, can I see beyond what I am seeing, I am very bad at reading between the lines, in normal human behavior in research I may be able to see beyond what is clearly written, can I do that and that only comes with experience with practice that will then feed into the meaning that are constructed.

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Limitations of constructivist representational in social inquiry: the "values are intertwined with knowing, as knowing is intertwined with being and acting." What I perceive to be right and wrong will affect, whether I want to see it or not, there is a very famous case called the various cases on ethics, that have been teaching to my students someone is called super size me, I don't know if you heard about it.

Super size me was film made about the harmful effects of McDonald's burgers, so please look it up this is not the time of place to discuss this, I just give you a very brief overview, so what I now if I am very health conscious, I will already have a biased view when I read whatever people was saying, if I am if I do not believe in or if I have you know if I have suffered the

negative effects of being addicted to fast food, I will say yes McDonalds is responsible for making people fat.

On the other hand if I am a true researcher, I will say well or if I have never tasted McDonalds in my life, I say well maybe it's making people fat, maybe not making people fat, I will have to look at what is going on, I will have to study both sides of the case. If I am a McDonald's employee or if I am a big prominent of fast food chains, I would look at the same situation, I will watch that movie, I will read the case and I will send know there is something else going on, so I am going to construct two different meanings.

So our values, you see well McDonalds is not forcing you to eat its burgers, don't eat them, if you don't like them, don't eat them. So our values, I am I you know, which side I am on, what I think is right, what I think is wrong, If I am employ or proponent or even not really you know I could be honest, side where I could say that well it is not the fast food agencies responsibility to get you eat something or not eat, it is your responsibility as an individual, so my values will decide how interpreter situation.

Constructive is the "constructivism is value pluralistic that is different knower's holding different ideals and values can construct different meanings, even in the same situation different values can exist in the same situation." And its okay we study these different values and then we present a case and we said this is how things happen.

There is a problem of methodological criteria that is always a problem with all qualitative research, which method are you following? is it sound? Is somebody be able to replicate it? Maybe, maybe not.
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The practice of evaluations conducted qualitatively (Greene, 2000)

■ Evaluations as the telling of stories:

□ "... evaluation practiced qualitatively is a narrative craft that involves the telling of *stories* – stories about individuals & groups of people in their own complex & dynamic communities, stories that enable understanding of what these communities share with others & what is unique to them, stories with an explicit authorial signature, & stories with the aim of understanding, & often action, as the improvement of practice or the reframing of the policy conversation, toward the appreciation of pluralism & complexity."

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Practice of evaluations conducted qualitatively, "evaluation practice qualitatively is a narrative craft that involves the telling stories - stories about individuals and groups of people in their own complex and dynamic communities, stories that enable understanding of what these community share with others and what is unique to them, stories with an explicit authorial signature, what the author feels about the story is reflected in the story, so stories with an explicit authorial signature and stories with the aim of understanding and often action as the improvement of practice or the reframing of policy conversations, toward the appreciation of pluralism and complexity."

So these are stories we are trying to enhance our understanding and promote the appreciation of pluralism and we say a life is not a mathematical model, life doesn't move in a straight direction, so life is not all plus and minus, a friend recently told me you can't you know this friend told me that I cannot access things, I don't have to know ahead of time what is going to happen, I get into a rickshaw and I get off at another place and even if I fix operate with the rickshaw puller ahead of time, he will haggle with me after I get down.

So life is never plus minus I will always changing, always it after so obviously we need to be adaptable because life is always changing and we appreciate qualitative research, qualitative research indicates or promotes the appreciation of the stories that we write need to be written in such a way that different world views are built into these interpretations and it is okay for that to happen, so that is what we need to structure our stories, around okay.

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Evaluations as the telling of stories (Contd)
(Greene, 2000)

- "… evaluators are likely to gain more comprehensive and in-depth program understanding by explicitly inviting dialogue around data from different methods & approaches."
- Implications for welfare reform:
  - Instrumental cases: Cases that are selected "… for their potential to provide insight into the overall reform initiative."
  - "What community characteristics might influence a program participant's sense of hopefulness or despair, connectedness or isolation, & then how are these feelings related to her or his program experience?" [530]

So evaluations as the telling of stories: "evaluators are likely to gain more comprehensive and in-depth program understanding by explicitly inviting dialogue around data from different methods and approaches." We need to understand what we have collected, we need to go through it we need to make meaning of it, so researchers make meaning out of the data or the evaluators, program evaluators especially program evaluators need to find out what different things meant to different people even within the same context.

How different people valuated or how different people understood the efforts of the program implementers and what they got out of it and that can only be done by inviting dialogue around the data from various methods and approaches that will give it some robustness the meaning will be more widely accepted is that is done.

The implication for welfare reform: instrumental cases: are cases that are selected "for the potential to provide insight into the overall reform initiative." These are instrumental cases we go through these cases and we find out how the overall reform initiatives really progressed or what it do for the community.

