

S O C I A L F I C T I O N S S E R I E S

Critical Plays

Embodied Research for Social Change

Anne Harris and Christine Sinclair



Sense Publishers

CRITICAL PLAYS

Social Fictions Series

Series Editor
Patricia Leavy
USA

The *Social Fictions* series emerges out of the arts-based research movement. The series includes full-length fiction books that are informed by social research but written in a literary/artistic form (novels, plays, and short story collections). Believing there is much to learn through fiction, the series only includes works written entirely in the literary medium adapted. Each book includes an academic introduction that explains the research and teaching that informs the book as well as how the book can be used in college courses. The books are underscored with social science or other scholarly perspectives and intended to be relevant to the lives of college students—to tap into important issues in the unique ways that artistic or literary forms can.

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Critical Plays

Embodied Research for Social Change

By

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and

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PRAISE FOR CRITICAL PLAYS

The rapidly expanding community of art-based research seeking models for inquiry together with those in the arts, education, psychology, social relations, and all fields concerned with how the creative process can further human understanding will welcome *Critical Plays* by Anne Harris and Christine Sinclair. Long before we started deliberating the nature of legitimate research methods, theatre and enactment plumbed the depths of human experience, generating lasting evidence of how fiction and drama have unique abilities to articulate and embody the complexities and subtle realities of the personal psyche, human relationships, and social action. It is time to integrate the parallel play between the arts and other academic disciplines for the benefit of all.

– **Shaun McNiff, author of *Art as Research* (2013) and *Art-Based Research* (1998), and University Professor, Lesley University, Cambridge, MA (USA)**

Critical Plays: Embodied Research for Social Change is one of the most methodologically creative and theoretically innovative sources to date for arts-based research. Using autoethnographic writing strategies to create deeply embodied characters, this play-as-research-text moves the reader into the critically reflexive felt-sense experience of students and professors engaging qualitative research and critical pedagogy for social change. Scholarly, performative, and creative, *Critical Plays* is a necessary text for the multidisciplinary qualitative research classroom.

– **Tami Spry, *Body, Paper, Stage: Writing and Performing Autoethnography***

Harris and Sinclair bring not just their expertise as arts-based researchers but their *artistic quality* to this exceptional book. The characters' monologue and dialogue are genuine, insightful, and unabashedly honest.

– **Johnny Saldaña, Professor Emeritus, Arizona State University (USA)**

True to the precedents set in the Social Fictions Series so far, in *Critical Plays* Harris and Sinclair offer a bold experiment re-

searching principles of arts-based research in scripted form. Drawing on their experience and inquiry as scholars and artists, the authors set their play in a graduate level methods class – a clever backdrop for exploring their understandings of the complexities of arts-based research through the multiple perspectives and various investments of their characters. With the integrity of using a performance-based method for traversing this rich and provocative research-scape, this book will undoubtedly prove an invaluable resource for scholars, instructors and students of arts-based research ... as well as an engaging and sophisticated read!!

– **Diane Conrad, Assoc Professor of Drama & Theatre, University of Alberta (CAN)**

Critical Plays takes you inside arts-based research on a visceral, pedagogical, and artistic level. The authors share a fictional classroom narrative in the form of a playscript, exploring the dynamics and complexities of working in an arts-based way. Highly engaging, deeply informed, and artistically rendered, I strongly recommend this book for both the newly initiated and highly experienced arts-based researcher. A must read.

– **George Belliveau, Professor, University of British Columbia (CAN)**

Critical Plays: Embodied Research for Social Change is an important addition to the field of arts-based research. The original and innovative approach undertaken by Harris and Sinclair is used to explore the research journeys of university students and their teachers by presenting their reflections, interpretations and reactions through this play text which examines significant elements of arts-based research through this process. The humanity and authenticity of each character engages and resonates with the reader. Characters directly address the audience allowing co-construction and counterpoints of reflection throughout the research journey. The transformative value and strength of arts-based research is presented in an aesthetically-crafted play (research text) which provides insights into the complexity of this field for those who seek to embody this approach. Each scene centres on an important aspect of arts-based research and provides the reader with greater understanding of this approach and where it is positioned in the field of qualitative research. Harris and Sinclair's passionate advocacy of arts-based research underpins this text which is enriched by their

extensive experience and expertise in the arts field. This is an engaging, thoughtful, and significant text which is a 'must have' on any bookshelf.

– **Margaret Baguley, Associate Professor of Arts Education, University of Southern Queensland (AUS)**

This new book is an engaging and innovative addition to the scholarly literature on arts based and arts informed research methodologies. Written with insight, humour and deep knowledge of the field this performance text explores both the potential and power of creative research approaches. A must for emerging and experienced qualitative researchers.

– **Robyn Ewing, Professor of Teacher Education and the Arts, University of Sydney (Australia)**

To paraphrase the Bard, 'Plays are such stuff that reality is based upon on and our lives are awoken by their insights'. Such is the work of Harris and Sinclair. Be prepare to LOL as you 'conspire' or 'breathe with' (Barone) the script recalling many class events, reflecting upon why things are this way, and challenged to change your behavior as students and teachers. As both researchers and playwrights, they have compiled a fiction that is all too real. Can't wait to see it performed!

