Our views: performing coexistence in secondary schools of the Basque Country (Spain)

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ABSTRACT

This research analyses the impact of an applied theatre programme (Our Views) on fostering coexistence in four secondary schools in the Basque Country (Spain). Qualitative study reflected a positive impact on participants' socioemotional skills. Improved relationships are among the positive effects detected in group participants' lives. The project has opened a space for reflection on coexistence among adolescents and for raising students' awareness concerning issues that they sometimes face. It has facilitated some changes in students' behaviours in their immediate contexts. This research provides evidence of Our Views programme's effectiveness in promoting positive coexistence among secondary school students.

KEYWORDS: Forum Theatre, playbuilding, coexistence, citizenship, secondary, Basque.

Introduction

This article describes a research project (Uria-Iriarte, 2018; Uria-Iriarte and Prendergast. 2021) analysing the potentiality of drama as a pedagogic tool fostering positive coexistence within the educational context of secondary schools in the Basque Country.

Describing the concept of coexistence is a complex task. It refers to the word *convivencia* in Spanish, which is derived from the Latin *cum vivere* (living with), and it is a polysemic construct based on multiple ideas. These include the ability to live in the company of others, "the possibility of sharing the experience of life" (Basque Government, 2016, 9), and the maintenance of relationships between people based on peaceful attitudes and values (Aldana-Mendoza, 2006) through behaviours allowing individual freedom, respect, and acceptance towards others (Ortega, 2007). Therefore, in English, the closest translation of *convivencia* could be "peaceful coexistence".

As recommended by UNESCO, learning to live together is one of the pillars on which education must be built. This universal demand is somewhat tested in the Basque Country, where coexistence has been challenged by ongoing violence (Basque Government, 2007). Basque society has long endured persistent conflict. Franco's oppressive regime (1936-1975) and the Basque nationalist *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*[1] (ETA)'s violent bids for Basque independence, committed between 1959-2011, are circumstances hindering co-existence across generations of Basque citizens.

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[1] Term in Basque. Translation: Euskadi (Basque Country) and Feedom.

In 2000, the Basque Department of Education[2] set in motion the building of programmes focusing on Education for Peace and Coexistence (Basque Government, 2007, 2010)."The protection of human life, the dignity of all people, and of their rights without exceptions, requires in a society like ours extensive educational work" (Basque Government, 2007, 6). The aim was to raise community awareness and promote education for citizenship that envisages the pursuit of integral, holistic learning, exercising respect for others' rights as an essential basis for coexistence among equals, genders, race and cultures, as well as de-legitimizing all kinds of violence (Basque Government, 2007, 2016). According to guidelines issued by the Basque Government (2010), learning to coexist is one of the main objectives of education and is as necessary as learning mathematics or any other core subject.

Spanish education law (LOMCE, 2013) states that a compulsory goal of secondary school is to educate students about how to become democratic citizens who value human rights and duties exercising respect, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, and a willingness to dialogue.

In this way, the need for the implementation of strategies and tools supporting coexistence in schools is fully recognised. Although the presence of theatre within the Spanish curriculum—and consequently, the Basque curriculum as well—is still limited, Spanish initiatives have been developed by academics, teachers and practitioners, such as Motos Teruel (2009), Cutillas, Morató, and Rizo (2010), Mouton (2010), and programmes such as *MUS-E* (FYME, 2019). All confirm the benefits of using theatre techniques to foster competencies related to coexistence.

Forum theatre and youth

Forum Theatre as created by Boal (2011), is an effective tool for opening space for democratic debate among secondary students and allows student participants the opportunity to both explore serious topics in depth and to develop capacities for handling personal problems and conflicts (Duffy, 2010a; Burton and O'Toole, 2009). The main objective is to facilitate the emergence of questions, offer multiple points of view, and stimulate dialogue through the exploration of other alternatives for acting in the world. As Sloane and Wallin (2013) assert, Forum Theatre empowers students to experience agency and the freedom to ask themselves about what kind of world they want. This empowerment involves adopting critical attitudes and politically informed processes for building community and peace, while at the same time promoting participants' personal welfare

In Spain, collectives exist that use Forum Theatre as a socio-educational intervention method for secondary school students, including *NUS Teatre* (2020) in Cataluña, or *La Rueda Teatro Social* (2020) in Madrid. In the Basque Country, the *Baketik*[3] (2016) foundation is dedicated to promoting processes of peace and coexistence. Among different projects, since 2007, *Baketik* has been presenting Forum Theatre pieces to secondary school students for raising awareness on issues such as harassment, racism, alcohol consumption, diversity and gender equality.

Generally, the Forum Theatre pieces produced by these collectives, mentioned above, are performed by adult actors. There are Spanish collectives in which secondary school students take an active part in Forum Theatre playbuilding processes. In Madrid, the Cross Border (2017) collective's project, *Ejercitar las Miradas* (*Training to Look),*

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[2] Basque educational policy is developed between the limits of the Spanish constitutional framework and competencies established within the framework of the Autonomy Statute for The Basque Country (EAPV, 1979).

