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## ***Open Circle: Playing coexistence in ten movements***

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### **Abstract**

The central focus of this article is *Open Circle*, a play written by Esther Uria-Iriarte that follows Arts Based Research (ABR) methods in theatrically interpreting the results of a doctoral research study carried out in four secondary schools in The Basque Country of Spain. The research aims to analyze the implications of theatre as a methodological strategy for the improvement of coexistence in secondary students of The Basque Country. *Open Circle* is accompanied by the relevant theoretical foundations that supports the ABR methodology and the aesthetic strategies applied to writing the play. In an intercalated way, we present various fragments of the theatrical work that reflect the researcher's feelings during the research process, including her difficulties and

vulnerability in working with adolescent participants, as well as her frustrations in facing the contradictions in her research results.

Key words: Arts-based research, dramatizing data, theatre-based research, coexistence, secondary education.

***First movement (a)***<sup>1</sup>

[The stage starts illuminating with a song. In every transition throughout, during a change in movement, a musical piece will play. The audience's space is semi-circular and contains different areas: a Supervisor's office composed of two chairs and a school context represented by a tower of hooked chairs.]

**Esther:** Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am the author and a character of this research-based play that I don't know how to write. [She moves into the space representing the Supervisor's office.] Nothing. I do not feel like dramatizing anything.

**Supervisor:** Good.

**Esther:** [To the audience] That's all? Isn't he going to tell me anything else? If I say this to him, it is for him to tell me the opposite...

**Supervisor:** That is what you told me, isn't it? That we better forget about the dramatization.

**Esther:** [To the audience] Okay, okay... And that's it? [To the Supervisor] Well... The truth is that I need motivation, I don't know. An external stimulus. Someone to tell me "come on."

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<sup>1</sup> *Characters:* **Andrea, Raquel, Lorena, Mikel, Pablo, Jon, Carlos, Diego** (Group of teenagers); **Esther** (Researcher and program's facilitator); **Monica** (Canadian academic supervisor); **Supervisor** (Spanish thesis Supervisor); **Agoras** (representing the academy); **Cuanticus** (representing quantitative methodology); **Socorro** (facilitating collaborator); **Teacher 1; Teacher 2.**

**Supervisor:** Okay. Then “come on.”

**Esther:** [To the audience] Like that... “come on.” As if it were that easy... [To the Supervisor] And what do I tell?

**Supervisor:** You already know.

**Esther:** Give voice to the data... Let the data speak... That is what Monica told me in Canada. But how do I match the academic with acting?

**Supervisor:** Can there be a character called “Academicus”?

**Esther:** Yes, a similar character... But, how do I present the results without falling into a mere academic description? [She moves into a central space and addresses the audience.] I want to run away from here, do you know? This is an awful mess... But it is as if I had audience; Monica by my side all the time, whispering in my ear.

[Monica gets out of the audience and sits by her side.]

**Monica:** Talk to your data.

**Esther:** What?

**Monica:** Yes. Dramatize your data.

**Esther:** The quantitative and the qualitative?

**Monica:** Is your research not about coexistence? Then put your data in coexistence on the stage.

**Esther:** I don’t understand.

**Monica:** Frame your work. You have literature that sustains it.

[A man appears among the audience dressed in a Greek tunic and holding two books.]

**Greek man:** [Clears his throat.] Let me see... Am I missing anything?

**Esther:** Who are you?

**Greek man:** Well... You being the author, you should know that, shouldn't you?

**Esther:** Let's see... [Looking at the audience sideways] But we must follow the theatrical convention. Therefore, as a character, I shouldn't know who you are.

**Greek man:** Well, well... I am who represents your Supervisor's idea. The one he referred to as "Academicus." You, I mean, the author has given me another name: Agoras.

**Esther:** Do you like it? Or do you prefer the other name?

**Agoras:** I would have preferred being called Einstein, or David Lynch even, but now that the play has supposedly been written already...

**Esther:** Let me introduce you to Monica.

**Monica:** [She extends her hand to Agoras.] *Nice to meet you.*<sup>2</sup>

**Agoras:** Enchanted. Let us go to the point, then. What is that about dramatizing the data?

**Monica:** Art Based Research. An emerging movement. Another way of researching. This theatre, this play is all part of the research. I hope that, when it is finished, you will know something more than what you believe you know and do not know. It's like "being in an area of not knowing how it is you know something."<sup>3</sup>

**Agoras:** Excuse me? [He starts glancing at the book.] I suppose that it is a hippy movement... [Talking to himself] Here it does not say anything about it...

**Esther:** Maybe you could include it in the next edition, couldn't you?

**Agoras:** [Clears his throat.] We will see, we will see.... My publishing house is a little scrupulous. But at the end, you are the author, thus, it will depend on how you finish your play.

