Toward Effective Teaching and Discipling of Oral Learners in South Asia

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This article is based on a master's level capstone project that developed, tested, and evaluated a one-week discipleship curriculum for oral learners with three groups of participants in South Asia, in the context of Youth With A Mission's Discipleship Training School (DTS). This article considers first the theoretical and practical context of the capstone project, before presenting the methodology of the curriculum and its testing and evaluation. For additional background information on YWAM's DTS, now offered in over 200 locations around the world, see also ywam.org.

On the side of a mountain in Nepal, just outside of a small Himalayan village, twelve Nepali Youth With A Mission (YWAM) Discipleship Training School (DTS) students stared at me blankly as I tried to teach the topic "Biblical Christian Worldview." Several of them were from a people group that live in a predominantly poor, isolated jungle community that is largely illiterate. Others were from larger villages and towns with some degree of schooling and considered semi-literate. They were eager and expectant to learn from the week's topic, but I quickly realised I did not know how to teach them in a way that truly facilitated their learning and spiritual formation. I was a professionally trained teacher, delivering content in a logical, reasoned way, but was failing to deliver the content in a manner these students could receive.

As I stumbled through my teaching, trying everything I knew to do to aid learning, I questioned why it was they failed to grasp, process and work with basic biblical concepts and principles that seemed so simple and easy to me. I simplified my teaching content. That didn't work. I tried slowing my presentation and delivery. That didn't work either. As I laboriously continued on, it became painfully evident that the barrier to successful learning did not reside within them. Rather, their learning hindrance was a result of my inability to effectively teach and disciple them. While my students were oral learners, I was trying to teach them in a literate way. I was a Western literate educator, trying to communicate and teach abstract concepts and principles to oral-cultured and oral-preferred learners.

For the past ten years I have lived, served, and worked solely in the context of the DTS program in South Asia. During this time, I have sensed an internal discomfort, requiring me to question: what discipleship and pedagogical practices effectively facilitate learning and spiritual formation in oral learners? This journey has resulted in an educational paradigm shift that is the driving force for this capstone project.

Various mission agencies employ a host of strategies to assist oral-cultured people to respond to the gospel. Most of the effort is being pioneered by church planting and evangelism streams, as is the case with YWAM's Frontier Missions (FM), which focuses predominantly on what missiologists call unreached and unengaged people groups. Through these efforts, we are

seeing previously unreached oral-cultured people groups responding to the gospel around the world. However, it would seem that there is little work being done to develop effective models of teaching and discipleship for these oral learners. If YWAM is to stay relevant in regions of the world where students and staff are predominantly oral learners and communicators (e.g. South Asia), we must wrestle with the development of discipleship pathways for them.

Understanding Orality and Secondary Orality

While there are still cultures in existence that have not been exposed to print, they are increasingly rare. Instead, what we are seeing is a "secondary orality" in which many people, though able to read and write, prefer to learn via oral and visual methods and find it difficult to learn through literate or print-based instruction (Chiang et al., 2004, p. 6). While they may have been required to read and study books at school, once leaving the formal educational system, they avoid reading and rarely consult print media for instruction. Universally, people are thinking, communicating and processing information more and more like oral learners (Chiang et al., 2004, p. 57). The ramifications of this in mission practice are enormous, both for how we do evangelism and for how we will effectively facilitate spiritual growth in oral learners.

The Chiang et al. Lausanne Occasional Paper *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (2004, pp. 11-13) indicates that close to two-thirds of the world's population either comes from oral learning cultures or prefers oral learning and communication. Meanwhile, an estimated ninety percent of the world's Christian workers still use highly literate communication styles and materials to evangelise, teach or disciple. This makes it almost impossible for oral people to hear and understand the gospel and biblical narratives. Christian workers need to grasp that effective communication with oral learners requires deferring to their learning style preference.

Orality and literacy are not in competition with each other like an either/or strategy. Both the written and spoken word of God go side by side. It simply means that strategies must be employed that are intentional and systematic in regards to how one approaches evangelism, discipleship and church planting where the learning and passing on of God's word is optimised to facilitate the greatest learning and transformation in the life of every disciple (Sells, 2011, p. 12). We must utilise more than a one-prong strategy to achieve this.

Adequately assessing the use of effective oral approaches for teaching and discipling oral-cultured students attending DTSs in South Asia is difficult (and we are not even including here our post-literate young people attending DTS programs around the world). Reasons for this difficulty in assessment are multiple, ranging from our decentralised organisational framework within YWAM, to the diversity and high turnover of DTS and school staff. This is compounded by the lack of a centralised record system of lecturers teaching in our schools in South Asia.

In ascertaining what is currently offered to oral learners in DTS programs in South Asia, I relied on discussions with leaders in YWAM's family of ministries working in this part of the world, as well as my own ten year experience overseeing DTSs in South Asia. As a program monitor for YWAM's University of the Nations (UofN), I am privy to DTS registration data for South Asia, including information on the focus of the DTS program at each location, subjects covered,

instruction methodology, evaluation, outcomes, field work etc. From this information, it appears little is being done in terms of oral teaching and discipling strategies in this part of the DTS world.