"What community characteristics might influence the program participants of hopefulness or despair connectedness or isolation and then how are these feelings related to her or his program experience?"

These are the welfare reform initiatives or these are the implications, the qualitative research helps us find out, how the reform progressed and how different characteristics of the

community could have influenced, what participants in the program felt about the program that was implemented.

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Role of the narrator-evaluator in storytelling is "an evaluator's own position in his or her work reflects both personal biography and political partnership, we talked about this, the representation of reality, the presentation meaning by and evaluator, by a qualitative researchers will include the researchers own sense of being and also the researchers personal worldview, both who the evaluator is as an individual and as an evaluator and who's interest she or he chooses to advance in the study, the reasons for the evaluation etcetera.

Commitment to pluralism "and thus representing the full array of perspectives and meaning in their stories for a comprehensive story all are also needed." For the narrator-evaluator needs to be committed to pluralism, needs to be cognizant of the fact, that more than one word view could exist and it's okay for things to be presented as they are. Accountability they also need to be accountable for the differences stories of evaluators make to the current situation future directions.

After all what we present in the public domain will affect how people see themselves, you see the programming implemented in a certain way, the evaluator go out, find out what is happening from the field come back and tell you that this is what we saw in the field and then what they say will have an impact on how people see themselves, they will see you know they will get a sense of how their efforts for being perceived, they will get a sense of what the people interpret it from the situation interpret.

And then you say this is not right, this should not have been perceived in a certain way, so that is what they deal, with that what they need to be careful okay.

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They also "guides for the improvement of specific contextual practices", stories that are present in a very helpful in that, the stories that are presented become "opportunities for program learning and insight by diverse interested stakeholders", they become vehicles for reframing the large policy conversation. These qualitative narratives then finally feed into the policy reframing process or they also feed into the conversations that are centred around policy making in reframing.

They also make "insistent demands to attend to the vital complexities, the legitimate pluralism and the politics of power that constitute the fabric of contemporary social life." Life is not plus minus, it's not linear, it is very complex, everything is constantly affecting everything else and these discussions, these stories, these narrative, enhance pluralism or enhance the attention to pluralism and also highlight the politics of power that are constantly affecting their complexities in our social system.

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Challenges of evaluation as story-telling
(Greene, 2000)

- "... how do those who read & listen to the evaluator's story about the meaningfulness of the state-level welfare reform decide if it is a good story?"
- "How does the evaluator know where the boundaries of his/her own advocacy lie?"
- "How does s/he as a 'qualitative' evaluator fairly & justly fulfil her/his responsibilities – to those who have commissioned the evaluation, to the members of the settings studied, & to the larger citizenry, the collective good?"
- "Whose interests are advanced, when the evaluator judges [the particular] state's approach to the welfare reform to be an effective one, but welfare reform itself to be a misguided policy direction?" – too many stakeholders, often with conflicting interests!!!

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Some challenges of evaluation storytelling: "how do those who read and listen to the evaluator's story about the meaningfulness of state level welfare reform decide if it's a good story?" Is it valid? Is it effective? How do we decide that? So the effectiveness decided. "How does evaluator know where the boundaries of his or her advocacy lie?" Where do we stop being evaluated and become proponents or become advocates for a particular situation.

I may want to go in depth about a particular program implementation and then I say well, hold on my talking from the perspective of the government, I am yes this is how this program affected XYZ or I say this is what the program did not do or this is what I should do, so where do we stop being evaluators and start becoming advocates that becomes a big challenge.

"How does he or she as a qualitative evaluator fairly and just leave fulfill his or her responsibilities to those who have commissioned the evaluation to the members of the settings studied and to the largest citizenry the collective good? We need to draw line, we need to balance these role, as an evaluator, as a person who is a representative of the funders, I need to say yes all the policies that was implemented were done well, because so that we don't ask for more money.
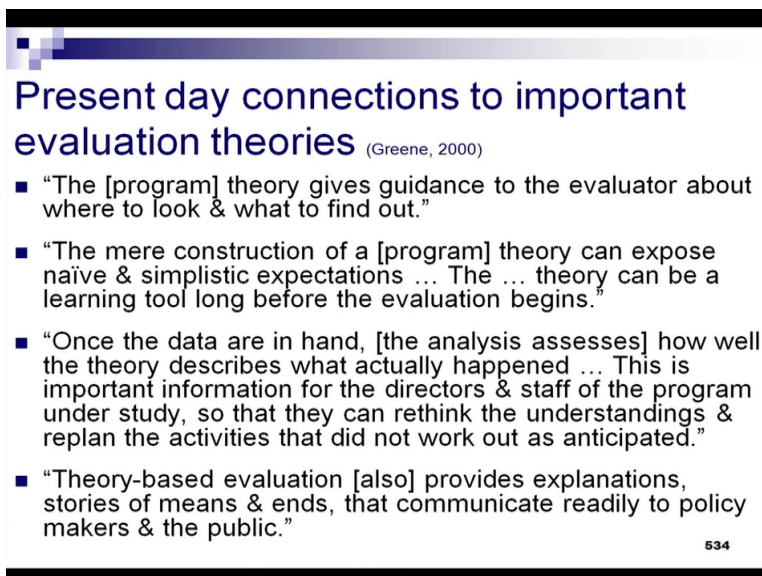
 if I am a representative of the government, I need to say yes the government as a fabulous job, if I am beneficiary who has somehow missed the boat, I am supposed to also look at their interest and say and no there wasn't enough for everybody. So where do I draw the line, there has to be a balance and you know if we talk more about or if one aspect of the evaluation is