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<sup>2</sup> In the original Spanish version, the expression in italics appears in English.

<sup>3</sup> (Gallagher, 2011, p.325)

**Esther:** This play is not going to be finished by me... This represents the unfinished, the question. [To the audience] It is you who will decide how to end this.

**Agoras:** [Clears his throat.] I would love to see how this play continues. Interesting, yes... [He goes to a corner of the stage talking to himself.] Art based research... I am so eager to retire...

**Monica:** Will you know how to explain it to your Supervisor?

**Esther:** I have him waiting in the future, and I think he's already convinced.

**Monica:** I'm so glad. *It's great!*<sup>4</sup>

### **Introduction**

This is the beginning of the play *Open Circle* representing research carried out between 2014-2018 within the framework of a doctoral thesis analyzing the implications and contributions of theatre as methodological strategy for the improvement of coexistence processes among Basque<sup>5</sup> secondary students.

In the Spanish educational context, the development of *School Coexistence Plans*<sup>6</sup> is prescriptive within each school. Thus, in 2000, the Basque Educational Department put special emphasis on this issue and elaborated guidelines and strategies to promote peace and coexistence. In this context, we considered it essential to articulate an alternative and preventive drama-based program that would be coherent with these coexistence plans. Theatre—as the mirror of human behavior and as the “seeing place” (the meaning of the Greek word *theatron*) in which one may practice

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<sup>4</sup> In the original Spanish version, the expression in italics appears in English.

<sup>5</sup> The Basque Country is a Spanish autonomous community located in the north-eastern of Spain and which contains its own and a strong cultural and linguistic (Basque) identity.

<sup>6</sup> The *School Coexistence Plan* is part of the Spanish Educational Project. It is a document that establishes the criteria, aims and procedures by which the educational community of the school determines the procedures for prevention, actions and evaluation to foster coexistence.

new realities—offers an ideal setting for students. They become active actors in their own lives, rehearsing citizenship that envisages both its rights and duties.

In total, 135 students of 2nd secondary grade (the 8th grade in North America) participated in this research. The selection of the schools was carried out through the Basque Government Education Department which provided us contact with four secondary schools. The program development was considered pertinent due to coexistence problems among students detected at these four schools. These problems included students' rejection of learning, inappropriate treatment of one another, and disruptive and aggressive behaviors. The selected institutions were public schools belonging to the linguistic model D (learning in Basque language). When compared to the Basque Country average, each were characterized as having a higher percentage of foreign and repeating students.

The implementation of a 16 sessions' intervention program was developed during curricular hours. Its nuclear axis represented the use of drama as a pedagogical tool to promote those intrapersonal and interpersonal skills related to coexistence.

The play represents my [Esther] feelings during this program and research process, including my difficulties and vulnerability in working with adolescent participants, as well as my frustrations in facing the contradictions in my research results. The script was presented in a Reader's Theatre format (Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 2008; Vanover, 2015) in my dissertation defense.

Open Circle is a choral play structured in 10 movements, in which 16 characters appear. I have used composite characters to represent teenagers, collaborators, and teachers. Each adolescent character presents a different profile of the group from the program's sessions. Likewise, Socorro represents the character composed of the five collaborators who participated voluntarily in the program, as assistants of the facilitator

(Esther). The two teacher characters represent the eight profiles of teachers who participated in the process. The phrases spoken by these characters are extracted from interviews or conversations I wrote in my diary. There are parts of this text that have been adapted, and other parts are literally scripted as the words were spoken by the participants.

Some characters are real, like Supervisor, Monica, and Esther (me). The dramatic text includes literal sentences the Supervisor and Monica shared with me in conversations and emails, as well as my reflections extracted from my diary. In the same way, abstract entities such as the academy or the quantitative-positivist current are embodied by concrete characters, such as Agoras and Cuanticus respectively.

***First movement (b)***

[From the audience, Carlos, a teenager, raises his hand.]

**Carlos:** I don't want to be here.

**Esther:** Why?

**Carlos:** Because I don't like theater. And I don't want to participate. So, if you don't mind, I would prefer to leave...

[Teacher 1 gets up from the audience and addresses him.]

**Teacher 1:** Why do you not want to participate?

**Carlos:** I don't like it.

**Teacher 1:** Why don't you try it? Come on, you will like it.

**Carlos:** Because I don't want to and that's it.

**Teacher 1:** Okay... But you have to be doing something in the meantime, don't you? I will give you books to write summaries.

**Agoras:** Look, I can lend you this one. [Shows one of his thick books.]

**Carlos:** I don't care. Give it to me.

[Agoras gives him one of his books and Carlos goes to a corner of the scene. He will stay there during the whole play, reading and writing.]

