

**Flipping the classroom with trade talk tales: Creative nonfiction writing
and theatre productions of customer-marketer interactions**

Abstract

This study describes creative nonfiction storytelling and in-class theatre productions of the tales as learning modules for advancing students' knowledge, skills, and insights of marketing-buying theory and practice. This study presents the learning theory, procedures, tactics, and learning outcomes from a wide-ranging (involving students and their instructors in seven universities across four continents), five-month long student creative writing and theatre "showings" projects. The projects focus on learning-by-doing in the processes of nonfiction storytelling creations and drama enactments by trainees as ways of individualizing learning and developing high-order thinking-doing skills. By creating dialogues among participants in these reports, many of these trade tales are convertible into short theatrical plays which are suitable for in-class productions. The creations of marketer-buyer dialogues-in-context and productions achieve dramatic impacts on engaging students in learning marketing principles and how marketing-buying encounters end well, and sometimes badly, and the long-run effects of both outcomes

Keywords: andragogy; buyer; creative writing; marketing theory; seller; service associate; storytelling

Flipping the classroom with trade tales: Creative nonfiction writing and theatre productions of customer-marketer interactions

Storytelling is not a monologue. It is a dialogue, a sharing of ideas and experiences, and it is central to teaching and learning.

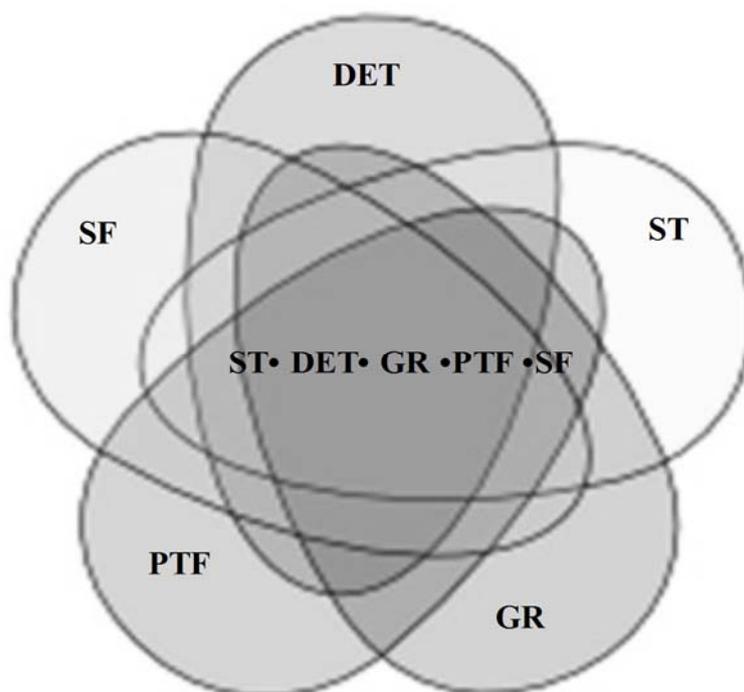
(Donald Smith, in Ross, 2008)

Introduction

The driving proposition of this study is that flipped, in-class learning experiences combining story-telling, drama and enactment, peer feedback supported by learning rubrics (also called grading rubrics) results in highly effective learning by students (including higher engagement levels concomitant with fun, improved retention, improved skill levels and behavioural changes). This study proposes that configurations all five these training conditions (storytelling (ST); drama enactment b trainees (DET), grading rubrics(GR), peer and tutor feedback (PTF), self-managed reflection(SF)), associate with highly effective learning (EL). “Effective learning” is achieving trainee improved knowledge and skills in and application of a discipline’s theoretical concepts (MTC), performance in assessment, as well as advancement in soft skills (SS) (such as presentation and persuasion skills) and the development of higher order thinking skills (HOT). Figure 1 shows the five andragogy steps conjunctively and illustrates the Boolean Algebraic recipe:

ST•DET•GR•PTF•SF→EL OR ST•DET•GR•PTF•SF→MTC•SS•HOT

Figure 1: Configuration of Conditions for Highly Effective Learning (EL)



The mid-level dot (•) indicates the conjunctive “AND” (Ragin, 1997) and EL is computed to equal the lowest fuzzy set value (between 0.00– 1.00; with 1 indicating full membership of the set and 0 indicating fully out of the set) of the five treatment conditions in the experiment as a causal unit. Thus, if DET = 0.2; ST = 0.45; GR = 0.6, PTF= 0.99 and SF = 0.35, then EL= 0.2 (Similar Boolean algebraic expression for EL, MTC•SS•HOT).