Oral learners and communicators prefer to receive information primarily through story formats so they can understand, apply, remember, recall, and use the information (Slack, 1994, p. 2). Oral learners tend to learn by listening, observing, discussing, imitating and repeating. They learn best through hands-on, practical, concrete (sensorial) experiences where they package information in stories moving from the big picture and drawing references to the parts in a circular way. Repetitive stories taught in a sequential manner that can be experienced are ideal. This aids retention, recall and reproduction of learning. Oral learners place high value on relationships and group harmony, so participation in the group and involvement in the learning process are keys to aid learning (Chiang et al., 2004, p. 146).

Seventy percent of unreached people groups today come from oral traditions and rely on oral communication rather than written communication; many reside in South Asia (Chiang et al., 2004). While many are responding to the gospel, YWAM offers little to facilitate discipleship and spiritual formation of oral learners. The DTS model currently available in South Asia offers a "Westernized," literate approach to education. This is reflected in the curriculum, presented in content categories, abstract ideas and concepts that lend themselves to a literate, lecture style, and formal instructional methodology. If YWAM is to facilitate the discipleship and spiritual formation of oral-cultured learners, we really must move toward alternative models of teaching, discipling and delivery of DTS content. The current project is intended to address this need.

Oral learners absorb information through teaching in the form of stories, songs, skits, pictures, movies etc. and thrive on dialogue drawing applications from big picture, concrete and practical stories. Optimal learning and practical application are achieved when students are invited to participate, discuss, reflect and reproduce the material in the context of peer-to-peer learning (Li, 2012). Discussion of observations and applications, and repetitive exercises that stress the learner reproducing the material, optimize learning and memory retention for oral learners. This educational approach also applies to the discipleship process.

YWAM's DTSs are uniquely designed to move people toward one another and God through program elements that foster strengthening community and relationships and develop spiritual maturity. By providing a communal learning environment in the DTS, we live and learn together where we are both initiators and recipients of instruction and teaching. By engaging in practices such as community worship, prayer, work, study, each participant is encouraged to seek the Lord, to hear his voice and to apply and obey the things they are learning. Students engage in activities that integrate mind, body, soul and spirit, as they live out their faith with others, working, playing, worshipping, praying and studying together.

Through this holistic approach, the propensity towards the elevation of the mind as the avenue to achieve spiritual growth is limited. This is important for oral learners, for if they ascribe spiritual formation purely to the intellect, they are prone to feel inadequate or disadvantaged when it comes to their own spiritual growth, especially if they cannot read or study God's word independently. Likewise, oral learners struggle to learn from teaching delivered in conceptual and theoretical ways with little concrete application or illustration.

Design and Methodology

With the above in mind, this curriculum was developed as a one-week teaching block and subsequently tested in three locations in South Asia. The teaching week was titled: *"God's Story – Our Story: Evangelising through Stories."* The teaching week consisted of 50 hours of learning (in accordance with YWAM's UofN guidelines for a full learning week), and involved all aspects of the DTS program including formal, non-formal and informal activities. It utilized teaching methodology that integrated information, attitudes, and skills, through a dialogical approach. Students participated in a variety of learning activities comprised of multi-media, story-telling, discussion, Discovery Bible study (DBS), drama, music, repetitive practice, learning by doing, small groups, worship, outreach and drawing or journaling. Throughout each week the methodology was regularly evaluated via feedback from both staff and students, as well as through direct observation, to measure effectiveness in facilitating understanding, recall, reproducibility and application (spiritual formation) in the lives of students and staff.

A total of 51 participants were involved in testing the one-week curriculum. Participants varied in age from 18 to 53, and mostly came from South Asia. While the majority of participants were from diverse parts of India, other participants (both YWAM students and staff) were from Nepal, Bhutan, Africa, Sri Lanka, Dominican Republic, Brazil and Taiwan. Students varied in economic, educational, linguistic and cultural background. There were 35 men and 16 women. The majority had completed Standard Ten of high school and were literate to varying degrees.

A learning outcome in this project was that students reproduce things they have learned (e.g. the passing on of stories). Thus, deliberate practicing of things they learned was woven into daily learning activities. Memory retention heightens when one continues to practice, engage and reproduce the material. By engaging students in a process that requires individual responsibility and effort in partnering with God and others, while fostering repetitive practice and application, we cultivate the exercise of ascesis. This both strengthens and equips students for continuing ministry after DTS. In listening to and processing stories, participants were required to draw out learning in an inductive, dialogical style. They dialogued together repeatedly using the same five questions, so that they could reproduce this instruction style with others in the community when re-telling the stories.

