

Why Orality Works: Insights from field experiences

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ABSTRACT

This paper based on results from field research addresses eight reasons why orality works in contrast to a literacy approach. Research shows that orality works when it is initiated and embraced by people with political authority and their social systems. Regional leaders engage and prescribe messages that are needed for their people, but unfortunately this rarely happens with Bible distribution, Bible stories or any “Christian teaching.” Indigenous leaders, not outsiders, are the ones most suited to decide what message people need. When that happens everyone listens, and *anticipates subsequent messages*.

Orality works when the message is contextual and perceived as relevant. Mission strategies that disciple a people group first address their concerns, fears, dreams, etc. to realize Kingdom transformation. Households enter the Kingdom, health improves, justice emerges, and the tide of redemption brings lift in every part of life.

Orality works when the message is relationally received. That relationship stems from hearing the same dialect (not just language), from known voices (not just actors), with village informational gate-keepers (not just anybody) in familiar community (insiders not outsiders).

Orality works when its message demands repetition. One motif in successful programs is “I listened again and again.” Learners receive the message through

entertainment education with participatory forms for learners to engage at deeper mental and emotional levels that lead to volitional responses.

Orality works when it is communally beneficial leading to observable behavioral change. Once people trust the message, they decide to walk a new path – solutions for health, grow new or better crops, ban prostitution or the practice of selling children, etc. This can be measured quantitatively and qualitatively by third party evaluation.

Preface for the ION Conference

The orality strategies of T⁴Global and MPReach¹ have affected more than five million people in five years from Nepal to Nigeria.² Their orality strategies have been implemented in thirteen countries to date, with success documented in a number of countries through Emory, Ohio, Johns Hopkins and Tribhuvan (Kathmandu) Universities.

This paper highlights some of the lessons learned and best practices reported from those projects.

T⁴Global is a non-profit group of orality strategists who facilitate effective transfer of training to oral learners. Oral learners are people who either cannot read or do not read. T⁴Global forms alliances of strategic partners to resource and implement training efforts to do more than simply pass along information to oral learners. The vision of T⁴ Global is to see lives transformed as a result of indigenous training efforts.

¹ T⁴ Global was launched in November, 2005 as a faith-based spin off from Voice For Humanity (VFH). The founders of T⁴ Global, Chuck Madinger and Pete McLain, were integrally involved in developing and implementing the orality strategy at VFH from its inception in March, 2003 (McLain was the project manager for the Afghanistan and Iraq projects and Madinger was the project manager for the Nigeria, and Rwanda projects). MPReach founder and director, Ed Weaver, has been applying audio technologies in orality contexts since February, 2005. In September 2007, MPReach and T⁴ Global merged their efforts. The five-year span of orality experience dates back to the beginning of VFH.

² Nepal: civic education, health and oral bible; Afghanistan: human rights and civic education; Iraq: civic education and health stories from the holy books; Sudan: civic education, health, biblical discipleship; Nigeria: HIV/AIDS, leadership training and discipleship; Rwanda: leadership training and discipleship; Ghana: health and oral bible, India: pastor training, Bible stories, health, Myanmar: pastor training and evangelism, Kenya: herdsmanhip and discipleship. In addition three other country programs cannot be listed due to security issues.

▲^{T4}Global management has spent the last five years developing and perfecting a training methodology designed to reach oral learners with transformational impact. From this the “T” and the exponential components (to the 4th power) emerged. The “T” communicates “transformation” - Kingdom transformation ▲ prescribed by the model prayer³ that comes when the **truth** (T¹) sets people free, and the mind finds its renewal.

▲ Truth must be **translated** (T²) linguistically, culturally and *orally* into those forms of communication that can be received, remembered and replicated in oral cultures: music, drama, folktales, proverbs, drums, etc. Truth must come through **trusted leaders** (T³) if the message is to be collectively embraced. This may well be the most critical stage of communication strategy success. Finally, messages can only be consistently guaranteed when they remain exactly the same. **Technology** platforms (T⁴) ▲ deliver messages that everyone hears without message degeneration or atrophy. The use of small media technologies (SMT) spread relationally can deeply impact the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) of an entire region.⁴

▲ To effectively reach and mobilize oral learners ▲ in the developing world, an MT4 mobile school, a new kind of community-based "distance learning" program is employed. This program does not depend on a brick and mortar facility. Instead of people coming to a building, the "school" goes to the people. Oral learners gather around the MT4 player in

³ “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In the context of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus expected disciples to live under Kingdom authority and principles. When that happens people are transformed. Whole communities believe and change because of his authority. (John 4)