– **Joe Norris, Professor of Dramatic Arts, Brock University (CAN)**

“The point here is that knowing is a multiple state of affairs, not a singular one. In pragmatic terms knowing is about relationships.”
Elliot Eisner, 2008

Vale Elliot Eisner, March 10, 1933-January 10, 2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

energy that she brought to all the conversations, deliberations and drafts and redrafts that kept us company along the way. The future is bright and beckoning for such a talented and courageous exponent of ABR. Christine would also like to acknowledge the support and inspiration of her friends and colleagues in arts education at the MGSE and the many, many educators, artists, teachers and students who taught her well and kept the spark alive. And she would like to thank her family, for their tolerance and good humour and unconditional support for all these strange and wonderful adventures that make up an academic life. Finally, an acknowledgement to a muse on his passing: thanks to Elliot Eisner, to whom this book is dedicated, for showing us, among other things, that knowing really is a 'multiple state of affairs'.

INTRODUCTION

PROLOGUE

It's a Tuesday, about 6pm, the first night of a semester-long class in Arts-Based Research, and a small and eclectic group of students assemble in their somewhat shambolic tutorial room to begin the trek through topics as varied as 'truth and verisimilitude', 'Creative/cognitive tensions', 'questions of representation', 'rigour' and 'ethics'. This fictional classroom is the site of our inquiry, and these characters the lens through which we examine and illuminate that inquiry into the nature of arts-based research as we understand it as scholars, and as we come to know it as artists.

CRITICAL FICTIONS

The arts deal with the evocative, the symbolic, and the expressive, with exploring through and communicating about experience in ways that transcend the verbal and the cognitive. The pliability of the arts to open doors to understanding has provided compelling argument for the exploration of creative and performative forms of expression in the transmission of research understandings and new contributions to knowledge. Through the *Social Fictions* series, Patricia Leavy continues this tradition, by creating new spaces for dialogue between arts-based researchers and those interested in or provoked by new sites and modes of inquiry.

Scholars are increasingly showing the diversity of methods and methodologies in approaching the work of doing arts-based research (see for example, Rolling 2010; Cahnmann-Taylor & Seigismund, 2008; Knowles & Cole 2008; Barone & Eisner 2012; Leavy 2013). New approaches are emerging each day, and for this reason we are very pleased to be able to make a contribution to the rapid development of performance texts as arts-based research. The *Social Fictions* series is unique in its ability to trouble the lines between fiction and research, indeed fiction-as-research, taking arts-based research another step forward in its development and potential.

Our book locates itself in an educational context – through its setting in a fictional classroom and its central action as the teaching of an arts-based methods class. However, we aim to speak more broadly to the principles of ABR, addressing the opportunities and challenges encountered by those who create it and those who reference it in their own work. While our play is set in a classroom, its characters provide a conduit to a range of social research contexts. These characters, coming from all walks of life and academic disciplines, bring those experiences into their own growing understanding of ABR, through which fundamental questions of ABR and its many contexts can be considered or tested. We see this book as a contribution to the expansion not only of arts-based research, but performance-based research as a sub-field, and the great diversity and potential yet to be fully explored here.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

In *Critical Plays*, as in other texts in this series, the fiction is embedded in the classes, interviews, collegial conversations, and creative collaborations we have both experienced in our work as arts-based researchers. Through the language of performance text, we embody our students, our participants, and ultimately ourselves in the characters of *Critical Plays*, and hope that the dialogic and performed basis of this inquiry brings to life some of the methodological conundrums that we ourselves have grappled with, and continue to grapple with.

This play of eight characters charts the difficult but rewarding journey for both students and teachers of arts-based research. Through a postgraduate-level methods class, these disparate characters discover a different side of themselves, while they discover a new side of academic research. As in life, the two lecturers – Barb and Kurt – do not escape the confronting nature of this work, and the undeniably (and sometimes painful) collaborative nature of it. Their journeys as individuals, as collaborators, and as researchers are intertwined. The text interrogates not only the ‘doing’ of contemporary research, but the ‘why bother’ or ‘so what’ of research as well. Returning research to its role as a deep and personal inquiry into the nature of life and the cosmos, these researchers find

that arts-based inquiry both reflects and explodes the rules, traditions and ethics of conducting research for social change and inevitably, must come to terms with how this deep engagement with ABR within an institutional setting challenges and provokes them into their own acts of individual and social change.

As we ourselves – like these characters – embody social change through our work, *Critical Plays* was a collaborative project. Firstly, in our approach to the inquiry – playwriting as method – we were not only negotiating the artistic constructions of meaning on the page through the creation of character, action and plot, but also, playwright to playwright (researcher to researcher). The notion of multiple truths and multiple perspectives was played out through the act of writing itself. This required us to explore how we would write together, how we would inquire through the vehicle of the play, and how we would arrive at shared understandings. This brought a richness and complexity to the process of writing and to the research experience. After all, we come to this work from very different perspectives – professional playwright and ABR scholar; theatre director and performance ethnographer – resulting in contrasting approaches to research and playwriting. Ultimately we found that the most effective way for us to write together, was to write separately and to share our understandings of the project, of our inquiry, of our characters and the play, through the artefact itself. Our co-construction of meanings emerged, just as it does in Boal’s Image Theatre work (1995), through a version of ‘silent negotiation’, with the artwork as the site of the embodied discourse. By working this way, we were able to *show* each other what we meant, artistically, through the work, as well as by talking about it. This was a powerful tool and we suspect a useful one for other collaborative creative researchers.