[3] Term in Basque. Translation: From Peace

fostered intercultural citizenship, coexistence and conflict resolution. Forum Theatre workshops were developed outside of school hours to encourage adolescents and teachers to write and direct dramaturgies for presentation in their schools. In Andalucía, *La Hoja Blanca* (2020) collective's leader and practitioner Stéphanie Mouton (2010), developed *Convive con Teatro (Coexist with Theatre)*, offering Forum Theatre playbuilding workshops to secondary students who voluntarily attended outside of school hours. During school hours, in Tutoring Class[4], students then explored emerging issues related to coexistence.

Inspired by these initiatives and the Coexistence Plans promoted by the Basque Education Department, "Gure Begiradak"[5] (Our Views) programme was designed to foster coexistence among secondary school students in their schools, and it was singularly timetabled into their curricular space. This programme developed educational strategies contributing to de-legitimizing any kind of violence, while encouraging processes of peace and positive coexistence promoted by the Basque Government. The programme's unique research design brought Forum Theatre playbuilding and performance into four Basque secondary schools' curriculum spaces where students fully engaged in its creation and in acting.

Qualitative study

In this article we will focus on the qualitative study that is located within a larger mixed methodology study. The main research question for the study was: can an intervention programme, based on a Forum Theatre playbuilding process, have a favourable impact on secondary school students' coexistence? Garaigordobil (2012) states that the ability to coexist is dependent on the quality of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills which represent socioemotional competencies. Social and emotional competence is the ability to understand, manage, and express emotional life, establish personal relations, solve practical life problems, and adapt to the demands of growth and development. Such competencies also include knowledge and appreciation of oneself, self-control, and the ability to collaborate with others (ISEI-IVEI, 2004). Therefore, after the principal question, we queried: would an improvement in any of these socioemotional variables positively impact classroom climates and, consequently, the quality of coexistence in schools?

Collecting data

Qualitative data was gathered using the facilitator's (Author 1) observations, which were recorded in a field diary. Author 1 held 47 semi-structured interviews with students, teaching staff, and volunteer collaborators (Table 1).

The quantitative study was based on standardised tests measuring degrees of impact on socioemotional skills, such as self-concept, empathy, emotional intelligence, assertiveness, prosociality, and conflict resolution. As a result, some interview questions were focused on those categories and intended to extract, qualitatively, a matrix of categories related to socioemotional competencies. For example, to quantitatively analyse the impact of "empathy" we introduced the question "Do you think that you are more likely to 'put yourself in another's´ shoes?'" (see these questions in Table 2).

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[4] Tutoring Class is provided as part of a nationwide Tutoring Plan that promotes students' personal and social skills, while systematizing activities for vocational orientation. Weekly, one hour is dedicated to conducting specific tutoring and mentoring activities within each class.

[5] Term in Basque.

Table 1. Summary of interviews.

Informants	Interviews	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
Students	One week after finishing the programme	3	3	3	4
	Immediately after the performance.	2	1	1	1
	Interviews during the process	1	9	4	3
Colaborators	Individual interviews	1	1	1	1
Teachers	Individual interviews	2	1	2	2
Total number of interviews in each school		9	16	11	11
Total of interviews			**47**		

Table 2. Questions to students.

Quantitative variables	Questions based on quantitative variables
Empathy	Do you think that you are more likely to "put yourself in another's´ shoes"?
Emotional intelligence	Do you pay more attention to your emotions? And to others' emotions?
Emotional intelligence	Has this experience helped you to communicate your feelings more openly?
Assertiveness	Has this experience helped you to communicate your ideas and opinions more openly?
Self-concept	Do you think that this experience has helped you to see yourself differently? And to see your classmates differently as well?
Conflict resolution	Do you face conflicts differently now?
Prosociality	Has the programme helped you feel more respected and cared by others?
	Others questions
	How would you describe the experience? What have you learned?
	Do you think this project will provide you lifelong benefits? Give examples.
	Do you perceive any change among group members? Can you give examples?

Students' interviews were conducted (1) *During the process.* Seventeen brief interviews (between five to ten minutes in length) took place during programme sessions with groups of two and three students. In total, 38 students participated. (2) *Immediately after the performance*. Five slightly longer interviews (between ten to fifteen minutes long) were held with four to ten participants immediately after the presentation of Forum Theatre. In total, 34 students took part. (3) *One week after finishing the performance.* Thirteen full interviews were held (30-45 min long) with groups of four to seven people. A total of 73 students participated.

In addition, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with teaching staff and volunteer collaborators (seven teachers and four volunteer collaborators) one week after completion of the intervention programme. Each interview was less than 30 min in length.