⁴ Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution (University of Minnesota Press, 1994). The authors trace the overthrow of the Shah of Iran to the infusion of cassette tapes from the Ayatollah Khomeini while exiled in Paris. On theories of behavior change see: Cole, H.P. (2002). Cognitive-behavioral approaches to farm community safety education: A conceptual analysis. *JASH*, 8, 145-159.

a hut, under a tree, by a well, or in the village center. As a small group, they listen, discuss and take action together in response to the audio or video training. The program does not create small groups for learning. Rather it uses groups that already gather for their own business and simply commission them as MT4 schools. There might be dozens of MT4 schools sprinkled throughout a community. While T4Global sees the technology as essential, the mobile school brings an incarnational component with facilitators and mentors becoming a conduit for training.

An MT4 mobile school consists of the following:

1. The School: a "mobile teacher" (MT4 player), low-cost, easy to use audio or video technology introduced by trusted and reliable community leaders.
2. The Classroom: a place where people already gather.
3. The Content Courses: an oral library of a variety of collaborative modular audio or video chips.
4. The Teachers: trained mentors using collective learning methodologies.
5. The Learning Process: collective listening to a consistent message, collective discussion, collective repeat listening, collective discovery, and collective application and action.
6. The Cascade Effect: learners discussing what they have learned with others, which produces a self-replicating, trainer of trainers (TOT) strategy that cascades out to others in the community and beyond.

Finally, in the text of the paper the mobile school and its components are included in the term "small media technology" (SMT). This is meant as an extension and supplement to mass media (television, radio, print, pod casting, etc), and not a replacement.

Why Orality Works: Insights from field experiences

In the field and discipline of communication strategies nothing could be more complex and at the same time as simple as reaching oral learners. The simplicity is that we all were created with the capacity to tell stories. Until we reached the age of about 10 we thought primarily in the concrete, not in the abstract. Language, song and dance came effortlessly. The complexity stems from our need to share our stories and other messages across learned barriers of communication. When seen in its best light, culture - that lens through which we define the world around us, is a path to transformation, not a barrier.

Why does one oral strategy reach into the mind, change the heart and modify the practices of one group, and not do so with another? Orality, like any other observable principle of communication, never stands in isolation. With orality just as in publishing literature, there is a complex sequence of events and necessary management of the process to reach the desired outcome of changing lives. We move from needs to ideas, to notes, to outlines, to drafts, to editing, printing, marketing, shipping, selling and revising. Some organizations and programs manage the process well. Others do not.

How a strategy is positioned in any context determines the eventual outcomes. When a pastor arrives at his or her assignment (church call), the person could tell people what they need, prescribe a course of action to move them forward and out of their self-inflicted problems, while he strives to be the leader who made a difference. (His peers would obviously agree and want to emulate that success) Alternatively, that same leader

could come in as a fellow-learner, take time to understand the context and come to corporate solutions for corporate action.

These scenarios are not too far removed from many Western mission strategies. Many wise mission leaders assess the countless factors that make a regional context unique. They learn from and with the local leaders, and build a long-term strategy to bring Kingdom transformation. More often, however, we think that we know success from our own experience (whether or not it has ever brought real or lasting transformation). We export our strategies into receptive markets. Then we unwittingly find ourselves rooted in (or blindly continuing in) colonialism and paternalism that may produce a lot of activity, building and extension of our ministries. When the real test of church character comes – apartheid, ethnic cleansing, corruption, affluence, etc. our house may not stand as we assumed. The church family around the world either privately bristles at our presumptions or blindly follows us because we must have the answers – look at our wealth!

When orality strategies are positioned for eager reception, easy remembrance, and exponential replication, community transformation can be a reality. But what separates successful programs from mediocre ones? The answer may be in the attention given to orality details. Figure 1 suggests one set of predictors experienced by T4Global and its partners that distinguish more successful from less successful approaches to initiating transformational change in a community.

