VOICES UP!
EXPERIENCES OF COLLECTIVE PLAYMAKING

by

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Abstract

In January 2016, a group of community members, students, and staff began creating a play together at the UBC Learning Exchange, in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. For the next twenty-two months, the group wrote, rehearsed, and performed a collectively created theatre piece, entitled Voices UP! This thesis project casts four of the community members who took part in the collective creation process as co-inquirers, exploring their experiences of collaborative playmaking. Considering art’s potential to contribute to mental health, the author combines two complementary qualitative methods – research-based theatre and narrative analysis – to investigate the co-inquirers’ experiences of playmaking in terms of relevance to wellbeing. The study results, drawing from interview transcripts, drawings, and objects from the collective creation process, are presented as both a thematic analysis, and a short play script, entitled Give Me Your Hands. Reflecting the process used to create Voices UP!, the short script was collectively written by the author and four co-inquirers. Give Me Your Hands is a play about making a play, and illustrates the shared and individual experiences of those who took part in a community-based collective creation process.
Lay Summary

In January 2016, a group of community members, students, and staff began creating a play together at the UBC Learning Exchange, in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. Over twenty-two months, the group wrote, rehearsed, and performed a collectively created theatre piece entitled *Voices UP!* This thesis project casts four community members who took part in the collective creation process as co-inquirers, exploring their experiences of collaborative playmaking. These community members shared stories of working on *Voices UP!* through interviews, drawings, and objects. Considering art’s potential to contribute to mental health, the author investigates the co-inquirers’ experiences of playmaking in terms of relevance to wellbeing. The results are presented as a collection of themes, as well as play script, entitled *Give Me Your Hands*, collectively written by the author and co-inquirers. *Give Me Your Hands* illustrates the shared and individual experiences of those who took part in a community-based collective creation process.
Preface

This thesis is based on a research undertaken by the author, Christopher Cook, and is original and unpublished work. This research study focused on a play called *Voices UP!*, collectively written and created by community members, students, staff, and volunteers at the UBC Learning Exchange.

The thesis includes several drawings and photographs attributed to co-inquirers. The short play, *Give Me Your Hands*, which forms part of the analysis and results presentation for this thesis project, was collectively written by the author and four co-inquirers.

This research received ethical approval from the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia, certificate number H17-00101.

This research was conducted on the traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.
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My deepest gratitude to my family and friends, for all the strength you lent me through this process.

And Scott – my husband, my love – thank you for never doubting that I am exactly where I am meant to be, even when I was in doubt, and walking beside me as I follow my heart.
To all the community members, students, and Learning Exchange staff who created

Voices UP!
Chapter One: The Play’s the Thing

But what has knowledge to do with art?

–Bertolt Brecht, Brecht on Theatre (J. Willet, Trans.)

Setting the Stage: The Research Problem

In January 2016, a group of community members, students, and staff began creating a play together at the UBC Learning Exchange, in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES), on the traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. For the next twenty-two months, the group wrote, rehearsed, and performed a collectively created theatre piece, entitled Voices UP! This thesis project casts four of the community members who took part in the collective creation process as co-inquirers, exploring their experiences of collaborative playmaking.

The therapeutic relevance of art has been posited for centuries – in Ancient Greece, Aristotle argued art was a means of processing emotion (Aristotle, 1970). More recently, the health benefits of art viewing and art creation have been advocated by authors in psychology and related fields, and are supported by a growing body of research (Argyle & Bolton, 2005; Camic, 2008; Leckey, 2011; Lomas, 2016; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Indeed, the expanding literature in the fields of arts therapy – utilizing visual arts – and expressive arts therapy – utilizing performance-based arts – continues to point towards positive outcomes (Lomas, 2016; Reynolds, Nabors, & Quinlan, 2000; Slayton, D’Archer, & Kaplan, 2010).

Considering arts’ potential to contribute to mental health, this thesis research combined two complementary qualitative methods, research-based theatre and narrative analysis, to investigate co-inquirers’ experiences of playmaking in terms of relevance to wellbeing. The results, drawn from co-inquirer interview transcripts, sketches, and objects they have chosen to
represent their *Voices UP!* experiences, are presented as a thematic analysis and a short play script. Reflecting the process used to create *Voices UP!*, the short script was collectively written by the graduate student researcher/artist and four co-inquirers. The short script, entitled *Give Me Your Hands*, is a play about making a play, and illustrates the shared and individual experiences of those who took part in a collaborative playmaking project. *Give Me Your Hands* is accompanied by a critical commentary (Belliveau & Lea, 2016), and a discussion of the relevance of this research to clinical work and the counselling psychology literature.

**A Community, a University, and a Play**

**The UBC Learning Exchange.** Established in 1999, the Learning Exchange brings together members of the community and university to collaboratively engage in knowledge sharing and change promotion at a local level (UBC Learning Exchange, 2016a). Based in the DTES, in Chinatown, the Learning Exchange serves a diverse range of community members. Individuals living and/or accessing programs in the DTES may face multiple barriers, including living below Vancouver’s low income cut off-line, unemployment, and mental wellness challenges. The DTES is home to a large population of seniors, and the DTES neighborhood of Chinatown includes large immigrant populations. Immigrants living in the DTES may face under- or unemployment and lack of housing to a greater degree than those living in other areas of the city (City of Vancouver Planning and Development Services & City of Vancouver Community Services, 2013).

Although the DTES is often viewed from a problematized lens, from a strengths-based perspective, the area is home to many artists, and individuals living in the DTES report a greater sense of community compared to the rest of Vancouver. Furthermore, the community has been a space for the development and implementation of a range of learning approaches and resources
to support individuals facing diverse obstacles and prejudices (City of Vancouver Planning and Development Services & City of Vancouver Community Services, 2013).

To address the diverse needs of the community members it serves, the Learning Exchange has launched a range of programing, from English conversation classes to computer skills courses. One such program, the Learning Lab, offers flexible, low-barrier workshop and club opportunities tailored to residents’ interests. The Learning Lab aims to match community members with learning opportunities they are passionate about, and/or collaboratively create new opportunities that meet their passions. From its beginnings in 2013, arts and culture has been a major focus of Learning Lab activities (UBC Learning Exchange, 2013).

The play. Collective theatre creation has previously been utilized in therapeutic (Boal, 1995; Westwood & Gordon, 2016) as well as research contexts (Belliveau, 2007; Norris, 2000; Wager, 2014). Collective creation is an approach to theatre making in which a group of artists and/or community members work together to make a play. Collective members may be involved in the devising as well as the performance of the collaboratively created work.

As a three-year pilot program (UBC Learning Exchange, 2013), an evaluation of the Learning Lab began in 2015 to consider the program’s impacts. A collective playbuilding project was initiated as part of the evaluation, in the hopes that it would enable community members to participate and offer feedback in an engaging and creative manner. More than thirty community members, students, and staff collectively created *Voices UP!*, a play that depicts residents’ experiences taking part in workshops, clubs, and other learning opportunities with the Learning Lab. Since its creation in 2016, *Voices UP!* has been performed as a staged-reading four times.

In keeping with the Learning Lab’s arts focus, and continuing the artistic and collaborative impulses initiated by *Voices UP!*, this thesis explores the experiences of several
community members who took part in the collective play creation process using narrative analysis and research-based theatre.

**Research Question**

What were the experiences of community members who took part in *Voices UP!* at the UBC Learning Exchange? The gathered narratives were explored to consider the potential therapeutic value of taking part in a community-based collective theatre project.

**Research Relevance**

As Lomas (2016) implies, the use of expressive arts in therapy is well-established. We need only look to music therapy (McCaffrey & Edwards, 2016), dance therapy (Hagensen, 2015), and drama therapy (Bassingthwaighte, 2017) to find recent research exploring the therapeutic effectiveness of performing arts in mental health settings. Lomas (2016), writing from a positive psychology perspective and coining the term “positive art”, calls for further research into “the role of artistic expression and appreciation in flourishing … and its potential in helping people lead more fulfilling lives” (p. 172). Positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) suggests the importance of exploring, emphasizing, and propagating growth experiences rooted in community. This thesis research explored experiences of a community-based collective playmaking process to consider the potential wellbeing benefits that collaborative art may offer. Within the realm of positive psychology, relatively few researchers have explored experiences of strengths in communities, such as the DTES, where residents may face multiple barriers (Rao & Donaldson, 2015).

*Voices UP!* became a core activity of the Learning Lab in 2016 and 2017. In other words, a collaborative play creation project, which began as a component of a program evaluation, became a learning and skill-building opportunity for interested community members that lasted
nearly two years. In counselling, particularly career counselling, there has been an increasing emphasis on programs that offer skill-building opportunities to individuals who may not be able to access traditional education and work trajectories (Sinacore et al., 2011). The traditional models and formats of individual or group counselling may not be appropriate or desirable for such individuals. What are examples of alternative programing and support options? Considering individual stories of participation in *Voices UP!* offered the opportunity to explore what co-inquirers gained from this theatre project. Such insights may provide a map for researchers, community members, and other groups who hope to embark on similar skill-building projects.

In addition, the UBC Learning Exchange is actively working to ensure that university researchers work in collaboration with community members, and that every stage of the research process is accessible ("Taking it to the street," n.d.; UBC Learning Exchange, n.d.). Advocates of arts-based and research-based theatre assert that it is a means of creating collaborative qualitative inquiries (Saldaña, 2003). This research allowed the graduate student and community members to work side-by-side, as co-inquirers in the creation of knowledge and art.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

If you knew it all it would not be creation but dictation.

–Gertrude Stein, Gertrude Stein Remembered

In the counselling psychology research literature, various authors have explicated the need for therapy practices that go beyond traditional talk therapy situated in the counselling room (Rogers, Tudor, Tudor, & Keemar, 2012; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010; Van der Kolk, 2014). In diverse focus areas, from trauma (Westwood, Keats, & Wilensky, 2003) to career concerns (Amundson, 2011), researchers and clinicians have begun exploring the benefits of using embodied and arts-based approaches in their counselling work. The following literature review focuses on the research supporting the use of creativity and art in the counselling process, and the potential therapeutic and wellness benefits that collective creative acts, such as theatre creation, may offer.

Creative Expression and Therapy

Carl Rogers, arguably one of the most influential clinicians and researchers in the field of counselling psychology in the last century (Haggbloom et al., 2002), defined the creative process as: “the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of [their] life on the other” (as cited in Rogers et al., 2012). Natalie Rogers, Carol Roger’s daughter, sees exploration of the creative process as an essential component of person-centered therapy (Rogers et al., 2012). Recent counselling psychology research literature aligns with Carl and Natalie Roger’s advocacy for the presence of creativity in the counselling process.

In a review of studies on the creative arts and their impact on mental health, Leckey (2011) concludes that research evidence points to the potential for creative arts to positively
impact wellbeing in a variety of ways, including self-esteem, mood, relaxation abilities, and optimism. However, Leckey (2011) acknowledges the need for further clarification in the literature around the definition of creative arts as well as more standardized means for measuring their impacts. Similarly, Stuckey and Nobel (2010) point to methodological issues in many studies exploring the impacts of creative arts in mental health, but also suggest that the existing literature indicates “creative engagement can decrease anxiety, stress, and mood disturbances” (p. 261). Lomas’ (2016) suggests the creation of a new category in the research literature, “positive art”, to encourage the exploration of the arts contributions to wellbeing (p. 172).

