

Don't Tell What You Can Ask

by Jane Vella, PhD

When my friend Maria and I get together, watch out world! Sunday, over a cup of tea on the back porch, we struggled with this axiom:

Don't tell what you can ask

Don't ask if you know the answer,

Tell, in dialogue

“How?” asked Maria. “How do you tell in dialogue?”

Swimming this Monday morning I found this response. How about considering two interfacing frames for “telling in dialogue”?

One is the [Eight Steps of Design](#) where the SO THAT behavioral indicators of learning, transfer and impact hinge with the WHY, and of course, the content: WHAT. Those behaviors (actions) are how learners learn the content and how they know they know when the session is over.

- inductive work: anchoring the new content with the context and experience of learners
- input: the content presented, (added)
- implementation: learners doing something (those behaviors in a small group (action))
- integration: taking it away to their context

Designing the learning event, where you will “tell in dialogue,” you make explicit the bright hinges between the content: WHAT, the situation: WHY, the behavioral indicators of learning SO THAT and, of course, the achievement-based objectives: WHAT FOR: By the end of this session all will have... which are a fore shape of the learning tasks and materials: HOW.

These learning tasks are designed using the four steps to connect to the context of each learner, to present clearly the new content and invite learners' interaction with that content in small groups, anticipating some kind of projection of that content into their personal context.

There is a lot of telling within these two frames. As teacher-designer I have the deliberative voice, deciding what will be taught/learned. This decision has been informed by my earlier



dialogue with learners through the LNRA: the learning needs and resources assessment. The breadth of that LNRA has given me some idea of the learners' contexts.

So, the materials I decide to use in the learning tasks are selected with concern for the principles of relevance and immediacy.

Telling in dialogue is hard work from the very beginning of the design phase! It is evident throughout the design and in all aspects of the event.

In our Sunday tea party, Maria and I agreed that this axiom, which encapsulates the system of Dialogue Education, guides us to avoid too much WHAT for the WHEN. A careful selection of strategic content can start adults on a personal learning journey within their own context.

Download and read [this example](#). Mark what you see as telling in dialogue. Please share your markings with me at jane@globallearningpartners.com. I will share them with Maria!

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