The Research & Education Domain

Towards the end of 2015, a team of educators from formal tertiary colleges and universities across several national (Australia, New Zealand, Spain, Taiwan, and USA) recognized the potential of educational drama (in-class theatre) (de Villiers & Botes, 2014; Yanow, 2001), storytelling (Alterio & McDrury, 2003; Barrett, 2006) and learning from teaching (peer review and joint reflection) (Showers & Joyce, 1996) as competency development tools to aid in the development of soft skills for business students, learning marketing principles and the application of theoretical frameworks and models to marketing-buying encounters service recovery experiences. Together, as an informal

alliance, seven educators tested a structure approach to teaching through learning, allowing students to use uniquely personal learning encounters to co-create knowledge and insight, in a formally assessed project. Several extrinsic incentives (such as grades and the chance for students' trade tales to be published) were used to motivate active engagement and promote excellent effort.

In 2016 the instructors came together (in virtual space) to create a set of common, standardized instructions, assessments supported by marking rubrics (Stevens & Levi, 2013) and to refine their thinking and collaborative endeavours. The result was the creation of the "Trade Tales Team", who set out to research new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Although schools were not synchronized in terms of start and end dates, the five-month period allowed for enough flexibility to accommodate the various teaching calendars and assessment schedules. (Not all participating schools structured the project as a graded, formal assessment, and not all schools made the project compulsory. For most lower-level undergraduate papers the projects were formal and graded, whereas the majority of high-level and post-graduate papers allowed students the freedom of choice to participate for extra grades). Learning is centred around the stories students produced, with educators in each country taking full responsibility for co-ordinating the projects in his/her school. Teaching resources such as the assignment instructions, "AbsolutelyBestHam Story" (as example to all participants), and the marking rubric (for those who elected to use the project as formal, graded assignment) was shared by all educators.

The participating students

The first collaborative project called Trade Tale Stories, started in January 2016 and was built around students' written accounts of positive and negative service encounters. The project aimed to allow students to reflect after action on the impact of the service staff's behaviour and their responses to consumers' buying behaviour and service failures – and in

a rare few cases brand loyal customers' moments of elation. This format empowered students to act as independent learners and expert consumers, well-versed in their own needs, demands and desires. Written encounters were recorded and shared with co-located students in informal teams. The aim was to allow students to verbalize their thoughts, to hear alternative views and perceptions on the events and interactions, and to reflect on their own interpretation of the response of service staff, through the eyes of their peers. Students self-selected a small group of two or three classmates to give impromptu feedback on two or three stories during a one-hour tutorial. The small team of students selected one of the three stories to enact (role-play), in an attempt to provide them with real insight into the emotive impact of the event/incident, to engage students as whole-person learners in experiential learning (De Villiers & Botes, Satoshi Meditari), and to allow team mates to indicate the response they might have expected from the service staff/marketer.

Participating students accessed the marking rubric and provided formative feedback to the storytellers on which elements to improve for clarity, engaging nature of the story, and alternatives and (more or less likely) responses acceptable to a diverse range of consumers. This helped the authors of the trade tales to compose the second part of the assignment, namely the shallow assessment and suggested multi-choice solutions to the event/incident. Students were given additional time to process the information, access the textbook and additional authoritative sources relevant to their marketing dilemma or consumer interaction event. This provided them with knowledge and insight to produce the third section of the assignment, namely the "deep" assessment.

