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Omega Graduate School

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***120 Day - Course Learning Journal***

The journal is a written reflection of your learning journey while working in each course and is an integration of the essential elements of the course within your professional field of interest. The objective of the *course* journal is to produce a degree of acculturation, integrating new ideas into your existing knowledge of each course. This is also an opportunity to communicate with your professor consistent with the Tutorial Methodology to express insights gained as a result of the course of study. Submit the course learning journal via DIAL. The course learning journal should be 5-7 pages in length, and should include the following sections:

1. **Introduction** – Describe the expectations of the graduate program and the campus residency component for that course. Summarize the intent of the course, how it fits into the graduate program as a whole, and the relevance of its position in the curricular sequence.
2. **Personal Growth** - Describe your personal growth–*how the course stretched or challenged you*– as well as your progress in mastery of course content and skills during the week and through subsequent readings – *what new insights or skills you gained.*
3. **Reflective Entry** - Add a reflective entry that describes the contextualization (or *adaptation and relevant application*) of new learning into your professional field. What questions or concerns have surfaced about your professional field as a result of your study?
4. **Future Expectations** - Continue the journal by addressing questions and concerns you now have relating to the graduate program expectations.
5. **Conclusion** – Synthesize the three body sections above, evaluating the effectiveness of the course in meeting your professional, religious, and educational goals.

**Introduction**

The course, Contextualization for Social Change, was informative and relational to my career. I’m so thankful to observe how Jesus brings me into more Omega Graduate School classes at just the right time when I’m seeing new challenges in my workplace as a school administrator. I love learning more Christian biblical worldview and being challenged with new material for deep critical thinking. It seems that each Philosophy course at OGS has tremendous purpose for life-long scholar practioning and world changing possibilities.

It is true that sociological integration of religion and society cannot occur with contextualization. Having the ability to study the scriptures contextually is most important. It does take study time to read scripture and study the context of culture during that time, but it is true and something that most churches do not allow for. The meaning of scripture can change according to the context. Context is key; text without context is a con. We don’t know what we don’t know. If someone does not teach it, how will others know? Contextualization should be transformational. It makes scripture alive and pertinent. Understanding in context is logical and should always be pursued. Faith integration along with culture helps solidify truth of scripture.

My husband and I had the privilege of experiencing this firsthand as Christian school teachers in underground churches in China. We were there for 2 years and worked in 4 schools. Not only were we in another culture group, but in a different Christian culture groups. Christian Chinese were taught western Christian church traditions from the earliest missionaries. Many are still taught in the same way today. Some of these traditions do not work well in China. The Chinese people are very driven workers. They have high expectations of their families and children. There were several families in the Christian school there who did not want communist teaching taught to their children in the Chinese government schools, so they chose Christian education. However, some of these families were not Christians, because of the legalistic expectations of the church. I know this firsthand from a sweet Chinese family my husband and I mentored in parenting. These family said as they’ve watched other Christians, they believed Christianity was just more weekly obligations to do and attend, and they were already very busy. But maybe one day when they got their children to USA for school, they wouldn’t be so busy, and they could do the mandates of the Chinese church and believe. It was difficult to explain to them that it was not correct, when those behaviors were all they saw.

But many previous missionaries from decades before were only taught western church traditions and were only able to teach what they knew worked in the western world. Thus, I’m so happy to have taken this course! Now to be able to spread the truth of contextualization of scripture in culture. This is the only way to reach others if we want to speak truth to the world.

**Personal Growth**

The course, Contextualization for Social Change, was a very integral part of my growth and study these past several months, also. My Christian world view continues to be enlightened but challenged as I think and reason through significant world culture and events.

One of the challenges was reflecting through scripture and biblical events and researching its cultural context. For instance, Acts 19: 8-10 and 21 needed contextualization to show us the culture of that day and age. Understanding why Paul made the decisions he had to when staying or leaving, were not only God ordained, but culturally mandated to reach all the Jews and Gentiles. It’s interesting to read the context and background of a culture to really understand the decisions made. While today, we may not make the same choices, our society is different, not only in our country, but in others around the world. Do we care enough to know the culture of others to reach them, or not? This is so important in missions.

I enjoyed being stretched mentally and spiritually when studying the macro theories that look at how social structures and institutions work together, especially since I work at a Christian school in USA. However, studying a country’s culture in education, government, religion, etc., is a huge undertaking in another part of the world. But how about adding the learning of their economic housing or health care and much more? It certainly takes me out of my comfort zone. To totally understand people and be trusted by them for relationship and help, we must know who we are dealing with. There is so much more to learn.

Studying a short amount on syncretism was eye opening for me. Knowing that some people really believe including all world beliefs that work for themselves, is okay, is hurtful for the church and Christianity. Now, what do we do with so much misinformation? Where are they being informed about things that are not truth? What went wrong with the world? How are we going to fix it? How are we now going to live in it? All societies need to be understood in their own terms, not in comparison with western culture. How will it work when USA is filled with more different societies from other countries today. In our school, we now have 30% diversity groups. Two years ago, we only had 2 different languages spoken represented by families in our school. This year we have 14 different languages. How are we going to reach each family?

**Reflective Entry**

Since our school represent many different languages in families, much help is needed to reach each student at school and parent help at home with understanding English language and traditions. Our school has had a Parent Services group in the past that seemed to help Spanish speaking families, but now how do reach 13 more language groups? And after taking this course, my eyes continue opening to the fact that all cultures understand and do things differently according to their own experiences, and that removes the evaluative lens from my eyes of judging whether a culture is good or bad. It just IS. Looking at every human being as God made them from the foundation of the world is our correct thinking. Getting to know them, make relationship with them that is a trusting relationship is most important.

