

# Growing Impact of Orality in a Digit-Oral Era

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The term “orality broke into mission circles in the early 1980s while I studied at Fuller Seminary trying to grow a US Anglo church in a predominantly African-American neighborhood. Getting a grip on this orality thing to the help of some black pastor friends that taught me about through their “oral culture turned into a long and sharp learning curve that took twenty years and working in over twenty-five countries. It is so simple. It is so overwhelmingly complex. Missionaries and pastors tend to generalize much of it to the point of making it simplistic. Hopefully, this lengthy article can serve as a short primer in orality that can potentially change the way we do mission and ministry.

## A DIGITORAL DIVIDE

A decade ago, Jonah Sachs dubbed this the “digital era:”<sup>1</sup> An age closing the backside of the 400 years of the Gutenberg Parenthesis.<sup>2</sup> The supremacy of print/text morphed into one that reharnessed the power of narrative as a spoken word through multiple expressions – animation, anime, clay art, virtual reality entertainment (VR), and holograms.<sup>3</sup> This digital seismic shift moved us beyond the Enlightenment era – itself a shift out of Medieval frameworks – four centuries promised that human reason, science, and literacy were the pathways to human progress. To some degree, they were right.

Then Gutenberg and his competitors capitalized on all that pathway but mostly literacy. Numeracy (another literacy) took us into the abstractions of arithmetic to “imaginary numbers”<sup>4</sup> that make the internet work with all your apps! Reading and numeracy could lift more people economically, socially, and spiritually as they learn to leverage information and knowledge. At the same time, it further marginalized others – the new “have nots.”

The Enlightenment dredged a canal, taking us places the mainstream could not, but left others behind. The excluded majority of the world did not read (access) or could not read and write (learned skill) to express their thoughts or understand the thoughts of others. In all this, the era of Gutenberg paved the way for the digital. Moreover, according to Clifford Geertz (The

Interpretation of Culture) prior to the Enlightenment reading existed as a collective activity and personal reading and reflection was reserved for monks and hermits.

In the digital age, we brought print/text expressions to another level and returned to enjoy performing our thoughts: viewing, listening, and narrative in all art forms. It gave us short sensory experiences. MTV flashed words, images, and sounds so rapidly that it literally captured attention in concentrated encounters. Affordable digitized film and audio platforms were 8-tracked, cassetted, CD'd, Beta-maxed, VCRed, VCD'd, and downloaded for personal binging. Newspapers and programs shifted radically to chase the trends of reading less to learn more<sup>5</sup> that felt more tabloid than “newsish..” We kept adding new apps and dropping old ones. Moreover, somewhat irritatingly, Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, and other chat groups demand attention on electronic devices, one-upping each other in endless marketing campaigns.

Nevertheless, even the latest greatest tools and toys can never grant full expression of interpersonal human communication – our feelings, intentions, attitudes, and thoughts. Technologies cannot go there – even AI. They never have. They never will. In William Power's *Hamlet's Blackberry: Building a Good Life in a Digital Age*<sup>6</sup>, you can trace the evolution of communication innovations. From the walls of caves to stone tablets, vellum & parchment, to moveable type and mimeographs, notebooks, and sticky notes, then smartphones (of which The Blackberry was the first branded “have to own” gadget of the era), generations simultaneously loved and bemoaned an addiction to the screens of their age.

The digital era, at some points, narrows the gap between the “haves and the have-nots.” At other points, they are galaxies apart.<sup>7</sup> The digitally affluent possess the expensive technologies and literacies to use them for communication. The digitally disadvantaged – the Excluded Majority – lack the gadgets, skills, and access (connectivity, bandwidth, subscriptions, and

1. Sachs, Jonah. *Winning the story wars: Why those who tell (and live) the best stories will rule the future*. Harvard Business Press, 2012.

2. Petit, Thomas. (2012) The Gutenberg Parenthesis. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-zzkgsKOBk>

3. CBS News. [Assisting surgery with 3D organ holograms](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/assisting-surgery-with-3d-organ-holograms/).

4. This is NOT for the mathematically challenged! <https://www.khanacademy.org/math/algebra2/x2ec2f6f830c9fb89:complex/x2ec2f6f830c9fb89:imaginary/v/introduction-to-i-and-imaginary-numbers>

5. Barnes, Renee, Harry Dugmore, Peter English, Rosanna Natoli, and Elizabeth J. Stephens. “This is ridiculous—I need to start a paper...”: An exploration of aims and intentions of regional print proprietors of post-COVID start-up newspapers.” *Media International Australia* 184, no. 1 (2022): 21-34. And, Bokesoy, Deniz. “E-newspapers: Revolution or Evolution?” (2008).

6. Powers, William. *Hamlet's Blackberry: A practical philosophy for building a good life in the digital age*. Scribe Publications, 2010. For those who never saw or owned a “Blackberry” it was THE device at the turn of the century. A phone, all your email and text messages in one – no need for a pager anymore. Moreover, if you are unfamiliar with pagers, read the ancient history of communication gadgets!

7. Madinger, Charles. “A literate's guide to the oral galaxy.” *Orality Journal* 2, no. 2 (2013): 13-40.

data upload/download capacities). Yes, billions own and use modern technologies and apps, but not at the commonly believed and advertised proportion of the world we claim.<sup>8</sup> Yes, we need to keep pushing the boundaries of communication, AND at the same time ensure that the digitally impoverished or marginalized somehow move forward on the coattails of the affluent without being left further behind.

## INTERTWINING WORLDS: ORALITY AND DIGITALITY

Nimrah grew up in a comparatively affluent family and developed a heart for serving women in the oppressive grips of the national religion early in life. Her compassionate father recognized that gift and that formal education could take her down roads that he could never travel as a man to bring hope and joy. So, she advanced through all her formal studies, including a master's degree, and enrolled in a well-recognized Asian Ph.D. program. She is a digital.

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She works with an NGO specializing in ministry empowering women. These are bright, intelligent people. Yet, they remain poor and lack the technology, access, skills, and funds to cross the digital divide. They could start a business but need more training. Their children get sick with preventable and treatable ailments and all too often die for lack of information. They represent the bottom (socio-economically) 2 billion<sup>10</sup> of the world and another 2 billion not far removed. Many in the cities were well-educated, like Nimrah. Large numbers went to school, but a disproportionate number never learned to read and write. ALL lived in oral tradition cultures with little understanding of the Kingdom of God.

8. Lythreatis, Sophie, Sanjay Kumar Singh, and Abdul-Nasser El-Kassar. “The digital divide: A review and future research agenda.” *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 175 (2022): 121359.

9. Madinger, Charles. “A literate’s guide to the oral galaxy.” *Orality Journal* 2, no. 2 (2013): 13-40.

10. Ortiz, Isabel, and Matthew Cummins. “Global inequality: Beyond the bottom billion—a rapid review of income distribution in 141 countries.” Available at SSRN 1805046 (2011).