### **Meeting with Arts Based Research: A turning point**

At the beginning of this research journey, I [Esther] could not have imagined where my journey would lead, nor the different turning points ahead. One of these marked a before and after in my academic development: my discovery of arts- based research (ABR) (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Hernández-Hernández, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Leavy, 2009; Prendergast & Belliveau, 2012). During my semester at the University of Victoria in Canada (organized through the Researchers' Mobility Program of the University of the Basque Country), Dr. Monica Prendergast—as my academic supervisor—introduced me to this new research methodology, ABR, and the challenge of presenting my research as a dramatic play, as well as reframing the drama-based intervention program that I carried out as a research-based theatre project (Belliveau & Lea, 2016).

ABR constitutes a range of qualitative methods in which interpretation and representation consists, in part or whole, of elements that could be derived from any area of the arts (Barone, 2001; Barone & Eisner, 1997). According to Cole and Knowles (2008), ABR proposes redefining ways of representing research and creating a new comprehension of the process, considering its physical, emotional, social and cultural aspects: “That is, to connect the work of the academy with the life and lives of communities through research that is accessible, evocative, embodied, empathic, and provocative” (p. 60).

McNiff (2013) suggests that, due to its artistic nature, research based in the arts seems to instinctively incline itself towards uncertainty, complexity, tension, and even a certain degree of chaos (despite striving for the opposite): “Researchers are reluctant at the start to encapsulate their enquiries, sensing that they need the space and freedom to

‘find’ what needs to be done” (p. 9). Hence, the artistic expressions and results—instead of trying to be impartial, arouse feelings and, frequently, generate questions instead of answers or certainties (McNiff, 2014a). Blumenfeld-Jones (2014) asserts that “we must be concerned with rendering reality in ways that are effective not for message sending but for provoking thought” (p. 9). This research form is never completed and there is always more space for creating and widening the comprehension of the study (Belliveau, 2016).

With all this in mind, if the work is presented with artistic ability and methodological coherence, it can attain total legitimacy in the academic field (Crimmins, 2016). Thus, there is a growing number of researchers who craft poetic or performative narratives in order to represent the results of their research (Bleuer, Chin & Sakamoto, 2018; Jenkins, 2010; Prendergast & Belliveau, 2012; Saldaña, 2016). Writes Prendergast (2013), “All art forms offer each of us the chance to reflect more deeply on existence and self through the action and reception of creation” (p. 12).

Nevertheless, Knowles and Promislow (2008) assert that academic theses using the arts as methodologies can only be developed and successfully defended where there are institutional contexts supporting them. In this way, there are universities where these helpful circumstances exist, including in Canada, the United States, Australia, Great Britain, or Ireland. Prendergast (2008), Bishop (2014), Clement (2014), Lea (2013) or Beare (2011) are among the academics whose work has been internationally promoted through this support.

In Spain, ABR is still an emerging methodological stream. There exists an inter-universities doctoral collaboration program between the universities of Barcelona, Granada, Girona, and Complutense-Madrid and ABR is increasingly assuming a relevant role. In recent years, several authors, such as, Calderón-García (2015),

Caminha (2016), Fendler (2015), Genaro-García (2013), Mena de Torres (2014), and Ucker Perotto (2015), have presented theses that include ABR methodologies (in Suominen, Kallio-Tavin & Hernández-Hernández, 2017). In addition, we must mention the recent thesis contributions of Méndez-Martínez (2019) and the dissertation on which this article is based (Uria-Iriarte, 2018).

Even so, sometimes it is not easy to find such facilitating contexts, especially for doctoral students who “often feel pressure to accommodate more conventional professional and public standards” (McNiff, 2014b, p. 6). Therefore, and coming back at that time of my stay in Victoria, I found myself with this challenge of presenting my research following ABR. Even though Monica’s ideas are very much in line with my background and career path as a professional actor and theatre artist, I must admit that I was apprehensive. Her assertion that method be the verb form of the topic, putting the topic into action (in this case, dramatizing the data), disrupted the logic of my thesis which was following a more traditional (i.e. quantitative) academic route.

However, this is the nature of theatre. Mismatch is routine, as is continuous discovery; elements can clash and qualitatively “mess up” a quantitatively tidy life. As I sought coherence in my career trajectory, I had to assume this challenge. Thus, I then had to go through a long negotiation process with my Spanish thesis Supervisor<sup>7</sup> via Skype and email; one of explaining, exhaustively, what ABR meant to my prospective research by presenting enough supporting literature.