The andragogy/ student project

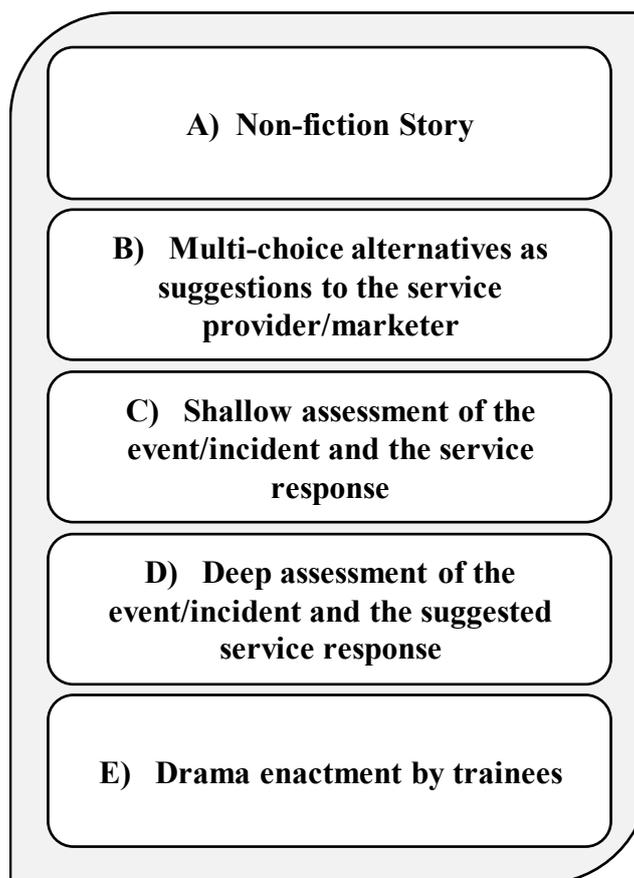
The primary focus of the project is to use storytelling and enactment as methodology

and bridge between marketing theory and practice. In the words of Rotmann and co-authors (2015, p. 114), “Storytelling could therefore also be identified as a response to a situation characterized by an appreciation of lack of certainties, by the existence of multiple perspectives through the interaction of multiple types of actors and, consequently, critiques and by the appreciation that any single solution or ‘silver bullet’ to tackle problems as and when they arise is absent.” The complex challenge of achieving behaviour change and improved understanding of complex service encounters and consumer decision processes have exactly these characteristics. A further educational focus was to ensure learners’ appreciation of the utility and value of reflection (Duijnhouwer, Prins, & Stokking, 2012; Hinsz, Tindale, & Vollrath, 1997; Yanow, 2001) and feedback from peers and experts (de Villiers, 2013; Leelawong, Davis, Vye, Biswas, Schwartz, et al., 2002; Mutch, 2003).

Many scholars report on the role of whole-person learning, educational drama (de Villiers & Botes, 2014; Sugahara, Dellaportas, Sugao, Masaoka, de Villiers, & Samkin 2016). Schank (1995) and Weick (1988) emphasize that learning new skills requires practice and opportunities to make mistakes and repeat doing necessary tasks multiple times. This repetition allows students to acquire unconscious, tacit, implicit knowledge as well as explicit, conscious knowledge, skills and attitudes to execute steps accurately. Woodside & Coleman (2011) defines drama enactments by trainees (DETs) as verbal and contextual exchanges by two or more trainees in customer–server dramas usually in the presence of trainee observers and trainers.

Thus, the project was structured as four highly related components, as set out in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Five components to the student assignment



The project was structured to provide students with multiple opportunities to think and rethink the story, their suggested solutions (how the marketer should have responded or how the marketer should improve their offering in the future) and find support from credible, authoritative sources for their multi-choice alternative solutions (see B in figure 1). These interactions with fellow students and knowledge sources provided them with new insights to improve their initial, uninformed shallow assessment (component C in Figure 1), to the more informed deep assessment (component D in Figure 1) and thus employ some higher order thinking skills (Jones, & Sanguedolce 2014). Appendix A provide an example of a transformation of a Trade Tale into a short play for in-classroom production (component E).