Nimrah and her friends live intertwined lives. They all feel the weight of Islamic oppression and express that burden to each other when they can meet up. The difference is that Nimrah and her digital tribe expand their secret conversation into their WhatsApp Group. She travels with her team to the interior, bringing training and encouragement to 20-30 marginalized women gatherings. The tribe planned it on a Zoom call since they work together while spreading out from one border to another. The solutions are complex. The digital affluent of the region capture the thoughts and emotions of their sisters off the grid and carry them forward.

Digitality<sup>11</sup> almost defines itself. We learn to express ourselves and understand others through reading & writing literacies and then bump it into digital communication and even the metaverse. The digital era requires learned skills that, with regular use, connect three parts of the brain. One part of the brain visually takes in images. Another part makes some sense of those images and groups them as letters and numbers. Another part of the brain assigns meaning to those letters in words and phrases. Still, another part of the brain interprets them for real life.

Reading and all other literacies distinguish the “haves from the have-nots.” Fluent readers, musicians & artists, code-writers & app developers’ literacies and skills connect synapse pathways. They begin learning numbers and ABC songs, recite them, write them, put them together in words, sentences, and entire messages (papers) and equations, and use them in software and apps to receive, process, remember, and pass on thoughts. That is the world of digitality.

## BUT WHAT IS ORALITY?

A Good Discussion with Unintended Limitations. When Walter Ong and Marshal McLuhan sparked the orality debate in the 1970s, they did so from a literary and media-centered perspective. From a literary perspective, Ong notices cultures that do not need text and writing and rely exclusively on hearing a message. He called that “primary orality.”

Eventually, those cultures discovered the use of textuality that advanced into reading, writing, and the ability to mediate their messages electronically. This he called “secondary orality.” Ong, McLuhan, and others related to the Toronto School were on to something important: they saw the impact of reading skills on the rest of human communication. However, the resulting definition of orality drastically limited the discussion to where they started it: “a reliance on spoken communication over textual.” Here is another: A communicative basis in speech rather than writing.<sup>12</sup>

11. An invented word here is used for those with advanced reading literacies and numeracy skills.

12. A Dictionary on Media and Communication

## ORALITY CLARIFIED

Understanding orality requires more than a cursory understanding of Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan.<sup>13</sup> Ong's filters began first as a Jesuit priest. Roman Catholics, who modeled the church after Jewish forms and functions, get orality by communicating the Gospel through all five senses. Second, he was an extraordinary multi-disciplinary scholar, most notably in literature (hence, his focus on orality and literacy). He also cultivated the relationships of anthropology, psychology, religious history, and philosophy and connected them all in communication. However, from beginning to end, orality is about communication.

"Orality" is misused and abused in mission conversations, and in doing so, we inoculate leaders from developing higher-impact communication. Those conversations usually gravitate to 3 things: literacy, Bible storytelling, and products. Literacy is undoubtedly an essential factor in orality. Bible storytelling often brings more orality-centric principles and practices of orality. Furthermore, ministry products from films, technologies, and new media employ them to one degree or another. To say any of these is orality is like saying the Four Spiritual Laws are evangelism.

When Ong published his seminal work, he defined and confined the discussion among the overlapping fields of anthropology and psychology. Anthropology led him to explain cultures regarding the impact of literacy – or lack of literacy. Primary orality describes peoples with no existing print/text literacy (no alphabet or reading-writing-comprehension systems). Cultures evolving into literacy he dubbed as living in secondary orality. These peoples continue developing their skills eventually to electronically mediate them (radio, television, drama scripting, and now in all communicative expressions of the digital era).

Ong tried to help us understand the differences between these two extremes. He took the psychology term psychodynamics (8 dimensions of people and how they affect communication)<sup>14</sup> that further clarified what it meant to be in the world of primary or secondary orality. These helped unveil the dimensions overlooked prior to the discussion and, at the same time, kept the focus on literacy.

The orality discussion is still adolescent. More observation and reflection led us ten years ago when we described orality as "a complex of how oral cultures best receive, process, remember, and replicate (pass on) news, important information, and truths."<sup>15</sup> Even though seven descriptive disciplines informed that complex, that also did not dig far enough. What

13. Walter Ong (1982). *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Marshall McLuhan supervised his master's thesis, and they became lifelong friends sharing their thoughts and publications.

14. Ong, p.37-49.

15. Charles Madinger. (2012). *A Literate's Guide to the Oral Galaxy*. p. 16.

is "oral communication?" Is it different than writing? Both begin with thoughts that people want to express. One uses breath, throat, tongue, teeth, lips, and ears. The other uses sight, hand, fingers, and muscle memory. They are simply different routes from the mind of one person to another. Deaf people have thoughts shouting in their minds, but they do not use aural speech forms tied to hearing world sounds.

## ORALITY: Communication Rooted in the Image of God

We need an extended definition of orality that sees the whole person communicating through a reflected image of God. He exists in a community of three persons communicating with one another. God thought of a universe filled with people to love and who could love him (his mind/inner speech), then spoke those thoughts into realities. He further expressed his mind and heart to us through all five senses. Example of The Passover Feast. God shared his mind and heart to pass over the sins of his people, who sprinkled the blood of a sacrificed animal over their doors. He prescribed a meal eaten together while wearing traveling clothes. All these were replete with symbols and metaphors. He expressed his mind in preferred ways and means by the "target audience" – the Jews, Greeks, slaves, and women. He framed the message in ways they could best receive, process it (mind, heart, and actions), remember it, and pass it on to others most naturally.

We deeply engage people in the Word by matching The Message to their preferences. Those preferences can be observed if we look hard enough. These preferences construct a communication framework developed early in life based on a few shared common traits of orality.

## ORALITY FRAMEWORKS

### Everyone enters the world the same

We have inner speech crying to get out – literally! Then we learn the appropriate words to describe the world around us and our wants. We learn songs, move rhythmically to music, and learn our mother tongue (heart language). A framework begins. Some get very good at remembering things in the literacies of song, dance, stories, folktales, and riddles. They live in a world of high orality reliance. Others expand their framework by learning other literacies – their ABC song, letters, counting, classifying shapes, reading, texting, computing, and digital cross over the digital fissure in the ground to live among the Dominant Minority of the world.

This is a world of low orality reliance. They are the global information gatekeepers, tech-savvy teachers, politicians, successful business owners, and more. They live in their world with genuine concern for others on the other side of the fissure, but something happens when they cross over.

Swarms of small seismic quakes opened the fissure into a nearly impassible canyon. On the other side of the chasm, those living in a world of high orality reliance are the Excluded Majority – 80% of the world. They retain their advanced literacies, just not the ones related to reading and writing. Yet, we work as if the 20% are the ones that really matter. The curricula we write and expect others to use, evangelism programs, Bible school and seminary teaching methods and values, how we structure our organizations, and how we communicate our ideas through outlines, bullet points, PowerPoints, concepts, and principles. They come from and relate to the Dominant Minority. People like us.

Now try to remove the Minority lenses through which we see the world and do our work. How? Focus on the traits of orality that clarify and differentiate how all people communicate. They range from high orality-reliant ways and means to low orality-reliant ways and means.