INFORMING THEORY

We’ve drawn on a range of theoretical and research traditions as we have developed this work. We note the historical influence of qualitative researchers such as Conquergood (2002), Eisner (2008) and Denzin (2003), who forged the argument for research practices which were “grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and

personal connection: ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing who’” (Conquergood, 1991:196). Such practices, they suggested, generated a more dialogic approach to research, allowing for the possibility that understanding could be achieved through highly contextualized symbolic, emotional or affective engagement with new knowledge, as well as with the more accepted propositional knowledge garnered from “empirical observation and critical analysis from a distanced perspective” (Conquergood, 1991:196). It is against this backdrop that the seminal figures in arts-based research – Conquergood (2002) and Madison (2005) in performance ethnography; Barone and Eisner (2012), and Cole and Knowles (2008) and McNiff (2013) in arts-based research – provided theoretical building blocks upon which works including *Critical Plays* have been made. As Barone and Eisner (2012) observe, the processes of selection, refinement and focus that are intrinsic to the construction of a literary/artistic form, also serve the researcher in pursuing a line of inquiry. Importantly, the artistic form allows for nuance and the spaces between events and characters to speak, and to reflect deeper understandings that cannot be captured only in words.

Performed research has qualities which distinguish it from other text-based forms, for example, the embodied, the live, the visceral, and the symbolic representations of what Eisner describes as “ineffable knowledge” (2008:5). These qualities critically influence the ways in which researchers, performers, participants and audiences engage with the experience of seeing the work or reading the performance text as an artwork.

Tami Spry (2011) has developed performative arts-based inquiry further by bringing autoethnographic practices together with performance ethnography. She describes her approach in which “a critical stance of the performing body constitutes a praxis of evidence and analysis. We offer our performing body as raw data of a critical cultural story” (p 19). Spry’s sense of the performing body as data informs our own embodied practice, as playwrights inscribing lived experience in the characters we create, characters who will further come to life in performances based on this playscript. This is the strength of arts-based research: its ability to breathe and enact on multiple levels and in multi-disciplines at once, an embodiment both

individual and collective, which constitutes by its intersubjectivity an epistemology and a lived experience of social change.

PERFORMANCE TEXT AS RESEARCH/ PLAYWRITING AS RESEARCH

What makes this text research and not just a play? Artists have long asserted our own systematic approaches to our work as equally rigorous, but including an affective dimension only strengthens its worth as new knowledge. Artists have always aimed to reflect, critique and extend society's understandings of ourselves as individuals and collectivities. Similarly, so have qualitative researchers. If we consider that the writing of the play is an act of inquiry (playwriting as method) then we can begin to see embodiment itself as methodology, a system of thought and set of tools.

Through the artform, in this case the writing of the play, we identified a line of inquiry – a quest for a new understanding, new knowledge. And in the construction of the play we continued this inquiry. The play, once crafted, provided a site of inquiry and then too an artistic, informed representation of that inquiry. Through the writing of the play script, we sought to clarify our understandings of specific aspects of ABR (topics for different classes in our fictional ABR methods class) and the process of clarification was conducted through artistic and conceptual problem-posing, and at times problem-solving; for example, how do we understand ethical issues for the arts-based researcher in a rich, rather than a simplistic way, and subsequently represent them so that others can understand or experience these ideas?

In this questioning comes the political potential of ABR to not only reflect society, but help transform it – something artists have long acknowledged. The idea that art can be made with no attention to the culture in which it is shown, on which it comments, and for whom it is created, would be a strange notion to most artists. Socio-cultural considerations are at the heart of why artists do what they do. So too are they central to arts-based research, indeed perhaps more central to many of us than ontological or epistemological questions of methodology. This does not mean that ABR lacks rigour but rather that the social function – indeed the research potential for new

INTRODUCTION

knowledge but also new ‘knowing’ – of arts-based research speaks to more aspects of the human condition than simply the intellectual aspect. What ABR has to offer is only now emerging, and we hope here to make some contribution to that rising wave.

THE AUDIENCE

Through this text, our aim is to provide an experience that is artistic as well as a substantial encounter with research. The characters who populate it are drawn from our lived experiences as researchers, teachers, and performance makers. *Critical Plays* is to us the systematic study of a classroom culture, comprising of six students and their two teachers, imaginatively conceived from experience, observation, interviews, community consultation (thematic analysis, etc.), and shaped into performance text which can be enacted or read as a script/text.