Each day students learned new stories, discussing and practicing them in order to retell them effectively. This enabled deliberate integration of learning (classroom) and things they were passing onto others (outreach). Knowing God and making God known were simultaneous, showing learning to be not only something for oneself, but for the benefit of others. Students were able to practice, give and receive feedback and coaching from one another, repeat with necessary amendments, and grow more confident in the material being learned. Each morning before new material was introduced, they discussed their learning and experiences in small accountability groups.

In designing a curriculum path and program elements for this capstone teaching week it was essential that students be equipped and empowered to engage and disciple unreached oral learners across South Asia. The teaching week was designed to bring to life God's metanarrative of restored relationship with his creation, and to inspire and motivate students to be his witnesses

in their communities and nations. Each day was divided into sections: small (accountability) groups, worship and/or intercession, and teaching that consisted of story learning, DBS and discussion. Each afternoon the students went into the community to share the stories and lead DBS and discussion learned that day.

Students learnt, discussed and practiced a chronological storying sequence following the central redemptive theme of the biblical metanarrative. These stories included the creation account, the fall of man, the need for a sacrifice (Abraham and Isaac), the coming of Christ, Christ's incarnational model of ministry, the cross, resurrection and ascension, the Great Commission mandate, and the coming and empowering of the Holy Spirit to each believer. The week's teaching title was: "God's Story - Our Story."

The Curriculum Path Design

As Thornton (2014) writes, oral learners learn best though dialogue, and a teaching approach that helps them "construct" knowledge through discovery, rather than just through passively receiving information (pp. 32-44). Likewise, Vella writes that adult learning is best achieved through dialogue that occurs in the context of true relationships (2002, pp. 3-4). The teacher must create a safe environment in which dialogue is intentionally invited and nurtured between all members of the learning process. Dialogue and the need for a safe learning environment are in line with Asian collective culture, with a high value on communal consensus and opinion. In designing the curriculum, I created safety in the learning environment for students and staff, so that they would have freedom to dialogue, discuss and practice learning.

Vella also states that "teams provide a quality of safety and shared responsibility in the adult learning experience" (2002. p. 22). I thus had students choose partners with whom they would share and practice the stories with, as well as allowing them the freedom to participate in their mother tongue, ensuring optimal sharing with one another at the heart level. Vella's approach to adult education also stresses the importance of learners putting into action the knowledge or skill they have just learned, and then reflecting upon the process in order to glean implications and make necessary changes. Adult learning principles are sequence, reinforcement and immediacy of learning (2002, pp. 12-13, 19-20). As such, I devoted time daily in the schedule to repetitive reinforcement and practice of stories learned.

The curriculum path for the week was designed with narration and discussion as the primary approach to learning. Stories do more than simply illustrate abstract concepts or principles. Telling stories and spending time discussing them, creates space for Holy Spirit to bring insight to each individual, as well as prompts learning from one another. This process fostered direct application and verbalising to one another the steps of obedience to take in response to revelation.

The Use of Stories in the Curriculum Design: (Jesus' Use of Parables and Stories)

Story-telling imitates the effective teaching practice of Jesus, and lends itself to fostering spiritual formation in oral learners. By using parables and stories, Jesus taught in a culturally acceptable and understandable way, so that all could hear, understand and recall, whether literate or not (Terry, 2002, pp. 11-12). Jesus communicated in a storying format that engaged, intrigued, challenged and invited people to respond to his message, whether or not they were

literate. Peterson states, "Jesus didn't just tell stories to entertain; instead He told them to connect the deep things of God to our everyday lives. Jesus' stories, besides inviting us into a larger world than we presently inhabit, pull us in as participants. . . . More often than not, one or another of them lodges unnoticed in our consciousness and then, unexpectedly, begins to release insights, to create new perspectives, to shift the very ground beneath us so that we find ourselves reeling, reaching out for wisdom" (1999, Back Cover).

Chronological Bible Storying in the Curriculum Design

Steffen (2014) explains that narrative is the predominant genre in Scripture: between 55 to 65 percent of the Bible is narrative. Peterson (1999, 2006) agrees, that although the Bible also contains poetry and propositional genres, both these genres find their roots and meaning, in the narrative genre. It is easy to see why "the Bible is very appropriate for oral communicators if presented in a way it presents itself" (Brown, 2004, p. 126).

Steffen (2014) quotes David Claydon "While the gospel is being proclaimed today to more people than at any other time in history, unfortunately many of those are not really *hearing it."* Steffen reminds us that proclaiming the gospel through propositions and plans rather than through the stories presents challenges for over sixty percent of the world's population – the oral learners. Peterson agrees, contending that "Spiritual theology, using Scripture as text, does not present us with a moral code and tell us 'Live up to this'; nor does it set out a system of doctrine and say 'Think like this and you will live well.' The biblical way is to tell a story and in the telling invite: 'Live *into* this – this is what it looks like to be human in this God-made and God-ruled world'" (Peterson, 2006, pp. 43-44). A story is not just about the telling, but it invites participation and evokes a response from the listener. "The biblical story invites us in as participants into something larger than our sin-defined needs, into something truer than our culture-stunted ambitions. We enter these stories and recognize ourselves as participants, whether willing or unwilling, in the life of God" (Peterson, 2006, p. 41).