Our Views programme

The Basque Department of Education selected four state-run secondary schools (we shall refer to them as S1, S2, S3, S4) of education model D (in which all subjects are taught in the Basque language, except during instruction in Spanish Language and Literature). Each school's student body included medium to low-income families. Demographically, the four schools feature multicultural contexts with high enrolments of foreign and repeating students (Eustat, 2017). The Basque Department of Education selected schools

that it determined would benefit from a programme reinforcing students' ability to coexist. In total, 80 students took part in the programme: 43 girls and 37 boys. One group or class per school was selected for the programme and each group's participants were students in the 2nd year of secondary education (year 9 in the UK). At each school, the management team chose which class would participate. The groups chosen were experiencing interpersonal problems between students, poor group cohesion, disrespect towards staff, absenteeism, or disruptive behaviours. Most participants had no previous experience in theatre.

Our Views was a drama-based programme encompassing a didactic sequence consistent with Spanish schools' Coexistence Plan. *Our Views* was facilitated by Author 1 with the assistance of five volunteer collaborators (one per school, S4 had two). The volunteer collaborators would assist in identifying specific needs among students and perform tasks that supported class activities. School teachers and tutors were invited to attend. The level of their participation was left entirely to their discretion and ranged from mere observation to active participation in the programme's various activities.

An agenda was set out that suited the characteristics, needs, and interests of each school (see Table 3). The programme was designed as a series of sixteen to nineteen sessions offered during the students' school day. One weekly session, 50-20 min in length, would be held. The programme was most often offered during Tutoring Class, but at times overlapped into Plastic Arts, Physical Education, and Citizenship classes, according to the schedules drawn up by each school's administrations.

Table 3. Schedule in the schools.

Specifities	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
Number of students	18	20	19	22
Number of teachers	2	1	2	2
Number of sessions	17	16	16	19
Duration of session	Held each week alternately between: 120' (Physical Education) 50' (Tutoring class)	120'	120'	50'
Curricular space	Tutoring class Physical Education	Tutoring class Citizenship	Tutoring class Plastic arts	Tutoring class Citizenship

The programme was conceptualized as a playbuilding process (Norris, 2016) that would be delivered in three phases: *Confidence and cohesion,* focussing on creating group cohesion; (2) *Exploration and Creation,* which delved into the generation, exploration, and material creation processes; and (3) *Rehearsal and Presentation*, during which a Forum Theatre play was constructed for presentation as *leitmotiv* of the journey, not as an end in itself. We briefly describe these:

First phase: confidence and generation (sessions 1-5)

We focused our first five sessions on developing rapport among participants through games and exercises. We aimed to encourage confidence, group cohesion, and disinhibition within the group. As facilitators, our intentions were to introduce ourselves, get to know one another in different ways, and to establish the necessary conditions for approaching the subsequent phases. We also initiated explorations into topics that would serve the playbuilding process. We adopted the practices of Image Theatre (Boal, 2011) to safely approach exploring the realities of the participating youth. We started by

building still images as tableaux, in groups or pairs, to display to classmates. At that point, an audience of classmates was invited to participate in analysing what they were viewing. The facilitator solicited responses from the audience members, including what words came to mind when viewing the images; how they might interpret the story behind the images; what might be the thoughts of different characters in the still images, and how might the characters express them (as these characters' inner monologue); what single words or sentences might they propose to activate images as movement; or encourage improvisation from these images.

Second phase: exploration and construction (sessions 6-10)

The five sessions of this second phase were dedicated to exploring topics generated by the adolescents. Employing teamwork and decision making, it was most important to build materials and explore themes related to participants' daily lives and coexistence. This phase was based on dramatic improvisations and scene creation. To stimulate creativity, we introduced music, painting, news items, stories, etc. Post-it notes proved helpful as a creation platform. We found the notes' use to be a practical strategy as the students would not be blocked or stuck attempting to fill an entire sheet of paper. Students regularly used post-it notes to write brief stories about events that they had witnessed or experienced that they considered to be unfair. We kept these small pieces of paper in a box. Later, students could randomly take some of them and explore the topics written on them, without knowing whose each was. Scene dynamization strategies such as *hot seating, thought checking, use of interior monologue, role reversal, writing in rol*e, *slow motion, freezing,* and *Forum Theatre* were introduced with the aim of facilitating analysis and reflection in performed situations. Adopting the *audience as playwright* strategy was useful as more tentative students could propose sentences or alternative actions without having to personally act in roles. At times, the facilitator redirected the play's dramatic action by *jumping onto the stage* while assuming a character. At the end of this phase, the class selected four scenes of dramatic text with which the facilitator (Author1) was entrusted to draft a script.