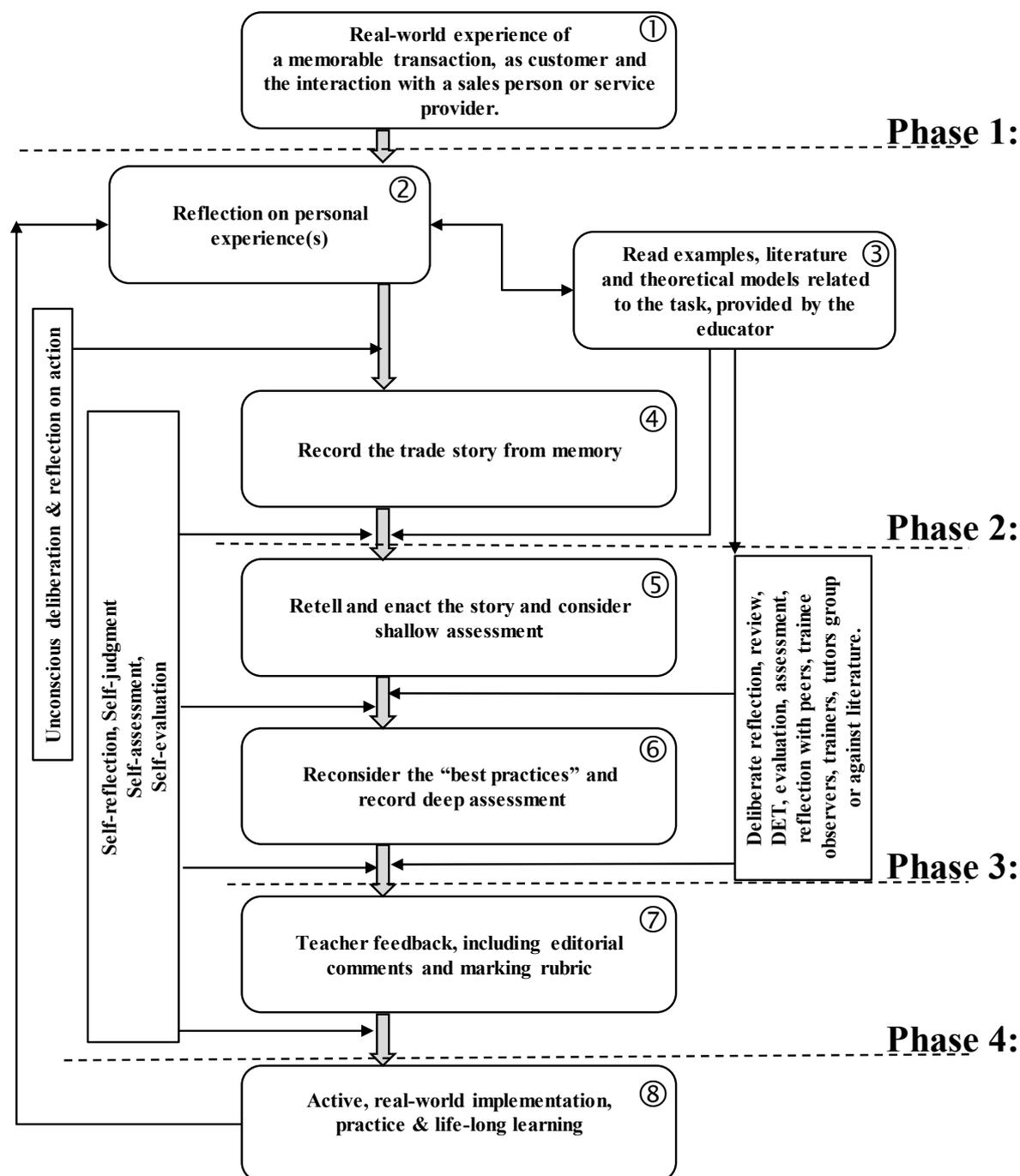
Learning Process & Hermeneutic Skills Development Process

This assignment is founded on three key learning outcomes. Students will: (1) develop abilities to reflect on action in order to improve as critical thinkers, (2) improve their understanding of service and service recovery principles in marketing, and (3) develop written and oral communication skills in order to persuade peers and experts of their stance on particular marketing problems and suggested solutions. This action learning study takes the form of an “inverted” (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000) or “flipped” (Bergman & Sams, 2012) classroom. The flipped classroom takes the focus off of the instructor and puts it on students so that they actively engage in learning. Flipped classrooms can take many forms (Bergman & Sams, 2012), and what usually takes place within the classroom may take place outside of the classroom (Lage et al., 2000).