After several conversations, my thesis Supervisor considered himself, likewise, prepared to face the challenge proposed by Monica, and supported me in presenting my results dramatically. We “dared” to propose the dissertation’s discussion section as a

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<sup>7</sup> Javier Galarreta. Professor of the Faculty of Education, Philosophy and Anthropology and member of the Department of Didactics and School Organization, University of the Basque Country.

dramatic text; an approach that was totally new at the University of the Basque Country. This was not an easy task because, as Knowles and Promislow (2008) assert, the doctoral students and supervisors who work with approaches related to the arts face numerous challenges: an assumption of risk, facing the unknown and tolerance towards ambiguity. This was something that required a certain courage in a context where traditional research structures still predominate.

Furthermore, adopting ABR would prove even more challenging as this research was supposed to dramatize both quantitative and qualitative results. Since our research was based on mixed method approaches, it might seem paradoxical to present a quantitative methodology under the umbrella of ABR. However, Archibald and Gerber (2018) explore the potential of integrating arts with mixed methods research (MMR) and present some research cases as evidence: including them under a new concept, *Art-MMR Integration Continuum*. Here narrative or statistical data can be integrated with an artistic delivery modality. Bieri et al. (2013) are presented as a case example whereby art was used to disseminate quantitative and qualitative data with the purpose of “generate[ing] unique responses in each viewer, which allowed personalized meanings to be attributed to narrative and statistical findings” (Archibald and Gerber, 2018, p. 965). Therefore, we felt the need to pursue the “logic of coexistence” (Puig and Bisquerra, 2016, p. 43) between and amongst all methodologies, and to give them the opportunity to dialogue together on the stage.

### ***Third movement***

**Socorro:** And how do you measure coexistence?

**Esther:** So many questions, so many questions... [She moves into the office. To the Supervisor.] Let’s see... What do I say to her? Because measuring coexistence is really a complex matter.

[Playing the music of “20th Century Fox” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qDdYlyLRoI> A man with a measuring tape around his neck appears. It’s Cuanticus.]

**Cuanticus:** Behold that I am here, exactly here, empirically and evidently here, at a measurable and ascertainable distance from thee.

**Supervisor:** Have you heard anything?

**Esther:** Well... Coexistence is a multidimensional and polysemic term, isn’t it?

**Agoras:** Just a tiny thing... [Clears his throat.] Psychological and emotional benefits are hard to detect in students...<sup>8</sup> You have been warned.

**Esther:** I haven’t heard anything.

**Supervisor:** I can call Garaigordobil... Let’s see what he says... [Calls call as if he were on the phone.] Blah blah blah... Yes... Yes... Sure... Blah blah blah blah... Oh, is that so? Thank you. [Hangs up.]

**Supervisor:** She has used batteries of standardized tests.

**Cuanticus:** To use batteries of...

[Playing a drum roll.]

**Cuanticus:** ...Standardized teeeests!!! That is marvelous!!! [He claps with emphasis.]

**Esther:** [To Cuanticus] Hey! Don’t get so excited that you are going to have to share your space with qualitative instruments.

**Cuanticus:** So rude...

[Cuanticus begins to measure the group of teenagers that is still among the audience.]

**Cuanticus:** Let us see... Self-concept, emotional intelligence, empathy, assertiveness, prosociality, conflict resolution, perception of satisfaction within the group<sup>9</sup> [Towards Supervisor’s office] Could you not have thought of more concepts to measure?

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<sup>8</sup> (Onieva López, 2011)

<sup>9</sup> (Garaigordobil, 2012)

[Esther returns to the central space where Socorro is. The circle of chairs is already set up. They both sit to wait. The light dims. Esther goes to the front of the stage and addresses the audience.]

**Esther:** Will the results be achieved? Measurable and ascertainable... verifiable and measurable...

**Cuanticus:** Oh, how do I love those words, my dear. Measurable and verifiable ... [To the audience] Repeat with me: measurable and verifiable results. Is it not marvelous?

[The group of teenagers and the two teachers-as go into scene and begin to make circles around Esther while they whisper again and again:]

**Choir:** Measurable and verifiable ... Measurable and verifiable ...

**Supervisor:** Go ahead!

[The choir gets paralyzed. Esther returns to the circle of chairs. Playing a school bell.]

**Esther:** Socorro, are you ready? [Socorro nods. Esther looks to the audience.] Am I ready? [Esther looks at the Supervisor.]

**Supervisor:** Come on!

**Esther:** [To the audience] The rollercoaster begins.

### **Dramatizing data**

*Open Circle*, in line with other authors' ABR (Bleuer, Chin & Sakamoto, 2018; Saldaña, 2016; Vanover, 2016), assumes dramatizing adaptations of the qualitative data or empirical materials, such as transcription of interviews, field notes, or written documents. These works may also include direct quotes from interviews and diaries. The play's text also incorporates the theoretical framework, the drama-based intervention program, the study's methodologies, the results of the research, the voices of all participants, and (especially) the subjective aspects of the researcher's experience.