Third phase: construction and presentation (sessions 11-16)

The facilitator was responsible for structuring a dramatic text that was based on material generated during programme sessions and from the scenes chosen by the student participants. A more democratic way to approach the work would have involved students writing the play, however the timeline of the programme simply did not permit this degree of involvement. Therefore, the facilitator assumed the task of giving shape to the ideas proposed by participants. Each session was video-recorded as a way to preserve all generated material, as well as to create a final audio-visual presentation to give to the school. The facilitator scripted the play using sentences verbatim that had been recorded during sessions, offering participants a greater sense of contribution to the dramatic text. Once the facilitator assembled the first draft, the students were asked for feedback informing possible changes. When participants all agreed on the final script (see Table 4 describing plays, themes, and synopsis), the next phase began, which included fulfilling tasks such as casting characters, reading the text together, rehearsing, and training for Forum Theatre work.

The rehearsal phase culminated in a Forum Theatre public presentation that featured programme participants. The audience consisted of school students (other participants and younger students) and invited teachers. The theatrical piece presented an *anti-model* that involved a problematic situation in which the main character did not achieve his or her goal. Forum Theatre plays generate a space where the audience can

rewrite the play through their active participation. The facilitator adopted the role of *joker* and invited audience members to mount the stage and replace characters to demonstrate an alternative action that might lead to a solution to dilemmas being portrayed onstage. This opening allowed for a new space in which participants could discuss and debate topics raised during the project.

We facilitated the aesthetic part of representation in two ways: (1) *dramatic strategies*, including music (chosen by students), freezing scenes, slow motion, choral voices, etc.; (2) *material resources* on which depended the construction of a stenographic structure and the support of lighting, sound effects, and the quality recording of each presentation.

Table 4. Synopsis of school plays.

School	Title	Issues	Synopsis
School 1	"Happiness"	Drug use	Teenaged Adela falls into drug use under the influence of a new boyfriend. This makes her miss a year of school. She eventually leaves her boyfriend and gets off of drugs. We will see that it will not be easy to re-integrate into the classroom and to escape the influence of her ex-boyfriend.
School 2	"Lie after lie"	Unstructured families Possibilities to be what one wants	Julia and Alex are schoolmates and are dating. Julia is struggling with her parents' recent separation. She is caught in the middle of both, and she feels like a "ping pong ball" played from side to side. Meanwhile, Alex confesses to his parents that he wants to study a Bachelor of Arts at university, something that his parents will not support in any way.
School 3	"Cousins"	School bullying Sexual harassment and cyber bullying	Ainhoa and Maria are teenaged cousins and very different from one another. Ainhoa is extraverted and rebellious; while María is introvertive and studious. We will see that both, under different circumstances, will suffer different kinds of harassment at school.
School 4	"Empty words"	Sexual identity	Dani and Alicia are teenaged classmates and friends. Dani is openly gay and constantly receives insults from his classmates. This makes him want to change schools. Meanwhile, Alicia decides to openly confess her bisexuality. It will not be so easy for her female friends to understand.

Data analysis

All the information gathered with qualitative-type instruments was analysed using the NVIVO computer programme. The resulting data was inductively reduced to a matrix of these dimensions: (1) Didactic elements; (2) Group space as a context for creation and participation; (3) Methodology; (4) Impacts. In this article, we focus on the last dimension of **Impacts** which focused on two categories: (1) **Improvement of socioemotional competencies**; (2) **Effects on participants' reality concerning coexistence.** During interviews, we began by focusing on socioemotional categories analysed in quantitative study, but soon determined that we could inductively extract more categories related to the impacts on participants' lives that derived from the data collected through information offered by participants during semi-structured interviews.

We have grouped subcategories that emerged from **socioemotional competencies,** including: *self-affirmation, emotional world, putting oneself in another's shoes, expression of one's ideas, managing conflict*, and *mutual care.* Subcategories emerged as **effects of explored themes in participants' reality:** *improvement in relationships*, *performance as a catalyst*, *raising awareness about reality,* and *connecting with life*.

Results

To present the results, below, we will adopt abbreviations to codify when participants` interviews took place: *During Process* (**DP**); *Immediately After Performance* (**AP**): *One week after finishing the Programme (***OP***); and School* (**S, 1,2,3,4**). In addition, we adopted pseudonyms for students.

Self-affirmation

This drama-based process has promoted participants' disinhibition and has encouraged **shame management**, something that helped these youth to interact with their peers. We must highlight a noticeable change in the level of participation that we observed in some extremely shy and quiet youth who seemingly "broke free" during the course of the programme; something that will significantly redound in participants' abilities to positively relate with their classmates. Such a personal development may prove to be a factor in promoting their abilities to discover other aspects of themselves, favourably impacting their self-perception and **self-image.**

> At the beginning when we did the scenes in teams of four and the whole class looked at me, in the first sessions, I was super nervous. And now, I am not ashamed to rehearse in front [of the class]. (María-OP-S2)

Managing shame is an important factor in fostering each participant's **individuality and uniqueness**. During the programme, some participants no longer hid themselves within the group, gaining **self-confidence** to speak and perform in front of their classmates. These youth began to mix more easily with their peers and established more dialogue with them: "as I learned to improvise, now I am more confident" (Rebeca-OP-S4): "I now talk a lot with Imanol and Xabier, who never spoke before" (Ana-OP-S1).