More Successful	Less Successful
Evoke from indigenous leaders good content subject matters that seem like good news to all the people	Bring program to leaders for approval, rather than self-initiated
Design engaging core messages and essential truths for the transfer of training	Gather existing content in sermonic, mass produced programs or translate existing content from a different culture.
Package the truths/information in contextual forms with familiar voices	Use mostly didactic forms. Add songs and drama for reinforcement rather than the medium of instruction
Deliver the program through trusted leadership networks	Begin only with friends, local pastors or interested individuals
Manage the process for success as if a Kingdom business	See management as worldly principles that inhibit freedom; or limit the responsibility for success to only a few in authority.
Insure the consistent reception of the core message through the incarnational use of technology	Use only seminars or mass media in which the messages are only heard once, have no interaction, and can atrophy with subsequent recollection.
Give attention to scope and strategic sequencing of holistic content that leads to Kingdom transformation of a community	Default to arbitrary spiritual teaching for "growth"
Plan to bring scale to initiatives that will effectively impact more people	Limit activities to local spheres of influence with local resources

FIGURE 1

▲ For the sake of this paper we will limit the discussion to a few critical nuances of these predicators that make a significant difference with T4Global initiatives. Communication that leads to transformation begins and ends with the people we try to reach. They design, produce, manage and respond to the information/truth at levels natural to their context – top down, horizontally and bottom up ▲

1. ▲▲ Orality works best when politically inaugurated and embraced.

The existing political networks that grant permission or blessing to the content for

sodality led programs most commonly tend to be friendly relational contacts. They may be denominational, congregational or even continental/global executive leaders. The experience of T4Global demonstrates that while these primary relationships are essential to building indigenously produced content, they do not extend far enough up the hierarchical ladder. To insure that the greatest community impact in oral communication/training initiatives will lead to Kingdom transformation, the process must include those higher up the political food chain whenever possible.

The political leaders referred to in this paper carry the weight of total influence more than within any single circle. Denominational general secretaries, presidents and even influential bishops or pastors are essential, but the long-term receptivity of any given program depends on the most influential regional or community-wide gatekeepers.⁵ In Africa, the higher the profile of the leader, the better the chance (Anyaegbunam, 2004) for program success. Central Asia needed the blessing and endorsement of the Shura Council, malaks, and village elders all of whom formed part of the equation for communication success.

In Kano State of Nigeria the influence of the church is minimal when it comes to reaching whole villages with a general outreach program.⁶ Therefore, friends within the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN) were chosen to seek the blessing of the Governor of Kano. More importantly, the Kano State Director of

⁵ The obvious problem of succession could present an eventual crisis. If the content introduced in a region demonstrates valued transformation its merits should lead to programmatic sustainability.

⁶ Kano is 99% Muslim. (World Christian Encyclopedia)(Barrett, Kurian, & Johnson, 2001) Our partner in the region, the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) maintains the best Eye Clinic/hospital in West Africa, but does not have the influence to reach whole Northern and Middle Belt communities even with a proven HIV/AIDS message developed with Muslim partners.

FOMWAN is the niece of the Emir of Kano, who many would regard as the most influential Muslim in northern Nigeria. With the blessing of the Emir, the District Heads were summoned, who in turn convened meetings with village chiefs, then elders. Entire villages would now *want* to receive the content and put it into action, because their most respected and influential leaders called for it. Similarly in Southern Sudan, the Governor of central Equatoria State as well as the Speaker of the House of the Government of Southern Sudan lent their voices for recording and support to the training concerning the peace process, as well as facilitated the distribution of the M4 training devices.

If the local political or geographical landscape is decentralized, the leader utilized can be at a local level, not necessarily the state or national level. One does not have to get the emir every time. In Nepal a well-known and respected doctor from a local hospital endorsed the health content. In Southern Sudan, a known regional pastor endorsed the discipleship content. Once again the context helps dictate the relational approach utilized.

Rarely do these leaders see needs that begin with Bible distribution, stories or any “Christian teaching.” The chief (or higher) decides what message his people need rather than outsiders. If outsiders and their programs are tolerated, it is usually for personal profit to a local leader or making that leader look more important in the eyes of his people. When, on the other hand, the gate-keeper(s) initiate a program with an outside “friend” (one who is going to make him look good) everyone listens, and everyone *anticipates subsequent messages*.

In most cases, experience shows that regional leaders gain accolades due to their role in inaugurating any given program. In the case of HIV/AIDS training in Nigeria, the inaugural village for training and its chief were petitioned by surrounding villages to share the program with them. Communities in the Himalayan Mountains in Nepal have developed a lending program where a community “lends” their MT4 kit to another community, expecting it to be returned for use elsewhere. During the civic educational outreach in Afghanistan, villagers from three communities away (5-10 km) came asking to hear the program. In Southern Sudan, local community leaders are demanding more MT4 kits and additional training content to bring to their people. The chief of a small village in Nassarawa State in the Middle Belt of Nigeria mentioned above now hopes for a hospital since more people are seeking his counsel.