**Drama and Therapy**

As Freud was publishing his first papers on the “talking cure” in the second decade of the twentieth century (Breger, 2012), the possibilities of using theatre practices in therapy were also being investigated. Jacob Levy Moreno is often credited with the creation of psychodrama, and began exploring the potential of group work that utilized drama exercises in the 1910s (Wilkins, 1999). Nicolas Evreninoff, working in the same period as Moreno, wrote of “theatrotherapy” (1927, p. 122), and wondered about the potential of theatre and the imagination to contribute to wellbeing and health. Vladimir Iljine, another contemporary, employed improvisation as a means of exploring “spontaneity”, “expression”, and “sensitivity” with participants (Karkou, 2006).

**Drama therapy.** Drama therapy draws on “drama as an experiential medium to facilitate psychological and emotional change” in clients (Armstrong et al., 2016, p. 27). Using a grounded theory approach to explore the 13 research articles published between 1960-2013 reporting on drama therapy interventions, Cassidy and colleagues establish a model for therapeutic change in drama therapy that includes offering clients “choice and control” and allowing clients to participate “actively” in experiential exercises (2014, p. 357). Among the 13 articles, the
reported “change[s]” included: “increased insight to self”, “awareness of relationship with others”, and “increased coping abilities” (Cassidy et al., 2014, p. 362). It should be noted that all literature examined in this review were case studies. Drama therapy practitioners are aware of the dearth of research literature, particularly quantitative studies, supporting the effectiveness of drama therapy and its mechanisms of change promotion (Armstrong et al., 2016).

**Psychodrama.** Psychodrama is a form of group therapy that centers on embodiment, in which one group member takes on the role of the protagonist, while other group members help to act out a clinically relevant narrative from the protagonist’s life (McVea, Gow, & Lowe, 2011). In their exploration of two psychodrama support groups focusing on “unresolved emotional experiences” in Australia, McVea and colleagues (2011, p. 417) used a qualitative, collective approach called comprehensive process analysis to establish therapeutically relevant moments in their enactments. The researchers determined several key steps in working with past affective experiences, including “awareness of … personal resources” and “new possibilities” through embodiment (McVea et al., 2011, p. 424).

**Therapeutic Enactment.** Therapeutic Enactment (TE) has been described by Westwood and Wilensky (2005) as an approach that draws on elements of psychodrama, allowing clients to embody previously unprocessed trauma narratives in a group context. TE sessions may include the restaging of participant narratives, giving an individual the opportunity to re-story past events by taking on a new, empowered role. Cases studies suggest therapeutic enactment may offer diverse populations tools for developing healthy relationships, confidence, and may be effective in work with clients with complex trauma histories (Balfour, Westwood, & Buchanan, 2014; Black, 2009; Hirakata & Buchanan-Arvay, 2005; Keats & Sabharwal, 2008).
The Potential Therapeutic Benefits of Theatre-Making

The practitioners cited above borrowed elements of theatre – mostly physically enactment of stories, improvisation and spontaneous play, and group exploration – as tools for use in the therapy room (Snow, D’Amico, & Tanguay, 2003). More recently, practitioners have explored the significance of taking part in a theatrical creation outside of therapeutic contexts.

Theatrical performance. Although speaking publicly is a common anxiety (Pull, 2012), acting in a theatre production may offer an experience that is therapeutically relevant on multiple levels. A performance cannot occur without an audience – it is a communal act. The collective witnessing of the audience brings performers into relationship with a community, and honors the stories being told. As explored in the studies below, the communal act of performance potentially offers confidence, recognition, and a sense of efficacy.

A qualitative, grounded theory methodology allowed researches (Faigin & Stein, 2015) to illustrate how participation in an Illinois community-based theatre initiative for multiple years impacted nine individuals with mental health diagnoses. Based on individual interviews, a focus group, field notes from interaction with the theatre group, and archival recordings and scripts from the company’s past performances, the study highlighted the potential for theatre to “offer participants an opportunity to explore, define, and enhance their sense of self” (p. 158), including taking on the “the valued role of ‘artist’” (p. 159); the chance for emotional, creative, and rewarding social connection between fellow actors and audience members; and a means of “social activism” that may contribute to “individual” and “collective empowerment” and a “sense of efficacy” (p. 157). The theatre initiative the authors explored had a multiyear production history, which points to the question: What impacts can a community group hope to have if they are engaging in a single or first production?
In line with Faigin and Stien’s (2015) research, Snow’s (2003) pre- and post-qualitative interviews with 20 participants with developmental disabilities in Montreal, suggest that participants viewed involvement in a single theatre project as contributing to their confidence and learning. In addition, the production gave them the opportunity to take on roles in which they perceived audiences were better able to see their strengths. Unfortunately, the authors did not specify the research or data analysis approach used beyond “qualitative” (p. 78).

Ten women at Bayview Correctional Facility who rehearsed and presented a production of *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*, by playwright Ntozake Shange (Moller, 2013), also reported being impacted by stepping into the role of performers. Post-production responses from the participants suggested a sense of learning, connection to other cast members, and achievement from the experience. Participants reported a sense of public recognition and achievement during and after the performance. The production allowed participants to “engage the audience in ways that were different from their normal interactions” (Moller, 2013, p. 70). In this paper, the author offers only descriptive accounts of the production and post-production feedback from the cast – no formal research methodology was employed.

A qualitative study involving 17 World War II Holocaust survivors living in Israeli and taking part in testimony theatre – in which survivors share their stories with younger generations and collectively present them to an audience – used a grounded theory to analyze interview transcripts discussing participants experiences of the project (Peleg, Lev-Wiesel, & Yaniv, 2014). Participants’ responses highlight the significance of taking on “the role of the teller” (p. 417). Although this study focuses on the potential of theatre to process trauma, the empowerment
of being the teller may well extend to stories around various life experiences, including learning and strength focused stories.

**Theatrical explorations.** The above studies culminated in final performances, but theatre workshops and training opportunities may also foster teamwork and connection to others. Using an instrumental case study research approach, Silverman and colleagues (2013) explored the potential of an arts-based, two-day symposium, which included theatrical explorations, to open up dialogues around the topic of suicide. The symposium was attended by 18 individuals with a range of cultural and sexual identities. The data sources were transcripts and photos from the two-day event, which the researchers coded and grouped into major themes. Reflections such as “witnessing and being witnessed by” others (p. 221), “a space for reflection”, and “a diversity of opinions”, and a “transformative quality” (p. 220), suggest the benefits participants found in the arts-based approach, and the ability of the arts to allow cross-cultural dialogues, creating space for a constellation of perspectives.

Playback Theatre, in which a group of performers spontaneously play out personal narratives, first emerged as both as a theatrical form and a means of social action in the United States in the 1970s (Fox, 2007). In a study based in Hong Kong, eight Chinese adolescents received thirty hours of training in Playback Theatre (Ng & Graydon, 2016). Using a phenomenological approach, and drawing on transcribed training sessions and written responses to survey questions, the researchers explored their participants’ experience of empathy. Participants’ comments suggest Playback Theatre training encouraged focused “attention”, “understanding … [the] subjective of view” of others, “connectedness” to “self” and the group, experiences of empathy (p. 135). The researchers point out that it is unknown whether their
participants’ comments were in reaction to working closely with a group for numerous hours while exploring personal stories, or related to the theatre training and exploration.

Using a mixed method approach, 19 Boston University students with mental health diagnoses participated in 10 Playback Theatre sessions (Moran & Alon, 2011). Quantitative data took the form of responses to the Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale, a self-report measure. Participants ranked themselves more highly on items such as “I experience myself as a creative person” and “I feel full of life” after taking part in the sessions (p. 320). Several themes emerged from a qualitative analysis of post-course survey responses, both at a “personal” and “interpersonal” level. Personal gains included growth of “self-knowledge”, “self-esteem”, and “being present”. Interpersonal gains reflected in participants’ responses included “being with others”, “feeling part of [a] group”, and “enhanced” empathy (p. 320).

The work of the above researcher suggests theatre participants may gain a sense of connection, develop empathic awareness, acceptance of self and others, as well as personal strength through theatrical explorations.

**Theatre as Therapy Beyond the Counselling Room**

Currently, a diverse range of formal mental health support services exist in the DTES, from peer support (for example, see Lookout Emergency Aid Society, 2012) to career counselling (for example, see The Employment Program of British Columbia, 2016), and these supports are expanding (D’Angelo, 2016). The UBC Learning Exchange does not offer formal counselling support, focusing instead on creating unique educational and research activities. Learning Exchange programming allows community members to step into new roles and engage in skill-building programs, from gaining experience facilitating a workshop to collectively establishing a new club (UBC Learning Exchange, 2016b). The opportunity to experience new
roles and build skills in this way can be viewed as an essential component of the counselling process, particularly in the realm of career counselling.

For those individuals who may not access traditional individual and/or group counselling services due to a range of social, mental, and/or economic barriers, what are alternative approaches to skill- and reflexivity-building that may support career, understood in its broadest sense, as engagement “in meaningful activities” across the life-span (Borgen & Hiebert, 2006, p. 395)?

The opportunity to create and perform a theatrical production may in and of itself offer participants the chance to take part in a meaningful life activity. In addition, the research reviewed above on participation in theatrical productions highlights benefits, from increased confidence to new found connection with fellow group members, which may help individuals continue to engage in meaningful activities in the future. Across diverse populations, from those newly arrived in Canada to Indigenous youth, relationships and social support may be beneficial in helping individuals manage change, in career as well as other life roles (Borgen & Maglio, 2007; Britten & Borgen, 2010; Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Erlebach, 2010). Furthermore, a sense of “connectedness” and “belonging” (Amundson, Borgen, Iaquinta, Butterfield, & Koert, 2010, p. 340), which may be achievable through involvement in collective theatre creation, may be useful in mitigating change.

**Rationale for Study**

The studies reviewed in this chapter explore the impacts of theatre productions and workshops among diverse populations and settings. The present study contributed to the growing literature on “positive arts” by offering an exploration of the potential therapeutic value of collective theatrical creation in a unique community-university educational context, in
Vancouver’s DTES. In addition, several of the studies explored above were limited in their research approach, or offered unclear methodological descriptions. As described in the next chapter, by combining theatre-based research and narrative analysis the present study offered a strong methodological approach from which to explore co-inquirers’ experiences of *Voices UP!*
Chapter Three: Art-Making/Research-Making

And, I hope, here is a play fitted…

–Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

As a part-time student employee at the UBC Learning Exchange, the author facilitated the creation of *Voices UP!*, a collective theatre production, with community members. Participants in *Voices UP!* took on the combined role of creator-performers, and presented the play four times during its 22-month development process.

This thesis research explored the experiences of community members involved in *Voices UP!* using two complementary qualitative methodologies:

- research-based theatre
- narrative analysis

The research question asked: *What were the experiences of community members who took part in a collective theatre project at the UBC Learning Exchange?* The gathered narratives were explored to consider the potential therapeutic value of taking part in a community-based collective theatre project.

**Research Paradigm and Methodologies: Rationale**

**Social Constructionism.** Epistemologically, the two study methodologies are rooted in social constructionism, a non-positivist viewpoint that encourages the critical exploration of essentialist assumptions (Burr, 2003). A major tenant of social constructionism is that what we know we create together. *Knowledges* – plural – are constructed between individuals in interactions. Burr (2003) writes that social constructionism allows for “no such thing as an objective fact”, and suggests that researchers working within this paradigm must recognize that “all knowledge” production is inseparably linked to the perspectives of those producing it (p. 6).
Furthermore, Burr (2003) notes that some “experience and expression” may “exist” beyond socially located interactions and knowledge generation. For example, body-centered art forms that express somatic knowledge may be “difficult to translate into thought and language” (p. 196), including traditional academic discourse.