### Traits of Orality<sup>16</sup>

Traits of orality describe the things that influence how we express our inner speech. These are not meant to rigidly ascribe or pigeonhole individuals or groups. Rather, they give general descriptions based on previous research and literatures. Look at one or two, and begin to connect the dots. First, the traits can be seen in clusters of similar observable things. One of those is how people “structure” their realities: how they view the status quo and change, how they categorize or classify things in their world, and how they view time. One type of structure (a specific trait) is how we view time. Some groups view time as measured in well-defined increments (seconds, minutes, hours). If the meeting time is 1:00 PM, a person might be considered late at 1:15 and need to offer an apology. Others see time as whatever is happening in the moment that requires my presence. If we call a meeting for 1:00 PM and someone must finish their work, they may show up at 2:00 with only an explanation of “I was finishing.” Church starts when we get there and ends when we leave.

A relational cluster describes traits that include how people relate to their environment (“we are the land” to “we use the land”), how they show respect to one another, and their identity as part of the group to see themselves primarily as individuals. If my identity weighs heavily toward being, first and foremost, a group member, I might say: “WE are; therefore, I



16. The “traits” similarly describe Ong’s psychodynamics and characteristics shared by William Parker and others (James Slack, Lynn Abney, Jay Moon, Chuck Madinger, and a language worker in a restricted country.

AM.” If I come from the other end of the spectrum, I might say: “I AM; therefore, we are.”<sup>17</sup>

The orality survey created for the Global Orality Mapping Project<sup>18</sup> goes further into all the clusters and traits. It also generates a report on any target audience that reveals more about how to create projects and training tailored to the needs of their orality quotient (OQ) of a people.

**Real Example:** Filipino Pastor Jonathan (Tan) Aronton received the assignment from our senior pastor to preach Luke’s account of the “Feeding of the 5,000.” He read the story multiple times from his ESV You Version Bible app. The Spirit of God prompted Luke to summarize and record events in writing. Others copied those documents throughout the centuries, and from 1997 to 2001, the ESV translation committee finished it for publication by Crossway.

Pastor Tan learned fluent English yet is most comfortable in Tagalog, so when he reads, he immediately hears and receives the words of Luke to study further. The Spirit brings new insights as he reads. His years of formal education then prompt him to take all these “learnings” from Luke and condense them into a catchy and memorable acrostic. Tan is the king of acrostics – second nature to him! At the same time, he realizes all that is communicating concepts and principles that need translation into real life – the stories people connect with and remembers from Sunday sermons.

He asked the worship team leader for songs to drive home his learning from this transforming event in Galilee, where Jesus “taught about the Kingdom of God and healed the people.” Tan asked another to perform a specific song as well. For the “reading of the passage” in our Pentecostal liturgy, he called some Next Gen leaders to choreograph and “dance the story.” Still, he wanted the church to grasp that Jesus meant to meet ALL their needs fully, and he wanted to do it using all five senses. So, he purchased 500 ensamadas (small Pinoy cheese-topped buns), put them in baskets, and told the ushers to distribute them at the prescribed time of the service.

The auditorium rippled with the crinkling sound of cellophane, the smell of fresh bread permeated the aisles, and people delicately fingered and tasted their morsels with smiles. It does not take much to imagine the delight on people’s faces as the 12 disciples/ushers put the tasty bread in outstretched hands. Then Ptr. Tan connected the dots about the Kingdom. “God wants to meet your every need. “Will you believe his Word and follow him in obedience? When you hunger and thirst for his Kingdom, he will unexpectedly surprise you with his provision!”

To close the service, he called for commitment. All

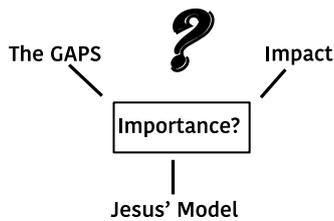
17. An interview with Dr. Barje Maigadi, former provost of the Jos ECWA Theological Seminary, and senior pastor of the JETS Seminary Church, and now retired as the Senior Pastor of the ECWA Wuse II church of Abuja, Nigeria. He described these two traits as the difference between Western and African views of life and our worlds.

18. ] Access the survey from Global Orality Mapping Project at: <https://gomap.pro/#content>

who would surrender their will and follow Jesus as Lord, he will take up your burdens. He can heal and restore. He can use your life for great things as his servants.” The front of the church filled. He called others to stand where they were and pray together, asking the Lord to provide all they needed. ‘He is our Shepherd. We shall not want!’”

### Why It Matters

Modeling Jesus. Jesus drew crowds like the Jewish leaders only dreamed of seeing. The Temple courts buzzed with reports of Lazarus getting called out of the tomb four days after he died. The incensed priests and Jewish leader prepared bold steps to kill him and Lazarus as



soon as possible! Just a day or so ago, David’s son Jesus rode victoriously through the Jerusalem gates in a Messianic processional with shouts of joy from throngs coming to reenact the Passover. They had no clue that this Lamb of God would be offered on the actual altar – not simply the facsimile staged in Herod’s remolded Jerusalem. That temporary version only reflected the one in heaven. The sermon that turned so many people off from following Jesus about eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood (John 5-6)? Everyone would soon reenact in the Passover Meal in a day or two.

He moved about through the city. Sometimes confronting the Pharisees, sometimes the Herodians, and even the Levites and priests. Then God gave one more testimony that Jesus IS the Son of God. He audibly thundered the VOICE in a declaration that everyone heard. Then on that same day, he confronted their unbelief one last time. They refused him and his message, and he finally said, “My message is not my own, for my Father commanded me what to say and how to say it. (John 12:48-49 NLT).

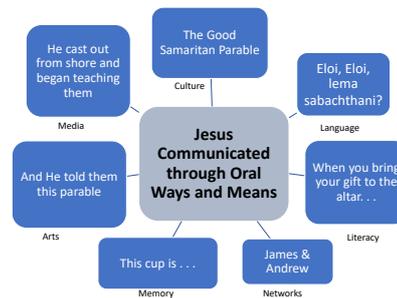
Ask someone, “How did Jesus teach?” The immediate response comes back: “with stories and parables.” Nevertheless, his communication model gave us so much more. He made up proverbs on the spot.<sup>19</sup> He Spoke poetically throughout the Sermon on the Mount (beatitudes and the model prayer).

He framed his message in cultural images and practice, employing the language and terminologies everyone understood. Hearing Jesus teach gives us glimpses into their everyday life. He most frequently taught in groups – huge crowds to very intimate conversations, and those conversations hearers immediately shared with others. He used all the arts and all our senses. He was looking at the grainfields, touching the blind man’s eyes, tasting the bread and wine, smelling the permeating fragrance of the nard,

19. Luke 7:47 ‘The one who loves much is forgiven much. The one who loves little is forgiven little.’”

and calling out fishing lessons to some men on a boat.