Our audience for this book includes all qualitative researchers and students, not only those of arts-based research, but more broadly those who see the expansive potential of arts-as-research in and across multiple disciplines. One significant intention of modeling this ethnographically-informed performance text as research resides in its potential to be relevant to the lives of our research students, in reflecting their own experiences and in highlighting pathways that are increasingly open to them as they begin their own scholarly research undertakings and journeys in a new and rapidly-evolving global research landscape. Thus, the book will be useful in the context of courses that address research methods, pedagogy and curriculum, arts-informed research and those concerned with research ethics. In research courses or for those graduate students doing thesis work, we hope the book provides additional insights into the lives of research participants and students, and into the intensely emotional and sometimes confusing methodological and ethical conundra that often accompany these journeys.

In addition, the book addresses themes and issues relevant to students of communications, ethnography across disciplines, rhetoric, education and the sociology of education, drama and theatre arts. As such the book invites interrogation of critical ideas and insights afforded by the active, imaginative engagement with the fictional

characters and their ‘real’ research dilemmas and challenges. Lastly, we share the hope that this text and the play within it can be read or performed purely for pleasure by any interested readers or actors, as Leavy has articulated as a goal for her first book in this series, *Low-Fat Love* (2011).

In creating *Critical Plays*, we have used both formal interviews and our own experiences rendered through diaries, emails, brainstorming, free-writing sessions and dialogue together throughout this process. We have used the triumphs and detritus of our everyday lives – as artists do, as teachers do, as researchers do – to inform the protagonists Barb and Kurt, and to imbue them with the repetition of heartbreak and grinding demoralization that scholarly work in neoliberal times can sometimes seem to generate. Equally, we use the humanity of the characters in this work to remind students of the great need and political power of retaining emotion and relationality in the research space, an act of supreme social action as we see it. Arts-based methods as seen in this play and the entire Social Fictions series we hope remind readers of the great and urgent need to continue creating new “methodologies of the heart” (Pelias 2008), and disseminating this work widely. In this way we can remain scholarly activists, not just in participant communities ‘of difference’, but in our own fractured, sometimes very fragile worlds.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS AND SETTING

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Barb Grattan (professor) – early 50s, energetic, always moving, attentive but a bit nervous. She is knowledgeable about this place and these systems, and despite her nerves her confidence shows through. She has a warm voice and face that belies her relentless concern with procedure.

Kurt Smith-Whiteley (lecturer) – late 30s, looks like a hippie, would not pick him as an academic apart from the uber-cool expensive leather satchel he carries. He is ruggedly attractive and relaxed in his presentation style, and his voice somehow conveys his jazz musician identity.

Francine Nebbins (student) – 23, Honours Arts student in Performance Studies. Planning on researching Australian women playwrights of the 20th Century – from communism to feminism, but is not clear how she will go about her research or where she hopes it will take her career-wise. She is unsure about her future. Her research models are Holly Hughes, Peggy Phelan and other performance studies scholars- practitioners.

Andrea Schuck (student) – 43, primary school generalist classroom teacher doing her Masters. Andrea is creative and chaotic, wanting to do something ‘different’ in her research so that she can take it back to her school. Doesn’t know what she wants to do exactly, but wants to change the culture of her school through her research. Not a confident student, possibly choosing ABR to avoid writing. Research focus: Shakespeare in the primary classroom. Her research models include Jonothan Neelands, George Belliveau and Elliot Eisner.

Gerard Posniak (student) – 46, School Principal, enrolled in the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, he is an ABR sceptic and is taking the class as a course work requirement only because it’s the only one that fits in with his timetable. He has already mapped

CAST OF CHARACTERS AND SETTING

out his study, has a fully developed proposal, identified participants, planned for the survey, and is currently completing the ethics applications for the university and the department. His research models include Australian John Hattie and critical pedagogue Peter McLaren, but no ABR scholars.

Malcolm Rogers (student) – 58, is a near-retirement Professor of Nursing and Allied Health, and former head of a large community health centre in a low socio-economic region of Melbourne. He is also a professional jazz pianist, but has never brought this into his research at all. He has spent a lifetime as a quantitative researcher. He has done extensive research into grief and end-of-life care, but more from an institutional care and policy perspective. Lately, his faculty has had a lot of success using whole body prosthetics and role play for training pre-service nurses and health care aids, and obviously on a personal level he believes in the power of music and art therapy. He is not at all sceptical, yet he is brand new to ABR as a practitioner.

Ajak “Suzi” Deng (student) – 24, single mother of two. Arrived in Australia 7 years ago. Has had little formal education either prior to or since arriving in Australia, but very bright and ambitious. She attended 1 year of TAFE ESL classes, then has intermittently tried to study real estate and acting. The arts are her great love. She wanted to be the first Black woman on Australian television, and even did a video audition but didn’t get in. She has been in a number of plays in town, but often her childcare needs interrupt her ability to commit. She has now gained portfolio entry to Social Work and has taken this class because she thought she could do an arts project, but she is feeling very intimidated. Her research model is Tami Spry because she is a passionate performer.