The programme became a space where **students' potentials** could emerge and allow participants to discover new aspects of themselves and others. The programme also enabled **teachers to get to know students** differently and discover students' capacities and talents, about which they were previously unaware.

> Carlos says that he has felt he's one of the 'dumbest ones' in class and that in this new environment he sees himself on another level, as he performs well. (Diary-12th session on April 21th).

> There were some students who…I did not expect this from at all, but 'wow!', they have performed very well, and have become involved: some have become very involved. (Teacher 1-S2)

> Some have pleasantly surprised me in their dramatization. I am thinking of someone who always remains quiet and has some hidden facets that I have now discovered. Yes, he opened up quite a bit (…) I am talking about a very liar student, who always wants to be unobserved. Now I have seen his comedic side in [acting] the soap-operas that he likes so much. (Teacher 2-S4)

Likewise, the process encouraged the individuality of participants as **self-reaffirmation and personal empowerment**. In the case of one of the groups in which there was a strong polarity between the girls and boys—and the latter group clearly exercised a certain power over the girls—an evolution was observed among the group of girls such that potentially strengthened inter-relationships and bonds of friendship between them. This circumstance also empowered the female participants in front of this particular group of boys: "Yes, I see more clearly in the girls, yes. In the girls I've seen that they've affirmed themselves a bit more" (Teacher 2-S3).

> At the beginning there was a big difference between boys and girls: everything was very divided between boys and girls, and it was clear that the boys were the ones who wielded the power. (Collaborator-S3).

According to Retuerto (2009), the theatrical experience, including the invention of characters and reworking of one's own experiences, enhances the development of positive self-image, and **emotional management** as we describe next.

Emotional world

Regarding emotional expression, the study's findings show that the programme helped student participants to **express their feelings,** not only in the programme's context but in their wider realities as well: "We now better express our feelings (…) and we know how the others are doing"; "It [theatre] helped them to express what they hold inside" (Teacher 2-S2); "As a person, you might be very reserved. This helps you to say how you are feeling and those kinds of things" (Elena-PsP-S1).

Additionally, strong reference is made to elements of **emotional regulation,** when students talk about representation that obliges them to respect certain norms of conduct that the theatre discipline demands, including exercising large doses of **self-control**. In this respect, the sense of belonging to a group represented a key factor of emotional **self-regulation** through mutual support and positive interactions. This involved a process that initially required the facilitator to offer significant support and guidance, in order to gradually ensure the group assumed greater **autonomy** in both decision-making and assuming responsibilities requiring **self-control**: "I am very proud of their behaviour. The truth is that I was very pleasantly surprised. I am impressed at how they behaved quietly backstage" (Teacher 2-S4).

> You are as nervous as others. I mean, you share this [nervousness] and say: 'I'm not going to be the only one here getting nervous, or the only one here who's going to get in a mess', it's like, we're all in this together and you feel like you're not alone when you get those nerves. (Gaby-OP-S4)

Students also stated that playing characters, and having to put themselves in the characters' skins, helped them to **pay attention to others' emotions**: "now we look closely at others' emotions" (Sara-OP-S3).

As Rieffe et al., (2007) assert, consciousness and a capacity for emotional recognition increase the **ability to empathize**.

Putting oneself in another's shoes

The students described experiencing increased empathy by playing other characters and having **to put oneself in others' shoes**. They observed that exploring other roles and analysing others' issues and perspectives provided them an opportunity to better understand others' situations, circumstances, realities, and emotions: "I found it funny playing another character…it was like a different me" (Imanol-OP-S4); "For example, with Erik I never cared what he felt, but now, when I put myself in his place, I don´t know …" (Natalia-OP-S2); "Perhaps you didn't have empathy before, but with this [project] you now have it and it is there for [all your] life" (Antonio-OP-S1); "Before, I didn't like him [another participant], I didn't care if he was bad, but not now. Even if I don't like him, I feel sorry for him" (Naroa-OP-S3).

According to Chow et al. (2013) the ability to overcome egocentric points of view, by experimenting with the feelings and thoughts of others, can promote more satisfactory and **less conflictive relationships.**

Managing conflict

The students expressed that the programme helped them manage conflict by adopting more effective strategies, including dialogue and **less reactive approaches** to high conflict situations. The students expressed an increased ability to immerse themselves in

others' feelings and bodily experiences, permitting them to better initiate conflict resolution strategies: "If we have a problem now, we talk about it more" (Eneko-OP-S2); "We think before speaking" (Beñat-PsP-S1); "[We are] calmer, without using violence" (Laura-OP-S2). [It's] less aggressive. Instead of being 'Hey dude! Leave me alone, I don't like it, I don't care', [this way, it's] 'if you want to, we can try to fix it'" (Koldo-OP-S1).