### Communication Model of Jesus



- Culture: Feels like “US”
- Language: Sounds like us
- Literacy: Words we use
- Networks: Through people we know
- Memory: with tools we use
- Arts: Packaged the way we like it
- Media: Delivered through multiple platforms

This is orality. Learned expressions of inner speech. Jesus communicated using all seven of the descriptive disciplines and he had to learn them from infancy to adulthood. God, the Son, spoke the world into existence, but learned to speak, how to dress and behave as a Jewish man, learn symbols and metaphors, and how to communicate with people in ways they could receive and understand his message.

Jesus received the mind (inner speech) of the Father – He commanded him what to say – and expressed it in multiple ways using all five senses. The Godhead showed us in the flesh how to communicate the Gospel of the Kingdom. Compare that teaching with contemporary teaching and preaching in modern churches, classrooms, publications, and products.

### Bridge the Gaps

The Excluded Majority. The early work of Dr. James Slack<sup>20</sup> highlighted the gap created by literacy levels showing only 10% of the world as highly literate. Loosely translated, that means only 1 out of 10 people in the world read to learn, and 80% of the world does not relate to our teaching the way we assumed they did.<sup>21</sup> Grant Lovejoy later elaborated on the global statistics<sup>22</sup> that confirmed those same claims – 80% of the world are what some classify as “oral learners.”<sup>23</sup> Another way of describing



20. <https://i-ostrat.com/research/>  
 21. Abney, Lynne L. “Orality assessment tool.” *International Orality Network* (1992).  
 22. Lovejoy (2011).  
 23. “Oral learner” is a convenient term that describes those who do not prefer to read. They range from entirely non-literate from a reading literacy perspective. These unveil our (including myself)

the Excluded Majority.

The modern Kingdom mission movement relates overwhelmingly to the 20% of the world, neglecting the other 80% of the world. It is like saying the only people we will equip ourselves to reach are the Chinese – 20+% of the world. If we reach others in the process, that is even better.

No student of Scripture would ever intentionally take that tack for our mission. It violates our understanding of the Great Commission. Yet, our training curricula, evangelism methods, preaching styles, “critical thinking” paradigms, and we even gear our kind of storytelling to the Global Minority. By default, our mission principles, practices, methods, and materials relate primarily to those who think like the minority, communicate like the minority, and relate to others and their environment like the minority. The 80% are the Excluded Majority.

Preaching, Teaching, and Training. We have done a pretty good job on the “what to say” regarding the message of the Bible. At least our particular view of those “what’s.”

But the “how to say it?” Not so much! We got stuck in the Enlightenment canal (diverting the navigation of a river to places merchants want to go), and now the digital generations are leading to a way out to where the river current is flowing again. They show us that we can use short videos to get our message out. They use stories and all sorts of narratives. They develop games, apps, and fast-paced, action-packed, nonsensical messaging. They get the point that other generations miss.

From informative to transformative. The Enlightenment Canal promised that with more information, we get more progress. So, our curricula and classrooms specialize in “data dumps” that educate students beyond their ability to obey and learn. Jesus, the omniscient God the Son, knew ALL truth. He could have just delivered informative sermon after informative sermon to get us back on track and make “real progress.” In doing so, he chose to tell stories and ask questions rather than tell or sell people on the Kingdom of God. He engaged them. He allowed the disciples to be the center of learning.

The modern era educated and trained people out of the reliances needed by the Excluded Majority. Many even believe that the 80% living in HOR must acquire literacy skills (reading comprehension) to live a complete life in Christ or accurately teach his Word. If following Christ means reading the Scriptures to know the Word, then the first three centuries of the church lived as sub-standard Christians. Only 12% of the world of the New Testament could read and write.<sup>24</sup>

Expanding standard operating procedures. We outsider perspective of people and our colonial mindset rooted in the fallacies of the Enlightenment. However, as this chapter sets forth, orality is for ALL learners of all literacies, including reading/writing comprehension kinds of literacies that are only one of many.

24. Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina (2016) - “Literacy”. Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: ‘https://ourworldindata.org/literacy’ [Online Resource]

assumed for the last 500 years that good preaching followed the Greek style of rhetoric. We state and support our main point (proposition or thesis) with good arguments or explanations. We even throw in a story, illustration, humor, or a song to keep people awake to support the points. The pastors at my own Manila church usually say they have 3 or 4 points, but then for each point, give an acrostic with several more points to remember! All of this is very low orality reliant as far as mnemonics (memory tools) go. The difference in the pastoral team in our church is that they are also retooling themselves to tell the stories of the Bible more than talking about the stories. They use object lessons, commission artistic expressions of all kinds, and turn hearers into doers of the Word.

When instructors embrace orality for learning, things change. Lectures last only 10-15 minutes, followed by interactive active learning and engagement. Student assignments include finding social media examples of the teaching. They do things like PhotoVoice taking pictures of people, places, and activities that tell the story of what they are learning. Projects include modeling clay figure action videos, song compositions, dramas, and other artistic expressions that tell the story of their learnings. Theological educational pioneers are doing just that. Connect with Calvin Chong at Singapore Bible, Jay Moon and Ellen Marmon at Asbury, Neil and Doreen Benavides in Mindoro, Eric Assland and Roberta King at Fuller, and Bauta Motty, recently retiring from a Nigerian Seminary; they all teach for transformation and not just information.

They all get it. Moreover, their students get it and practice it in the churches. People remember sermons for weeks and months. An African seminary class on Paul’s letter to the Romans unfolded it using memory tools of hand gestures, songs, and stories from their culture. The stories taught all the theological concepts without first using the Western systematic theology jargon. Faith, redemption, justification, sanctification, adoption, sovereignty, predestination, mercy, and grace – All taught with stories, songs, and proverbs. They needed no literature review, although they received one to file away. Fifteen years later, I met students that retold the message and added that their church members could do the same thing. They still apply it to their lives and share testimonies of transformations. Things are changing. However, to get back to the river from the canal requires intentional navigation out of the smooth waters of textuality and lectures and into unpredictable currents of higher orality streams of practice.

### Revisit Pastor Tan

Follow the process as an experiment in orality. Tan’s assignment came from the senior pastor via an email to the staff (inner speech expressed electronically). The sermon came from Luke’s account of the feeding miracle Jesus used to express the multidimensional nature of the Kingdom for all who would have faith.

God spoke his mind & Heart to Luke, who expressed it in writing for Theophilus and his friends. Ptr Tan read the words and stimulated his mind and thoughts to summarize the message and meaning in an acrostic expression because that kind of memory tool is now expected when he preaches. He also needed to engage the congregation through all five senses by including songs, dance, and the tasty aromatic ensamadas heard cascading through the room. He gathered people in small groups to talk and pray about the implications in their life as others moved to the front with specific prayer and counseling needs.

All of these followed the communication model of Jesus as they were set in a Pinoy cultural context, speaking mainly in Tagalog, explaining it all in things from their everyday life, gathered to learn collectively, using memory tools they have learned to love and expect, filled with the arts, and taught through mass media (Facebook Live and a large crowd) down to micro-casting as we received his instructions in our 3-5 person groups.