Jaime Rebeck (student) – 32, is Kurt’s PhD student who doesn’t turn up until Week 6 – she is a powerful voice from the ‘field’. Anthropology student currently in the central Australian desert researching Indigenous filmmaking using an ethnocinematic approach, Jaime is in constant online contact with Kurt but is not

CAST OF CHARACTERS AND SETTING

contributing to the class the way she should be. She is struggling with common ABR issues such as ethics, intercultural complexities, remote research locations, power imbalances, and boundaries with her supervisor Kurt, on whom she may have a crush. Conducting her research in an aboriginal community in the Northern Territory, Jaime continually confronts these and other challenges associated with transcultural arts-based research as a different way of knowing, in a community that isn't her own. Her research models are Trinh T. Minh-ha and Linda Tuhiwai-Smith.

SETTING

This play is set mainly in an Australian urban university classroom in which an (evening) arts-based research methods class takes place throughout the action of the play. It is a fairly old-school room, with little except an overhead projector, a data projector, desks and chairs.

There is a screen at the front which is used throughout, sometimes as a classroom projection screen and sometimes as a device of the play.

Some action of the play also takes place in other minimally-defined spaces such as: the two lecturers' homes, their offices, a cafe, a public housing meeting room, and a street. These spaces do not require sets for production, but rather screen projections and sound may be used to set the scenes, and minimal props can indicate the spaces.

PROLOGUE

KURT

Is in his office. It is (perhaps surprisingly?) very ordered – doesn't necessarily match his free and easy look. There are artefacts – gifts and treasured artworks from his time in remote communities and Laos where he lived for some time. There is also a framed arthouse photo of a younger Kurt performing in front of a crowd of adoring fans. Kurt is playing the saxophone, trying to improvise but it's not working. He keeps trying a lick and loses the groove, starts again. He begins to check his watch, knowing he is going to be late for class.

BARB

Is in her office which is full of papers and photos – a seminal trip to Scotland of many years earlier, some of her paintings, her kids and her husband Dougie. There are production photos, and stacks of paper and folders fill the room, the furniture, etc. She is pacing.

I don't know why I do this to myself ... every ... time!

I'm a fraud. I just feel like a ... complete fraud. Why did I think this was a good idea? Why did I think it was a good idea to co-teach with an inexperienced teacher something like an arts-based research class that is going to take my whole heart and soul? Could I not just have picked a statistical methods class or something? Jeez

(she emails Kurt)

Dear Kurt, I still have not received your lesson plan for tonight and class is looming. Any ideas?

(she hits send, and simultaneously we hear the 'ping' on Kurt's email of it arriving. He doesn't notice, as he plays right through it.

Beat.

She picks up the phone, dials. His phone begins to ring. He stops playing, stares at the phones, starts playing again. She hangs up, frustrated.)

Oh great!

(they both check their watches again, and rush out)

SCENE / CLASS 1: SUBJECTIVITIES

(A small junky classroom with a dozen chairs with fitted half/desk tops. An old whiteboard, with the remains of many notes from previous classes not quite fully erased. There is a large clock on the wall. Six o'clock is showing, though it's unclear whether this is the correct time or if the clock is working at all. The room is empty, but the sounds of people can be heard outside the door. A young woman, about 23, enters.)

FRANCINE

(checks clock, then her watch) Six o'clock. Really? I'm never early. *(to audience)* I'm never early. I like things to be underway in a class before I arrive. That way I get the vibe of the class but don't have to contribute to it, except by coming late. And you can tell a lot about a lecturer by the way they react to you when you interrupt them. I once withdrew from a class after the first week cause the artice stare I got when I walked in chilled me to my marrow – that was a woman without compassion – no way I'd get an extension from her without extreme measures. It was a no brainer, I got out of that class as soon as I could. Luckily I came across Kurt and he had me hooked. He was giving a lunchtime lecture on jazz as research, but really he was wooing every woman there – the smile, the stories, the deprecating humour. Talk about charisma. I would have over-enrolled just to be in his class. I didn't realize there'd be two of them running this. Hey, what if the woman's a real ice maiden. Now that would be, I don't know, ironic? Anyway, I already know what I'm going to do in my research. I've known for ages, since before the summer break. I had my research question weeks ago – maybe I'll keep that to myself for a while, though – let them think they inspired me to formulate something fresh – one of the tricks of the trade for a professional student – this is my fifth year here. But I've said too much, I don't even know you. Now here I am, first person in the room and I'll have to choose a seat before anyone else – that's an unfamiliar experience.

(Francine tries many seats before finding one that she thinks allows her minimum exposure. She's just settling in with iPad and headphones as Kurt enters with other students Malcolm, Gerard, Andrea and Francine together, chatting happily.)

Moments later, Barb arrives, and starts to arrange printed materials on the small front desk, then attempts to fire up the computer in order to operate the data projector sitting next to an antiquated overhead projector. Kurt and Barb move the overhead projector onto the floor. While the students look around for suitable seating, Barb & Kurt huddle over the computer and the data projector, attempting unsuccessfully to bring it to life.)