As Leavy (2009) asserts, in social studies performative representation can be useful for many research purposes, including awareness, empowerment, emancipation, discovery, exploration, and education. Mienczakowski & Moore (2008) remind us that “performing data is an immensely powerful way of presenting research” (p. 453). Arts-based data representation may potentially contribute to providing greater access of research for audiences and, hence, a greater layer of empathy (Eisner, 1997; Hernández-Hernández, 2008).

Lea & Belliveau (2016) assert that when data is dramatized, researchers do not verbalize, but rather show the results of their research, through a three-dimensional (re)presentation of their data which moves us in space and time. Conrad (2016), in her extensive work with young people, affirms that a dissemination of arts-based practices has the potential to generate an empathic comprehension of young people’s experiences and what the researcher herself has experienced during the research process.

The dramatization of data allowed me to express my subjectivity in positioning myself as a “do-er”, or improviser, instead of “observer” Gallagher (2011, p. 326). According to McNiff (2014a), it is about showing not only the changes occurring in an intervention context: assuming “a willingness to enter dialogue where the researcher may be influenced and changed” (p. 257).

Creating this text was a journey whereby “writing up” my data as a play enabled me to observe myself doing, living, and thinking; in other words, rethinking and discovering my internal and external motivations. I entered a process of analysis, exploration, and revelation. This research process with its turns, turnarounds, changes, disappointments, joys and different points of arrival, all come together with the common aim of engaging the art of theatre as a platform to share knowledge and encourage change.

***Fourth movement***

**Supervisor:** Puberty...

**Esther:** Would you like me to give you a small preview of all the strategies I have used to gain teenagers' attention? Get the volume down, stay silent, wait, get out of the classroom...

[Esther walks towards the space representing school. The action on the stage is silent.

The group looks rowdy and Esther moves trying to catch their attention. She jumps, lies down, goes away, comes back, does charades, etc. Until she gets up a chair and shouts:]

**Esther:** SILENCE!!!

[The group freezes while looking at her.]

**Mikel:** [Whispering] Damn!

**Esther:** [While getting down from the chair] Now you know that I know how to shout. What's curious is that I shouted asking for silence...

**Agoras:** I almost had a heart attack...

**Esther:** You are not real, so you can't die.

**Agoras:** [To the audience] I believe she is not in a good mood...

**Esther:** [To the group] I feel very angry. Do you know what interruptions means to me?

**Group:** Yes.

**Esther:** No. [Pause] A volunteer?

**Mikel:** Me.

**Esther:** Try to come forward. [Esther stands as an obstacle and Mikel can't go forward.] This is the feeling of interruption to me.

**Agoras:** Interesting... You have embodied the concept of “interruption”. Learning that involves the body.<sup>10</sup>

**Esther:** Another one interrupting me...

**Agoras:** My apologies. Continue, continue... [To the audience] Such a temper...

**Lorena:** [To the audience] I mean... We are teenagers. According to the teachers, we should stay silent, without interrupting the class and be seated six hours a day without moving. Well, no. We are teenagers and it comes out like that... And it’s something we have to do, want it or not. So, it’s not that we do it on purpose, it’s just that it comes out like that.

**Esther:** [She walks to the front of the stage.] Well, I think that she is actually right. But it’s difficult for me... What to do? How to do it? [Esther starts walking around while repeating the same.] Email my Supervisor: I don’t know... This is a rollercoaster and I’m heading down, master... Sometimes I feel like *Miss Rottenmeier*<sup>11</sup> What can I do? [Hesitates but in the end, she gestures clicking “enter.”] Send. I’m exhausted.

[Socorro comes by with a pillow. Lies Esther down and places the pillow under her head. Socorro caresses her while Esther closes her eyes.]

[Playing “Loa loa”-a basque lullaby <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOoR1G5lvB4>]

**Agoras:** It is important to have the support of the circle of co-workers related to this kind of work.<sup>12</sup>

**Esther:** [She moves to the front.] This is extremely difficult... Being comfortable in an area of uncertainty.<sup>13</sup> I find my own difficulties and think that I’m no good at this...

**Cuanticus:** Honey, this looks like the Theater of the Depressed.

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<sup>10</sup> (Jara & Mantovani, 2008)

<sup>11</sup> Miss Rottenmeier is a character in the animated series of “Heidi”. She is an old woman, mature, severe, rigid and bitter that works as a governess.

<sup>12</sup> (Malekoff, 2004)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

**Esther:** I'd like to say something funny, but I can't right now...

**Agoras:** Should I tell a joke?

**Every other character of the play:** No!

**Agoras:** [Clears his throat. Takes Esther's hand and takes her to the office as he talks.]

Errors are unavoidable, particularly when working with groups of teenagers who can touch and stir a professional on the inside in many ways, and even cause episodes of rage. Anyway, if that rage is generated in a warm space, it is possible that the group of teenagers would prefer the heat of the anger to cold and controlled indifference.<sup>14</sup>

**Esther:** Do you think so? Or are you just saying it to cheer me up? [When they arrive at the office, Agoras leaves. Esther looks depressed.]