> It has happened to me during this time [in the programme] that I wanted to insult someone, but I said 'damn, I will shut up because I already know how this other person is feeling' [after an issue was analysed in-session]. You shut up; you bite your tongue. (Gaby-OP-S4)

Baier (1994) asserts that conflict resolution based on empathy and emotional commitment to others encourages the practice of citizenship based on **ethical care,** which in turn promotes prosocial behaviour.

Mutual care

Participants' support of prosocial attitudes through **mutual care** was noted**.** In this regard, the project may be perceived as having impacted on students' attitudes of cooperation and friendliness towards one another. As a project based on collective construction and teamwork, it supported acceptance of a diversity of opinions through **inclusion** and mutually negotiated and **cooperative** attitudes: "We treat each other better" (Ana-OP-S1); "You learn to respect the opinions of others. you learn to share" (Rebeca-OP-S4); "and when you see someone feeling bad you don't ignore it" (Iñaki-OP-S2); and "[you] help if someone went blank [when performing]" (Daniela-OP-S2).

By adapting programme features based on participants' interests, and by offering each one **personally relevant tasks,** reluctant students were provided full opportunity to take part in a creative process whereby their own ideas were fully considered: "Nieves provides interesting ideas about the staging. I think she has been given space here that she hasn't previously found" (Diary-S1-17th session on May 9th).

According to Segura Morales (2002), this creative process, based on mutual support and cooperation, opened an emotionally safe space where students could **freely express** their thoughts without undermining others' rights.

Freedom to express one's ideas

The process helped participants feel that they can more **freely and directly** express their ideas and opinions. Participants consistently indicated that what they liked most about the programme concerned working together and feeling reassured that **all ideas were welcomed.** Students commented that they had been able to give an opinion without fear of being judged, but, instead, experienced being heard. In this regard, the sessions may be perceived as creating an inclusive space encouraging increased appreciation of diversity: "[The programme] has given us permission to express ourselves freely" (Lorena-OP-S4); "I, at least, felt quite free in class. I mean, you expressed yourself how you liked" (Julio-OP-S4).

Students also shared that they have experimented with **a different way of self-expressing:** through drama. One teacher underlined: "In the artistic way, this is a way of being able to express oneself. In the other way [traditional education] they have no possibility right now [of expressing themselves]" (Teacher 1-S3).

Effects in participants' reality concerning coexistence

As asserted by McCammon and Østerlind (2011), these drama/theatre activities gave the participants the opportunity to try out new behaviours promoting life skills in their immediate reality.

Improvement in relationships

When interviewed, some students expressed the belief that the programme had served to **unite the group,** and that theatre had helped them interact with other participants. Increased **cohesion** and mutual **respect** were perceived as directly improving the group's atmosphere: "It helped them to smooth things over a bit" (Teacher 1-S4); "We have strengthened our relations" (Enrique-OP-S2); "It's like now we understand each other better" (Laura-OP-S2); "There were always tensions between us, arguments, and now there aren't. There used to be around two [arguments] a week, but now there aren't as many" (Raquel-P-S4).

Our Views helped participants work closely with one another, including students between whom there had been little affinity or hardly any relationship, and the programme provided an opportunity for them to get **to know each other differently and better**. Knowing each other in a different way established new relationships and reinforced previously established ones: "Well, what I like the most is connecting with people who I didn't really relate to before" (Carolina-P-S4).

> For instance, a couple of female students didn't talk to each other, [but] they've now been working together on the play; I liked that. And now in class, I think they're interacting better. (Teacher 1-S1)

> For example, in class with some [students] who you didn't get on well with before, you didn't know so well, or kept your distance from, now you're more friendly with them. (Nieves-OP-S1)

Performance as a catalyst

The **performance** was of paramount importance to increasing students' level of involvement. The pressure that a public performance creates required participants to step up their personal levels of commitment **and responsibility:** "At the last moment, an hour before performing the play, they realised they were all in the same boat, and that the play would soon go ahead, in the best possible way" (Collaborator- S2). Furthermore, fulfilling group objectives and overcoming the difficulties involved in putting on a performance resulted in feelings of **collective achievement.** The performance offered a space providing **recognition** and **social approval** within the group and wider educational community.