Interestingly, scholars exploring social constructionism have often borrowed the language of theatre and other expressive arts – using words like performativity or performance, and highlighting language “as a form of action” – as when Burr writes, “when people talk to each other, the world gets constructed” (Burr, 2003, p. 8). The social constructionist position that “knowledge is … seen not as something that a person has or doesn’t have, but as something that people do together” (Burr, 2003, p. 8) reflects this study’s research context. The Learning Exchange takes the position that knowledge sharing and creation are forms of action with the potential to impact change in the local community.

**Research-based theatre.** Research-based theatre, and the art form of theatre in general, reflects a social constructionist perspective: a theatrical production is not created by one person, but by a group whose artistic perspectives collectively contribute to the meaning of the piece. Theatre productions construct worlds and narratives with languages, voices, bodies, movements, lights, sounds, narratives, and rituals. This research project employed theatre as a methodology – the art form of theatre is present in and key to both the study process and results presentation. For centuries playwrights have been creating theatrical productions inspired by research – whether based on historical accounts, such as many of Shakespeare’s plays, or interview transcripts, as seen in several of contemporary playwright Moisés Kaufman’s works (Beck, Belliveau, Lea, & Wager, 2011). More recently, scholars have begun investigating possibilities for research-based theatre – rather than research results informing an artistic
endeavor such as a play, the artistic endeavor of theatre defines and informs a research project. Performing research results is a common practice: academic conference presentations can be viewed as a kind of performance in which results are presented to an audience. Research-based theatre encourages scholar/artists to consider how the various components of theatre – including characters, storylines, props, and costumes – might contribute to conveying research. But the use of theatre in research does not need to be limited to the results stage – theatre may inform research question formulation, in addition to the data collection and analysis process (Belliveau & Lea, 2016; Norris, 2000), as in the present study.

For this research project, the graduate student researcher/artist joined with members of the community, working together to engage in shared “critical and empathic explorations” (Belliveau & Lea, 2016, p. 3). Numerous authors (Conrad, 2016; Okello, 2016; Wales, 2016) have suggested that research-based theatre may fight against marginalization by sharing the experiences of participants in diverse contexts, so they can be witnessed by a wide range of audiences, making this an appropriate methodology for use in the DTES community.

Several examples of research-based theatre both within and outside of the counselling psychology literature informed this study. In teacher education, the research-based play *Collective Playbuilding: Writing Ourselves* explores a theatre creation process involving 12 teachers-in-training (Belliveau, 2006, 2007). With the objective of creating a touring elementary school play on the topic of bullying, George Belliveau facilitated a collaborative playbuilding process which resulted in the collectively written *You Didn’t Do Anything!* Retrospectively studying the experience, *You Didn’t Do Anything!* became a play within a play, as Belliveau combined the script with additional data – such as “participants’ journals, interviews, [and] research field notes,” (2007, p. 31) – to create the research-based theatre piece *Collective*
**Playbuilding.** Belliveau (2006) expresses striving to refrain from privileging either art-making or research-making while creating *Collective Playbuilding*, searching instead for meeting points that honored both data and art. The data analysis process involved immersion in the data, followed by drafting the script, returning to the data, drafting a new version of the script, and so on, to ensure “that [the] artistic process would never get too far away from the research” (Belliveau, 2007, p. 9).

Working within a therapeutic context, Lea (2016) describes developing a research-based theatre play in collaboration with Belliveau and a group of Canadian military veterans. The collaborative script was created with the intention of capturing the work of the Veteran's Transition Program (VTP), a group therapy initiative for returning service persons, founded by UBC Counselling Psychology Emeriti Professor Marvin Westwood. For the script, *Contact! Unload*, Lea drew on stories transcribed directly from conversations with the veterans, observations from VTP staff, articles, and group improvisations during meetings and rehearsals. Lea describes consciously refraining from “creating” in his role as a playwright, instead “crafting” stories (p. 66) – selectively “interweaving narrative frames” present in the data to form the emerging script (p. 67). In this way, Lea committed to an analysis and synthesis of the data, while acknowledging the pull towards artistry.

Conducting research in Vancouver’s DTES community, Wager’s doctoral dissertation (2014) took the form of an ethnographic research study involving the creation of a collaborative theatre project with youth, entitled *Surviving in the Cracks*. Data consisted of a range of sources, from individual and group interviews, video recorded segments of rehearsals and presentations, to journals from participants and the researcher, field notes, and the play’s script itself. The research process included an analysis in which the researcher and one youth collaboratively
contextualized the play in terms of local youth discourse, accompanied by images and details from the script-creation process.

Belliveau and Wager’s use of script selections interspersed with academic text, Belliveau and Lea’s commitment to the data within a theatrical space, Wager’s use of images – several components from the above authors’ work informed and inspired the present study.

**Narrative analysis and research-based theatre.** Alongside research-based theatre, narrative inquiry offered a framework for the project’s data collection and analysis. The acceptance of narrative analysis over the past century reflects the embracing of “participant-centred” research approaches, as well as the acknowledgement of the importance of “the biographical” and “the social” in counselling psychology and other social sciences, as these disciplines explore new perspectives on “language”, “power”, “culture”, “reflexivity”, and identity (Squire, 2005, p. 91). Polkinghorne (2007) describes this reorientation to narrative as part of a larger “reform movement” towards qualitative inquiry in the 1970s (p. 472). Josselson (2006) offers a description of narrative research that could easily be used to describe playwriting, stating that narrative scholarship “strives to preserve the complexity of what it means to be human and to locate its observations of people and phenomena in society, history and time” (p. 3).

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) define narrative research as encompassing all studies that make use of stories. Such a definition may be broad enough to include research-based theatre. Theatre is rooted in storytelling, making stories the focal point of both narrative analysis and research-based theatre. Figure 1 shows additional ways in which the two methodologies complement one another.
Like research-based theatre, narrative analysis is rooted in social constructionism. As Gottschall writes, “much . . . in human life is thoroughly infiltrated by fiction” (2013, p. 12). Stories are not a single truth, but a collage of individual and collective viewpoints, and the intersection of these viewpoints is what narrative analysis is interested in exploring. In terms of process, Saldaña (2011) draws parallels between the search for story-content in an interview transcript by a researcher conducting narrative analysis, and the process of transforming a transcript into a monologue in research-based theatre. Furthermore, Arvay (2003) suggests viewing the narrative interview as a dialogue or “performance” between interviewer and interviewee (p. 166). Arvay (2003) also states that re-storied co-inquirer narratives might take the form of a play, among other literary genres.
A recent example of a narrative inquiry that embraces theatre is Valle and Connor’s (2012) staging of mothers’ special education narratives. The authors took 15 participant narratives – mothers speaking of their children’s experiences of special education in the United States – and represented them via a play, embracing the opportunity theatre provided “to explore [the] data from multiple angles” (Valle & Connor, 2012, p. 21).

**Study Procedures**

**Co-inquirer recruitment.** Research was conducted at the Learning Exchange, which serves Vancouver's DTES and surrounding communities. Study co-inquirers were adults:

1. involved in *Voices UP!*, a collectively created play;
2. willing to discuss their experiences taking part in collective playmaking.

Co-inquirers were recruited by means of a written consent form, which also served as a letter of invitation to take part in the study (see Appendix A). A Learning Exchange employee passed out the consent forms to *Voices UP!* cast members when they dropped in to take part in a program or activity. No attempt was made to contact cast members outside of the Learning Exchange. The Learning Lab does not keep mailing addresses of the community members who use its programing, and some patrons may not have a fixed living address. As such, hand-delivery of the form to potential co-inquirers was the most practical means of informing community members of the study.

All six community members who were involved in *Voices UP!* over the summer of 2017 were offered a consent form. Although more than thirty community members participated in *Voices UP!* over its twenty-two-month duration, as it was a drop-in program, the collective members changed over the course of the production. Forms were handed out to all community
members involved in play who dropped-in to the Learning Exchange in July or August of 2017, during the data collection phase of this study.

Four community members agreed to take part in the study. Following Lieblich and colleagues’ (1998) suggestion that narrative analysis conducted with a relatively small sample size allows for a more thorough and detailed exploration of a limited number of transcripts, four co-inquirers were deemed sufficient. Three of the four co-inquirers were involved in Voices UP! from its beginning in January 2016, until its conclusion in November 2017. One co-inquirer joined Voices UP! in September 2016, and took part until its conclusion in November of 2017. Three co-inquirers self-identified as seniors. Two identified as Chinese Canadian, one as Canadian, and one as Indigenous. Three co-inquirers identified as male, and one as a female.

Data Collection

The study drew on several data sources:

a. Individual interview transcripts;

b. Photographs of objects chosen by the co-inquirers to represent their experience;

c. Photographs of art created by co-inquirers during the interview;

Each co-inquirer took part in an individual narrative interview, of approximately 60 minutes. All interviews were conducted by the graduate student researcher/artist. The interviews began with a request that co-inquirers share stories around their experiences of Voices UP!, after the graduate student opened the interview with an “orienting statement” (Logan & Buchanan, 2008, p. 478; see Appendix B). Interviews took place at the Learning Exchange, and portions of the interviews were audio recorded. Co-inquirers did not need to agree to be audio-recorded to take part in the study, and had the option to request the recorder be turned off at any point. In
several instances during interviews, the recorder was turned off and the researcher was granted permission by co-inquirers to take notes by hand.

Co-inquirers were invited to bring an object to the interview, which represented their experience of taking part in collective theatre creation. The object could be anything they desire: a prop they made for the show, a personal item, or a found object. Co-inquirers had the opportunity to speak about this object as part of the interview. Photographs of the objects form part of the data collected for this study.

Art supplies were made available during the interview, and co-inquirers were given the option to create a sketch that represented their experience of collective creation. Both the object and the opportunity to create a visual representation of their experience were meant to supplement the traditional verbal narrative interview format, providing individuals with multiple means of expressing their experiences. Furthermore, research-based theatre encourages the exploration and representation of experiences beyond words, capturing other forms of communication – such as visual gesture – for representation on stage. With co-inquirer permission, the graduate student took a photograph of sketches made during the interviews, as part of the data collection.

**Data Analysis**

**Transcription.** The graduate student transcribed all audio recordings from the interviews. Transcription is not only a matter of technical concern, but a theoretical statement (Mishler, 2003). As different transcription notation systems offer researchers the opportunity to represent different features of a verbal exchange, consideration of the chosen notation system is essential. The interview transcripts in this study were produced using the notation system proposed by Poland (2001; see Appendix C). Poland’s notation system is like the formatting
used in many contemporary play scripts, and provided the necessary detail for constructing transcripts to explore the reported experiences of the co-inquirers from a narrative and research-based theatre perspective. Additionally, as the co-inquirers had experience in writing a play script, they were familiar with this formatting. This format may have facilitated their reading and review of the transcript during the member-checking process.