Of course, the inverse of this principle is also true. If the program has negative consequences, it may never gain community endorsement and fail to achieve Kingdom transformational goals. One such close encounter came during a West African scale-up program that included a song in the program using non-religious slang unacceptable to the Muslim ear. The content had been vetted at all levels, but each partner failed to notice this irritation. The immediate remedy of omitting the song from all subsequent phases and a profuse apology to the regional powers sufficed to preclude the banishment of the program. The leader saved face. The program continues.

2. Orality strategies work best when indigenous partners drive the content development process.

When national church leaders ask us for program content maybe the response should be: “we have no content. We exist to assist you in building your own content.” Whether working with house church leaders in China, or Anglican Archbishops in Africa, all desire to avoid subliminal paternalism. Knowledgeable, mature, godly leaders know the needs of their people.

To that end, it is *their* cultural grid that allows *them* to lead their outside partners in how to take the gospel and address specific situations. The Samburu people of northern Kenya asked for assistance in a program as herdsmen against the plight of drought. Their wealth and status is found in the number and health of their cattle, but when the rains fail and the grasses are gone the cattle die and with them all hope. The immediate challenge is to bring ways of producing more cattle that can supply more food and do it in a shorter amount of time. The ultimate need is hope on something that can stand in every season.

The first project (cattle herdsmanhip) is extremely complicated and is being addressed by some of the foremost experts in the world. For the Samburu and other nomadic herdsmen there is no commodities market (buying, selling and transporting cattle). If they sell their cows it usually is at a fraction of their value. If allowed to breed, Samburu have never heard that no more than 18 months should pass for the best results. So, this first communication project puts together messages in their own language using interviews with elders they respect, music and drama that teach the core content, and questions for them to discuss that will lead to a transformation of herd economy and well-being.

Because this first need is addressed, a second set of messages is directed for the deeper issues and long term hope. The God who created them for His pleasure also wants to share his honor with them for eternity. Therefore, the sponsors of the Samburu outreach program want to also include a series of messages that lead to faith in Christ and the ways of following him. However, the content originally selected was simply taking what had been done on another continent and translating it into the Samburu language.

This approach, while certainly well practiced, does not address the fact that the target audience knows NO stories of the bible, has a completely divergent story of creation, and a concept of God unrelated to the God of the Bible. Once this fact was pointed out, the sponsors of the program asked: “what then do you have that we can teach?” The answer was: “we do not have anything, but you do. You just need to reflect on where this people group is in their understanding, and where they need to be in harmony with the Scriptures.” Again, “You drive the program, not outsiders.” As you address the issue of origins, Samburu partners tell the Genesis 1-2 narratives in light of the Samburu creation myths they grew up hearing.

▲ Another part of indigenous content design is that it should capture existing songs, drama, proverbs, folktales, etc. that immediately resonate with the people we try to touch with good news. Much in the way Martin Luther used the popular tunes of his day, the locally known songs can be refitted with Biblical content. Other content must be scripted, composed or played that captures the essence of a message. Even within a language group (Hausa) certain proverbs take on different meanings from one geographic

region to another. The northern reaches of a group may interpret a proverb in a very different way than it does with its southern relative. Who has the ability to discern such subtle detail in a message? Indigenous leaders are the only ones capable this design. ▲

Sudanese partners speak truth into the lives of their countrymen who have lived together through 50 years of civil war. In the end, the Bible must be heard clearly, a task made easier by the expertise of indigenous leaders within their cultural setting. The T4G national program sponsors in Southern Sudan decided initially that they needed 3 kinds of content distributed to their listening groups: 1) Information about the CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement) between the governments of Khartoum and Southern Sudan, 2) HIV/AIDS awareness, and 3) biblical teaching pertaining to forgiveness. In Nepal the local fellowship of indigenous churches chose two topics: health and Bible stories. The health course has already changed community behaviors in relation to diarrhea, pneumonia and TB diagnosis and treatment. The follow-up course of Bible stories led many to faith in Christ from several un-reached people groups. Nigerians chose health and leadership content. Iraqis chose health issues. The Samburu of Kenya chose herdsmen and health issues in addition to Biblical stories training. All of these programs have tremendous potential and probability for their pilot projects to blossom into a full scale communications and community action programs to affect not only the immediate lives of individuals but also bring communal Kingdom transformation.