**Supervisor:** What are you feeling?

[Pause]

**Esther:** Incompetency...

### **Aesthetic decisions**

I [Esther] was aware that the decision to include so many characters made future staging difficult; however, having contemplated the Readers Theatre format (Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 2008; Vanover, 2015), I stopped thinking about the limitations and let myself be carried away by what the imagination and the body were asking to me.

But, how could we respect the aesthetics of a theatrical text, without falling into it becoming an academic text that reads as static and intellectual? It was necessary to find common places where the ABR and the rigors demanded by the academy could live together. In this way, honouring the academic context, I incorporated the voice of authors of literature through three strategies: footnotes, screen images, and the voice of the characters (especially Agoras). All this was done in an attempt to not fall into, as

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<sup>14</sup> (Malekoff, 2004)

Saldaña (2016) would say, a “talking heads” play (p. 35). My intention was to build a dynamic play dressed by aesthetic strategies such as active scene changes, scenic metaphors, using objects, music, humour, etc.

The stage directions act as relevant aesthetic proposals with the intention of visualizing the scene as accurately as possible through the written text. This exhaustive description responds to the need to consider both the poetics of the body and the image as elements that facilitate the staging of those feelings that the word, by itself, could not transmit. The image of what is not said speaks for itself and functions with the strength of a metaphor: images of the tower of hooked chairs, or water pouring over Esther (seen later on here). With all these creative choices, I included different dramatic strategies such as choral voice, still images, or slow motion.

The screen also plays an important role. In a hypothetical staging, the screen would contribute to bringing a special aesthetic force and movement to the play as it helps to expand the spatial and temporal dimensionality. Music is also fundamental and plays another character with its own identity: one accompanying and giving an aesthetic sense to what is happening in the scene. It could be said that the music—accompanied with lighting effects—reflects those feelings that I wanted to highlight during key situations of the research process.

The play does not follow a linear order: instead I followed the impulses of a non-chronological thought. It is, rather, a structure in the form of a puzzle. As we go about placing the pieces, we begin to understand the whole. Perhaps it is the structure that worked best for me when expressing my own ups and downs during the research process, and also representing the feeling of the emotional roller coaster that is a part of working with adolescents. I have played with the text to break with the conventions of

the theatre: blurring the dividing lines of audience and stage; playing theatre within the theatre; mixing fiction and reality.

Finally, it must be remarked that humour is used as a strategy permeating the entire text. For example, presenting Agoras and Cuanticus in a humorous way, responds to the need to break with solemnities and transgress structures. Paradoxically, humour opens a space for a critical analysis that only its own sharpness can provide.

Furthermore, humour has been a tool for being able to describe, in a comfortable way, those moments that are most painful in the research process, including not finding meaningful quantitative results in comparison within the more complex lived experience that is expressed through the drama.

### ***Eighth movement***

**Esther:** [To Cuanticus] Now, now it's your moment. Go ahead.

[Cuanticus begins measuring the group of teenagers with his measuring tape. He takes a microphone and starts reciting variables that have been measured as if he were calling the winning numbers for the Christmas Lottery.<sup>15</sup> Every time he mentions a variable, shows a part of his measuring tape. The rest of the characters-choir- are going to repeat the results in a unified tone. Each person of the choir has a hidden object covered by a black piece of cloth.]

**Cuanticus:** Significant difference on Seeelff-IIIIImaaageee!

**Choir:** Nothing caaaaaameeeeeee ooouuuuuut of iiiit!

**Cuanticus:** Significant difference on Eeeeempaaathyyyy!

**Choir:** Nothing caaaaaameeeeeee ooouuuuuut of iiiit!

**Cuanticus:** Significant difference on Emoootionaaal Inteeelligeencee!

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<sup>15</sup> An example of Christmas Lottery in Spain to aid in imagining the tone of the scene and the way of calling the results. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yNq9URG1WI>

**Choir:** Nothing caaaaaameeeeeee ooouuuuuuut of iiiit!

**Cuanticus:** Significant difference on Asseertiveneeeeeess!

**Choir:** Nothing caaaaaameeeeeee ooouuuuuuut of iiiit!

**Cuanticus:** Significant difference on Prosociaaaaalityyyyy!

**Choir:** Nothing caaaaaameeeeeee ooouuuuuuut of iiiit!

**Cuanticus:** Significant difference on Conflict Reeeeeesooluuutioooooon!

**Choir:** Nothing caaaaaameeeeeee ooouuuuuuut of iiiit!

**Cuanticus:** Significant difference on Groouuuuup Perceeeptioooooon!!

**Choir:** Nothing caaaaaameeeeeee ooouuuuuuut of iiiit!

[He no longer calls any variable. He takes on the same aseptic tone as the people on the tribunal of the lottery:]

**Cuanticus:** The measuring of variables in every series... has not shown any significant differences.

**Choir:** [Whispers and moves next to Esther.] Nothing has come out of it... Nothing has come out of it... Nothing has come out of it...