**Transcript review.** Once the interviews were transcribed, the graduate student met with each co-inquirer to review their transcript. During this meeting, co-inquirers were invited to make any changes they wished to the transcript. They were given a copy of the transcript, and encouraged to contact the graduate student if they wished to make any changes after re-reading the transcript on their own. This meeting was optional, and attendance was not necessary for continued involvement in the study. Nonetheless, all co-inquirers chose to attend.

**Thematic analysis.** The graduate student analyzed the transcribed audio interviews following steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

a. Familiarization. The transcripts were read multiple times, and first impressions noted.

b. Code generation. Codes relevant to the research question were selected.

c. Theme generation. Codes were grouped into themes.

d. Theme clarification. The relationships between themes and codes were reviewed.

e. From theme to story. Theme names, definitions, and the overarching narrative presented by the analysis were clarified.

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a means of “identifying” and “reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). Capable of supporting a social constructionist lens, thematic analysis can be used to explore meaning-making within the social context
represented by interview transcripts. Furthermore, it is a method apt for use with diverse qualitative methodologies (Braun & Clarke, 2006), including narrative analysis and research-based theatre.

**Analysis of sketch and object photographs.** Riessman (2007) points to a study by Luttrell (2003) as an example of narrative research that involved participants creating collaged self-portraits from found materials and images. Inspired by Rose (2001), Riessman (2007) isolates three spheres – (1) “the image”, (2) “context of production”, and (3) “reception” (p. 172) – to consider when analyzing art produced as part of a narrative study. Utilizing these spheres, the analysis of photographs of images and objects created by the co-inquirers began with the following questions:

a. What was constructed?

b. How was it constructed?

c. From what diverse view-points can the object be viewed in relation to the research question?

**Script creation.** Combining the analysis of the transcripts, photographs of sketches, and objects, the graduate student researcher/artist re-storied each co-inquirers’ narrative as a monologue or scene.

From a research-based theatre perspective, Saldaña suggests additional tools to draw on during the process of scripting data. Saldaña (2003) points to poetic transcription – perhaps more appropriately called poetic re-transcription – as a means of generating monologues and dialogue from transcripts. From a discourse analysis perspective, Gee (2014) describes creating stanzas in an interview transcript – grouping information into chunks, and the chunks themselves into larger groups. Glesne (2005) suggests deleting words from a transcript in such a way that creates a
poem highlighting integral concepts and thoughts. Additionally, Saldaña (2003) suggests in vivo coding – or creating codes and themes with words directly taken from interview transcripts; Saldaña has used in vivo words/phrases as script dialogue and even play titles. In vivo dialogue and poetic transcription were both employed by the graduate student in the present study.

After the graduate student initially drafted monologues and scenes from the data, these pieces of text were collectively interwoven into a short script entitled, Give Me Your Hands, by the graduate student and the co-inquirers. Give Me Your Hands is presented in the following chapter.

**Member checking.** As mentioned above, the process of script creation from the data was a collective one. Inspired by the process used to create Voices UP!, the graduate student held multiple individual meetings with each co-inquirer to review drafts of the script, and the monologues and scenes were rewritten based on co-inquirer feedback, suggestions, and edits. Sometimes co-inquirers arrived at these meetings with dialogue written on scrap pieces of paper, and often the graduate student and co-inquirers would rewrite a scene or lines of dialogue sitting side-by-side. In this way, member checking was an inherent part of the drafting process of Give Me Your Hands.

**Findings Presentation**

*Give Me Your Hands* is presented in chapter four, with a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. In chapter five, a critical commentary (Belliveau & Lea, 2016) of *Give Me Your Hands* is followed by a discussion of the research results. In his dissertation, Lea (2013) uses “a critical commentary” as an accompaniment to a “scripted research” project, and suggests that placing “academic prose” next to a theatrical script allows for two “interdependent” but
“distinct” representations, which together can form “a stronger expression of research understandings” (p. 148).

Co-inquirers had the option of being credited by name for the script *Give Me Your Hands*, as well as for any sketches or objects included in the results. When co-inquiries chose not to be credited by name, the text “created by a study co-inquirer” or “created by [co-inquirer chosen alias]” appears.

**Ethical Considerations**

**The art of research/the research of art.** Moving between art and research is a central challenge of research-based theatre, and one that the graduate student researcher/artist embraced. Following the theatre artist and researcher Linda Hassell, who works from an approach called *dramatic fusion* (Hassall & Balfour, 2016), the graduate student investigated the “liminal space” between research and fiction (p. 113). Hassel’s works are made from the joining of data, autobiographical memories, and creative explorations. The graduate student strove to allow in vivo or verbatim text to assist rather than “dominate” the re-storying process. Generating a script that goes beyond the words captured in interview transcripts may create text that better “represent the complexities of the findings” (Bird, 2016, p. 144). For Wales (2016), in creating the play *Home Truths*, a research-based theatre exploration of foreign domestic workers in Singapore, fiction was a “protective framework for housing … data” (p. 159) and a means of exploring its intrinsic “dramatic tension” (Wales, 2016, p. 159). Importantly, however, the graduate student was also aware of Saldaña (1998) and other research-based theatre practitioners’ advice to focus on the study purpose, rather than on the portions of data that may be the most theatrical – taking care to “authentically” share the whole research picture (O’Toole & Ackroy, 2016, p. xiii).
Exchanging roles. As a student employee at the Learning Exchange, as well as an actor and co-writer of *Voices UP!*, the graduate student balanced multiple relationships with co-inquirers. Importantly, the graduate student’s part-time work as the assistant to the Learning Lab did not place him in a position of power over other cast members. The graduate student was not responsible for program planning, or selecting participants to take part in Learning Lab activities. Nonetheless, care was taken to clarify with *Voices UP!* cast members that participation in this research project would not impact a collective member’s participation in any program or activity at the Learning Exchange.

To help separate his multiple roles, the graduate student met with the co-inquirers outside of his standard Learning Exchange work hours. Visual aids were also employed: the graduate student wore a shirt that said, “THIS IS THE SHIRT I DO GRADUATE RESEARCH IN” when meeting with co-inquirers for this research project, and a shirt that said, “THIS IS THE SHIRT I DO THEATRE IN” while rehearsing for *Voices UP!* (Figure 2).
Additionally, using Ortlipp’s (2008) work as an example, the graduate student kept a reflexive artist/researcher journal throughout the project to explore his own experiences, preconceptions, and biases during the process. Selections from the research journal informed *Give Me Your Hands*.

**Evaluating Arts-Based Research**

In terms of assessing this research project, Bochner (2000) argues that much qualitative research is “messy”– but researchers shy away from the mess, concerned more with “how [they] are judged as ‘scientists’ by other scientists”, rather than with “whether [their] work is useful, insightful, or meaningful” (p. 267). Importantly, evaluative perspectives from which to view arts-based research may differ from traditional qualitative approaches. Prendergast and Belliveau (2013) suggest considering if a work:

- Aligns with the data in its representation of co-inquirers;
- Offers accessible results, in both academic and artistic forms;
- Makes use of a range artistic tools in service of the inquiry.
The script *Give Me Your Hands*, as seen in the following chapter, uses diverse means – such as puppetry, karaoke, and projections – to capture co-inquirers’ voices and share them in a uniquely theatrical way. From a more general qualitative perspective, Creswell (2013) writes about the need to employ “validity strategies” (p. 201). This study used data triangulation from multiple sources – interview transcripts, objects, and visual art – to ensure the analysis was firmly rooted in the data. Additionally, co-inquirers had the opportunity to take part in member checking and provide feedback on their interview transcripts, as well as participate in the collective crafting of a script from the data.
Chapter Four: Results

Give me your hands, if we be friends…

–Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

In the present study, two parallel processes of analysis were undertaken:

1. searching the data for core themes;
2. crafting the data into a play script.

These parallel processes influenced one another, and were both integral to gaining a thorough understanding of the collected texts. They also offered flexibility in unifying the diverse sources from which data was collected, bringing together interview transcripts, researcher notes, as well as photographs of co-inquirers’ drawings and significant artifacts. Two co-inquirers chose to draw as part of their interviews, and although none of the co-inquirers brought objects to their interviews, all four pointed to specific artifacts that represented significant aspects of their experience. Each artifact played a role in *Voices UP!* as either a prop – the giant Mahjong tiles – or characters – the sock puppets. In analyzing the drawings and the artifacts, co-inquirer descriptions guided the interpretations presented here.

Reflecting Gee’s (2014) work, the analysis of the interview recordings began in the transcription phase, as words were grouped into separate lines and stanzas to suggest thought breaks or transitions. Brackets in quotes from the transcripts denote a word or words that have been changed for clarity, or to protect the privacy of *Voices UP!* collective members.

Below, the thematic analysis is presented, followed by the scenes and monologues generated from the data. These scenes and monologues have been brought together in a short play, entitled *Give Me Your Hands.*
Thematic Analysis

To be honest, I have no idea what’s going to happen.

Just blank! … And I just said –

“Well, you know, I don’t know anything about it but I am willing to give it a try.”

I would consider it … a new experience for me.

These words, transcribed from an interview with a co-inquirer, offer a description of their experience at the beginning of the collective creation process. For this co-inquirer, and all who took part in the present research, Voices UP! was their first experience creating theatre. A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, drawings, and significant artifacts led to the establishment of 6 core themes. The theme titles are in vivo quotes from interview transcripts:

- Theme one: “The creation of relationship.”
- Theme two: “A puppet can be like a little bridge.”
- Theme three: “I learned something – how to do a play.”
- Theme four: “I want to be creative.”
- Theme five: “Not one person … the group.”
- Theme six: “A footprint.”

**Theme one: “The creation of relationship.”** The first theme illuminates the Voices UP! creation and performance process as a means of cultivating and developing relationships, both within and outside of the collective. Theme one was present in all four transcripts, as well as a drawing. One co-inquirer described the Voices UP! process as exciting, explaining that it offered an opportunity “to meet quite a few people”. Another stated that process allowed them “to make new friends”. The theme of relationship was exemplified by a third co-inquirer, in their description of the collective as a “family”. The co-inquirer continued:
We were very happy
because we looked like a big family.

For example, if I say,

“Oh! Today I want to change how the puppet is looking,”

Then somebody can give me an idea …

The group … help[ed] each other.

The above quote implies a connection between the relationships that developed and supporting
one another in the process of creating the show. The same co-inquirer explained: “That’s why I
said, ‘We are like a family,’ – we help[ed] each other.” As suggested by the image of family, the
coiquerer also implied a feeling of belonging. Summarizing the experience of making a play
overall, they said, “we have membership”, the collective is “all together”.

A sense of belonging was echoed by another co-inquirer, who said “I want[ed] to be part
of’ the collective. The same co-inquirer suggested that the right relationships were essential to
their taking part in the project:

Actually I consider myself very fortunate
because I happen to meet the right people –
the people that I feel comfortable with.

It may not work at other places,
at another time…

with [other] people…

The timing brings everything into relationship.

Additionally, the co-inquirer highlighted the interactions between audience and cast during

*Voices UP!* performances, saying “this is also a relationship”: 
They share in our ideas,

thinking, expressions, when we are on stage –

and we look at them,

and we get feelings from them too.

It’s both ways.

It’s always the word “interact”.

And it’s also the word “relationship”.

The relationship between performers and audience members was also present in co-inquirers’
descriptions of the post-show talk-backs, or question and answer periods:

I like to be with the audience.

I like to listen to them.

Because they are from a different group,

not from the Learning Exchange …

They would have asked me a question …

from their own point of view,

which is something I would never experience.