When it comes to using a pedagogical praxis that communicates successfully to an oral learner, Bible storying is an effective tool. By listening to stories from the Bible, told in a sequential pattern, oral learners are able to absorb the story and accurately recall and retell it. Learning is maximised when there is discussion and group dialogue about the story, or dramatization or activity requiring retelling by the listeners. By constantly working from the biblical metanarrative to the smaller stories contained within it, chronological Bible storying makes a strong argument as an extremely effective teaching method.

Chronological Bible storying presents God's word to oral communicators and learners who cannot necessarily understand, remember and reproduce Bible teaching when it is presented to them in a literate, expositional format. By telling stories of the Bible in a chronological timeline, the teacher follows the natural organization of the stories. Oral culture people and oral-preferred learners like to begin at the beginning and tell the stories as they happened. They remember stories in the order they happened (Terry, n.d). Steffen (2014, p. 10) continues, "If the predominant genre of the Sacred Storybook is narrative, evangelicals must give narrative theology its due. It is time to re-story, re-narrate, re-drama, re-character theology," so that abstract concepts can once again be "placed within concrete events" (p. 10).

In Chiang and Lovejoy (2013, p. 45), Walker reminds us that "Transformation is the process of inculcating the story of God as found in his word. We do this by living out the word and rehearsing God's word through stories, song, drama etc. By constantly rehearsing God's word in such ways, the Holy Spirit transforms our personal story to fit into his story." The more one incorporates the story of God into their life, the more their life reflects the story of God. We can influence the worldviews of disciples by telling biblical stories that offer alternative answers to the fundamental worldview questions. As Wright says so well, "Stories are, actually, peculiarly good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews" (1992, p. 40). Terry agrees that "Bible storying is a good missiological practice and strategy for oral learners, when combined with deliberate sensitivity to the listener's spiritual worldview. It helps inform story selection and in turn dictates how stories are taught and then used by the listeners on others" (2012, p. 42). Terry continues: "The worldview must be known, not so that the storyer can simply engage in apologetics to combat erroneous beliefs, but so that the storyer can engage a people at their point of greatest spiritual need while dealing with beliefs that hinder an understanding and acceptance of the Gospel" (2002, p. 5). Wright contends:

> If stories anchor people's existing perspective on the world, then the best thing Christians can do in order to displace that perspective is to tell better stories, and we have them! Our stories must provide biblical answers to the essential questions of life. The more biblical stories people know and can fit into a single comprehensive story of God's saving work, the more completely they are able to embrace a biblical worldview. (1992, pp. 38-40)

The Use of Discovery Bible Study (DBS) in Curriculum Design

In Isaiah 55:11 God says of his word, "It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (New International Version). This verse encapsulates the motivation behind DBS. Proponents of inductive DBS exhort that it is a process that allows participants to have their hearts enlightened as they discover who God is in his word. There is a dependency on God, as the Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher, and God speaks through other people as they participate in dialogue with one another. "The DBS is relentless in shepherding towards transformational living through personal authenticity, accountability, personal responsibility, evangelism, prayer, and acts of service. It is a natural, engaging, empowering process of encountering God" (Baines, n.d. p. 1). Program elements of DBS do not alienate people who lack formal education, but work in diverse groups that exhibit different life (and church) experiences (Baines, n.d. pp. 2-5). The standard DBS model is:

- A time of sharing – things you are thankful for from the past week/day
- A time of sharing – things that were challenging from the past week/day
- Accountability – How did it go with previous "I will" statements?
- Reading of Scripture (or listening to Scripture/story)
- Re-reading of Scripture/story
- Re-telling of Scripture/story
- Sharing: What does the story (passage) tell us about God?
  What does the story (passage) tell us about man?
  What does the story (passage) tell us we are to obey?

From the DBS model, I utilised daily accountability (small group) discussion times, where students and staff discussed what they had learned the previous day (both in class and during the ministry time in the community) and things that they had found challenging. I then reiterated that each story was part of God's big story, and laid the foundation for that day's stories.

The broad curriculum story path I followed for the week was as follows:
1) God's Story Begins!
      a). The Dawn of Creation – God's Story begins (Gen 1-2)
      b) Made in His Image – The Fall of Man (Gen 3)
2) God Continues to Reach Out!
      a) Abraham is Tested/Obedience and God Provides a Sacrifice (Gen 22:1-19)
      b) Jesus is Born – Emmanuel/God with Us (Luke 1 & 2)
3) Jesus – Our Example!
      a) The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
      b) Nicodemus – You Must Be Born Again (John 3:1-17)
4) Jesus Makes A Way!
      a) Life, Death, Resurrection, Ascension (God's Story – video)
5) Jesus' Command and the Empowering of the Holy Spirit
      a) The Great Commission Mandate (Matthew 28:16-20)
      b) Pentecost – A Helper is Given (Acts 2:1-21)

For each story, I told the narrative using pictures and retold it before asking the class or individuals to help me retell it. Each student was given business cards with the pictures printed on them, which they added to a key ring for their own re-telling purposes. Alternatively, they were given blank cards to draw their own pictures and diagrams to help remember the sequence and flow of the story. They then separated into pairs (often in their language groups), to practice retelling the story. We discussed each story using the five basic questions below:
      What did you like about this story?
      What was confusing or unclear in this story?
      What do you learn about God from this story?
      What do you learn about man (people) from this story?
      What are you going to do as a result of hearing this story? (What is there for us to obey in this story?)