▲

3. Orality works when the message is contextual and perceived as relevant.

By “contextual,” we assert that *the* Good News must come as *good* news

to the recipient. What is good news to the mother of a nine month-old child outside Yei, Sudan? The children of the community can be seen drinking ground water. Typhoid, malaria, diarrhea and food scarcity are her constant realities. The governments and ruling forces of the region dictate the degree of non-combative “peace” she experiences. As an LRA (Lord’s Resistance Army) abused widow, she can no longer live in her home village because the trek to the watering hole jeopardizes her life in the haunts of wild animals. So, what does “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life mean to *her*?”

The example of Sudan reflects the complexity of bringing the Good News into parts of the global village in which most have never lived, visited or understood. Even those of our mission dedicated to *being* good news in desperate regions never completely understand the angst and intricacies of the cultures. Simplistic explanations for the endless caravan of slavery and the hostilities of the north and south ascribe the root causes as religious or even ethnic tension.⁷ While these contribute to the desperate conditions, the trail of this caravan winds back millennia to both Christian and Muslim slavers. The roots of the conflict weave through Western Colonialism, its predecessors and its Middle Eastern successors. The clans, power sharing, and political maneuvering that spawned the independence era set the stage for a constant ebb and flow of power and control.

In actual Sudanese programs the regional and local leaders prescribed messages of hope as related to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), a series of messages on

⁷ International Crisis Group, God, Oil and Country: Changing the Logic of War in Sudan. ICG Africa Report No. 39. International Crisis Group Press, Brussels, Belgium; 2002. pp. XI-XXV. See also, Gabriel Warburg, Islam, Sectarianism, and the Politics in Sudan since the Mahdiyya (London: Hurst and Company, 2003).

HIV/AIDS and a series of Bible stories/teaching. These would be truly good news. “CPA” was only a word villagers heard before the outreach, but now they know that they can vote about their future, and God created them with the ability to care for one another in peace. HIV/AIDS was a curse, now people know it as an avoidable disease that can be treated though never cured. “Forgiveness” is not something we simply receive from God, but something we must do for those who wrong us. We do not have to retaliate against our “enemies.”

4. Orality works best when programs embark on a multi-phased strategy that begins with *community outreach*.

The issues and topics of the outreach are totally at the discretion of regional and local leaders. The first subject matters normally fall into two categories: civic education/human rights and improving life skills (health, agriculture and micro-business). All of these topics can be address with the truth God intended us to live by rather than the myths and cultural lies that hold people in bondage to suffering and poverty.⁸ These are truths that transform: women in Afghanistan are now seen as “human,” not as property to be bartered. Mosquitoes do not carry HIV/AIDS, nor can you catch it from eating utensils or working beside an infected person. If you stop drinking water at the onset of diarrhea, a person will dehydrate and die. If you sell some of your cattle now, you will have money to buy new cows when the net drought comes and your family will not starve.

⁸ Darrow Miller, Discipling Nations, The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures (Seattle: YWAM Press, 1998) pp. 64ff.

Community Outreach may be one “course” or a series of courses. (HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria, etc.) The second phase might begin with an introduction to the biblical worldview and an Oral Bible that may also include traditional stories, proverbs or familiar quotations. This production is timed as close as feasible to the first programs. An oral bible (similar to Chronological Bible Storying [CBS]) addresses the local/regional contextual factors and brings revelation that ends with the question: “how now shall we live?” This question should be answered in community. The content also introduces music, roundtable discussion and testimonies about the bible narratives.

Mission strategies that disciple a people first address their concerns, fears, dreams, etc. to realize Kingdom transformation. Again, we aim for more than conversions. Jesus said that we could disciple *nations* (a multi-phased task) – all those peoples of the earth we put on lists to be reached. Will the Gospel transcend a culture to bring it into submission to the Kingdom or not?

When the contextual issues of a people find resolution in the Truth, He will transform them. Widows can be cared for, orphans can be united with families, food can be in good supply, justice can prevail, health can be restored at some stronger levels, and all demonstrate that His will *can* be done on earth as it is in heaven. Carl F. H. Henry states boldly, “We cannot be the modern priest and Levite, by passing suffering humanity. It was the New Testament world-life view that lifted the ancient world out of pagan barbarism”. This begs the question: “What will future generations say about ours lifting this society out of the present social ills?”

5. Orality works best when relationally received. One time tested methodology in the transfer of training is the *trainer of trainers* (TOT) program to develop and distribute content for a course. The caveat comes as we use this training methodology with primary and secondary oral learners. (Anyaegbunam, C. M., Paolo. & Moetsabi, Titus. 1999; Anyaegbunam, C.M., 2007) Primary and secondary oral learners inherently realign or adapt the instruction to the local context. A trainer of trainers (TOT) program held in a restricted access country asked participants to gather people to listen and discuss the content. Knowing social gatherings and tradition prompted some trainers to play the Small Media Device (SMD) at funerals and weddings. These local experts also know when to stop for discussion or questions. All this is critical because the device is relationally neutral. In the hands of an indigenous trainer it is a tool for transformation.