Another co-inquirer described meeting someone for the first time after a show – a new
relationship. The same co-inquirer chose to represent their experience of *Voices UP!* as a sketch
of “friends” on stage, during performances (see Figure 3).
Figure 3. Drawing by co-inquirer.

The few dark vertical lines representing the curtain, and solitary horizontal line representing the stage, are only a backdrop to the lighter, smiling faces of the cast that take up most of the page. The open faces draw our focus as we view the sketch. Interestingly, although the co-inquirer described the faces as “friends” with each other, they are smiling at us – the viewers – extending the relationship outside of the Voices UP! group.

Theme two: “A puppet can be like a little bridge.” After the first few months of developing and rehearsing Voices UP!, Eagle Sky, a member of the collective, suggested the group create a scene with puppets. The collective did not have time to develop the scene prior to their first and second performances, but in the fall of 2016, the group created sock puppets and added them to the script. The collective performed the show twice with the puppets, who became significant characters, with their own dedicated scenes.

Linked to the first theme, “A puppet can be like a little bridge” describes puppetry as a communication tool. The second theme also highlights puppetry as a major component of many
of the co-inquirers’ descriptions of *Voices UP!* One co-inquirer drew a comparison to naming a new born child when they talked about the group’s experience creating puppets:

> After, when we finish making the puppet, we give [it] a name …

Almost like people

when they have babies –

they give a name too.

It looks like [the puppets are] born –

“Oh!” everybody has a puppet,

and it means we have a big family.

The above quote, spoken by the same co-inquirer who described the collective as a “family” in theme one, links puppet creation to the co-inquirer’s experience of connection with other group members. According to another co-inquirer, “the creation of relationship” and “interaction” within the collective was also linked to the sock puppets:

> And I find it interesting …

I never imagined that a puppet can be like a little bridge.

We are building a bridge.

For both sides. Me. And the other people.

A bridge for the other group members.

During their interview, the same co-inquirer posed the question, “How do you interact with other people?” They answered by describing the puppets as “a method of communication”.

In a similar vein, a co-inquirer explained that the puppets were a tool to “make friends” because they could “use the puppet to talk to each other”. The co-inquirer spoke of the puppets – rather than the collective members – writing, rehearsing, and performing the play. For example,
they said “all the puppets” developed “the Voices UP! script”, “the whole group of puppets [practiced]”, and “the puppets” gave a successful performance. The co-inquirer implied that the puppets were characters that collective members could step into when on-stage, during performances, and off-stage as well. One of the benefits of having puppet characters to take on: “Every time when we are practicing, if one of the puppets doesn’t like [an] idea [in the script], they can change it right away”. In other words, the puppets may have offered a means of voicing opinions safely – a collective member was not wanting to change the script, their puppet was.

The puppet characters may also have offered confidence and a tool of overcoming anxiety during the performance, giving the group something to focus on:

It feels like we were real puppets.

We’re not people –

[You] are not [you], [I] am not [me] –

we are into the puppet.

We are the puppets.

In the show, everybody is not thinking of themselves,

they are thinking of the group of puppets.

I don’t know – I don’t know if that [was] the idea or not,

but that’s my feeling.

Theme three: “I learned something – how to do a play.” “It’s a fun activity,” said one co-inquirer, referring to the process of creating Voices UP! Each co-inquirer described their experience of making a show together as enjoyable. Beyond pure enjoyment, co-inquirers pointed to Voices UP! as a skill-building experience, the third theme present in the data. The in vivo quote used for the title of theme three implies the breadth of skills co-inquirers explored –
the group created and staged a play together. In putting on a theatre production, the collective explored acting and script-writing, song writing and performance, set design, prop design, staging and direction, as well as talk-backs with the audience.

Considering performance skills, the experiences shared by co-inquirers contained many examples of gaining acting knowledge and insight. One co-inquirer, focusing on the sock puppet as an object that represented their Voices UP! experience (see Figure 4), demonstrated the puppetry skills they had learned as part of their interview.

*Figure 4. Significant artifact. "Super Sky". Puppet by Eagle Sky. Photo design credit: Voices UP! Collective.*

*Voices UP! was presented as a staged-reading, meaning that the cast performed with scripts-in-hand, and memorization was not required. Despite reading from the script during the performance, another co-inquirer described using the acting skill of “expression” to convey meaning:*

I don’t want to, hopefully, be just

reading out a sermon on the stage.
The expressions,
the intonation,
and the volume of it,
has a lot to do with the show
in attracting people’s attention…
You’ve got to bring [the audience],
and you’ve got to guide them through.
Because you are trying to tell [them],
“This is what I am going to say.”

In terms of the participating in public performances of *Voices UP!*, some co-inquirers described the thought of being in front of an audience as provoking some anxiety, while others expressed feeling at ease with public speaking from the beginning. For one community member who did feel nervous, practicing helped: “After a few times [in] rehearsal, you feel more comfortable”. Similarly, another co-inquirer stated that the rehearsal period gave “each person the chance to speak in public” before the performances. Both of these co-inquirers implied rehearsal was a means of laddering up to performance, working from speaking in front of other members of the *Voices UP!* towards acting in front of a general audience.

Most theatre creation processes work towards a performance of some kind, and each co-inquirer described viewing the performances as a goal. One collective member said “everyone” was working hard, putting in “energy” and “effort” until “the show”. Another co-inquirer described being engaged and interested by the fact that the collective was working “to produce something”. Several suggested the desire to make the script “better” or “number one” before it was presented to an audience. Two other co-inquirers asked when the next performance of
Voices UP! would be during their research interviews, and one provided the name of a venue for a future show. These words suggest that all four co-inquirers embraced working towards performance as an overarching goal of making a play.

Alongside performance skills, the co-inquirers expressed gaining broader skills in theatre-making over the nearly two years that Voices UP! was being developed. Once co-inquirer explained that the feeling of fun during the Voice UP! process naturally led to the creative development of the piece: “I’m thinking, “Oh, make a puppet is fun,” right? Then after we have one puppet, then a group of puppets, and then it gets people thinking of other ideas” for the script. Their description illustrates a step-by-step approach to theatrical creation, building on what the group has already created and moving forward together.

Throughout the rehearsal process, the Voices UP! group engaged in rewrites of the script. One co-inquirer described changing the script “about four or five times” – pointing to refining as a major part of the creative process when making a theatre piece. Another explained rewrites as necessary in this way:

Because maybe the first time you write
you didn’t get the real
meaning, or something,
of that part…
Some of it is necessary to change.

A second co-inquirer described selecting certain ideas over others in the rewriting process:

You’ve got to put it together
and review and look at it
and then of course you take
whatever is better for the entire project,
and there are certain things we can do without.
I wouldn’t think those are the bad ideas
it’s just maybe it wouldn’t fit at this present state…
But it may go very well with another time,
with another project.
The above words describe a necessary editing skill in the dramaturgical development of any theatrical script, but particularly important in collective creation. Furthermore, the words recognize that when elements are edited out of a script, it is not an evaluation of their worth, but an attempt to choose the elements that fit with the developing production.

Beyond performing and script-making, a co-inquirer described other skills learnt during the process:

Not just making of the puppets, or even the writing …
downstairs in the parkade we were setting up the stage,
and we were sawing and then nailing and painting …
You can’t miss out that part, not having [the set] – it won’t work.
The co-inquirer went on to say that the production needed both those who could use “a pen” to write the script, as well as those who could use “different instruments”, such as a “brush”, “hammer”, and “nails”. This co-inquirer stated that they learned to use a saw for the first time when building the set for Voices UP! Through “the whole process we [kept] learning and changing,” according to the co-inquirer, highlighting the evolution and flexibility of the collective creation process, and the chance to gain more skills as the production continued to develop.
Theme four: “I want to be creative.” The above themes suggest the multiple means of collective and individual creative expression available to co-inquirers during the playmaking process. *Voices UP!* offered opportunities for both expressive arts, such as performance, and visual arts, such as set design. Theme four acknowledges the desire and possibility for collaborative and individual creative expression present in the co-inquirers experiences of collectively creating a play. “I don’t want to miss any part of it,” said one co-inquirer, who tried to be present throughout the development process, because they wanted the chance to “be creative”, and had that “opportunity” with *Voices UP!*

“We [made] up the story”, said one co-inquirer, referring to a collective means of creative expression present in *Voices UP!* Pointing to individual creative expressions, another co-inquirer spoke of liking rehearsing their part in a scene, and another of designing giant Mahjong tiles as props (see Figure 8).

One co-inquirer implied the freedom to pursue individual creativity when talking about making puppets, saying “it [didn’t] matter what kind of puppet you [wanted] to make.” Another co-inquirer, who also focused on their puppet as a significant artifact from *Voices UP!* (see Figure 5), emphasized the “feelings” and “memories” present in the puppet they created.
The co-inquirer explained that they named their puppet in a way that was personally significant to them. The co-inquirer also stated that the puppet gave them the opportunity to express their “ideas” to the audience.

The fourth theme shows that co-inquirers’ experiences of Voices UP! included both individual and group creativity, whereas the fifth theme focuses on the importance of the group context in co-inquirers’ experiences.

**Theme five: “Not one person … the group.”** In one interview transcript, a collective member described Voices UP! with the following words:

So this is something –
over here we have people –
drop-ins, students, volunteers from
different nationalities and backgrounds,
but then we all come here and
we’re going to stay

and share something with one another.

The fifth theme speaks to the multiple ways the co-inquirers acknowledged the *Voices UP!* creation process was rooted in group-work. Three co-inquirers pointed to needing a group to have experiences like *Voices UP!* One said, “if you are by yourself, you can’t do those things,” and another:

I would never have thought about it if

I was just by myself within the four walls.

*(Repeats quietly)* Within the four walls.

A third co-inquirer expressed being happy to have the group to help with things like answering the audience’s questions, which they acknowledged they would have been unable to do on their own.

One co-inquirer described the collective as being made up of a “good leader” – referring to the graduate student, one of the main facilitators of the project – and “good leading members”. Another explained it this way:

It takes both sides, together.

Traffic flowing.

It takes people like [the graduate student],

and at the same time it takes

people like the different volunteers

who are willing to come in

and share their time and their effort.
The process of collectively rewriting the script involved checking in with every member of the group, as described by a co-inquirer. They recalled each rehearsal period ending with cast members getting to answer the question, “Hey, do you have [an] idea to change … something [in the show]?” One co-inquirer suggested *Voices UP!* was a very “good” title for the show, saying “we really can voice up our ideas, our opinions, and everything.” Speaking to a contrasting experience, another collective member spoke of “sometimes” keeping their “feelings to themselves” in the script-writing process, “in case someone blows up.” The potential for arguments to develop over certain aspects of the creation process harkens back to the earlier image of the collective as a “family” – as in any family, conflicts happen. The above co-inquirer, who at points felt the need to “keep” their “voice down”, spoke of wanting to carry forward a desire to work in a “peaceful” and “friendly” way. Furthermore, this co-inquirer stated that they still want to do “more” performances of *Voices UP!* and enjoyed the experience overall.

Another co-inquirer described being “proud” of the group’s achievements as a collective. This co-inquirer – the third to focus on puppets as their significant artifact – spoke of the puppets as a symbol of the “strong group” (see Figure 6) – saying that without the puppets there would be no show.
Figure 6. Significant Artifact. "Denzel". Puppet by Voices UP! Collective. Photo design credit: Voices UP! Collective.