We either answered these questions as a class or in small groups with feedback and discussion with the class. I identified teachable moments as students drew observations and questions from the story. On multiple occasions, particularly as the students and staff shared from question five, God moved bringing revelatory understanding and conviction. As the Spirit led, I would move the group into times of worship, prayer and declarations of repentance and response. Repeatedly, students were moved to tears and prayer as the Spirit ministered.

In pairs, the students went into the community each afternoon to share stories they had learned. After sharing with someone, they were encouraged to lead the person or group in DBS. Each evening we had debriefing. I facilitated each pair sharing opportunities they experienced in telling their stories and in leading discussions; the groups they were meeting with etc. We ended with prayer and thanksgiving for those we had met that day.

Application and Reproducibility in Curriculum Design

Experts remind us that we retain less from reading (10 percent) or from hearing (20 percent), than from discussing with others (75 percent), putting the lesson into practice (85 percent), or the 95 percent we retain when we teach it to someone else (Chiang & Lovejoy, 2013, p. 154). Jesus evidently understood this. The answer to the Great Commission is contained within the commission itself. Jesus said "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20, NIV).

When it comes to the unique learning needs of oral-cultured and oral-preferred learners, participatory repetition is especially critical to help students replicate learning and empower them to pass on what they have learned to others. In this way, we make disciples, who in turn make disciples of others (Chiang & Lovejoy, 2013, p. 78).

Program Elements: Community, Worship & Obedience in Curriculum Design

Understanding the importance that community relationships play in the life of a student, YWAM is positioned to foster greater learning in the collective cultural context of the DTS program in South Asia. In this project, deliberate attention was given to creating a communal learning environment with times of worship, sharing and repetitive practice, to further facilitate spiritual growth in each student. For spiritual formation to occur, it requires the repetitive formation of embodied communal practices, the core of which are centred in Christian worship and sharing (Smith, 2013). By incorporating a strong participatory worship component as a program element throughout the teaching week people were able to re-tune and re-direct their imagining and perception of God, themselves, others and the world. Another important program element was daily personal identification of an obedience step in response to God's word (story). My desire was to call students and staff to a greater commitment to God and to a life of obedience. Obedience-based discipleship requires a system that facilitates and promotes change, not just in the mind, but also in heart, action and behaviour.

Ongoing Adaptions to Curriculum Design

Using God's metanarrative as the overarching theme for the week and then dividing each day's teaching into chronological micro-narratives required me to teach in easily reproducible parts. Using DBS required relinquishing control over the exact outcome of discussion times, and I struggled with wanting more control over the content that we covered. I was also anxious that using the same five questions for each discussion would prove boring for students, as would re-telling and practicing the stories each day. However, this was not the case.

I also realised it was essential to go into the community on the first day. Not only were students able to share the stories they had learned with others, but they experienced the success and ease in which they could tell others about God through story-telling and asking simple questions. It was also essential to keep the stories to one or two per day, to allow time for the students to practice and retell the stories as well as discuss them in light of the five questions. This also required keeping the stories they were learning to a smaller number of verses to maintain biblical accuracy.

Allowing adequate time for telling and retelling stories, discussing, practicing, dramatization, drawing, and sharing in a variety of mother tongues all took more time than I anticipated. I constantly reminded myself that less is more. I found myself wanting to push the class harder and faster to learn, to steer their observations and discussions to the points I felt we needed to discuss. This approach resulted in an internal challenge, to let go and allow the Spirit freedom to lead and guide the group as he saw fit. I had to trust God that the Spirit was bringing the things he wanted to say and highlight in the life of the students and class.

Taking time to dramatize the story, or draw pictures to remember the sequence for a story was essential and sound practice to aid with recall and subsequent re-telling. I also realised that the five questions were an essential model when discussing the stories, as they are easily reproducible for the students and staff in the community.

Results, Assessment and Evaluation

Prior to the teaching week, I interviewed some students, using a Pre-Interview Evaluation form. Twenty students and staff from the three locations were interviewed, monitored and observed throughout the project. At the end of the week, I completed a Post-Interview Evaluation form and a Personal Strength Assessment Form with each person. Additionally, a follow up phone interview to the school leaders and an email after several weeks, was used to ascertain if the students were continuing to practice and use the stories as a regular part of their weekly outreach and large field assignment. From these interviews, discussions, observations, emails and phone calls the project was assessed concerning the desired outcomes.