In this exercise, students are asked to write a story (see Terkel’s (1997)) of a memorable transaction or encounter (see Phase 1 and 2, of figure 3) where they were the customer interacting with a sales person or service provider. They are asked to describe in as much detail as possible, everything that went on during the encounter. Students can choose an event with positive, negative, and/or mixed outcomes. Participating instructors name these “Trade Talk Stories.” The distinct phases and action steps are shown in Figure 1 and discussed below.

Figure 3 about here.

Figure 3: Eight Step Iterative Process of Learning from Personal Introspection, Enactment & Peer Teaching



Four-Phased Process

In order to scaffold the flipped learning process (Berrett, 2012) and ensure that students have the requisite sources, foundation knowledge, and entry-level skills to aid in their learning process, the assignment was divided into three distinct phases. Phase 1

comprised a short workshop on story writing, subjective personal introspection (SPI), and auto-ethnography as research methods (Canniford, 2005; Holbrook, 2005, 2006; Rod, 2011; Woodside, 2004), supported by online materials with examples of trade stories and reflective writing. In phase 2, students wrote their stories, “slept on it” to aid deliberate incubation, reviewed their own stories after the incubation period, and shared stories with peers in small teams of two to three students (Latulipe, Long, & Seminario, 2015). In phase 3, students handed in their stories for feedback from the instructor and reviewed the editorial comments. Post-project, students get into the habit of auto-ethnographically reviewing their consumer experiences and with continuous reflection on their own actions and those of their friends, family members, and observed strangers. Instructors refer to the Trade Tales at appropriate times during the course work to extract examples of service and service recovery strategies and tactics.

Twelve Steps in Hermeneutic Skills Development Intervention

Step 1: The first step happens before the class and is recorded in the memory of the student due to its high emotional impact.

Step 2: During the first class, students are introduced to the assignment and given a brief opportunity to recollect an incident and share it verbally with small group team members in class. Students focus on their own actions and feelings as consumers during a positive or negative service interaction. Teams include two or three students who have little or no direct impact on each other's final grades (Latulipe, Long, & Seminario, 2015). Students are urged to provide positive, critical comments to their peers on clarity, relatability, and the suggested solutions.

Step 3: Students attend a short tutorial where service-dominant logic (Lusch & Vargo, 2006; 2014); the “flower of services” (Lovelock, 1992; 2003, p. 342), story writing (Biggs, 1998; Woodside, Sood & Miller, 2008), and “auto-ethnography” which involves the

researcher's lived experiences (Canniford, 2005). The expected assignment format is also discussed. Students are given examples of the grading rubric (available upon request), and a Trade Talk Story (available to conference attendees). This recollection aided by theoretical models, frameworks, and knowledge from journal articles allows learners to make new links to prior knowledge and students' lived experiences. The assignment instructs students to, "Write about either a very happy trade talk experience or a disappointing trade talk experience. The story should have ups and downs (failures, surprises) to provide enough nuance to analyze and enough variance to allow for multiple solutions."

Step 4: Students formally record their story in the format provided and receive two weeks to reflect upon and deliberate their actions, emotions, and suggested solutions for the marketer (this other side of the service interactions). Students are asked to, "Give your unconscious mind time to revise, lengthen and add the deep meanings into your story." Their recorded assignment, supporting the Trade Talk story, needed to include a "shallow assessment". In other words, a variety alternative solutions the consumer might recommend to the marketer to enhance or improve the service interaction.

Step 5: Before students submit their assignment, they also have to suggest solutions and record a "short surface assessment" of the solutions. This step allows students to link to prior knowledge and make connections between explicit models and the authoritative readings provided in the tutorial.

Step 6: The assignment includes rating their own multi-choice solutions and a more in-depth "deep assessment" of their own suggested solutions. The purpose of this additional step is to deliberately force students to access tacit knowledge, self-evaluate their alternative solutions, and reconsider "best practices" they have experienced from alternative service providers, resulting in higher order learning outcomes (as per Bloom's Taxonomy of learning) (Bloom, 1956).