Participatory communication strategies generally value democratization of information, or horizontal (peer-to-peer) as opposed to traditional top-down approaches prevalent in print, broadcast and other technology heavy media. While participatory strategies are more recently gaining popularity in the west, they have been more naturally the way that rural people groups in developing countries communicate. (Jacobson and Servaes, 1999) Scholars are now recognizing a 3D communications strategy, incorporating top-down, horizontal, and bottoms up in order to foster lasting community change pertaining to good governance, (Anyaegbunam, C.M., 2007) but could also be used to support behavioral health issues and spiritual growth in individuals, small groups, and whole communities.

Of the three levels of communication, the horizontal dimension (peer to peer) is the one that seems to have the most effect on community beliefs (knowledge), values (attitudes) and behaviors (practices). Most of the attention should be directed toward small listening group communication that values the relational connection between communicators and is therefore more horizontal, or participatory. Decisions and new directions in oral societies tend to be collective. Therefore, messages must embed questions that call for interaction and lead to communal action.

Trust is another major factor in this 3D typology. Do the listeners recognize the speaker, or at least know of the person? In group listening is there a common trust of one another? Can the source of the content be trusted if influenced by outsiders? In Southern Sudan, during the program evaluation of the pilot phase listeners frequently commented that they trusted the message because it was presented in Bari, a dominant local language, and that they recognized the voice of many of the individuals talking on the device. (Eggers and West, 2008) Such comments validate the relational value in the MT4 program and apparent transparency of the actual hardware being used. Arvin Singal (Shefner-Rogers, Stromberg, and Singal: 2005) reported that the listeners to the program in Afghanistan overwhelmingly trusted the technology, its source and message.

Because the message that we talk about here is pre-recorded and presented via technology, some may say it is not literally an interactive two-way communication. However, when facilitators can be trained to stimulate group conversations and address possible misconceptions this reinforces and catalyzes relational communications. In this

way technology can experience a degree of incarnation. Nothing will ever take the place of one person leading another into life change.

6. Orality works when messages demand repetition.

We must ask the question: “Does our message capture and retain the attention of listeners.” If so, we have successfully done what Arvind Singhal and Everett Rodgers spoke of as *entertainment education* (Rogers and Singhal: 2003). Education and training that makes a listener part of the story significantly increases the probability of behavior change. The examples of radio drama performed in South Africa spread throughout the continent altered even the daily schedules of those who would not miss an episode. Call in requests for this kind of repeat programming is the demanded only second to popular music in Nigerian radio broadcasting.⁹

Oral communication is not typically associated with exact word for word recitation except where mediated by technology (Ong, 1982). The essence of a message may remain the same, but the communicator (song, story, drums) is permitted a degree of dramatic license. One value of small media technology is that it enables recall and replay of oral content without message degradation or atrophy. When dealing with holistic health and well-being issues such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, diarrhea, it is critical to maintain the integrity of the original content to protect against syncretism or other

⁹ Interview with former Minister of Information and National Orientation of Nigeria. Chief Chuckwuemeka Chikalu. October 22, 2005.

potentially dangerous forms of misrepresentation. Likewise, spiritual and other content have respective value of consistent and accurate replay and archive.

Consistent message replay, enabled by the small media technologies, among listening groups not only re-enforces content, but makes the messages more memorable and available for verbal recitation by peers. This happens partly because messages are communicated in oral forms with traditional orally encoded and culturally engrained formulas (Ong: 1982). By “orally encoded,” it adheres to formulas (rhyme or meter – Twinkle, twinkle little star. . .) that help us remember other important information. (Now I know my abc’s, tell me. . .) It is the story that we read to our children in their pre-literate stage, that they asked us to repeat again and again. Nursery rhymes that coaxed us for repetition – “Mary had a little lamb” and other rhymes and fables that taught the doctrines of the church during a night of illiteracy. Iambic pentameter made Burmashave staggered signs along American highways in the 1950-60’s an icon and the most popular shaving cream– “men with whiskers...neath their noses...ought to kiss...like Eskimoses! ...Use Burmashave!”

