

## **Teaching or Telling?**

By Bambi Betts

I have never known a learner who was damaged when a teacher attempted to help him get to real understanding.

On the other hand, I have known many who have been truly handicapped by teachers who interpret teaching primarily as telling.

While we can argue that teaching is occasionally about telling, what we now know about how learning actually takes place is more than enough to compel us most often to replace 'telling' with more learning compatible strategies.

Teaching and learning are becoming more fully understood every year. The lag between what we know and what we do is, at best, embarrassing and at worst inequitable and sometimes damaging for learners.

For example, looking simply at retention rates, here is the research on adult learning, Average retention rate when the learning activity is: Lecture 5 percent; Reading 10 percent; Audio Visual 20 percent; Demonstration 30 percent; Group Discussion 50 percent; Practice by Doing 75 percent; Teaching Others and Immediate Use of Learning 90 percent. (Source: National Testing Lab, Bethel MD, P. Reed TAM/TIA 2004)

The most common refrains we hear about why teaching must, for the most part, remain 'telling' are:

- There just isn't enough time to 'cover' everything. So, that means if I tell you, then you learned it and I have done my job. Not so.
- The kids DO learn from my telling'. Perhaps some do, under some conditions. But for the long term do they gain the ability to apply, interpret and explain in a variety of circumstances?
- That's how universities do it, so they better get used to it.

Now? At eight years old and for the next 10 years? And if it is how universities teach do we have ANY responsibility to help the education community begin to practice our best understanding of how learning happens?

We are all part of the teaching PROFESSION, not the job of teaching. Being a professional implies constantly reexamination of practice and collecting hard evidence of what actually works.

Checking student results for whether teaching is the same as telling might be a wise starting point.