ANDREA

(to audience, as she finds and organizes several chairs into a semicircle) People say you always know if there's a teacher in the room because they've rearranged the chairs. They might be right. I wonder if there's a research question in that? I'm hoping this is a talkative lot because I haven't got a clue what we're supposed to be doing tonight – I know I'm supposed to have a research question ready to hand in or, share or some such thing. I've got five questions and I'm pretty sure they all suck. And Gerard's here – he was my old boss before he got the nod to run the P-12 – I'll tell you this much for nothing, he'll have his question neatly typed and placed in a manila folder with copies for everyone in the class. A-type personalities as school principals. I wonder if that's a good research question? *(pulls several pieces of paper out of her handbag)* I had a brainwave in the car on the way here, wrote it down at the traffic lights. That's the one I'm going to read out if I'm asked – if I can find which one it is. God I hope we get a break for a coffee. I came straight from school and had yard duty at lunch time. I haven't sat down since 11 o'clock this morning and I was up at 6 to get the kids off to school – not that I'm complaining. I hate whingers. *(she sits)*

GERARD

It's already 6.10. Clearly, the technology doesn't work. I have 2 hours of emails waiting for me when I get home so I really hope this class finishes early tonight. I've prepared my research question

and have made copies to distribute, which should expedite the discussion of my question to get things started. As all good leaders know, any plan is better than no plan and I'm presuming that this IS the plan for tonight's class – group discussion and, I hope, a quick sign off on the question so I can continue with the project I've mapped out. They still can't get the technology working – I'm not entirely pleased.

(The students have seated themselves in the semicircle and are waiting for some kind of cue from the lecturers. There is an awkward pause as the students watch the lecturers struggle with the technology. Kurt realises they are waiting on him.)

KURT

Introduce yourselves please. Take a few minutes to get acquainted. We'll be starting soon, promise.

(There's a slight pause as the students look at each other, wondering who's going to begin.)

MALCOLM

I'll start – 'age before beauty'. Hi, I'm Malcolm.

ANDREA

And I'm Andrea, hello. I'm a bit nervous. Oh, and this is Gerard, we know each other already, don't we Gerard?

GERARD

As you've heard already, my name is Gerard. Hello Andrea, how are you. Oh, and it's Gerard, not Gerry.

(They all look expectantly at Francine, who still has her headphones on.)

FRANCINE

(Without pulling her earphones out.)

Hi, Francine

SCENE / CLASS 1

MALCOLM

(to Suzi)

And what about you, what's your name?

SUZI

My name is Ajak, but please call me Suzi – it's easier for ... it's easier.

MALCOLM

Hi Suzi. Welcome.

KURT

Just a few minutes more and we'll be all sorted. Sorry you guys – this room isn't used too often and the cabling is ancient.

(They continue struggling with it under the following)

MALCOLM

I can't believe how small this group is. I thought this class would be really popular. I've watched arts-based research gain steady hold in health and medicine – and to great effect, too – but I've never really tried it myself. It feels good to be a student again. And only thirty years after my last studies – things have certainly changed. Except for that overhead projector there. I think that was in use in the last methods class I did. Applied statistical methods in allied health – circa 1985 – Yes, I think they were cranking up that old faithful back then. I remember being blown away one night when a lecturer took out a pen and wrote on one of the transparencies, **while we were watching**. That was about as arts-based as things got back then. And here I am tonight, another methods class, and there's going to be music and painting and performance. I'm in research heaven.

SUZI

I think this might be a mistake. Kurt made it sound so great and so easy, to come along to his class, but I'm just starting out. Some of these people are old, way older than me. They must have done a lot

of study. Research is a scary word – I’m not sure how it fits in with my Social Work course, but Kurt seemed to think it would be something I could use and something I’d be good at. He must know, right. He’s got a doctorate and he’s the teacher. He must know what he’s doing. As long as I don’t have to say anything I’ll be ok. So that’s a plan, right? I’ll sit here next to the girl with the headphones and not say anything til I’ve got an idea of what’s going on. Yep, that sounds like a plan.

(Finally, the title slide for the class appears on screen)

<p><i>(Kurt takes ‘centre stage’ with laser pointer in hand to begin the class. Barb moves to the side, presiding over the course materials to be handed out later. She watches. Kurt leads the students through his slide show, in silhouette, without sound.)</i></p>	<p>Welcome Arts-Based Research Methods: An introduction Your MCs: Kurt and Barb</p>
<p><i>As the class progresses, Barb stands to the side, attentive, presiding over the materials to be handed out, and waiting for her turn. She addresses the audience directly, talking to herself aloud.</i></p>	<p>The self-conscious aim of life is to find expression, and art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realise that energy. (Oscar Wilde)</p>
<p>BARB I still feel like a fraud. Or the class monitor. In a moment he’ll stop speaking and it’ll be my turn and I’ll get to distribute the handouts and talk about the assessment. Suck it up sweetheart. This was your choice. Kurt thinks they’ve put me here to keep an eye on the new boy, just in case he strays too far from the flock. Not so. I offered, no teaching load, and not much glory. I wanted to be there.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the line of inquiry? • How does method inform practice; and how does practice inform method? • How is this work communicated to honour the artistic/creative practice; to honour the voices of participants? • How is this work communicated in the academy– as new knowledge and as credible research? • How does methodology support this inquiry?