Broadcasting messages through television, radio, printed media and even seminars are effective and may never be replaced. “Microcasting” for discussion simply takes communication to the next level toward action and communal change. Listening groups in Sudan, Afghanistan and Nigeria commented that radio can carry consistent and culturally engrained messages, but that typically is not as easy to use in a group due to timing and scheduling issues, or other barriers. Furthermore, broadcasts do not allow the

group to instantly replay a message that might have spawned controversy or require more in-depth discussion.¹⁰

In the evaluation of an MT4 pilot project in Southern Sudan, people commented that now they understand the promises made regarding the CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement), because the agreement was expressed in their language by the governor of the Central Equatorial State. They commented that they now understand the teaching of Jesus to forgive our neighbors and to “not return a sin for a sin.” Several commented that the messages are played repeatedly after church or other public gatherings including funerals where people are gathered in groups for long periods of time. In Nigeria during a focus group interview, one young woman said that the content was not new information. This difference was that this time it was delivered in her heart language by people she recognized. She said that, “in community seminars people would come in and tell us this information, and then leave. We did not trust them, and we could only hear it one time so we did not learn it well.” In other places comments were made that there is now an awareness in the community and that there is good teaching at church and people are now more interested in attending. One head chief commented that there is less arguing and conflict among his “youth.” Initially we were surprised that this would affect “youth” behavior until we later learned that “youth” characterizes anyone who’s “face is still shiny” or between a child and an elder.

¹⁰ Much more research and discussion is needed at this point. The use of seminars and single point reception limit the amount of repetition needed to integrate a message into a person and eventually an entire community.

7. Orality works when it is communally beneficial for collective action. If the result of any orality program is the transfer of training from the message to the intended receivers, the ultimate goal is surely change in behavior. We strive for some sustainable impact, then the training must reach some critical mass; or as Malcolm Gladwell puts it, a tipping point. (Gladwell: 2002) Prior to Gladwell, Everett Rogers talked about the *diffusion of innovation* (Rogers: 1962, 2003(Vygotsky, 1978)) that seemed to track along the same path to collective action we desire in our orality programs. He referred to four main elements that capsulate the premise of this paper.

First we introduce a new idea or practice (innovation). Second, we observe the relational path that new idea must travel (communication channels). In almost every successful communication strategy word spread from village to village through family and tribal ties. Third, we allow the group to process this information over time to internalize the message and take ownership of its application (time). We always recommend a minimum of 60 days for any given message/program to permeate a community. Most have taken less time to reach nearly every adult in the village. Finally, the individual and political units of the area take action for the common good (social system). Once hearing about something that will improve life, no one can remain neutral. Desire for something new is born, and life is unalterably changed.

In this way training content enters into community conversations and becomes an agent of concretization of thought and practice– the congealing of community solidarity on any given issue. (Vygotsky, 1978) In the case of rural Nigerians, because the issues of HIV/AIDS were discussed openly and with a call for action, the village leaders decided

to officially ban prostitution because it was one way through which the virus is transmitted. In a small village in Central Asia, the men decided that they would no longer enter agreements to sell their daughters to repay a debt. Further, they would allow their daughters to attend school and have a voice about whom they would marry.

Do the people believe they can really make a change happen? The poor of the world generally feel powerless. Armies pillage their land, property and families. Corruption drives up the prices of fuel and basic needs beyond the abilities of the average man. Education is affordable to the rich or to the elder brother. The fatalism of Islam often leaves rural Africans in Nigeria and Sudan feeling like there was nothing they could do about it prior to the orality program that introduced new ideas. Before they said: “If Allah wills, they I will ‘catch it.’ I obviously can do nothing to change my fate.” After the program people were anxious to let others know you do not have to die from HIV, and it can be prevented. They discovered they could make a difference and went about it with the zeal born out of confidence. (Bandura: 2000)

When those who ultimately benefit from the program understand they can pass that benefit on to others a cascade effect begins. People themselves only need a few resources to solve their own problems, and employ a participatory method PRCA (Participatory Rural Communications Appraisal) (Anyaeibunam, *C.M.*, 2007).

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8. When orality works the outcomes can be evaluated and results can be reported for mutual benefit in missions.

To better understand breadth

and depth of such work we advocate evaluating both qualitative and quantitative aspects of a program and follow the same standards practiced in sound research.¹¹ Quantitatively demonstrate that our orality strategies raise the literacy of any given subject we introduce. Qualitatively gather the stories of those who have been verifiably changed. The common practices and standards even in the NGO world expect every project to minimally predict the KAP gain - knowledge, the attitudes or values of the culture down to the worldview level, and practices or behaviors that change. All of this can and needs to be measured at some level.¹² This is especially true for us who claim to have the answers to the difficult issues in life.