### **Seeing Is Believing**

A church in Hong Kong regularly donated to a ministry committed to promoting orality and reaching "oral learners." Eventually, budgetary pressure forced a prioritizing decision that redirected their resources to things they saw as making Kingdom progress. They were right in doing so. Most ministries lag in pursuing oral strategies because they have never seen them demonstrated in the flesh. This article concludes with all the proof that anyone needs to take some bold steps into the practice of 21st-century orality. (See Appendix 1 Case Studies). Objective research demonstrates that implementing the principles of orality multiplies impact.

Why Such a High Impact? What were similar contributing factors for success or limited success? What things do they share that can lead us to more fruitful work? Each concluding case study in the appendix also comprised a meta-analysis. We asked each of the country directors and leaders the question: "What made this program successful? What can others learn from it?" Leaders identified the following eight elements that significantly contributed to the success of each program. More surprisingly, we discovered that Jesus used these same things to communicate his Kingdom messages.

#### *Acceptance/Resistance*

Engage in the language and dialects of the people. The programs in Nigeria were all in the Hausa language but had to be re-recorded by those with a different accent and changing some of the words.

Language and dialect - in country regions, we can always tell "us from them" by the nuances of language. The Show Love & Care program was recorded in the Hausa language but with the speech rate used in the South. People in the north said they did not trust those "Middle-Belters." So, we edited the

recordings and increased the speech rate, and to the surprise of all, it was immediately accepted as their own!

The regional literacies. Not only the sound of the words makes a difference in receiving and accepting a message, but so also do the words themselves. Word literacy is simply that we either use that Word in everyday life or not. A program in Namibia to slow the spread of HIV/AIDS among truck drivers started but had to be completely changed because of using words and phrases that made a loud statement: "THIS is NOT us!" It advertised the program as Stop Multiple Concurrent Partners. We changed the program and let the truck drivers develop the theme and title. Now they were ready to receive it on their terms.

Jesus: used the language and dialect he learned in Galilee and Nazareth. At least once, he may have used a Greek word (Hades) as he sat teaching his disciples at the headwaters of the Jordan, where a temple Pan guarded the entrance to the underworld - the gates of Hades. He spoke his w final words from the cross in Hebrew and Aramaic.

He used familiar terms and expressions of the people to help them understand the Kingdom - watchtowers, walls, seeds on the path, hidden treasures in a field, crosses for self-execution, swallowing the gnat, the camel and a needle, sheep & goats, mustard seeds, and leaven in the dough. He never cited a famous Rabbi. He taught about preparing for his coming like a bridegroom, processing unexpectedly to surprise his bride.

#### *Culturally Contextualized*

The Taliban dictated the roles and opportunities available to women. Men, therefore, had to intervene in the oppression of women if things were going to change. The men met, listened to well-known leaders' recordings, discussed it in their traditional jirga council, and redefined how women would gain personhood status. They framed the conversation for change among elders in the local jirga who identified their cultural breakthroughs. No governmental mandate could do that. Fathers should not sell their daughters to pay off a debt - they were his children made in the image of God under their care. Wives should be allowed to go to the market by themselves just as men and boys could do whenever they pleased. The jirga, in their appropriate systems, led the way for community change.

Jesus taught "how to love your neighbor" by telling an all too familiar story of a culture war - Jews and Samaritans. He drew upon characters from social networks like priests, Levites, and other Jerusalem pilgrims. He could have just started and stopped where the Bible did: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Lev. 19:18). "You have heard it said." End of story. We get the picture only when we see ourselves IN IT. We need messages in terms people know and use (our "literacies"). Moreover, the message must come from

and be endorsed by people like us.

### *Community Dialogue*

We learn best when we learn together. And, people most readily change when they talk about something together and come to new understandings and do new things. The work of researchers like Icek Aizen showed that when we try to lead people into new things, it requires confronting what everyone else in our community thinks or values. Are we willing to go against that? Is this new message worth it?<sup>25</sup>

All the case studies gathered local people in groups to listen and discuss content their leaders deemed necessary. We used audio player rather than video because it forces the brain to work more creatively and prompts people to give their opinions and thoughts. The methods were also easily replicable for diffusing a message with a short explanation of how to use the simple technology. When a drama, song, interview, or other content led to a good stopping point, we embedded an audio alert in the recording that led to questions for synthesis, evaluation, and collective decisions. Unless we help people through their commonly held values, they may not move beyond them.

Here again, Jesus interacted with people at dinners, synagogues, seashores, mountain inclines, watering holes, and walks along the highways and byways – talking about his Kingdom. He almost universally asked penetrating questions that drove people to understand better his radical alternative to “religion” described in the Sermon on the Mount. “They were amazed at his teaching with authority, and not like their religious leaders;” “Who is this man that can even forgive sins?” “They went away grumbling” about his “eat my body and drink my blood” sermon. Following this lead from Jesus, one of our pastors began having a Call for Discussion after the sermon as the altar call. People will talk if we give them the chance and direction.

### *Viral Communication Networks*

Each case study represents a partnership inaugurated with the highest recognized leaders of the area. The highest was the national minister of communication. That led to a village chief or a local jirga at the lowest level. Pastors, paramount chiefs, imams, emirs, denominational executives, Muslim association directors, and ministry leaders endorsed and promoted the works before they started. The cascading effect of the most respected people opened the door for all those under their authority.

The nature of the programs facilitated replicability. Local leaders produced the content with guidance from experienced outside experts. They learned to commission, record, and edit songs, dramas, and interviews to address needs. They connected the dots

25. Aizen, Isac. (1991). *The Theory of Planned Behavior*. He says that there are three significant factors in behavior change (impact): Beliefs, shared values, and if we think the change is worth it, and I can actually pull it off.

that this approach could be used with cassettes, CDs, and SD cards. They sent them downstream to relatives and nonboring districts, churches, towns, and villages. Find and diffuse the message through known and trusted networks. Those are the “nets that work.”

Jesus did it from the beginning of his work, starting early on with the Jewish leaders amazed by his understanding at an early age. He met with tax collectors, ate with leading Pharisees, and connected with and transformed notorious outcasts that spread the Word, women of influence, and people he healed – like Simon the Leper.

### *Memorable*

Each program developed memory tools. The West African program used a familiar logo and theme recognizable in the community. The Afghan and Iraqi programs tied the message to famous Quranic quotes. The Zambians used hand motions and gestures to remember the steps for removing potential abusers. Most of what the Global North call memory tools are for low orality-reliant people – acrostics, alliterations, or the bulleted main points of the sermon. High Orality Reliant people put it in proverbs, songs, dance, and other creative art forms.

Jesus got painfully graphic to make the point: the cross seen along the roads, the planting of the seed, living water from the genuine Spring of Life, drinking wine, and eating bread, the “born again” image, go and sell everything you have and give it to the poor! The more senses we use, the more people remember – like the feasts of Israel. The Jews may not have accepted his message, but they caught what he was saying and never forgot it! His use of symbols and metaphor became synonymous with his teaching style – bread & wine, a pearl of great price, faith as a mustard seed, the sign of Jonah, to prime the pump.