[The lights dim. There is a spotlight on Esther. The rest of the characters take off the piece of cloth covering the object. It is a pitcher filled with water. They lift it off slowly and spill the water over Esther. They leave. Esther looks at the audience.]

[Playing "Time" of Hans Zimmer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4amUUIJdmAY>]

[From now on the scene will take place at a very slow motion. The Supervisor walks carrying a blanket. Once he gets there, he places the blanket over Esther's shoulders.

Dark.]

### ***Ninth movement***

[The scene starts lighting up. Esther is on the floor, covered by a blanket. Totally covered, so she can't be seen. Agoras is by her side.]

**Agoras:** Come on, Esther... Get out of there...

**Esther:** I don't want to!

**Agoras:** [To the Supervisor] Is she going to stay like this much longer?

**Supervisor:** No... She will get up...

**Esther:** This is some shit.

**Agoras:** Come on now... Stop punishing yourself... Being from San Sebastian<sup>16</sup> you should already be used to getting water thrown on you all the time, should you not?

**Esther:** That was an awful joke!

**Agoras:** I just wanted to cheer you up... Come here, Cuanticus. Show me those results.

**Cuanticus:** Here you go... [He hands him over the measuring tape. Agoras starts checking.]

**Agoras:** But... There is something here...

**Cuanticus:** You see, I have tried to tell her, but she is down there being stubborn and does not want to listen to me.

**Agoras:** The decrease of self-image is much smaller in the treatment group. It is almost stable.

**Group of students:** [Turns to the audience] I mean, we are the treatment group, right?

**Agoras:** Whereas on the control group it plummets. It is not enough to be considered a significant result, but almost. It is a remarkable tendency. Interesting...

[Esther gets her head from out of the blanket.]

**Esther:** Could it be interesting?

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<sup>16</sup> Capital city of Gipuzkoa, which is a region of the Basque Country (Autonomous Community inside Spain, known for having a really humid climate).

**Agoras:** Let me take a look over here [Opens the book.] Let us see... [Reads.] Self-image and self-esteem are in constant adjustment during each person's development and tend to diminish towards the beginnings of puberty.<sup>17</sup>

[Esther straightens some more.]

**Supervisor:** Hence, the results could indicate that self-esteem diminishes in both groups, but almost maintains the same level in the case of the treatment group.

**Agoras:** And have you seen the part on perception of satisfaction into the group?

**Cuanticus:** Well, it descends in both groups...

**Esther:** I don't want to hear anything else! [She hides again under the blanket.]

**Agoras:** Hey, you could be more delicate, could you not?

**Cuanticus:** The numbers are the numbers... You might want to tell me how to explain that to her...

**Andrea:** If you could let us talk... I mean... I don't know what those tests say but...

**Cuanticus:** Then you need facts, facts!

**Agoras:** Would you let her speak?

**Andrea:** Thank you. Before this, someone used to pick on me, and now not so much. What I mean to say is that the group has improved.

**Pablo:** A bit...

**Lorena:** We feel tighter and more connected.

**Raquel:** We respect each other more.

**Teacher 2:** I do believe that it has been useful for them to smooth things over. I have seen them looking more like a group.

**Teacher 1:** Well, I have realized that while they were participating on the project, during the couple of hours they were there, they acted differently.

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<sup>17</sup> (Garaigordobil, 2010)

**Lorena:** Well, I say that we understand each other better.

**Raquel:** It's like every one of us has its own personality. Everyone has their own opinion.

**Teacher 1:** Individual changes. Specially, I notice that change in girls. They are more focused, they make themselves be valued, as they deserve.

**Raquel:** Now we girls are tighter together, and we don't care so much that the boys laugh and tease us.

**Socorro:** Girls feel more empowered.

**Raquel:** It has also turned out to be useful for getting to know each other better.

Because I had no other way than to do that scene with Mikel with whom I didn't get on well, honestly...

**Pablo:** New connections have arisen.

**Jon:** And I thought that being new to this class... I thought that I was going to be more like... isolated. But this experience has helped me get closer to the group. I've had the opportunity to know them better.

**Andrea:** Yeah. I have started talking to Jon since we started in here.

**Lorena:** Me too.

**Andrea:** In the end, there's nothing left to do but to work with them. You have to try to stay in sync so the activity goes well.