This co-inquirer also captured this sense of the “strong group” in their drawing of the experience (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Drawing by co-inquirer.
The co-inquirer described the drawing as representing the collective writing (upper left corner), rehearsing (upper right corner), and performing of Voices UP! (bottom half). The co-inquirer stated that the smiling face in upper left corner represents happiness, and explained that the drawing illustrates the groups “cooperation”. While sketching, the co-inquirer stated they “wanted to draw more people” to make sure they captured all the members of Voices UP! The drawing’s repetitive lines, and the way in which the individual figures in each group are posed in unison with the rest of the group, supports the meaning of “cooperation”. In the part of the sketch that depicts performance, the sense of cooperation has been extended to include the seated audience, as they are shown collaborating with the performers by watching the show.

**Theme six: “A footprint.”** The final theme refers to the lasting impact co-inquirers described the experience having on them personally, as well as their hope that Voices UP! impacted others.

All four co-inquirers spoke of an emotional impact, stating the experience made them “happy”, “proud”, and gave them “a feeling of accomplishment”. One co-inquirer remembers thinking after a performance, “I’ve done it! I can do it!”, and spoke of an increased sense of “self-esteem”.

Another co-inquirer spoke of gaining “courage” through the process. Despite the group’s lack of experience in theatre creation, the show was a success, and gave the co-inquirer “courage” to try new things. The co-inquirer shared their realization that a group’s education level is not important if “everybody gives a good effort”.

For several co-inquirers, the impact was described in terms of memories. According to one member of the collective:

Even though now we [are] finished…
when we look at the [cast] picture,

we’re still thinking, ‘Oh what a good time!’

The same co-inquirer also described a lasting impact, saying, “outside” they are “still” friends with the other collective members. Also speaking of memories, another a co-inquirer described the impact of helping to build the set:

I mean, I can usually pick up chop-sticks,

forks and knives,

but not [work] with a saw – it was really amazing, you know.

And, I did a little bit of it … it’s part of a very important piece of memory in my life.

Another co-inquirer, who self-identifies as a senior, spoke of never having the opportunity to explore theatre before Voices UP!, explaining that prior to coming to Canada their education did not include drama, and that even after they immigrated here, their work scheduled prevented them from taking part in creative projects. Two other co-inquirers, both also self-identifying as seniors, suggested an additional impact of Voices UP! was learning something new “regardless” of age, and one felt it helped keep them “active”, rather than “passive”. As one co-inquirer said, although “we all grow old”, ongoing learning can help us “grow old with grace”. Another co-inquirer suggested that making art like Voices UP! made them “smarter”.

Several co-inquirers also described different ways that they hoped Voices UP! left a “footprint” beyond the collective, impacting audiences as well. For one co-inquirer, it was important to pass on knowledge and stories from their life through the script of Voices UP! This co-inquirer described the “giant Mahjong tiles” as their significant object from the show (Figure 8) – knowledge of the Chinese game of Mahjong is some of what the co-inquirer hoped to share
with the audience. In Figure 8, these giant Mahjong tiles are being held up by audience members. This prop, then, directly impacted the audience’s experience of the show, involving them in the action of the script.

Figure 8. Significant Artifact. "Giant Mahjong Tiles". Props byVoices UP! Collective. Photo credit: UBC Learning Exchange.

One co-inquirer spoke of hoping the audience would recognize that the cast was in “close relationship” with one another while performing. They described wanting the audience to “remember” a group “working together” to “contribute” to “the whole show”. This co-inquirer felt that there was an impact on audience members, based on what they saw when they looked out during a performance, saying that the audience “seemed” amazed, engaged, and appeared to have an “eagerness to … understand”.

Another co-inquirer recalled the audience’s “happy” faces, clapping, and the fact that they asked “so many questions” during the talk-backs as evidence of “success” of the show, saying, “it means” through “our hardworking … we can make people happy too.”

Finally, the interview transcripts suggest that the ending of the project has also impacted the co-inquirers. One co-inquirer asked, “Are we going to do it next year? I don’t want to miss
Voices UP! for 2018.” Another said, “I hate to see that the project is over,” and “I wish it could go on and on and on and on.” Interestingly, the collective member framed the ending of the project as temporary, using the image of a spark and starlight:

That little spark.
I mean the spark doesn’t go on forever,
like the stars in the sky.
It’s always the bright moment,
the sparkling, the brightness, and afterwards – stardust. You know.
But then tomorrow the stars will come out again.
The starlight returning tomorrow night echoes the idea that relationships built between cast members will extend beyond the project’s conclusion.

Playmaking/Research-making. The above six themes are further expanded upon in the short script *Give Me Your Hands*. Following Belliveau (2007), *Give Me Your Hands* is the result of a “dialectical, hyphenated process” (p. 33): it is a play generated from immersion in the research data, and an analysis created with the aesthetic sensibilities of a playwright. Storytellers operate within many disciplines, and storytelling is present in the proceeding thematic analysis as well as the script that follows. As Leavy (2009) writes, “artistic practice” and qualitative practice are both “crafts” (p. 10) – effective qualitative research requires the transposition of data into a new form that offers insight, just as theatre and other art forms may encourage new connections and perspectives.

Data Dramatization

*Give Me Your Hands* is short play about making a play. Made up of nine vignettes, or short scenes, and three solos, or monologues, the script offered both a means of further analysis
and results presentation. Plays within plays, as well as plays and scenes about playmaking and performance, have been rich sites of exploration for both historical and contemporary playwrights, from William Shakespeare to Daniel MacIvor (For example, see MacIvor, 2006; Shakespeare, 2003). In research-based theatre, Belliveau explores a play within a play, as well as the topic of collective creation and performance, in the script Collective Playbuilding: Writing Ourselves (Belliveau, 2007).

Wherever possible, in vivo lines, blocking notes, and scene titles were used. However, Give Me Your Hand attempts to equally represent all data sources, including interview transcripts, drawings, and significant artifacts chosen by co-inquirers. As such, the lines in the script are more than just direct quotes from interviews. Some words were inspired by other data sources. The narratives in the data have been transformed into stories of three fictional puppet characters, highlighting the significance of puppet creation and puppetry in the collected data. One of the characters, Ehren, represents the experience of the graduate student, allowing for a reflexive exploration of the researcher’s relationship to the inquiry process. Below is the fourth draft of Give Me Your Hands, which was collectively written by the graduate student and co-inquirers. The script is explicated in a critical commentary included in chapter five.

**Give Me Your Hands: A Short Play About Collective Playmaking**

by Christopher Cook, Jay, Ken Lee, Eagle Sky, and Teresa Shu-Tak Wong

From here one's hand could pluck the stars.

–Li Bai, Staying the Night at a Mountain Temple
(Translated by Mark Alexander)

We have within ourselves
Enough to fill the present day with joy

–William Wordsworth, The Recluse
Cast of Characters

ZHAN: A sock puppet. A creator/performer of Voices UP! The actor playing ZHAN should be older.

EHREN: A sock puppet. A creator/performer of Voices UP! The actor playing EHREN should be younger. This actor also runs the projections during the show.

SHELLEY: A sock puppet. A creator/performer of Voices UP! The actor playing SHELLEY should be older.

Scene

The play takes place in a room at the UBC Learning Exchange – a sometimes classroom, sometimes meeting room, sometimes art-studio, sometimes karaoke club, and one of the primary rehearsal spaces for Voices UP!

Time

The action occurs over 22 months, from early 2016 to late 2017.

Projections

The play involves projected text and images controlled by the actor playing EHREN. All the vignette titles should be projected, as well as the text and images specified in the script. There are no blackouts between vignettes, each one flows into the next.

PROLOGUE

The audience enters a classroom like space with tables and chairs. Karaoke versions of upbeat classics – such as The Beatles’ “I Want To Hold Your Hand” – play softly in the background. The supplies for making simple puppets – socks, eyes, pipe cleaners, fabric glue – are on each table.

Once the audience is seated, EHREN stands at the front of the space and encourages audience members to try making a sock puppet – and playfully challenges them to try to do it in ten minutes or less. As EHREN guides the audience through the process, the actors playing ZHAN
and SHELLEY circulate to support audience members in their puppet creation.

After ten minutes or so, the actors pull on their own sock puppets and flow into the first vignette of the play. They may encourage the audience to continue to work on their puppets throughout the show. The actor playing EHREN cues up the first projection, that reads:

“From 2016 to 2017, a group of community members, students, and staff collectively created a play, called Voices UP!, at the UBC Learning Exchange.”

VIGNETTE 1: FIRST SHOWTIMERS

ZHAN, SHELLEY, and EHREN – three sock puppets – look out at the audience.

EHREN. (to audience) Over 22 months, we made a play together.

ZHAN. (to audience) Me, this is my first time to do a show.

EHREN. These words are directly quoted from or inspired by interviews I did with community members who took part in the creation and performance of Voices UP!

SHELLEY. (to audience) We’re talking about making a script –

ZHAN. (shaking arms, covering mouth) Bit nervous. It’s just about – “Will we be successful? Will we? Can we do it?”

EHREN. I’m a first-timer – not to theatre, but to academia. How do you write a play and make it research?

SHELLEY. To be honest, I have no idea what’s going to happen. Just blank!

ZHAN. … Bit nervous – but little bit of excitement too.
VIGNETTE 2: A PUPPET IS BORN

EHREN turns to ZHAN and SHELLEY.

EHREN. Hey, Shelley, Zhan – we’re making sock puppets!

ZHAN. (to EHREN) Oh really?

SHELLEY. (to EHREN) Well, I don’t know anything about it …

ZHAN. (to EHREN) So nice!

SHELLEY. (to EHREN) I’m willing to give it a try.
(to audience, quietly – an aside) Socks!? 

ZHAN. (to audience, quietly – an aside) No clue what we’ll have at the end.

EHREN. Doesn’t matter what kind of puppet you want to make. Here –

EHREN cycles through projections of various materials for making sock puppets, like the material the audience has used to create their own puppets.

ZHAN. (to audience) All the different items, different materials –
(playful, having fun, to SHELLEY) “Hey! I want bigger puppet eyes!”

SHELLEY. (to ZHAN) “I want my eyes lower!”
(to audience) I never knew for socks, other than putting on your feet, you can work it into something else! I had no idea that it would end up into something very much different than just a sock, a piece of sock.

ZHAN. We each make are own,
But the group is making all these puppets together.
When we finish, we give them names.

EHREN cycles through photos of the sock puppets from Voices UP!

EHREN. I love the one named “SUPER SKY”!
SHELLEY. I don’t want to name mine “John” or “Mary” – then it just comes up in my mind: the word “Love”. That’s what I really want to show. I go home that night, I find my teddy bear – it’s wearing a little sweater with “LOVE” embroidered on it. So I put it on my puppet.

ZHAN. Almost like people when they have babies – they give them names too.

SHELLEY. “Love” is not just a name. There’s a lot of feelings, a lot of meanings at the back of that name.

ZHAN. It looks like – the puppets – it looks like they’re born.

VIGNETTE 3: BUILDING BRIDGES

EHREN cycles through photos of the sock puppets made for the show.

EHREN. *(to audience)* You know, you can meet quite a few people making a sock puppet.

SHELLEY. *(to audience)* This is a method of communication.

ZHAN. *(to audience)* Each puppet, like the people, they can make friends.

SHELLEY. I can look at the group through the puppet.

ZHAN. They only have to use the puppet to talk to each other.