> We must also understand that it is not easy to go ahead and step up in front of classmates, say a text, with this age, right? Out of embarrassment, out of nerves. I don't know... all this is good, right? And they [the students] have merit. Going out and doing it [acting in front of an audience] has merit. If anyone has been confused, if they have done better or worse, I don't care. Just go ahead and be able to perform it. All my respect. (Teacher 2-S3)

Asked to provide **suggestions for improvement to the programme**, a few students said that they would prefer that the student actors perform any suggestions offered by audience members, as they believed themselves to be better theatrically prepared to act out the suggested scenes than are the audience members: "In the Forum Theatre I would prefer

if participating audience members told us what to do and we acted it out ourselves" (Mikel-OP-S3)

There was also reference made to the behaviour of some participating audience members **who did not take the performance seriously**: "Not because of how it was organized, but because some students treated it as a joke" (Hugo-OP-S3). Therefore, it was suggested that before the play, the **facilitator inform the audiences** about Forum Theatre themes, techniques, and opportunities for audience members to participate. "Perhaps before doing the play, tell [the audience] what it is more or less about" (Mikel-OP-S3).

Raising awareness about reality

The usefulness of the programme was ensured by the connections that were made between the sessions' **emerging themes** and what happened in students' real worlds. In this sense, students highlighted that theatrically staging these themes allowed participants to open a space for **reflection and exploration** of other alternatives to behave in life. Students stated that witnessing relevant issues being represented in dramatic contexts, experiencing them through dramatic production, and then engaging reflection helped them to become **more aware** of these real problems. It also enabled them to more easily approach matters with an **open mind**: "The scenes we perform are based on real life. You know they really happen. Then, it is for you to realize and reflect on this" (María-P-S2) and "reconsider how you can be in life" (Francisco-OP-S4); "not only have your own idea, but to take into account the ideas of others and recognize more varieties [of points of view]" (Imanol-OP-S4).

Alluding to having undergone a learning process based on their **lived experience,** some students claimed to have developed the capacity **to face similar situations** in the future: "[it has served helped me avoid] falling into bad influences like Adela [a character in the play]" (Diego-OP-S1); "Because what we learn here will present itself to us many times in real life; what we learn now, in the future when we are older, it will serve us" (Natalia-P-S2).

Connecting with life

The programme enabled participants to discuss emerging issues, such as bullying, drug use, romantic love, male chauvinism, abuse, sexuality, homophobia and difficult family lives. In this respect, the work impacted their immediate realities. Certain **changes in behaviour** were observed regarding problems directly related to coexistence: "The truth is I'm very happy because before you only heard sexist comments and now not as often" (Carolina-P-S4); "We were having to deal with all that bullying stuff and it was [a question of] whether to tell my parents about it or not. Well, as I could see [in the programme activities] that it was worse not to talk about it, I [volunteered to] put myself in that situation and saw that it's better to tell your parents" (Maitane-OP-S3); "in [terms of] behaviour towards parents, now I've started to get on better with my parents" (Daniela-OP-S2); "Before, when leaving class, I used to hear many [racist] comments, like 'Machu Picchu!'" and things like that and now I no longer hear such comments" (Carolina-P-S4).

> Gaby: Now people, like, speak more about this topic [of sexuality]: "Do you remember this and that? That we learned this and this?" And they don't criticize or anything. This shows that they liked the topic we had been working on and that they have quite valued it.

Julio: Besides, the issue of abuse by these girls [towards me], do you remember what I said about that topic [performed in a session]? Well, it hasn't happened again. (OP-S4).

Some students expressed that engaging this playbuilding process will **serve them for life**, better ensuring their ability to **coexist**: "Yes, this will serve us for life. I don't know if it works for others, but for me, yes, it does" (Daniela-OP-S2); "to live with others and not only think about ourselves but also about others" (Natalia-P-S2).

Teachers also highlighted the usefulness of the programme as a pedagogical resource employing artistic pathways for developing a peaceful coexistence: "I think that it [the programme] may be good for improving living together or to improve the [social] climate in certain areas" (Teacher-S2).

Some feedback reflected less benefit to participant students: "Yes, I liked it, but it has not contributed anything to me" (Patricia-OP-S1). There were those who described the project as an "opportunity to skip class" (Pablo-AP-S2) or to avoid other subjects' classes: "We also miss classes" (Ander-OP-S4). Some touted the usefulness of the programme for learning how to "lie" (Igor-OP-S2): "if I'm in a bind, [I can] improvise a lie or something" (Miguel-DP-S3).

We close this section representing the study's results by sharing a rap created by a student. The lyricist is a repeating student who typically demonstrates minimal interest and motivation for following school routine. His degree of participation in the play´s creative process impressed his teachers. The piece he wrote was introduced in the play:

We must have so much respect,
Spend days in others' sneakers, that's the challenge.
Doesn't matter the colour of your skin, friends are necessary,
That way we'll accept everyone, like they are just like us.
After all, we're all equals.
No one is going to change your role.
Doesn't matter how you appear or if you wear different clothes.
You're all winners, here's your prize. (Imanol's rap for the play- S4)

Discussion and conclusions

The goal of this research was to analyse the implications of a drama-based programme regarding coexistence among secondary school students in the Basque Country. The study was set in four schools, during school hours, and engaged the students in Forum Theatre playbuilding; a process that could be described, in the words of Vine (in Duffy, 2010b), as "a luxury [that] few TIE/educational theatre groups enjoy" (191).