<p>Thought I could help. Be a mentor to the young star. We should all take our turn in the mentor role, that's what I've always believed. But I was being disingenuous. I wanted to be in the proximity of passion. And this is what it feels like. Like fraud. And the worst part about it, he, that young boy, he thinks I'm a fraud as well. What would she know about arts-based research? What would she know about art? I listen to him speak. He's poetry in motion. Oh damn, I think that's a cliché.</p>	<p>Your work should: make an original contribution to knowledge in terms of the originality of the approach and/or findings.</p> <p>Denzin says: The seventh moment ... is concerned with moral discourse, with the development of sacred textualities. The seventh moment asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalisation, freedom and community (2003:9).</p>
<p>I just didn't anticipate finding myself quite so ... at odds, so marginalized. It was a crazy thing to do, to offer to co-teach this course. I am not an artist. I'm an academic, a serious researcher with a track record. And my workload really is unforgiving. Hell, I <i>want</i> this ABR class to thrive, which he doesn't realise. I want to learn more about it too, that's part of the hook for me. I desperately miss <i>learning</i>, I even wish sometimes I could be a student again. What a beautiful luxury that is. But co-teaching a new class like this is probably as close as I'll get – I've been reading for weeks now already, all the key authors – the Barone and Eisner, Saldana, Leavy, Ardra's work, all the Denzin forays into ABR. It's the – what is it that's so tantalizing when I see Kurt in full flight, reading his stories, introducing his latest work in music, or in applied video – what is it? – ethnocinema. It's the ineffable ... the blessed relief of the unknown knowledge – that which is known but cannot be spoken, he just seems to embody it – was I ever like that?</p>	

<p>KURT <i>(Briefly heard from the shadows)</i> This work aligns itself with the arts-based research tradition about which Elliot Eisner and Tom Barone have written extensively and modelled so eloquently in their own research writing. They identify seven features of Arts-Based Research:</p>	
<p><i>(As each of the seven features are highlighted there is a mimed discussion amongst the class. It is animated and all the students are involved, except for Suzi, who sits apart.)</i></p> <p>BARB The creation of a virtual reality and as he turns in my direction, I know he expects me to not understand, but of course I understand. I've got a fucking doctorate, even if it was on parchment – I have to stop doing that ... I'm not that old. Of course I understand the creation of the virtual world, the construction of a fictional framing in which the imagined becomes 'real' or is given the appearance of the real, the verisimilitude which permits the authentic voice to be heard.</p> <p>As for ambiguity, well, ABR is at the heart of ambiguity – to revel in the partial and contradictory truths that co-exist – in scholarly worlds, in virtual worlds ... in all worlds, let's be honest.</p>	<p>Seven Features of Arts-Based Educational Inquiry.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Creation of a Virtual Reality. 2. The Presence of Ambiguity. 3. The Use of Expressive Language. 4. The Use of Contextualised and Vernacular Language. 5. The Promotion of Empathy. 6. Personal Signature of the Researcher/Writer. 7. The Presence of Aesthetic Form.
<p>Yes, it's the ineffable that brought me here, Kurt.</p>	<p>As Michael Polanyi says, we know more than we can tell. Thus, not only does knowledge come in different forms, the forms of its creation differ. The idea of ineffable knowledge is not an oxymoron (Eisner, 2008:5).</p>

(The focus reverses. Barb is now in silhouette and Kurt takes up her position in the light.)

KURT

Great discussion. I'm going to hand over to Barb now who's going to talk you through the hard stuff – the nuts and bolts of things, assessment, deadlines, you get the picture. Barb?

(Kurt watches briefly as Barb begins her Powerpoint then pulls his phone out of his pocket on which he reads an email to himself, as)

<p>KURT</p> <p>“Hey Kurt, I’m not going to be coming to the class. I’ve enrolled and will send you updates, but I’m into the most important part of my study and I can’t get away. I’ll do the assessments and I’ll even make it back for the presentations in the last week – should have a shitload of footage by then. Jaime”.</p> <p>(pause)</p>	<p>BARB’S POWERPOINT</p> <p>IEX 904 Arts-Based Research Methods: An introduction ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS</p> <p>Journal: Hurdle requirement – weekly. Submission Date – 2 weeks after last class Proposal: Draft –Submission Date Week 3 Weekly tutorial presentations Research Presentation: includes revised draft, rationale for ABR, work sample</p>
<p>Why do I always feel like she’s the supervisor and I’m the doctoral student? And why does that shit me instead of making me feel happy that she’s at least self-motivated?</p> <p>(beat)</p> <p>Because she’s a pain in the ass, that’s why.</p>	<p>Further information on the Journal A reflexive journal: i.e. (of a method or theory in the social sciences) taking account of itself or of the effect of the personality or presence of the researcher on what is being investigated. <i>Reflexivity: is the process of examining both oneself as researcher, and the research relationship. Self-searching involves examining one’s “conceptual baggage”, one’s assumptions and preconceptions, and how these affect research decisions, particularly, the selection and wording of questions. Reflecting on the <u>research relationship</u> involves examining one’s relationship to the respondent, and how the relationship dynamics affect responses to questions</i></p>

	<p>For next week: Journal entry on ABR Epistemologies: Knowing and Feeling Five minute tutorial presentation about your research proposal – “What I know and what I feel”</p>
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(Kurt breaks in, rudely interrupting Barb mid-sentence)

KURT

Folks, there is one other student in this class – Jaime Stenock – who is doing a PhD with me in ethnocinema. She is based in Alice Springs, and is making collaborative videos with Indigenous young people about the music scene in Central Australia. The study is really pretty ground-breaking, I must say, even though Jaime herself isn't Indigenous, but –

SUZI

– A culture vulture?