### *Artistic Expression*

When Marshall McLuhan said, “the medium is the message,”<sup>26</sup> he understood the power of images – verbal and non-verbal. He was not affirming us as the medium/message. In expressing ourselves through art, those expressions become the message. They are not just add-ons or illustrations to our actual message. They ARE the message. Each of the programs developed a theme song that summarized the entire message. The Zambian program assigned a group to drum and dance one of the episodes – something they previously thought might be inappropriate in the church. The Afghan program hired a professional comedian to add humor so that it lowered defenses and resistance to an incredibly challenging message.

Again, Jesus took the Passover Meal (culinary arts) to explain further what God meant through the ages about the need for a perfect sacrifice to turn away his wrath. He sang with his disciples after the upper room experience and as they walked to the Garden. He

26. McLuhan, Marshall, Quentin Fiore, and Jerome Age. 2001. *The Medium Is the Message*. Hamburg, Germany: Gingko Press.

drew upon the architecture of the Temple to foretell the coming destruction of the Jewish sacrificial system that he embodied. He celebrated at weddings – which meant he danced!

### *Multiple Media Platforms*

At its roots, all communication is interpersonal. Jesus spoke to the masses but intended it for individuals. After the Body & Blood sermon, he asked his disciples for their response. One person's inner speech is expressed in multiple ways and means. Some seem more remotely associated with the original "sender." Printed materials, social media, websites, games, and the latest clay art and animations share this principle but use alternative platforms.

In our case studies, the same is true. We designed and produced messages broadcast through mass-mediated outlets. The audio players (Muria) were entrusted to local stewards (Muria Agagi's), who shared them with local people and surrounding villages and towns. In the Nigerian village of Akwanga (Nasarawa State), they listened together so frequently that they could share the entire 4 hours from memory. They no longer needed the player. THEY became the media platform!

If a communication strategy is built to pass on the message (program) through replicable means, the message will go viral.

In Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan, people from surrounding areas heard about the program and sent delegations to "borrow" the players so they could memorize the messages, songs, and discussion questions and move out to other villages. In Zambia, the ZAMCOM NGO asked to train community radio stations to reproduce the Holding Esther radio drama and program in local languages and art forms.

The Parable of the Soils/Seed/Sower illuded the disciples. Jesus told it to the masses, who were not to understand it. Next, he told it again with further explanation to the 12. He preached to the masses his famous sermon on the Mount and Plain. Did he only tell the parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son only one time? He preached in houses, synagogues, and grainfields. At dinners, breakfasts, and suppers. He preached some of that so often that when he sent out the 12 or the 70, they felt comfortable preaching the Kingdom of God as he did.

The point: Use platforms that take the message virally. The other key to high impact: is that the best and highest impact message speaks to individual hearts. Jesus spoke simultaneously to many people, but some took it personally. Lepers asked for personal healing. Blind men cried out for Messiah to heal them. Jairus pleaded for healing.

Draw people into a narrative if we want them to connect at a deeper level for longer. Using radio drama-type messages, we develop what Arvind Singhal calls para-social relationships where listeners love or hate the characters. They identify with and develop an attachment to them or their issues.

When people feel connected to characters (even fictitious), a good storyline opens them to new realities. If the storyline shows them a positive way forward (positive deviance)<sup>27</sup>, listeners stand an even better chance of adopting the positive beliefs, attitudes & values, and behaviors. Messages gain impact.

### **CONCLUSION: HACKING DIGITORAL SUCCESS**

Last year I attended a De La Salle University event sponsored by Lufthansa Airlines. They gathered around 250 bright students to come up with solutions to big problems. Many related to the airline and transportation industries, while others were humanitarian. My role was to keep asking questions that forced things to go beyond the surface and find realistic and marketable answers. The solutions were so good that angel investors sponsored some student projects to take from concept to market.

The digital era needs hackers like that. How do we bring along the Excluded Majority into the benefits of where we go? How do we help low orality-reliant people relate to higher orality-reliance worlds? How do we include all people in the hacking process? How do we train digital and other techno-affluent Christians to communicate life-changing information and truths anywhere and with anyone worldwide? Furthermore, do it in ways that HOR people best receive, process, remember, and pass on that message.

Expanding discussions. Get beyond the 50 years of Ong's literacy discussion. Literacy certainly affects this discussion since it is one of the markers differentiating higher and lower orality reliance preferences. One's reading comprehension level and regularity of using print-text and digital archives train and even untrains our brain and long-term memory.

Nevertheless, orality involves the whole person and the totality of how we communicate. The discussion integrates the voices from anthropology to further integrate each dimension of culture. Total communication is cultural. Psychology sheds light on understanding the mind, emotions, and cognitive functions. Educators specializing in andragogy and learning theory speak into the discussion from their expertise on how people learn, especially adults. Include also experts in linguistics and literacy. The world of the arts, like that of musicology and ethnodoxology, unleashes creative expression within the human race. Theology has only recently begun to build a theology and missiology of orality. They have generally done so from the standard low orality reliance starting point of concepts and principles rather than an examination of the songs, proverbs, and stories. Biblical Studies and church historians make the connections beginning with the Holy Spirit speaking to the prophets of all times, reducing it to text from oral sources to pick up and read publicly again. Communication Studies tie them all together as they did for Ong and his kin.

<sup>27</sup> Singhal, Arvind. August 20, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DMGbxX9U>

## Hear the Global South

Include Excluded Minority leaders. It may carry a significant price tag for affluent digitalists. Let them define the problem and bring solutions to the table. As one oft-quoted leader said, "We do not want to be at the table. We need to be in the kitchen!" Orality conferences and seminars have been going on for decades, as well as in Canada (first nations) and Australia and their indigenous peoples. Africans live the orality. Western missionaries talk about it. The Philippines was ground zero for Westerners to learn how again to connect the Gospel through stories and the arts. We need more research, practitioners, and scholars from those places leading the Dominant Majority that practice orality as an add-on to programs, curricula, and sermons.

Continued education and training. New training beyond Bible storytelling is emerging.

A movement is afoot developing orality studies programs in leading seminaries like the Asian Graduate School of Theology and the Saleng Leadership Institute (SLI) mentioned in the case studies appendix. Two of its member schools offer master's and doctoral studies in orality. The Asian Theological Association introduced orality in its breakout. Find seasoned experts that can lead others into higher impact, and a book project is underway to describe and prescribe orality in classrooms and curricula. African theological educators are gathering 25-50 leaders to study the state-of-the-art resources for their programs. Another group of pastors and schools in Central America know they cannot reach the indigenous peoples without understanding and

Some go-to sources for orality include good training:

- The Global Ethnodoxology Network (<https://www.worldofworship.org/organizations/>)
- Artists in Christian Testimony (ACT). (<https://www.actinternational.org/>)
- Payap IUniversity (<https://www.facebook.com/LLLatPYU/>)
- South Asia Institute for Advanced Christian Studies (<https://www.saiacs.org/master-of-arts-in-worship-and-music/>)
- The Institutes for Orality Strategies (I-OS). (<https://i-ostrat.com/training/>)

The Enlightenment dredged a canal, taking us places the mainstream could not, but left others behind. The excluded majority of the world did not read (access) or could not read and write (learned skill) to express their thoughts or understand the thoughts of others. In all this, the era of Gutenberg paved the way for the digitalists. The degree to which we discover our orality is the degree to which we may impact the Digital Era.