given more emphasis then the other part gets left out, there has to be a balance, that there has to be some amount of objectivity as far as possible and then you say values you just said that everybody is personal opinions come in, they do.

But that is where our expertise, that is where our hard work as evaluators lies and we evaluate social programs, we have to learn to be involved with the program and also distance from the program and balance this distance and involvement. "Whose interests are advanced, when the evaluator judges the particular states approach to the welfare reform to be an effective one, but welfare reform itself to be misguided policy direction? - too many stakeholders, often with conflicting interests!!! Needs to be catered to.

So how do we evaluate the program or policy in light of the conflicting interests of the stakeholders, how do we prioritize? How which stakeholder is more important to do we need to attend to? How do we how do we set those priorities and how do we balance it? is always a challenge.

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Present day connections to important evaluation theories: "The program theory gives guidance to evaluator about where to look and what to find out." "The mere construction of a program theory can expose naive and simplest expectations. The theory can be a learning tool long before the evaluation begins."
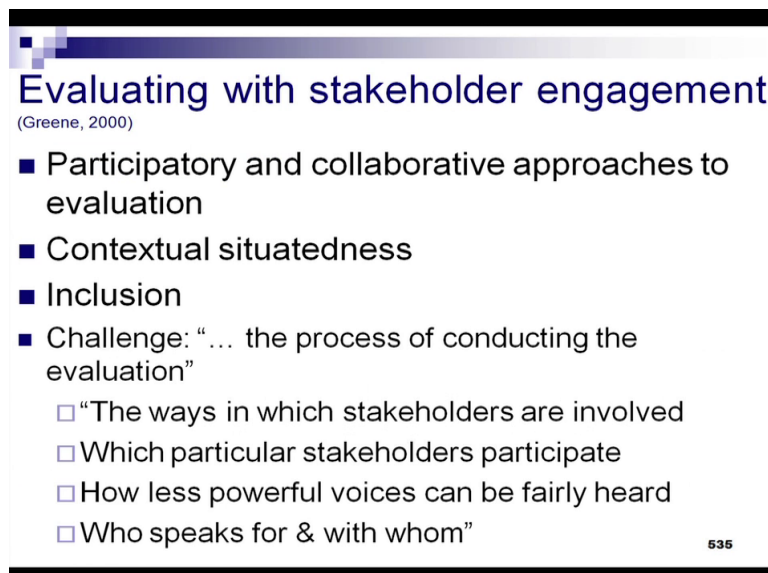
So evaluation theories can give us some insight, they can help us guide our evaluations, they can show you know theory can help us develop insights into the program before it is implemented, so we say one money, time and energy.

"Once the data in hand, the analysis assesses how well the theory describes what actually happened and so we tied in with the theory and we say where the theory came out of the ground, it came out of practical life, is it valid? Is it not? What is more applicable here? This is important information for the directors and staff of the program under study, so that they can rethink I understanding and replan the activities that did not work out as anticipated."

Theory based evaluation also provides explanations stories of means and end that communicates readily to policy makers and the public." They also provide you, they also help the also help explain the cause and effect relationship, they also not really in a very Plus and minus term, but in that in terms of whether what we started with actually became beneficial or not.

And so they try and speak to both ends of the spectrum people who planned the program and people who benefited from it or who were affected by it.

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Evaluating with stakeholder engagement participatory and collaborative approaches to evaluation, The best contextual situatedness is always very helpful, when we talk about when we know, when stakeholders are engaged with the evaluation process these are the benefits,

the first is the evaluation becomes a participatory and collaborative process, everybody gets to participate in it and they can provide the perspective.

The evaluation can be situated contextually, we know where we are talk you know where we are which perspective we are evaluating the programmer policy from, then the inclusion everybody gets to be included, the challenge here is the process of conducting the evaluation becomes a challenge, the ways in which stakeholders are involved need to be decided, which particular stakeholders participate stakeholders with conflicting interests may not be such a good idea.

But how do you choose which stakeholders to take and which not to take how less powerful voices can be fairly heard and who speaks with and who speaks for and with whom and that is all we have time for in this lecture, thank you very much for listening, there's a lot of things that we can discuss in this, but I told you right in the beginning the idea is to plant ideas in your mind and stimulate you to go out a new directions and see what is happening in then come back and read up and maybe develop further interest in this whole area, so thank you very much for listening we will try and wind up the discussion in the next one or two lectures, thank you.