During the teaching, the learning of stories was assessed through immediate re-telling and practicing of the story in pairs, triads or as a class. If a student struggled with a particular story, it was easy to identify the problem and help them practice with peers. Through accountability small groups, students assessed one another concerning statements of response they made the previous day. Thirty to forty-five minutes Monday to Thursday were used to debrief and evaluate ministry time in the community. The evaluation time consisted of hearing a report, challenges faced, their experience sharing the story, etc.

Participant Growth

Of the twenty students interviewed, eighteen had previously suffered negative experiences in a school environment and expressed negative sentiments about education, teachers and learning. "School was boring and often not practical to anything worth knowing." "I found it difficult to concentrate and I easily got distracted" (2015, personal communication). For most of them, learning was a passive activity in which they memorised and regurgitated content the teacher told them. The teacher talked: they listened and took notes. One male student even stated, "At school, there was no need to read or learn anything by yourself if the teacher could teach well and could explain well" (2015, personal communication). Another student said, "I found school and learning difficult because I was not good at writing and taking notes in class."

In student feedback about the previous week's teachers in the DTS, most teachers reportedly taught in monologue and in formal ways (a normal educational practice in South Asia).

Most students remembered very little of the content (other than the title of the week) from the previous week. Many said: "I take notes in class, but unless I go back and look at my notes, I forget what the teacher taught me" (2015, personal communication). When I asked them if they could teach me anything from what they had learned the previous week, most of them quickly stated, "Not without looking at my notes."

When I asked how they know that they have really learned something, all said that they knew they had truly learned something when they could actually do it themselves or when they could apply it to a particular situation. One of the students stated, "I know I have learned something when I can connect things I am learning in practical ways to my own life" (2015, personal communication).

When observing the students, the energy level in participating and interacting in discussions, small groups and class times increased as did the speed in which they entered into dialogue with one another and myself throughout the week. For many of them, the way I taught the week was very different from any class they had been a part of before. Simply being asked to put away their notebooks and desks, as well as sitting in a circle (both staff and students together) from the very beginning of the week, seemed novel and increased excitement for the things we were discussing.

Likewise, the energy and motivation to go into the community each afternoon and share what they learnt increased throughout the week. The first day some of the students were pessimistic about the success they would have going into the community to share stories. This changed by the time they returned from the first outreach. "I never realised how powerful God's stories are when I tell them. People are so interested and want to talk to me!" (2015, personal communication). By the post-interview assessment (as well as observation of student feedback when thanking me), they all had grown tremendously, both in the amount of Scripture they had learned (stories), as well as in boldness, confidence, joy and willingness to share with others.

One student stated, "I found it so easy to learn in this way, sitting in a circle, not taking notes. Normally I have to write and take notes to remember things, but learning in this way was so easy. I didn't take any notes the whole week, but I really learned Scriptures and stories." Another student said, "Having the freedom to speak in my own language was such a big help for me to learn and to really understand things as I talked with my friends and as we shared together from the stories." Still another stated, "The stories were helpful because we did not take notes and yet we still remembered their points. We were remembering without notes and without our Bibles and so now I know I can tell these stories anywhere, anytime."

In regards to the students' ability to retell the stories they were learning, we worked hard at holding each other accountable to accurate Scriptural accounts. By giving ample time to draw pictures to aid recall, or develop actions or a dramatization of the story, and allowing them multiple opportunities to practice in pairs or small groups, they quickly learned and could retell the stories with ease. By giving them time to think about their own unique stories (testimonies) and giving them a card with their photo on it, asking them to add their story to the metanarrative of God's people empowered with the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses, one student made the

statement, "I enjoyed realising that God's story is a big story. In the past I did not realise that I am part of his big story and that God is using me and my story to tell others his big story."

By the end of the week in all three contexts where it took place, fifty one participants were excited to go out each afternoon and tell others in the community stories from God's word. As a teacher in many DTSs, I have found in the past that students were extremely hesitant to engage people in the community (*do* evangelism) due to previous bad experiences or feelings of inadequacy. This teaching week was the most positive response I have ever had in students sharing God's stories with others. One student said, "It has encouraged me to share with people and ask questions because I realise that I can easily tell stories from God's word and ask people simple questions. I felt so free to talk and share with people about Jesus and many things."