## APPENDIX 1. Seeing is Believing: Oral Strategy Case Studies

**West Africa:** How can the church affect the HIV/

AIDS epidemic?

Nigeria: Show Love & Care. National leaders asked Voice for Humanity for a communication strategy to enhance their HIV/AIDS programs: ECWA, the Christian Health Association of Nigeria (CHAN), and the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN). They addressed the ravaging HIV/AIDS epidemic, but with little effect on slowing it even in the church, helping those who tested positive, and reducing the stigma on families with sick relatives.<sup>28</sup>

First, we engaged community, church, and mosque leaders to give direction for a program to reduce the HIV prevalence in 2 states - Nasarawa (Middle Belt) and Kano (northern belt). Second, we helped nationals develop their messages incorporating the principles and methods of orality. Third, we gathered local people to collectively listen to recorded messages on MP3-type technology and discuss the content and questions provided in a group setting to develop their solutions.

We established a baseline threshold for the local knowledge, values, and behaviors surrounding the HIV/AIDS epidemic with a pre-intervention survey. Next, we gathered local people in groups at their community's and religious leaders' direction to listen and discuss the messages about HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and stigma reduction. Groups listened to the audio messages on easy-to-use audio technology that they could pass on to surrounding communities.

The most challenging area of Nigeria for Christians to promote the teaching of the Bible is in the epicenter of Nigerian Islam: Kano. The people recognized the Emir of Kano as their supreme authority, even above the governmental authorities, and the Emir endorsed the program. He called together the paramount and local chiefs to participate, and they all acknowledged that prostitution and marital unfaithfulness contributed to the epidemic in the capitol and the surrounding districts. HIV/AIDS spread as fast or faster in Kano than in other regions of the country.

Results: The pre-intervention survey revealed that 396/600 individuals incorrectly answered questions about the disease, transmission, stigma, and care for positive people.

The program launched with the same approach of recorded interviews of well-known leaders and indigenous content that included music, drama, interviews, testimonies, and discussion questions.

The post-intervention survey showed that from the 396 individuals answering the questions incorrectly, after going through the program, 394 answered accurately. The overall communal increase in HIV/AIDS literacy increased by nearly 27%, with 10% as the benchmark for USAID's success. No other program came close to these results verified by researchers led by Dr. Igho Ofotokun of Emory University's Grady

<sup>28</sup>. The standard rate of success by USAID Nigeria. The Show Love & Care rate: 26.8%.

Ponce De Leon Health Center in Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>29</sup>

Focus groups shared that previous “open communities” for sex workers now banned prostitutes from entering. HIV/AIDS prevalence dropped, and the Emir of Kano produced a nationally televised program of thanks and celebration. The Christian program directors (Rev. Dr. Bauta Motty and Rev. India Maggagi) and their Muslim counterparts were invited to the principal mosque of Kano. That visit was the first known invitation of pastors inside that sacred place. The Show Love and Care initiative rolled out to 2 other northern Nigeria states.

**East Africa:** How do we change harmful sexual practices?

The ROADS<sup>30</sup> HIV/AIDS intervention engaged church and community leaders in a multi-sectoral program. It sought to slow the spread of the disease along the transport corridor from South Africa to Sudan. Truck drivers stopped at each country border to complete the necessary entrance and exit documents, usually taking three days. The drivers and their “road-boys” waited with very little healthy entertainment to pass the days and nights, so young girls from surrounding villages came (often sent by parents) to “service” the men who gave them a little food and small compensation. The problem involved multiple sectors of society – from income generation, farming techniques, driver support services and education, a biblical storyline, and health care that included HIV/AIDS testing and awareness training.

A significant component of the program was a communications strategy that involved national, regional, and community radio programs as well as a solar-powered/rechargeable MP3 type player that contained a variety of programming, including music, radio drama, discussion questions, interviews with truck drivers and assistants, and the families of the infected.

Results: a relatively small number of truck drivers (n.75) completed a pre and post-test survey about the disease and its spread.<sup>31</sup> Of those initially answering 50% of the questions wrong (n. 32), their post-intervention scores rose dramatically. Of the 32 scoring 50% or lower, after listening to the dramas, songs, interviews, and discussions, 21 got all the questions answered correctly.

**Afghanistan:** How do we address deep-seated beliefs and values?

29. Ofotokun, I., Binongo, J., Easley, K. A., & Favaloro-Sabatier, J. (2006). *Voice for Humanity HIV/AIDS education program using small media-based technology for oral communicators at the community level to enhance HIV/AIDS awareness and promote risk reduction*. Dr. Ofotokun reported unofficial Word from his supervisor that Emory had never seen these dramatic results. They began using some of the lessons learned from the program and the subsequent interviews and focus group discussions.

30. Regional Outreach Addressing AIDS through Development Strategies. HI360; <https://www.fhi360.org/projects/regional-outreach-addressing-aids-through-development-strategies-roads-i-and-ii>

31. The survey was not program-wide, only included truck drives, and therefore could not be used in the official reports.

Civic Education Programs involving voter registration, Constitutional, Parliamentary, and presidential elections. Warlords rule. The Taliban controls anything related to fundamentalist Islamic tradition. The elections were about to fail in 2003/4 because very few and hardly any women were registering to vote in fear of retribution. UJS and Afghan agencies asked Voice for Humanity and its mission partners to engage people in 16 critical provinces to promote voter registration, a vote on an Afghan constitution (requiring three seats reserved for women), and the presidential and parliamentary elections.

Dr. Arvind Singhal<sup>32</sup> (University of Texas, El Paso), Dr. Corrine Sheffner-Rogers (University of New Mexico), and Dr. Ether Long served as the 3rd-party evaluators. National and local jirgas embraced and endorsed the programs, including 8 hours of radio drama, interviews, roundtable discussions with well-known experts, personal testimonies, music, comedy, children’s programming, and discussion questions. The MP3 units went to local regions that shared them with others who sought them out from as far as 50 kilometers.

Results. Singhal, Long, and Rogers reported that: 1.) In some cases, after hearing the messages about the need for women to register and vote, local women banded together, walked to the voter registration office, and publicly registered to vote. 2.) Focus group interviews revealed a pattern of women stating: “This is my golden moment. My husband called me a person for the first time – not his property. He even lets me go to the market unaccompanied!”