The programme's collected results demonstrate its impact on socioemotional skills. Firstly, according to other studies of Motos Teruel et al. (2018), we observed demonstrable changes in some extremely shy and quiet participants who began to fully participate in the programme's activities. Managing embarrassment and fear became a key aspect of improving participants' self-affirmation by raising their confidence and sense of security within the group. As Etherton and Prentki (2006) assert, drama projects can increase participants' chances of successfully fostering their self-esteem and confidence.

Like Motos-Teruel et al. (2018) we also observed some gender differences during this drama-based process. Significantly increased female empowerment was noted within one school's students participating in the programme.

Our Views provided participants opportunities to better manage their emotions and generated safe space in which to freely express one's feelings and opinions. This

feature exercised what is asserted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) to be a human right. Most students experienced the sessions as an inclusive space where all ideas were respected, embracing diversity. "Theatre, in short, is a form of freedom" (Cutillas, 2006, 425). However, while experiencing freedom to express themselves, students developed their capacities for emotional self-regulation because the exercise of theatre discipline, as a collective and collaborative art, requires behaviour management based on responsibility, commitment, and co-operative attitudes.

Participants also indicated that performing other characters helped them pay attention to one another's emotions and to understand new points of view. According to Cahill (2010), exploring roles and perspectives broadened participants' imaginations, which helped each to walk in someone else's shoes and develop empathy. This circumstance is relevant to the development of prosocial behaviour and conflict resolution (Aden, 2014). Therefore, the creative collective process became the basis for the development of prosocial behaviours through mutual care based on attitudes of non-judgement, respect, collaboration, and solidarity. All these improved attitudes regarding dialogue, self-control, and positivity towards others encouraged more effective approaches to conflict management. Experience in applied theatre supports the assertion that dramatic role-playing is a powerful tool for dealing with conflict (Burton and O'Toole, 2009; Lepp 2011).

Positive effects on the participants' lives were observed as improving student relationships. As Kohlberg (1984) asserts, group contexts facilitate developing knowledge about self and others. The playbuilding process required participants to work closely with students with whom they shared little relationship. It provided an opportunity to know one another in different ways. Teachers witnessed other aspects of their students' characters and personalities, discovering their skills and challenging prejudices that they held about them.

The programme opened a space for group reflection about problems emerging in the sessions. The staging process promoted participants' abilities to understand others' perspectives on the topics presented, to raise awareness, and to try other ways of being and acting within their own realities. The collective work engaged during the playbuilding process and the pressure involved in preparing a public performance fostered commitment and responsible attitudes. In addition, according to Hickey-Moody (2015), performance can signify a space of social validation and self-affirmation; an opportunity for youth articulating their voices.

In spite of these positive effects, as shared by students, some participants expressed that the experience contributed little to them, personally, only helping them to miss class or learn to lie. Such feedback reminds us that our practice is not a "magic recipe" and can even serve to meet unintended goals. As Balfour (2009) claims: "Change rarely occurs in the way any social architect plans for" (353).

Concerning research limitations: (a) interviews were conducted by the session facilitator (Author 1). Including additional evaluators would have complemented the evaluation process with external points of view; (b) a long-term evaluative follow-up could provide more details about the programme's long-term impacts. A follow up evaluation after a period of time might yield more information about the programme's potential benefits.

Regarding this programme, we suggest: (a) better preparation of the pedagogical space created during the play's performance by means of prior instruction to the audience and teachers; (b) contemplation of other techniques for facilitating audience intervention, for example, *simultaneous drama strategy* (Boal, 2009: Vine in Duffy, 2010b).

This research sought to discover whether an intervention programme that is based on a Forum Theatre playbuilding process would favourably impact socioemotional competencies in secondary school students, fostering coexistence among them. Our research provides compelling evidence of the positive effects of *Our Views* on participants and their coexistence with one another. Theatre is a collective art and allows the creation of spaces where one can exercise responsible citizenship. Theatre becomes a laboratory where youth can rehearse transformative actions, developing skills related to basic competencies such as *learning to be* and *living together*. These are constituent elements for building positive coexistence.

Finally, as the *Our Views* programme facilitator, I (author 1) have learned to feel comfortable while experiencing uncertainty and to accept personal feelings of vulnerability during the sometimes-messy processes involved in working with adolescents. All this is broadly described in the article "Pedagogy of paradox: discovering the role of drama-facilitator in the secondary school classroom" (Uria-Iriarte, in press).

> Thanks, now I finally understand my brother's sentence: "There are those who come from nothing and turn into everything". I didn't believe him, but now I'm starting to agree with him, thanks, hugs. (Pablo-Watsapp-S2)

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