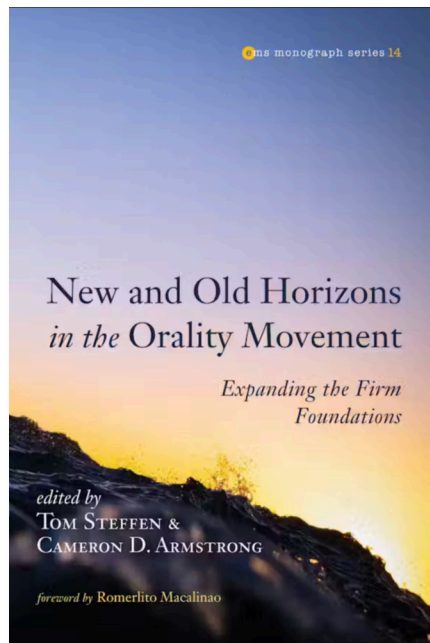


**RESPONSE TO CHRISTOPHER BRAINOS' REVIEW:  
New and Old Horizons in the Orality Movement:  
Expanding the Firm Foundation** by Tom Steffen and  
Cameron D. Armstrong, Eds.

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**REVIEWED BY  
L. LYNN THIGPEN**

Editors Steffen, Tom and Armstrong, Cameron D., *New and Old Horizons in the Orality Movement: Expanding the Firm Foundation*. Oregon: Pickwick Publications. Pp 304, ISBN: 978-1-6667-3080-7 \$39.00 paperback.



In his review, Brainos uncovered an important point surrounding the orality movement: “There is no standardization in terminology.” As a researcher in this field, I found “orality was an unfortunate misnomer,” so I sought a more apt description term than “orality” and one that was less pejorative than “illiterate.” (See *Connected Learning: How Adults with Limited Formal Education Learn*.) In that dissertation using grounded theory research methodology, I came to realize that so-called “oral learners” preferred to learn through connection or relational means, and this was a new development. People were seen to be integral to the learning process of these adults.

The volume under discussion is part of the EMS Monograph Series and contains papers presented during the Orality Track of the 2020 national EMS meetings. These papers are organized into four parts, one of which Brainos felt seemed more like “rabbit trails” (Part 4) due to the variety of topics discussed. Steffen mentioned this fact in his initial material “Setting the Stage” (xvii) and explained that Part 4 was designed to expand the horizon of orality, as the title suggests.

As for Brainos’ critical feedback on my chapter entitled “Deconstructing Oral Learning,” he made an important point about empowering “individuals to educate themselves and others.” I found oral/connected learners were often “shut out” of learning opportunities because those possessing the skills to be learned would not share them freely. Skills seemed to be valuable commodities to be shielded from outsiders. In many situations in which oral learners wish to learn, they are indeed “shut out.” They

cannot attend the more formal systems described by Brainos, some having failed in that system and others never being allowed in due to life circumstances. Teachers and systems are not accessible to oral/connected learners who typically gather knowledge in more non-formal and informal situations, such as on the job or “on the fly.” In agreement with Brainos, I feel this is a sad commentary and one that brings great shame to oral/connected learners. (See “The Dark Side of Orality” in *Honor, Shame, and the Gospel: Reframing Our Message and Ministry*.)

In some of the courses I teach, I require students to spend time as oral learners, something I did as part of my dissertation research. Students cannot use phones, computers, books, or any type of reading material. This exercise has been excruciating for those who are highly literate. In that vulnerable position, one must rely on others to read for them, to answer emails, and for every interaction that includes print. As Brainos mentions, this unfortunate situation “leaves the learner subservient to the teacher,” and that is something we want to rectify. How might one learn given that situation? Are we accommodating and making space for adults who learn relationally and not through print?

I write and speak about making way for oral learners, advocating for their learning needs, and agree wholeheartedly with Brainos. (See “When Signature Pedagogies Clash: Making Way for the Oral Majority with Connected Learning.”) Having no means readily available for adults with limited formal education (ALFE) to explore further learning opportunities is an inequity and a travesty that we in the orality movement seek to address. I wish all the present established institutions and venues of education – public, private, and in the church – would embody the learning hidden within books (especially within Scripture) and make way for relational learning. Given the extent of orality, I believe it is time for that accommodation.

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