Just recently, I personally worked with a family from Ethiopia from our school. The parents moved here just last year and both mom and dad are registered nurses. They were the first of their family’s generation to have college educations and it was looked upon that they were well-respected by their family group. To keep the respect, their two children were to be examples of exceptional students regardless of their young abilities.

Mom worked day shift and dad worked night shift. Their oldest child, Tolu, was almost 5 years old when she entered our school. Previously, she had attended preschool at a private school in Indiana. Mom taught Tolu how to read, and she instructed her every day after preschool. Tolu however, did not have a play time with friends during afterschool hours or on weekends, as Mom was still instructing her, so her social skills were lacking. Mom and dad believed that providing her with learning more than socializing was the important thing. This would continue the respect their family gave to Tolu’s parents. When she came to our school last year, mom wanted her to skip Kindergarten and start in first grade. Somehow, her desire was granted by another administrator. It was true Tolu could read, but she had no learned social skills as a 5 year old entering grade 1. The first quarter of school was an extremely hard one for Tolu. She associated school with play as before in preschool. Never having attended Kindergarten, she was expected to learn more as a first grader. She did not have Kindergarten experience with part academic learning, and part playing with others as in most kindergarten.

Tolu became a behavior problem, running away from her teacher and hiding during the day when she could escape, because she had difficulty sitting in a school desk. She did not get along with others and many times took things from them. Something had to be done. Mom and dad had never experienced this before with her in preschool. At this point, it was decided that the best environment for Tolu would be to move her into Kindergarten. She was the age of the other students there. When we as administration and teachers decided this was a good idea, we proposed it to the parents.

Tolu’s parents could not understand why we would do this. If Tolu was not in grade 1, it would be an insult to the family in Ethiopia and she would be considered a failure along with her parents. We tried to explain from our own culture that this would not be failure but was best for socialization and academic learning for Tolu.

After many conferences with her parents, I prayed asking our Father, what is best for this family? I finally asked another Ethiopian family in our school to attend a conference, with Tolu’s parents’ permission, giving them a bit of background. Maybe discussing together would solve the issue. Tolu’s parents were thrilled to meet another family from their own culture. After a few more meetings, these two families were drawn together, and the children of both families became good friends. And at the beginning of the second semester, Tolu’s parents told us they were ready for Tolu to be put in Kindergarten. What could have been a continued hurt for a family, through prayer and much relational building in trust, turned out to be a wonderful opportunity to learn another culture. Today this family loves our school, loves us and this year, Tolu will be going into grade 1. I’m so thankful for what I’ve learned this spring in this class which solidifies truth and gives meaning to Jesus’ truth and studying other cultures all over the world.

**Future Expectations**

After knowing from Wayne Township Student Services in our county, we have many different language family groups in our diverse population, I’m thankful to understand a bit more, and come up with new ideas of helping these families. This year will be a new year of challenges, not like ever before.

We are going to expand our school’s Parent Services with a few parents who are bilingual from various countries, and they will be assisting new families as we learn where they are from originally with their native language spoken at home. These volunteer parents will come to school and help the students, as well as call the parents occasionally. They will assure them of the understanding of written emails from teachers and the school.

Just knowing that in the body of Christ, all of us need each other is key to communication success. No one is more valuable than another. For this new venture, we will evaluate and re-evaluate to make changes that are needed for all families to understand. We will learn to communicate in ways that these new ones from their own cultures can understand ours, and we must understand theirs. Each culture will be taken seriously, free from our western influence. We will not compromise our high view of the authority of the Bible. And the fact that the Holy Spirit teaches us about Jesus, staying healthy and faithful to the meaning of scripture.

As I study more, I’m assured it is possible to help others coming to our school from outside cultures that our own. I love the fact that this challenge in our school is a situation of social concern for us. I plan on talking with our PTF, Parent Teacher Fellowship, to have a discussion on a new strategy to connect to these new families as we continue to grow. I want to ask questions such as: Will this be a continuing challenge for us in America today as more and more families than ever before are coming here? If so, what can we do? Do we have a theological, moral obligation or concern to these families? What will be the issues that will need to be addressed? What will be our new communication strategy? These questions are taken from Social Issue Strategy Worksheet that I will refer to often.

I’m excited to see how this new adventure will come along. I’m so thankful to have learned from this class.

**Conclusion**

It was a tremendous joy to read journals, research articles, listen to lectures, and have good discussions during this course. It seems every new course leads into more experiential learning for me, and I can immediately use in my school work as administrator. From personal growth through reflective journaling and use of knowledge now and in the future, I’m more informed and will use the contextualization in my higher ability class this year.

I will look for ideas in which to make my higher ability middle schoolers use critical thinking and logical reasoning in culture and community this year. Since we have a larger diverse school group this year, our focus will be on integrating new families into our community at school. We will discuss community awareness in our culture for all people groups. Where are they located? Why do we care? How do we integrate our school culture and biblical worldview mission to them to help them understand? How do we show them love of God, love of learning and love to others? What activities might this include? Using another strategy worksheet from this course, higher ability students will be challenged to think as Jesus thinks to make a feasible plan. In their team groups, through discussion, they will strategize and meet with parents, church community leaders for suggestions.

This is an exciting plan and I look forward to reporting back how all of this is working.