Men reported reversing their practice of giving (selling) a daughter in marriage (usually early teen to older men), allowing daughters to attend school, and being part of choosing their husbands. Voter turnout in the places of the VFH programs was three times other locations.

Mindoro (Oriental), Philippines. How do we train pastors who cannot read to learn?

The Mangyan tribe has been the focus of numerous outsider missions. Mangyan pastors serve with little or no formal education or reading literacy skills and rarely enter or finish a high school education. They highly admire and attempt to follow the teaching and preaching principles and methods of Bible schools and seminary-educated national leaders. In other words, they preach propositional sermons or exegetical sermons, sing Western missionary hymns or Hillsong, and read the text in Tagalog (the third or fourth language of local people.

Drs. Neil and Doreen Benevides began working in 2009 among the tribe to help bring Kingdom transformation and development. They eventually recognized the futility of imposing Western-style seminary/Bible school training. Churches remained

32. Most noted for his work in Entertainment-Education, para-social relationships (identifying with characters in radio/television drama), and positive deviance (using positive stories to change behaviors instead of the negative consequences and power of fear).

economically poor, rarely began new churches, and the Biblical literacy of the pastors remained relatively low.

Neil pursued more study in the space of orality after completing most of his Ph.D. work at the Oxford Center for Mission Studies (OCMS) and found a solution for the limited success of their pastor training. He launched a new kind of Bible school that did not require reading assignments or text-based assessments. He taught a narrative approach to theology, hermeneutics, and homiletics. Although they prepared for an enrollment of 40 students that might be qualified to begin the program, the demand was so great that they expanded it to 60.

Results: In two years, the SLI pastors multiplied churches by starting 17 more in their region. The narrative approach to learning and teaching translated into church members who increased understanding, application, and memory of the Scriptures.

A survey conducted by the lead pastor (Nestor) asked members of his church at the beginning of the program: "What was the sermon passage from the previous week? What did it say? How did you specifically apply it? Did you share it with others? As a "pre-intervention survey" the answers were predictable: 1. They could not recall the passage, 2. Could not recite anything from it, 3. had not figured out specific things to do about it, and 4. had not shared the sermon or passage with others.

Ptr. Nestor experienced narrative teaching and preaching in SLI coursework, then preached and taught in his churches using the same principles and methods. After three months, he surveyed the church with the same questions but with different outcomes:

1. They remembered the sermon passage from the previous week and recalled the previous three weeks.
2. The people could tell the story from the Scriptures he preached.
3. They reported what they did to put it into practice.
4. They testified of retelling the story or sermon to others.

### **Zambia:** Radio Drama as Transformative Learning

Holding Ester (Program) envisioned gentle caregivers of African orphans. Social norms saw that kind of gentleness as harmful to develop responsible teens and adults. On the contrary, exploited or abused orphans in Africa generally need to experience gentle, loving care from adults – especially men. When this happens, a surprising number of these traumatized children find healing and openness to accept the love of God, their Father. If this does not happen, the probability plummets for these children ever to know Jesus as a loving Savior.<sup>33</sup>

33. Crawford, Christa. (2012). So you want to rescue child sex slaves: What you need to know before you begin <https://bookpub/book/so-you-want-to-rescue-child-sex-slaves-what-you-need-to-know-before-you-begin-xln6v1go48> Crawford, Christa., & Miles, G. (2017). Finding our way through the traffick: navigating the

The Program: Susan VonOlszewski, an American teacher, heard of the plight of these kinds of orphans. She attended an orality conference that inspired her to take action by creating a new kind of caregiver training. The male caregivers grew up in a male dominant society that especially demanded strict obedience to the voice of a "father figure." If a child does not comply, it is often thought the best (and caring) response is to physically hit, verbally scold, or severely punish a child – "Do not spare the rod."

Susan worked with an orphan care organization with operations in Zambia that employed more than 50 caregivers. They sponsored a 3-day workshop using a professionally produced radio drama that captured the story of 2 orphaned girls and their flight to find healing from the abuse of an aunt and uncle who took them in after the parents' death. The research question explored the transformative effect of using a radio drama in a workshop to see if getting absorbed in a story would affect knowledge, values, and practices.

Measuring for change. All participants completed a quantitative pre-intervention survey with questions linked to the program learning goals and outcomes. The survey was retaken (matched numerically to their pre-survey) at the end of the program two days later. Second, following the workshop's conclusion, we administered the Transportations Imagery Model (TIM) Survey to quantitatively measure the degree to which a listener was drawn into the story and identified with the characters.

Mr. Pete Dougherty (a BBC producer) conducted and recorded interviews during and after the workshop to capture the thoughts and attitudes of the participants. The qualitative methods confirmed the findings of the quantitative pre/post-intervention surveys and the TIM survey. Focus group interviews asked similar discussion questions about learning goals and outcomes.

The workshop. The 3-day workshop brought 108 leaders from 25 organizations and churches. The participants took the pre-intervention survey at the outset of the first session. Several interviews were recorded, all related to the learning goals and outcomes. Participants listened to the seven episodes of the radio drama multiple times with discussion and active learning experiences during the process. Homework assignments included composing songs, and poetry, forming a drama troupe, or drumming & dancing performances to reenact an episode.

Results: Significant increase in knowledge/beliefs, attitudes/values, and behaviors/practices (KAP). The post-intervention matched survey compared to the pre-intervention baseline showed a 40% increase in KAP. Even more significant is that most answered the pre-survey questions with around 60% accuracy and then went on to over 90% accurate answers. 100% of the participants could perform one of the skills used

complexities of a Christian response to sexual exploitation and trafficking. Regnum Books.

in the drama to de-escalate emotional outbursts in children gently.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Narrative Transportation Effect*

A large percentage of people who scored higher on the post-surveys also scored high on the “transportation” survey indicating they were highly transported into the story. Comparing all the other factors (age, experience, education), the only factor that explained the high score on the post-survey was their narrative transportation. People absorbed into a story tend to change KAP.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Focus Groups and Personal Interviews*

First, the participants gave unsolicited comparisons between learning through listening dialogues or with other workshops and in-service training. Narratives were more compelling to everyone. Second, participants reported developing a connection with the children personally for the first time. They felt the pain.<sup>36</sup>

The learning experience unveiled and clarified things at work in their ministries. After the workshop, participants gathered to form a social media support

34. The learned skill: “Breathe deep and count backward from 10 to 1.” For more complete results, see: Madinger, C. 2010. Coming to terms with orality: A holistic model. *Journal of Missiology*, 38(2), 201–213.

35. Green, M. (2004). Transportation into narrative worlds: The role of prior knowledge and perceived realism. *Discourse Processes*, 38(2), 247–266.

36. Murphy, Sheila T., Lauren B. Frank, Joyee S. Chatterjee, and Lourdes Baezconde-Garbanati. “Narrative versus non-narrative: The role of identification, transportation, and emotion in reducing health disparities.” *Journal of Communication* 63, no. 1 (2013): 116–137.

group to keep learning and encouraging one another. They discussed their experiences with children in light of what they had just learned and committed to future strategies.

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