SHELLEY. I never imagined that a puppet can be like a little bridge. We are building a bridge. For both sides. Me. And the other people.

EHREN. It was my first time making puppets – they just make me happy.

SHELLEY. *(to audience)* Everyone, I’d like you all to try something. If you haven’t already –
think up a name for your puppet…

ZHAN. (to audience) It can be any name you want.

SHELLEY. Now turn to the person beside you –
let your puppet introduce itself…
So this is how it all started.

ZHAN. Everybody has a puppet now, right?
It means we have a big family.
Because if I am cutting something for the puppet –
my cutting is not good – I turn for help.
(to SHELLEY) Will you cut this for me?

SHELLEY. (to ZHAN) Of course.

ZHAN. (to audience) That’s why I said,
“We are like a family…”

SHELLEY. (to audience) Building a bridge.
The creation of relationships.

ZHAN. …We help each other.

VIGNETTE 4: VOICES UP?

ZHAN. (hesitating – a shift) Then … then we all sit down, right?

The performers all sit at the same time.

EHREN. We help each other make the script –

SHELLEY. I still don’t really think
we have any idea what we’re doing.

ZHAN. Every time when we were meeting,
we discuss the story, the lines, the characters.
Everybody gives ideas and sentences.
Ehren writes it down.

EHREN. People have different opinions,
different ways of saying things.
And of course, we try to work through it.

SHELLEY. You’ve got to listen –
it’s just a matter of sharing different ideas to make the whole thing better. Actually, *Voices UP!* – it’s a very good title for our show. We really can voice up our opinions and everything.

ZHAN. *(standing)* No problem with most people in the group. Sometimes someone is hard to handle, But what can I do? Just – I try to keep my feelings to myself, try to keep my voice down.

EHREN. *(to ZHAN)* But it’s called *Voices UP!*

ZHAN. *(to EHREN)* In case someone blows up or something. *(to audience)* I try to keep it to myself.

SHELLEY. *(to ZHAN)* I just *VOICE UP* my opinion! I don’t think I am over confident – I have never done any big show. But I don’t mind – if I speak up, I speak up.

ZHAN. *(to SHELLEY)* I don’t want to show it … in front of everyone.

SHELLEY. *(quietly)* Oh. *(Slight pause. Then, to audience)* But this is something – over here we have people – drop-ins, students, volunteers from different nationalities and backgrounds – we all come here and we are going to stay and share something with one another.

### VIGNETTE 5: A LITTLE FLARE

EHREN. We have our script – then we rehearse it.

ZHAN. This means cooperation. Because everybody is doing their own part. There’s no conflict. I think it’s a lot of fun, I like to do the scenes – it makes me proud to say the words we wrote. Even in the rehearsals, practicing gives each of us the first chance
to speak in public.
And we build up friendship –
We’re spending afternoons together.

SHELLEY. With rehearsal
you sort of find the flow.
You don’t just look at your own part,
you watch the whole thing –
for example, the person who is speaking,
just ahead of you – so you know when to step in.
Also – I know nothing about theatre plays,
but I do think if you are on stage
you got to have a little flare,
to draw people in.
We don’t want them floating around thinking:

ZHAN. (imitating an audience member)
“Oh! What am I going to have for dinner?”

SHELLEY. Of course, it was very nice –
we held our scripts during the show
so we didn’t have to memorize.
But you can do more than read it out.
The expressions,
the intonation,
and the volume of it,
have a lot to do with the show
in attracting people’s attention.
Should it be of a higher pitch, or a lower pitch?
You don’t say:

EHREN. (quickly expressionless) “I-am-a-puppet-my-name-is-Love.”

SHELLEY. You’ve got to say it with the emotion –
put in a little flare.

**EHREN’S SOLO: TAINTED LOVE**

*A karaoke version of the Soft Cell’s “TAINTED LOVE” bursts on. EHREN steps forward. The karaoke lyrics are projected,*

EHREN. FLARE, you say! ATTRACTION, huh?
I AM A PUPPET! AND MY NAME IS …
EHREN sings along – hamming it up with gusto, and moving through the audience. ZHAN and SHELLEY stare, open-mouthed. After the first verse and chorus, ZHAN interrupts, loudly with a cough.

SHELLEY.  
(to EHREN, speaking the line with feeling)  
Just, “My name is Love, and I am a Puppet,” is fine.

ZHAN and SHELLEY EXIT, taking a seat in the audience. Through the following, pages of EHREN’S handwritten research journal are projected.

EHREN.  
As I interview members of the Voices UP! cast about their experiences on the second floor of the Learning Exchange, the Wednesday afternoon Karaoke Club blasts in from the room beside us. I think about all the experiences these folks and I have had – we’ve been making different types of art together for over two years. As a UBC student, I work at the Learning Exchange part-time. Painting t-shirts, papier-mâché hands, belting out “You’re the One I Want” from Grease and dancing it up. We’ve done it all.

The first performance of Voices UP! – I missed it. I was at my wedding, and the cast gave me a card – congratulating my husband and I, wishing us well, and offering blessings to our marriage.

So these research interviews I’m doing – we might not have the traditional investigator-interviewee relationship.

How do I make it clear to the folks I am interviewing that I’m not an artist right now – not that guy who does art part-time on Thursday and Friday afternoons? That I am … a researcher? Oh, that sounds strange: “researcher”. I know how to make a bit of drama, But I have no idea how to make research.

So I do what I do whenever I need some more clarity:
I invest in some graphic-ts.

Two pictures of EHREN in graphic t-shirts appear on the screen.

One says, “This is the t-shirt I do theatre in.”
Other one: “This is the t-shirt I do grad research.”
And the Muppets because … Come on, they’re the Muppets!

Maybe these will make things clearer for us.
Clearer for me.

ZHAN’S SOLO: NECESSARY CHANGE

ZHAN comes back on stage, and EHREN takes their seat in the audience.

ZHAN. Oh we’ve been working on this play for months and months and months. It takes a lot of dedication. Every time we practice, we change, every time we change the script, we practice – and in the end, still, we’re asking: “Do we want to change something?” At the end of each rehearsal, everyone gets to answer that question.

It’s a little bit different when you are actually on stage trying to speak it out. You may have to rewrite: “Hey, maybe we can do it like this!”

You’ve got to put it together, look at it, and you take what is better for the entire project. Like, for example – Ehren, I don’t think we should keep you singing *(imitating EHREN’S Karaoke)* “Oooooooh!” like that. I don’t think it’s a bad idea, It just maybe doesn’t fit.

That’s the process. We keep learning and changing. The whole thing takes time – But that’s okay, right?

I’ll tell you, a story goes:
There was this boy who was always skipping school. One day, he saw an old lady with a long iron rod at the bank of a river. She was rolling the rod in the water – back and forth with her bare hands. (as if to the woman) “What are you doing?”

SHELLEY.  (from audience) “I’m making a needle!”

ZHAN. “Oh! But that rod is huge!”

SHELLEY.  (from audience) “If you roll it long enough, it will be what you will it to be.”

ZHAN. How many months – years – decades – did it take? The little boy never found out because he never skipped school again. He grew up to become a famous artist – the poet Li Bai.

Persistency, will-power, patience – You need all these qualities to create.

It takes time to make a needle or a poem or a script. You have to be able to put in the time. I never had time before I retired. Never learned about plays, I didn’t have much schooling in China. When I came here, 30 years ago, I stepped off the plane, and I didn’t know English. It was like I was a new born. They said, “How are you?” I just laughed – no idea. They said, “You are stupid!” Just laughed – I didn’t understand … The plays here are in English and I’m just working till now, anyway. I never had time to learn something like this before.

SHELLEY’S SOLO: WHAT’S IN A NAME?

SHELLEY comes back on stage, and ZHAN takes their seat in the audience.
SHELLEY. “I am a puppet. My name is Love.”
Next person says,
“My name is John, I am also a puppet.”
But I wanted to sound more interesting.
I added, “I was born at the Learning Exchange.”
Then, “I’m a Canadian.”
We are all Canadians, we are all part of it.
That’s what I wanted to tell the audience.

It’s not that I wish to take up a couple of seconds on air,
but to enhance –
I hope the puppet’s name, Love,
can draw people’s attention.
Because if you just say,
“I am John,” they will forget after half a minute.

How did I come up with that name?
Well – Love is not just a name.
There’s a story behind it.

First, as we were half-way through the process –
I lost somebody.
I lost him.
He is gone forever.
So much in grief, so much in Love.
I lost my Love.
In every way,
in every sense the word means –
Love is a big word.

Then the second part is:
I want to emphasize Love.
We all need Love.
You can love anything – anything!
Your tea,
You can love your pet,
your work.
You can love a certain person.
Love makes a happier life, a better world.
A famous English poet once said:

EHREN and ZHAN stand and speak from the audience.

EHREN. “The best portion of a good puppet’s life:
ZHAN. “Their little nameless unremembered acts of kindness –

SHELLEY. “And Love.”

VIGNETTE 6: EARPLUGS

All three puppets are on stage again.

EHREN. (to audience) Hi everyone, welcome to our performance of Voices UP!

ZHAN. (shaking arms, covering mouth, as at the start of the show)
“We’ll we be successful?”
“Can we do it?”

SHELLEY. There’s a lot of people in the audience.

EHREN. On May 2, 2017, we performed
at the Bayshore Hotel, in downtown Vancouver,
to a room of sixty conference attendees.

ZHAN. We want to be number one!

SHELLEY. We want to be the best we can be.

ZHAN. I feel shy!
Everyone can see me up here,
I’m pretty colorful.

SHELLEY. Nervous? Surely, to a certain extent.
But excited!
After a few times, and rehearsals,
you feel more comfortable.
What they call “stage-fright”?
Could happen, but it doesn’t help:
The performers need the audience.
This is also a relationship.
They share in our ideas, expressions –
we look at them,
and we get feelings from them too.
It’s both ways.
It’s always the word “interact”.
And it’s also the word “relationship”.
The interactions of the performers and the audience
made us sparkle.
There was a click – and sparkle!

ZHAN. It feels like we are real puppets. We’re not people – You are not you, I am not me – we are into the puppet. In the show, we live in the puppet’s world. I don’t know if that is the idea or not, but that’s my feeling.

SHELLEY. I want to put life in the puppet. I want the puppet to show people that it’s got a character. It has a … Little brain. It can – in a way – express itself. It wants to make friends with the audience: “Hello, Everyone, my name is Love. I was born at the UBC Learning Exchange, I am Canadian. I am very happy to be here.”

ZHAN. When we finish, the audience – (clapping enthusiastically) the clapping’s so loud I can’t hear – I’m going to bring ear plugs next time! I’ve got sensitive ears. But I feel… What can I say? I’m feeling a little bit of … I don’t know how to describe it. It’s something – the audience are enjoying our performance. That’s why they are clapping their hands. And in return we bow and clap our hands too. I’m proud. Proud of the group. Every puppet makes the effort, right?

SHELLEY. You watch people, the audience, the expressions on their face. Evaluation is up to the audience, it is not up to the performers, we did our part already.

By looking at their faces you can tell they are happy – they enjoy what they have seen. Sometimes you may hear, “Ohhhhh!” with a little laughter – maybe they’ve seen something they never expected.
Honestly, it’s a very warm feeling.