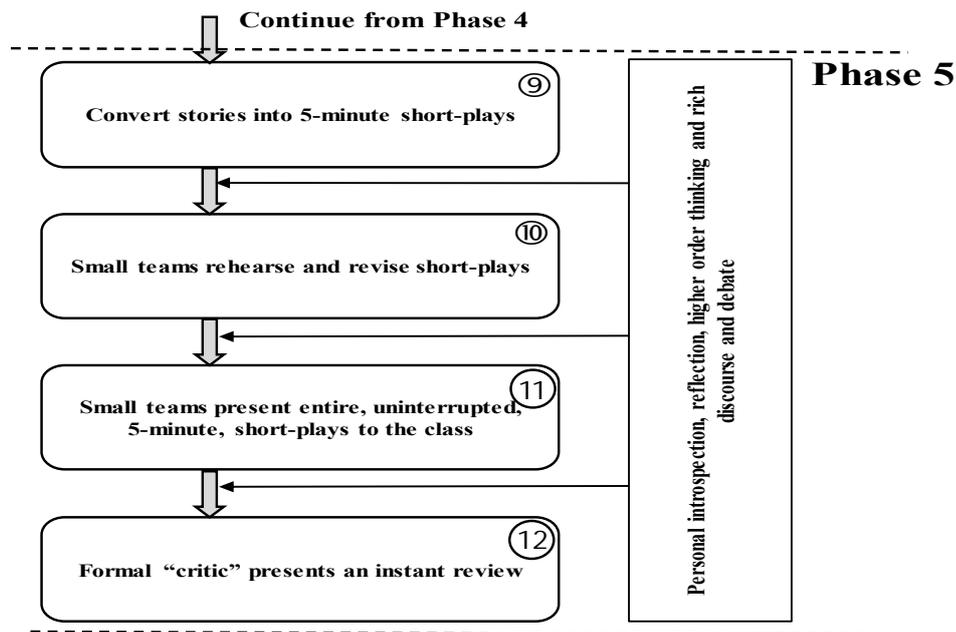
Step 7: Students submit their Trade Talk Stories via the online submissions system. The Consumer Behaviour instructor provides authentic, situational feedback via the grading rubric and editorial comments to each story (De Villiers, 2012). The editorial comments are specifically and resolutely linked to the learning outcomes and particular discipline knowledge in this paper.

Step 8: Students are invited to add comments to the class blog and discussion forums on “further thoughts” and “new insights” as the class progresses through the consumer decision-making and service related topics in the paper. The lecturer refers to the stories in class at appropriate times and highlights the links to the particular examples from the students’ work, related to the topic under discussion (for that week).

Additional Steps

Completing four additional steps are valuable to complete to bring Trade Tales to life in the classroom. Flipping the class and involving the entire class in the discussion which follows the drama enactment, allow for deep and rich discussions. These four steps involve the creation of both expressed and non-expressed conscious thinking as dialogue with other and with self. Learning outcomes are: improved understanding and application of theoretical frameworks; insight into the variety of perspectives and arguments from various consumer perspective; and making sense of the complexity of dealing with diverse consumer segments.

Figure 5: Phase 5 – Drama enactment by trainees (DET)



Step 9: Students convert stories into short-plays (e.g., 5-minute productions). Each short-play includes creating two—or-more persons’ conversations and one-person self-dialogues (similar to the Billy Idol’s (singer) *Dancing with Myself*).

Step 10: A team of 3-to-5 students rehearse/revise each short-play. Rehearsing the short-play (i.e., bringing the play to life) nearly always causes revisions and additions to the dialogues in the play as well as improvements in the delivery of actors’ lines in the play.

Step 11: Each student team presents a complete production (no stopping and no interruptions during the production) of the short-play.

Step 12: A “formal critic” presents an instant review of the production followed by entire class discussion of play’s contents, production, and lessons learned. The formal critic is a trainee (student) pre-assigned the role of critic. The formal critic receives instruction to (1) identify the focal issue presented in the play, (2) how the issue was resolved, (3) likely long-time impact of the issue on the marketer-customer relationship in the play, (4) two key lessons learned from the play, (5) an “exciting moment” in the play. The formal critic receives instruction not to focus her/his critique on the acting qualities of actors in the play.