Households enter the Kingdom, health improves, justice emerges, and redemption brings lift¹³ in every part of life. When the Community of the King practices the Kingdom manifesto (Sermon on the Mount) no power can bar itself from change and transformation. Further, one of the extraordinary insights that Donald McGavran (McGavran, 1970) brought to light is that the Kingdom impact should be demonstrable. Missionary reports that expect no communal change, by the default of never expecting it, get exactly what they aimed for – numbers of baptisms and buildings built, tons of bibles shipped, numbers of people exposed to a message and the number of responses to

¹¹ (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) and use approaches directed specifically toward participatory communication. (White, 1999)

¹² This does not mean we put the Holy Spirit in our scientific methodology boxes. It does mean that we can responsibly account for the efforts and resources we use to do Kingdom work. There will come a Day when all will hear and see this accounting.

¹³ Donald McGavran, on Redemption and Lift, and Ted Yamamori's Cycle of Reciprocity. (D. E. Miller & Yamamori, 2007)

programs. If we started businesses using the same principles, they would never make it past the prospectus stage.

▲ Can we more definitively measure Kingdom impact? If we cannot put our transformational claims/results under the microscope, maybe the reason is simple: most endeavors of the church make no significant behavioral change. ▲ Read the Gospels and Acts. ▲ In some towns where the Kingdom of God invaded, you could no longer find a sick person. The number of sorcery books and practitioners decreased dramatically. Pagan temple worship and idol marketeering took a deep hit to the point of sending a major Roman city in a riotous uproar. City leaders repented of not providing justice to prisoners. The poor were able to give abundantly to the needs of others during hard times.¹⁴

▲ In examining our results, resilient programs and workers could raise the standard of excellence in mission. This does not mean turning missions into the American corporate culture as much of the West has already done with the church. It does mean responsibility in stating what we will do and how we propose to get it done, and to accurately report those results to our donors/partners ▲

▲ Evaluation and reporting should come from independent third parties that have no vested interest in our success or failure.¹⁵ When third party evaluation and reporting substantiates and validates the claims made for our cause, we raise the level of trust for

¹⁴ Not all the work is so easily “measured.” Often in the history of church planting movements no visible results were seen nor was impact measurable in building the relationships and foundations for God to do his divine work.

¹⁵ Ohio University, Emory University, Johns Hopkins, and Tribhuvan all taught lessons in the process of evaluation that could never have come ▲ from within our infant organization. However, the cost to engage major research institutions is extremely inhibitive. T4Global now recruits PhD candidates looking for communication or technology research projects for dissertations. ▲▲

our donors and build the confidence and capacity of our national partners to do more than they previously imagined. This kind of evaluation can also posture programs for future revision and greater impact by noting design and execution flaws in strategies that with prayer and reflection can redefine and direct our management of mission.

Conclusion

Orality happens. The question is, “how will we use it for the benefit of those whose lives we hope to transform from sickness to health, from oppression to justice, from starvation to self-sustenance, from those who are without God and without hope in the world to citizens of the Kingdom?” As we position the truth in forms that orality can take, the truth will set people free. As with the written page, much depends on the writer to craft the presentation. So with orality, the communicator must not only know his or her subject, but more importantly know how it will be received, remembered and replicated in any given context.

Some of what remains to be addressed:

1. What is the role of intercession and the providence of God on how individuals and communities are transformed under Kingdom influences?
2. How orality and literacy approaches differ in essence and form.
3. How do seminars, literature, and broadcasting differ in effects from the use of micro-casting and the use of small media technologies?
4. How do we design and develop contextual transformational curricula that touch on all the subjects needed for a culture and the people of the land?

5. What are the culturally embedded codes formulae that make for good presentation of messages in any given context?
6. What happens when technology is introduced into a culture in which it is foreign? Prestige, wealth, value of existing elders/teachers/schools. Can they compete with the well-produced content that goes through a multiple phase editing process?
7. How sustainable is this model? Can the local economy afford to continue or afford not to continue?
8. At what point do the local leaders assume all responsibility for scope and scale?
9. How do we build Faith Based Organizational collaboration in other regions of the world when we do not practice it at home, or on the field? Ethnic, denominational, language, political, educational, and geographic complexities on top of poverty, corruption and lack of education/training must be addressed.
10. How do you manage this process of building transformational programming?
11. What do you do about the rapid change in hardware technologies?

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