Sample Journal Entries – Combining the I-It

SAMPLE 1 (for a theory class):

Elliott presents a powerful critique of Habermas. This was of particular interest to me in view of my summer critical theory readings where we examined not only some of Habermas’ writings but also those of other critical theorists, particularly those in the field of education (e.g., McLaren, etc.) and how their work draws on or extends that of Paulo Freire (Pedagogy of the Oppressed). Elliott argues that 1) Habermas’ theory of the unconscious is principally negative, ignoring the creative work of the unconscious. 2) It cancels out the cognitive-affective interplay and is an excessively rationalistic account; a critique made by feminists also, e.g. Ellsworth and others who draw on Freud’s work critically. 3) Autonomy is said to be the result of making the unconscious conscious. 4) He neglects Freud’s point that the unconscious is indestructible and can only be brought to a partial level of control. 5) He resists the idea that deep affect resists linguistic structure and argues that desire and feeling must be linguistically expressed and critically reflected upon. As such, reason triumphs over desire. 6) He loses sight of the dynamics of repressed desire within the social field. And, 7) he adopts universal norms from developmental theorists e.g. Kohlberg.

Our class discussion was very rich since there are sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and educators in the group. It was sometimes hard for me to follow the input from the sociologists and I realized once again that I am not as well-read within their discipline as I might like. That was one of the reasons that I like our summer critical theory reading group. But I also get frustrated sometimes since their conversation is often 10 feet above the earth – I wish that they could ground themselves more in practice. Do sociologists think that it is the task of social workers to “enact” their theories? I am not sure but hope to develop a strategy for asking them!

Elliott’s critique is also helpful as I think of my own desire to engage in research on social class and subjectivity among women in the academy. It’s important for me to develop some theoretical insights for thinking about this work as it is importantly “autobiographical” given my own social class background and my journey within the working class into a professional position as a psychologist-in-training. I have read lots of autobiographical writing among women in such positions but the process remains undertheorized within psychology and I find that psychologists’ understanding of social class is limited to its treatment as a “demographic” variable within multivariate analyses. I am much more interested in the phenomenology of social class and the cultural aspects of social class position and how it creates and is recreated by women in class transition.

SAMPLE 2 (for an action research class):

My dissertation research is based on an inductive research process. My literature review should therefore provide a conceptual context or framework of the study (Maxwell, 1996, p. 25; Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 28). Maxwell (1996) argues that the conceptual framework is a tentative theory about what is going on with the phenomena under study, as such it is more accurate to refer it as a theoretical framework. A theoretical framework differs from a more conventional literature review. It draws upon "different approaches, lines of investigation, or theories that no one had previously connected" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 26). A rigid focus on a narrow body of literature from a particular theoretical orientation could limit my interpretive ability. Sources of knowledge
for constructing a theoretical framework are diverse, including theory, empirical research, experiential knowledge, and pilot studies. Unfortunately this is not always accepted/acceptable within psychology that has a “narrower” understanding of the literature review within the context of the hypothetico-deductive framework, that differs substantially from the inductive research process that I am undertaking. This is sometimes frustrating to me as it is not only the dominant perspective in psychology but some in our class and in our department think that it is the only perspective… in which case there is no space for me and my interests … but I don’t think that is true – I hope not.

As I read more about qualitative research I see the tension between existing theory, which is described/engaged in a theoretical framework, and emergent theory which is developed from inductive analyses. In an inductive research process, the researcher constructs theory from the data. Qualitative researchers are concerned that existing literature will become a straight jacket that limits the researchers construction of emergent theory (Lincoln, 1990; Maxwell, 1996). A critical examination of the literature requires that the literature be treated as a source of ideas rather than an authority to whom one defers (Maxwell, 1996, p. 27).

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In my dissertation research I have been writing a review of relevant literature prior to data collection as well as engaging in an ongoing process of reading theory, research, and working-class autobiography during the data collection and analyses process. I am continually in a dialogue with the literature and the literature informs the ways in which I made meaning of the data. As I am developing my analyses, I find that there were three concepts or metaphors from the literature that fit with particular aspects of the data: class habitus or embodiment of class culture, border crossing, and multiplicity of self. The concepts are drawn from different fields of study: embodiment is drawn largely from a sociological psychoanalytic perspective, but also from sociocultural research; border crossing is drawn from culture studies, and multiplicity is drawn from postmodern theories of subjectivity. Obviously I would not have seen this “fit” without doing the reading and analyzing tasks simultaneously BUT the fact that I “knew” these concepts prior to beginning my interviewing also informed the development of the data collection process – they feed each other and are iterative processes.

NB: These are composites prepared by M. Brinton Lykes, drawing on the work of Sandra Jones, PhD, while she was a graduate student at Boston College. Note that both examples combine theory, application or praxis, and self reflections.

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