Outcomes

The enactments provided learning-by-doing opportunities, the chance for students to generate alternatives, thus developing high-order thinking-doing skills and flipped the classroom away from a teacher-centred telling style, to a student-centred discovery style.

Additional empirical research is necessary, but initial reports by educators, class representatives and feedback from students- in the form of verbal feedback and unsolicited e-mails) indicates multiple benefits, ranging from “fun”, to “helped me to understand the theory better”, through “motivated me to try my best” and ultimately to “it made my rethink my aggressive response and perhaps unfair demands from the rep”. One student wrote a highly emotive email in which she reports to have been inspired to “spend some more time researching assignments, because it is clear that feedback from real people and even my classmates can improve my reports. For once I got what the theory meant and how to apply it to some of my own experiences in my life as shopper. By the way, I love shopping but will do it with new eyes and a new mind. Maybe I should do even more shopping”. (The latter perhaps not quite the result we hoped for, but as marketers we are not complaining too much about that result either.)

Thus, the initial student reports on their learning experiences support the central proposition for effective flipped learning through teaching and peer feedback. The combination of storytelling (ST); drama enacted training (DET), grading rubrics (GR), peer and tutor feedback (PTF), self-managed reflection(SF), will does appear to associate with highly effective learning (EL) and thus to provide a proposition for further research and field experiments.

❧ The End ❧

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Appendix A: Conversion of Trade Tale Story into Short-Play

The Drama “Jessica Serves Not” (Woodside & Coleman, 2011): Arch arrives at the Iram-Tuxley Inn1 in Montreal in September and approaches the reception desk with his wheelie luggage and a thick worn briefcase. Time at his arrival is 12:30 PM.

[Arch says to self, “I’m happy to be at hotel early. Maybe I can take a nap this afternoon.”]

Jessica looks at Arch and says, “Welcome to the IramTuxley Inn. May I help you?”

[Jessica says to self, “This guy is a bum; clothes are wrinkled and wheelie’s cloth is frayed and the wheelie with a broken wheel.”]

Arch, “Yes, I have a reservation, the name is, ‘Woodside’.”

Jessica looks at computer screen and responds, “Check in is at 3 PM. You will have to wait. Sorry. But you can use a computer around the corner in the lobby to go on-line while you wait.” Arch, “That’s fine. Thank you.”

[Arch says to self, “Jessica never acknowledged my reservation; I hope that she noticed that my reservation is for two nights. No big deal about waiting to 3 PM. I can easily kill two hours responding to e-mail messages.”].

Jessica, “By the way, your room rate is \$125.00 per night and not the \$140.00 per night that was quoted to you.”

Arch, “Great! Thanks.”

[Arch to self, “Strange that the rate is going to be lower than what I agreed to pay for. Why would Jessica offer a lower rate to me when I already reserved the room and after my arrival?”].

Three computers and chairs are located out-of-sight of the front desk but just steps-away around a wall separating the receptionist desk from the computer area.

Arch goes around corner, out-of-sight of reception desk, and sees three computer monitors on a long table with three chairs. He sits at the middle computer and begins to move computer mouse. Screen asks for password. [Arch says to self, “Strange that Jessica would send me to computers that require password without the password. Christ, how annoying!”].

Arch picks up luggage and returns to front desk and waits 5minutes as Jessica waits on a customer checking into the hotel. Check-in customer is asking for a room with a view.

Then Arch speaks to Jessica, “The computer screen is asking me for a password.” Jessica, “ll come right over and log you on.”

Arch, “Thanks.”

Arch returns to the computer to wait for Jessica.

[Arch asks self, “Why couldn’t Jessica just give me the password number. Maybe the hotel policy is not give-out the password to customers.”].

Arch waits 10 minutes at computer for Jessica while he reads a newspaper. [Arch says to self, “How annoying! Where’s Jessica?”].

Arch returns to front desk and waits 5 minutes as Jessica serves an arriving customer. Check-in customer asks what time is checkout. Customer wants to know where breakfast is served. Arch's turn arrives and stands before Jessica and stares at her and he does not speak.

Jessica tells Arch, "I cannot come to the computers; here is the password for the computers."