**Pablo:** In my case, for example, I feel that I have gotten better in that empathy thing... Walking in someone else's shoes.

**Andrea, Lorena, Raquel, Pablo:** Yes, yes! Me too.

**Pablo:** With Jon, for example. I really didn't care about what that guy felt, but now... It's like I take his place and... it's kind of different.

**Lorena:** Before it was like there was someone I disliked and I didn't care that it was wrong. But not anymore. I might still dislike them, but I can also feel pity for them.

**Andrea:** For example, I remember the activity of Diego's letter. It was so shocking... Because you had to play the character, put yourself in his shoes to kind of understand how he felt like...

**Pablo:** You understand, you empathize, and then you can tackle conflicts in a better way, can't you?

**Pablo:** Damn right.

**Lorena:** You're right. If we have a problem now, we talk it out. Not screaming though, but in a more appropriate tone.

**Pablo:** During this time there have been some moments when I have wanted to badmouth someone, but then I thought to myself "damn, I'm going to shut up because I know how the other person is going to suffer."

**Lorena:** I would say that we tend to pay more attention to other people's emotions.

**Andrea:** I'm not sure... I now feel freer to express myself. At least during the sessions...

**Pablo:** Free speech. No one judging you for everything you say.

**Pablo:** Hey! And let's not forget that Jon speaks!

**Jon:** I see myself differently now. Being embarrassed is a pain in the ass. Now I believe I am funnier. [Everyone laughs.]

### **Public presentation: the last step**

Giving life to data through a dramatic text, like all others, was born with the vocation of being represented for the academic audience and a wider community. Therefore, for my dissertation defense, we presented the script in a Reader's Theatre format, due to a lack of financial means to stage the research-based script, and second, because it is a format

that could fit more adequately in my academic context. We had to consider that it was the first time that this type of dissertation was being carried out at the University of the Basque Country.

We presented some of the fragments of the play. I played my character and my thesis Supervisor played his (it was his first experience as an actor). The other characters were played by students of the university and a performative arts laboratory in San Sebastian. In total, 10 actors participated in the representation, interspersed with the discourse of the main researcher (me).

All of this was a challenge and a risk, since we really did not know how the examining committee was going to receive this dramatic representation. However, the response was more positive than expected. In fact, when the dissertation ended, the audience in the room broke into applause (unusual during a dissertation defense at our university, given its protocols). The examining committee praised the decision to present it in this way and thanked us for this new contribution to research.

We could see that audience members were excited, some even with tears in their eyes. The comments generally reflected emotional attachments created by the theatrical representation and the possibility of having better understood the research process. My brother-in-law—who was previously convinced that he would never comprehend anything of my dissertation—enthused, “I got hooked on your dissertation, which is no small thing!” The play allowed me to display aspects of the research that other methodologies cannot show.

This approach to presenting results makes research more accessible to the community (Leavy, 2009; Cole & Knowles, 2008). It allows the possibility of contextualized and vernacular “daily” linguistic forms, as opposed to abstract or technical speeches which can eliminate the primary qualities of the experience (Barone,

2001). Therefore, artistic creation and conventional research can work together to facilitate processes in which researchers and audience can comprehend each other: expressing and sharing the complexities of human life (Belliveau & Lea, 2016). The aesthetics of the theatre opens another lane when it comes to presenting research; a more emotional, more visible, more vivid and more comprehensive lane.

The boundaries between art and science can be blurred: horizons may open to new spaces of knowledge. The artist in this creation process shifts into becoming the researcher as she submerges herself in the study of the world in order to capture details that reveal universal truths. The researcher, on the other hand, shifts into becoming the artist scrutinizing the world to represent it, revealing aspects previously unknown. Art as science or science as art; two aspects overlapping each other and able to feed each other in mutually beneficial, coexistent ways.

### ***Tenth movement***

[The group of teenagers rushes off. Carlos keeps writing.]

**Esther:** It's over, you can leave.

**Carlos:** Oh, okay! [He picks up his things and is about to leave.]

**Esther:** Wait...

**Carlos:** Yeah?

**Esther:** No. Nothing... [Carlos leaves. Esther addresses the audience.] I was going to ask him a stupid question about why he didn't want to participate in the sessions... But why should he? I am not a guru; I am not in possession of the truth. My wish to use art to provoke a personal and social change might not coincide with the wishes of the community I address.<sup>18</sup> Why should I assume that anyone wants to change? Why should

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<sup>18</sup> (Etherton & Prentki, 2006)

I assume that this is a miraculous cure?<sup>19</sup>

[Starts placing the chairs as they were at the beginning, hooked together creating a tower. Looks at the space carefully and leaves.]

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<sup>19</sup> (Heap, 2015)

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