Desired Outcomes – Application and Obedience

The implementation of this teaching week went far beyond my expectations in meeting the desired outcomes for learning, application and obedience in my students. By the end of the week, the students were able to:

- Use storytelling and inductive questions as primary methods of dialogue and instruction.
- Verbalize learning through processing and repetitive reproducibility activities in class.
- Actively explain to others in a reproducible way (make disciples) the content (stories) discussed and learned in class.
- Learn and retell seven Bible stories to one another and to others in the community.
- Lead Bible studies with others in the community and facilitate the discovery of truths contained in God's word through asking five basic discovery questions.
- Verbalise an understanding that every event (story) in the Bible, as well as their own life story, is part of a much bigger metanarrative of God.
- Cite specific Bible characters and their individual contributions to God's metanarrative.
- Discuss ways God has used them and their unique story to impact others.
- Demonstrate an ability to verbalise content learned to others and to reproduce and teach things learned daily in the DTS to others in the community.
- Identify and verbalise areas in their life where they are obedient to God's word (direction) and areas where they struggled to put into practice the things they know they should do.
- Identify and verbalise instances and testimonies of how the Spirit led them in their retelling and discipling times with others in the community.

What Didn't Work

What I wasn't expecting and what caught me off guard, was a negative view some students had surrounding stories and storytelling. Several DTS students dogmatically told me stories were for children and that they already *knew* the stories and as such, did not see the point in learning and practicing them. When challenged however to tell a story prior to my telling it, or even re-telling it directly after I told it, I quickly discovered that not one student could do it with any degree of accuracy to the Scriptural account. As a result, I spent more time laying a foundation for the use of stories and inductive Bible study as effective teaching, discipling and evangelism strategies for impacting oral-cultured people and learners. I spent more time talking about Jesus' model of telling parables and stories, and why stories are a good medium to share the metanarrative. I slowed the content to allow for more discussion on why we struggle with

storytelling (e.g. thinking it was just for children, for fiction, for Sunday school etc.) and what it meant to follow Christ's example as his witnesses.

I also found that in teaching stories in English to those for whom English is a second or third language, there were at times complications in maintaining Scriptural accuracy as many translations and words vary greatly from language to language and/or simply did not exist. Also, each of the DTSs had several students with severe substance abuse backgrounds, resulting in poor memories and difficulty in their retention of the stories. A few students struggled no matter how simple the story line was or how much they practiced retelling it. For these students in particular, the use of pictures in the retelling of the story was essential for their memory recall.

Pivotal to the success of this capstone week was the flexibility of DTS school leaders who afforded me the luxury of commandeering their entire learning week. When teaching through dialogue and participatory means, additional teaching time is required for sharing, discussion, practicing etc. In a DTS teaching week with translation, a school speaker is given a minimum of 16 hours in the week for presenting teaching content. I used 27 hours for this project.

Implications and Action Steps

Implications for Teachers

The challenge for teachers committed to stimulating real learning is how can we empower students to take what they have learned and implement it in practical ways in their own settings. This requires synthesizing of the material so that it can be demonstrated in a concrete way. Personal articulation of practical steps of obedience for individuals, application, repetitive practice, strong peer accountability groups and implementation by retelling and reteaching others reinforce the learning process. Steffen observes:

> Teachers in established theological institutions at every level have recognized that their students are having greater difficulty following their teaching, much less reproducing it through tests and papers. Their oral-preferred students prefer images over words, texting over talking, watching over reading, screens over paper, interacting over writing, dialoguing over listening to lectures, creative productions over writing dull papers, and group activities over individual effort. How can teachers pass on thick theology to such learners? Will not thin theology result? (2014, p. 7)

A teacher must discover what students need and want to learn, creating opportunities for dialogue, participation and obedience throughout the process. In cultural contexts like South Asia there is tremendous power distance between teacher and student. It is essential the teacher works to break this down through intentional building of relationship and trust both in and outside class. Going with the students into the community each afternoon, partnering with them to retell stories and lead discussions are informal ways of building relationship. In teaching oral learners, a teacher must strive to help students learn through dialogue. The teacher must learn to tell Bible stories effortlessly and without notes. The teacher must learn and tell stories in a way that actively engages students and encourages them to share what God is revealing to them.

However, this leads to the question: how does one teach parts of the DTS curriculum that do not naturally lend themselves to a biblical story format and to DBS? For example, concept three from the DTS curriculum, category one: *"God is a personal/relational being in that He is three distinct persons in one being (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)."* Topics like the Trinity and Biblical Christian Worldview do not naturally fit into one story, leaving one to choose from Scripture multiple stories to bring the main emphasis of the teaching, and then lead discussion in deliberate ways to ensure the required teaching points are highlighted and discussed. How can we successfully teach materials in the DTS that do not lend themselves naturally to a story format or to a Bible story? Does storying, in the discipling context, only work with Bible stories? Could DBS work with stories that aren't from the Bible? How can we forge a more holistic integration of learning and application, lecture and outreach phase to facilitate daily implementation and application of stories being learned, practiced and retold?

Implications for DTSs in South Asia

We must be disciple-makers who not only equip people to their full capacity to serve God and others so they demonstrate lives of consistent obedience, but also ensure that DTSs are places where students learn to reproduce what they are learning into the lives of others in the wider community. How can we better position the DTS model to be replicated in multiple settings, nations and cultures? Perhaps our YWAM DTS strategy needs to be broader. Watson and Watson (2014) suggest looking beyond individuals making commitments to Christ, to including family, community, and nation in the process (p. 110).