Jessica writes password on slip of paper and hands it to Arch.

Arch responds to Jessica, "Thanks."

Arch returns to computer and types in password. Goes to his workplace website and checks e-mail. [Arch says to self, "What the f___ was that? Why couldn't Jessica just give the password to me when I arrived?"]

QUESTIONS FOR IN-CLASS DISCUSSION

The use of computer in lobby was a major topic of three separate conversations between Arch and Jessica. Why did Jessica send Arch to lobby computers without the password? Wait time for Arch to get password in minutes: Why was Arch not password worthy? Does this drama suggest changes are necessary in conversation transactions by service workers and customers at Iram-Tuxley Inn? If yes, describe changes that you might suggest. If not, explain reasons for maintaining conversational protocol in the drama. Why did Jessica indicate a lower hotel price rate to Arch? Is Arch likely to return to the Iram-Tuxley Inn? Explain your answer.

Drama productions of "Jessica Serves Not" (Woodside & Coleman, 2011) were completed in the spring semester 2011 at Boston College and Salem State University. Students volunteered for the following roles: (1) Arch, (2) Arch's alter ego, (3) Jessica, (4) Jessica's alter ego, (5) additional customers waiting in line, (6) director of the play, (7) prop supervisor, and (8) producer. The following comments include the written summaries from discussions by audience members to the two drama enactments: [Customer] Appearance is important – broken wheel, wrinkled suit; Poor customer service is going to equal unsatisfied customers; Be empathetic; Negative emotions can set a tone; Training is key – front line; Treat customers the same; What people say may not be what they are thinking. Students' individual verbatim responses included the following responses: Bad customer service will result in bad news; No flexibility with tired customer equals no return customer; Should have been more courteous and given more attention, that would be key, be more sympathetic; Jessica is at the front line of their service and she gives the customer Arch a negative impression, she is either poorly trained or incompetent; Appearances can affect the service a customer receives; People do not say what they are thinking; Ask for all your needs before you leave the counter, desk receptionists are always busy; Appearance is important; She was a bit rude; He should have known check-in time prior to arrival; What people say may not be what they are thinking; Customer service was not great; Seems Arch was annoyed and rightfully so; Jessica did not treat Arch with a lot of respect maybe because she thought he looked like a "bum"; Jessica should have given Arch the password before she sent him to the computer; There is no necessity for the hotel to lower the price after the customer has already accepted the price; Jessica as a customer service person should not judge her customers on their appearances; Bad customer service; Treat customers the same; Jessica needs proper training; Jessica should have had better customer service and been more assertive to Arch; Jessica needed more training; Jessica treated Arch based on his appearance, she should treat every customer the same regardless of appearance; She did not check back in with customer while he was waiting; She was not sincere with the customer upon their arrival; Employee needs training on customer service; Negative emotions can set the tone for service; Poor customer service can lead to non-repeat customer; Treat everyone the same; Poor customer service ¼ unsatisfied customer; Unnecessary waiting annoys

customers; One unpleasant experience can change entire view of a company; and Arriving on time is sometimes a good situation.

STUDENTS' RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE IRAM-TUXLEY INN FOLLOWING THE DRAMA ENACTMENTS

The students provided the following key recommendations to Iram-Tuxley Inn's management following the two productions of the drama. Arch is unlikely to return to the Iram-Tuxley Inn. Protocol necessary that all customers with reservations should receive written slip with password for use of lobby computers upon their arrival at front desk. Why would a hotel reduce the room price when a customer arrives when the customer does not ask for a rate reduction? Hard to justify this action.

STUDENTS' EVALUATIONS OF THE DRAMA ENACTMENTS

Written anonymous evaluations of the drama enactment were consistently positive to highly positive. Most students included suggestions for future productions of the "Jessica Servesy Not" and all responded favorable to including the drama in future semester courses. Suggestions included allotting time to memorize lines; creating alternative versions of the drama to show how the meetings could have been done well versus poorly. The class discussions following the drama enactments led to the decision for students to individually, or in groups of four to five students, write and produce their own recent experiences as customer-server enactments. This creative work included filming productions of new dramas and relating the lines in the conversations in the dramas to journal readings on buyer-seller interactions.