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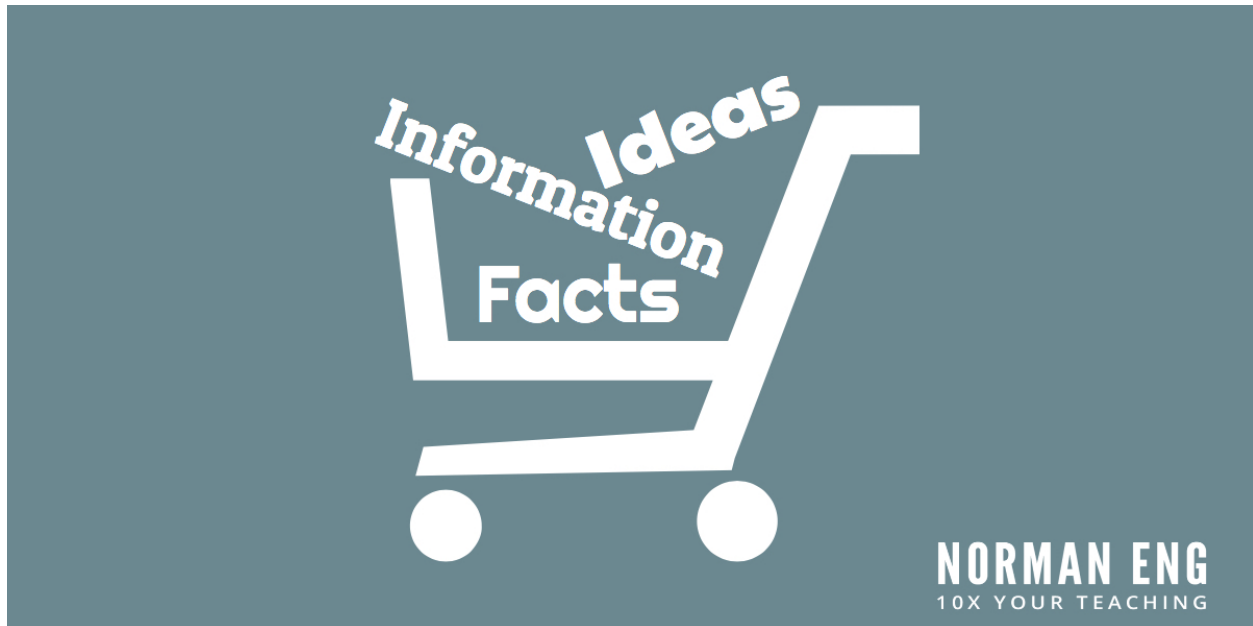
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Is Teaching About Selling? Absolutely.

By Norman Eng, Ed.D.

Originally posted at: <http://normaneng.org/is-teaching-about-selling-absolutely>



A professor once told me, “Students are NOT customers. To say they are is insulting to both professors and to students.”

Unlike customers, students are not always right, he argued, and that we shouldn’t tell students what they *want* to hear. Rather, as experts we need to tell students what they *need* to hear. Anything else is pandering.

Other [critics](#) fear that selling implies a transactional relationship, one where students pay for a degree. Most folks just aren’t comfortable with the term *selling*. They think of people like this:



Sleazy. Sales-y. Manipulative. Fake. Tricky.

But that’s just a *perception*. **Selling is really about packaging information in ways that move others.**

Look at the way clothing catalogs are put together. Every season, they focus on a particular theme, such as back-to-school, the holidays, or the

summer season. Doing this make them coherent, relevant, and meaningful to their customers.

It's no different when we present research findings in an article. Except we use theoretical frameworks to contextualize our topic, set up our purpose, and shape our message.

It doesn't matter how objective or empirical we think we are. We're still *framing* our communication no differently than a lawyer framing her case, an advertiser framing his product, or a journalist framing her story.

Same in teaching.

If I'm lecturing about the law of supply and demand, I'm not just going to define it. None of this: "Supply and demand is the amount of a commodity, product or service available and the desire of buyers for it, considered as factors regulating its price."

Yet citing textbook definitions is common practice in many PowerPoint lectures. If it were me, I'd rather ask students, "Have you ever tried to buy, say, airline tickets or concert tickets and then come back to find the price went up?"

That's how you capture attention.

In fact, K-12 lesson plans often refer to this part as the *hook*. I'm "packaging" or framing the content for my particular audience. There's no trickery involved. It's producing a clear, digestible, relevant, and meaningful message.

In that respect, I'm absolutely selling the idea of *supply and demand*. Is it then too much of a leap to say that teachers are *sellers of ideas*?

Author Daniel Pink doesn't seem to think so. He refers to this as [*non-sales selling*](#). Writers sell when they tell a story. Parents sell when they raise their kids. Colleagues sell when they collaborate. Friends sell when deciding which movies to see.

We're selling every single day.

In a customer review for my book, [*Teaching College*](#), one reader praised it but recoiled at comparisons to selling. This, despite the fact that I incorporated marketing terms like *target audience*, *ideal customer profile*, and *unique selling proposition* throughout.

We have this hang-up when it comes to *selling*. But if it's about moving others, then isn't selling the essence of great teaching?

I'd love to hear your thoughts.