KURT

Excuse me?

SUZI

Culture vulture! That's what we call white people who come in and – you know, want to research all the natives. That kind of thing. No offense.

KURT

Uh, yeah. Okay. Well keeping it specific and avoiding *generalisations*, let me just reassure you that Jaime is, well, she's not like that – I mean, she's –

BARB

(saves him)

This is so perfect – I love when this happens!

SCENE / CLASS 1

KURT

Sorry?

BARB

That kind of ethical dilemma about working cross-culturally, or working in new methods or alternative media – that is so what ABR is about, right Kurt? These are cutting edge approaches, and *of course* issues of ethics and power are always present. I think this is a great place to pick it up next week.

KURT

(Comes to)

What? Oh yeah exactly, great job everyone. That's it for this week. Sorry we didn't get time for a coffee break. Bring your coffee mugs next week and we'll bring the biscuits. We'll make sure we take a break – get some time for chatting – that's when the real thinking happens, isn't it Barb?

GERARD

(Raises hand)

Excuse me? Didn't you ask us to bring our research questions for sharing? I mean, some of us came prepared and I'm not sure why we haven't covered this. Does that mean we can go ahead and proceed with our planned project?

(Barb passive aggressively looks to Kurt to handle this.)

KURT

Yeah sorry about that – the time just got away from us. Bring them back next week – Gerry, right?

GERARD

I prefer Gerard.

KURT

Yeah cool – Gerard – bring them back next week and we'll pick it up there.

(Gerard is not pleased but holds further complaint for now.)

KURT

Okay, and finally: to start you off on your reflexive journals, which – as we said online is absolutely crucial to this process – please consider the statement “I’m walking out the door and I’m thinking about ...” right now, class #1 – get it down, ok? Let’s document this process right from the beginning.

Okay, thanks everybody – see you next week.

(Kurt and Barb leave, Barb reassuring him quietly.)

As the students are packing up their things, chatting amongst themselves, sending and checking text messages, each one pauses briefly and addresses the audience directly)

FRANCINE

I’m walking out the door and I’m thinking about the crush I had on my first year History lecturer. He was so smart, so aloof, so revealing. I followed him around, not exactly literally – took every class he offered, made sure I was in his tute group, read everything he wrote. It was unrequited but I did discover the Australian communist playwrights of the 30s and I fell in love with them instead.

(she leaves)

GERARD

I’m walking out the door and I’m thinking that it’s March and I need to have my study designed and completely calibrated by the end of May. That’s not a problem, I’ve just about wrapped up the design, now just waiting on some guidance with my ethics. It would help if I had a supervisor lined up. And I’m deeply sceptical – Kurt is, well, a jazz musician who seems to think of himself more of a rock star, and strikes me as completely unqualified to be guiding me through my methods study, as minimal as my needs are. And I think he has an agenda.

(he leaves)

ANDREA

(holding a scrap of paper in her hand) I'm walking out the door and I'm thinking that Elliot Eisner is a revelation. What does he say? *(she reads)* "The quest for certainty, as Dewey points out, is hopeless" [4]. No, that's not the one, it's this one *(finds another piece of paper)*: "Words, except when they are used artistically, are proxies for direct experience. They point us in a direction in which we can undergo what the words purport to reveal. Words, in this sense, are like cues to guide us on a journey" [5]. God, I love TS Elliot. I'm always struggling to find the right words – the best proxies – for my experiences with the children. It's as if I **know** what needs to be said, what needs to be discovered, but I just can't find the right words or put them in the right order. I'm getting onto Book Depository tonight – gotta get that Eisner book. Better get the Dewey one as well.

(she leaves)

MALCOLM

So Kurt spent time in the central desert – I wouldn't have taken him for an outback kind of guy. More like a pretty boy who can do no wrong. Harmless enough, but not used to failure. And what kind of good research can you do if you're not used to failure? Okay Mr Teacher-Man: I'm walking out the door and thinking – I'm thinking about not thinking too much at all. Don't go there Malcolm. Just keep it light, stay in the moment. One day at a time.

(he leaves)

SUZI

I'm walking out the door and I'm thinking, next week I'm coming with a dictionary, or, maybe, I'm not coming at all. When is a Sudanese gonna research a white person? Never, cuz we don't care!

FRANCINE

(returning)

Hey, Suzi, I think I might live somewhere out your way. Would you like a ride?

SUZI

No thanks. I'd rather wait 20 minutes for the train, then walk a kilometre home from the station in the dark, thanks anyway.

(Beat)

Kidding. That'd be great, thanks.

(Francine laughs and they leave together.)