The design of a DTS (where it usually consists of an 11 to 12 week lecture phase followed by an eight to 10 week field assignment), also has implications that can be adverse for oral learners. One is the delay between learning and the opportunity to put it into practice. For oral learners, reproducibility is essential in learning, for it is in the retelling and reteaching that they integrate learning in practical, concrete ways. It is essential that they have the opportunity to share learning with others immediately, if possible.

The present DTS lecture phase curriculum does not lend itself to easy application for oral learners. Rather than learning through abstract concepts, they learn best through story formats that they can discuss, retell and share. They need experiences that are active and practical where they can apply the information in concrete ways to their lives. The DTS curriculum must be reframed to reflect God's metanarrative so that students (both oral and literate learners) realise they are part of a much larger story.

Implications for YWAM and the UofN

How do we amend the DTS program to meet the needs of oral learners while still fulfilling requirements of the UofN, such as the use of a breadth of speakers (teachers) to teach the curriculum (topics)? Few teachers are skilled and qualified to teach through stories and inductive, participatory Bible studies, and those that do are mostly engaged in church planting among the unreached and not necessarily adept at discipling adults to greater maturity through storying.

How can YWAM develop new alternative models of discipleship appropriate for oral learners? Can the eradication of Bible poverty take a multi-faceted approach that sees literacy

increasing but also includes alternative methods and models to effectively teach, disciple and evangelise oral-cultured and oral-preferred learners?

Discussion with individuals in YWAM's Frontier Missions stream suggests that, so far, no one has successfully run an entire DTS using storying, dialogue, and DBS. There is urgent need to develop models of DTS that are easily reproducible, that facilitate oral learning through storying, repetition and retelling. How can we network with the DTS teachers who understand how to effectively teach oral learners through stories or the disciplers who know how to effectively disciple oral learners? What can we do as a mission to train future YWAM teachers for oral learners? How can we overcome the disconnect between what is learned in class and the replication of it into the community (lecture phase and outreach phase)? How can we build collaborative partnerships with the various YWAM streams, locations, teams and ministries?

How can second level schools in the UofN better facilitate oral learners? What new ways could we use to effectively evaluate oral learning and what would constitute success in such a program? How would we teach content in both our DTS program and second level schools in the UofN, and what curriculum changes need to be made to effectively teach oral learners?

The UofN requirement for the outreach phase of the DTS to be in a cross-cultural setting often means students go to a context that is not in their mother tongue, rendering effective communication difficult, even when it is within their own nation. Might it be better in South Asia for students to do their whole DTS in a location where they can speak the language and have longer to build relationships within the community?

Possible Action Steps
While it is relatively easy to identify questions and challenges facing YWAM and the UofN's DTS program as we examine the unique needs and plight of the many oral learners around the world, much more discussion, prayer and wisdom needs to be sought in order to find the way forward. Possibilities include:
- We could bring together International DTS Centre (IDTSC) and Frontier Mission (FM) leaders to discuss, pray and examine key concepts highlighted in this capstone project and ways to work together, such as partnering to run pilot DTS models in oral-cultured communities where some of the current DTS guidelines could be waived.
- The IDTSC could reframe the DTS curriculum to present the biblical metanarrative to better suit oral learners and identify key topics that lend themselves to easily being learned, studied and discussed through stories and DBS.
- Schools like "Word by Heart" could be run completely orally with no written material or notes to ascertain the viability of the power of ascesis and daily practice.
- The UofN Master's program in "Discipleship and Spiritual Formation" could spend part of a module examining the unique needs of oral-cultured learners and could bring in key individuals to model teaching through storying and DBS.
- We could run seminars at our regional events as well as global gatherings with others outside of the YWAM network that are leading the way in teaching and discipling oral-cultured and oral-preferred learners to teach, model and facilitate necessary discussion within YWAM.

- We could identify people that can train YWAM speakers to teach oral learners effectively through storying and DBS. They could be commissioned to run training seminars and schools that would better equip each of us in this new approach to teaching and discipling.

Conclusion:

In 2012, the International Orality Network published a paper, "Beyond Western Literate Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts." It was produced after forty-two academics and practitioners from 18 institutions and 14 organizations met together for a consultation on issues pertaining to oral cultures and, in particular, unreached people groups. From this consultation, they drew three indications placing the issue of orality squarely at the forefront of modern mission endeavours. They were:

1. There is an abundance of oral preference learners in the classrooms.
2. There is a need to embrace orality as a part of the curriculum.
3. That what is working on the field to do with issues concerning orality is now beginning to speak into formal education, offering rippling implications for accreditation.

To walk in greater fruitfulness in the great commission mandate, we must take seriously the needs of the oral-cultured and oral-preferred learners and communicators. YWAM needs to move forward with a clearly defined strategy in order to not only lead unreached people to faith, but to move toward effective teaching and discipling of a large proportion of the world's population and the emerging generation of secondary oral learners in the West.

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