**VIGNETTE 7: SO MANY QUESTIONS**

**EHREN.** After the show, we have a talk-back –
a question period with the cast onstage.

*The performers sit in unison.*

**SHELLEY.** I’m glad.
I like to be with the audience.
I like to listen to them.
Because they are from a different group.

**ZHAN.** I feel a little bit nervous again.
*(laughing, playful)* But I don’t have to answer – thankfully!
If I had to answer all those question it would be too much.
Good thing we have a whole group who can do that kind of job.
The audience is asking so many questions –
we are proud because people are interested.
We made *Voices UP!* a success.

**SHELLEY.** They ask me questions
from their own point of view, it’s like –

**EHREN.** “Oh I’ve never thought about that!
That’s a good question!” –

**SHELLEY.** To listen to complementary words
is very nice, of course.
However, I want to learn,
something that I am not aware of from the audience –
how we can improve.

**EHREN.** Someone puts up their hand, and I point to them –

**ZHAN.** *(hand up)* “Are you doing any work evaluating this experience for people?
Like – what was it like for you to make a play together?
What are you all taking from it?”

**EHREN.** One of the cast says –

**SHELLEY.** “Actually, that’s what Ehren’s grad research is on.”

**EHREN.** “Yeah, I’m making a play about making a play.”
I’m wondering if my cheeks are as red as they feel.
How am I going to translate this experience into research?

ZHAN. (to EHREN) Can we help?

**VIGNETTE 8: BLUE TALES & BRAD PITT**

ZHAN and SHELLEY stand.

SHELLEY. I have a feeling of accomplishment –
(imitating herself) “I’ve done it! I can do it!”
Self-esteem.

ZHAN. It gives me courage, right –

*The performers playing ZHAN does a gesture –
palm flat open, pushing it forward against the air.*

ZHAN. Yeah, courage to do new things.
Even though we are
just small puppets,
as a group we could
make a very good script,
and show, for the audience.

SHELLEY. Actually – this is going back again –
I wish I could mention more about
my first-time dropping-in for one of the workshops.
It was just really remarkable.
I came in with the sort of the feeling that,
“Okay let me drop in and see what is happening –
if I like it, I’ll stay, if not, maybe I’ll do something else.”
But I’d never realized or imagined that I would stick to it for two years.
Two years!
And I have been very regular in coming,
I don’t drop out right in the middle,
because I don’t want to miss any part of it.

ZHAN. It doesn’t matter how people are educated,
or how difficult it is,
if you have a good Leader
and good Leading-Members –

*ZHAN speaks a Chinese idiom:*

三个臭皮匠，胜过诸葛亮
“The three of us are better than one Brad Pitt” – that’s a direct translation.

(laughing) No, no –
You know who Zhuge Liang is?
Zhuge Liang is a name like Shelley or Ehren. Zhuge Liang.
He is a very, very old man, very wise – an advisor to the king, Liu Bay.
It means: three regular people are better than the king’s most prized advisor.

I think English has this saying too, right?
“Two heads are better than one.”
We can do things successfully, even though we are not experienced, if we do it together.
That’s what the puppets stand for, to me – Our strong group.
Because if you are by yourself, you can’t do those things. That’s a group of people, making good things, all together.

I would never have this opportunity if I was just by myself within the four walls.
(Repeats quietly) Within the four walls.
Everybody grows old.
But people grow old with grace.
Regardless from the teen to the twenties to the thirties to the forties whatever – you’ve got to keep going, keep learning.

With the writing and practicing we are concentrating on doing something,
You are active. You are not passive.
You help yourself by helping others.
Working on this project, you pick things from other people.

It’s not only the making of the puppets, or even the writing.
For weeks, downstairs in the parkade, we were setting up the set, and we were sawing and then nailing and painting – we can’t miss that – it won’t work.
It is a very important part of the whole project.
ZHAN. You don’t use
a pen or ink?
Just use different instruments –
the hammer, the nails.
You’re still a part of the group.
You need different people to do different things,
You need everybody.

SHELLEY. It’s really amazing.
I mean, I can pick up chop-sticks,
forks and knives,
but not a saw!
And I did. I sawed a piece of the set!
It’s part of a very important memory in my life.

ZHAN. Also, you know, Ehren – you are a very good leader.

EHREN. (to ZHAN) But like Shelley,
I learned how to saw
when we made the set.
I wasn’t leading any of that.
I never would have built a set on my own.
And you taught me how to drill, Zhan!
I like what you said before,
“Leading-Group Members”.
Everybody’s leading, everyone
took the lead in the project.

ZHAN. (to EHREN) Yes, a good leader,
leads good group members.
It takes both.

EHREN. Thanks, Zhan.

ZHAN. You don’t have to thank me.
After *Voices UP!*, we’re more than just friends,
we’re like brother and sister.

EHREN. That’s not how I described our relationship
in my ethic’s application.

SHELLEY. (to audience) What we’re really talking about is teamwork.
I used to live in a different world,
a different community –
I never learned too much about ....
Accepting people.
Actually I consider myself very fortunate because I happen to meet the right people – the people that I feel comfortable with. So I wanted to be part of the team. And I also had the chance to do things on my own. A little skirt for my puppet, for example, so it would cover my arm – and I am not a sewer! – I finally made one out of a gift bag. It’s a little costume for the stage. It seems you can make things out of everything! It’s a matter of trying, It may work, it may not. If you don’t try you never know.

Because, when I was a kid, I painted a picture – it was a dog, I put blue color on the tail – and the teacher told me, “Dogs don’t have blue tails!” Then I was a little upset. “Gee, I really did something wrong.” Here, if I put a blue nose on my puppet, I am sure no one is going to say, “Hey, how come the nose is blue?” And I guess now I would think – “How come the dog can’t have a blue tail?”

VIGNETTE 9: GIVE ME YOUR HANDS

ZHAN. Even though now we have finished, I still look at the photo of the cast and think, “Oh what a good time!” Sometimes I meet Shelley outside too, then we stop, and yap yap yap for a few minutes then – bye-bye. Not only here we become almost a family, outside we are friends too.

SHELLEY. (to audience) I consider this play as one of my masterpieces. Through the project I have done it the best that I can. Maybe I screwed up a little bit here and there – I forgot a word – but that’s alright, I did my part.
You remember what Puck said, at the at the end?
“If you don’t like it, it’s okay.
But I am honest to myself.”
Okay? “Give me your hands.
You give me your hand.”

ZHAN.  (to EHREN) When are we going to do Voices UP! 2018?

EHREN. I don’t know, Zhan.

ZHAN. We should have more performances.
Later on, if we get a chance,
We should go to the Chan Centre!

SHELLEY. (to audience) Hopefully it leaves a footprint
at the Learning Exchange,
for people who we work with
and also for the audience who watch our play –
hopefully they will remember something of us
working together to contribute to a whole show.
(to EHREN) I hate to see that the project is over.

ZHAN. (to EHREN) I wish it could go on and on and on and on.

EHREN. (to SHELLEY and ZHAN) It sounds like it’s “We done it! We created
something!” But also –

SHELLEY. (to EHREN) “Oh, it’s over. Oh, boy this is over.”
(to audience) It’s just “Oh!” At the end – you draw the curtain.
I miss it – I miss that little spark.
But the spark doesn’t go on forever,
like the stars in the sky.
They always have a bright moment,
the sparkling, the brightness, and afterwards – stardust.
But then tomorrow the stars will shine again.
(to EHREN) I think we should end with:
“Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart”.

EHREN. Who said that?

SHELLEY. William Wordsworth.
That’s what the play was: the breathings of our heart.

ZHAN. “Fill your paper …”
Let’s say stages instead of paper. We make theatre!
EHREN. Okay. Do you want to say that together?

ALL. *(to audience)* Fill your stages with the breathings of your hearts.  

THE END
Chapter Five: Discussion

If it gives people a voice it is worth something.

So often we forget what we are no longer hearing.

–Naomi Wallace, *Playwriting Seminars 2.0*

In the following chapter, a critical commentary of *Give Me Your Hands* is followed by a broader discussion of the research results.

**Give Me Your Hands: A Commentary**

This play is only one possibility for dramatizing the data collected for this study – while offering an in-depth exploration of the co-inquirers’ experiences, it attempts to refrain from suggesting the collected data can lead to a single, specific answer (Belliveau, 2007). The play presents the data in a form to be experienced, rather than examined.

**Data to script.** How much of the text of *Give Me Your Hands* was directly quoted from interview transcripts? What words have been changed, added, or left out?

Some lines of the script are direct quotes, and some lines are inspired by words from interviews. During the interviews, co-inquirers often flowed between the present and past tense when talking about their experiences. In the script, all lines are written in the present tense, to encourage a feeling of immediacy when the script is performed. Words from the transcripts were changed to protect the privacy of the co-inquirers or of other *Voices UP!* cast members who chose not to participate in this research project. Words were also changed for clarity – “them” becoming “the audience”, for example, or “it” becoming “the play”.

Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter four, the script attempts to equally represent the diverse data sources, including artwork and artifacts. Much of the blocking suggestions in the
script – the stage directions stating physical actions of the characters – come directly from observed actions during interviews.

It is important to recognize that stage directions describing blocking are notes to performers. The power of seeing a movement on stage, rather than reading a description, should not be underestimated. For instance, the gesture that represents courage in the script – a hand pushing forward – when performed, may provoke an emotional response in audience that is difficult to imagine when reading the script.

The byline of *Give Me Your Hand* lists the co-inquirers as well as the graduate student – this script, like *Voices UP!*, was written through a process of collective creation. The graduate student would not have had access to the stories included in the text, were it not for the co-inquirers telling them. The story of the metal rod being rolled into a needle by an old woman, recorded by hand in the graduate student’s journal, is only one example of the rich content provide by co-inquirers (Figure 9).

*Figure 9. Drawing from the graduate student’s research journal. The story of making a needle. Story told by co-inquirer.*
The graduate student, aided by a background in theatre, contributed by proposing an initial representation of the co-inquirers’ experiences in a theatrical form. The co-inquirers were invited to comment on each draft of the script, and these drafts were rewritten collaboratively over the course of multiple meetings. The collective process of writing *Give Me Your Hands* was familiar to both the graduate student and the co-inquirers, and allowed the researcher and co-inquirers to discuss how to best capture the data for staging.

**Puppets: Characters and bridges.** Puppets were central to many of the experiences reported by co-inquirers in this study, and are the fictional characters that populate the short play, *Give Me Your Hands*. The play’s title, as well as being an in vivo quote from one of the interview transcripts, also serves to suggest a central component to sock puppetry: hands. The audiences’ experience of the play is meant to be one that is filled with a playful exploration of puppetry, which recalls the way in which the community members involved in *Voices UP!* first explored sock puppets together. In the prologue, the audience members enter a sock puppet workshop preshow, and during the action of the play, the performers encourage the audience to experiment performing with their puppets. Although the audience is only asked to turn to the person beside and introduce themselves, this small act of the performance is like the initial acts of puppetry undertaken by the cast, which helped “bridge” their relationships. Is it possible that *Give Me Your Hands* audience members, having introduced themselves to each other as puppets during the show, might continue to interact after the show’s curtain-call, building new relationships too?

In *Give Me Your Hands*, the puppets address the audience directly throughout the piece. Audience-performer interactions serve to further the highlight the centrality of relationships to the co-inquirer’s experience of collective playmaking. At various points the performers, through
the puppets, relate to the audience as confidents, participants in a sock-making workshop, and an actual crowd gathered to watch a show.

**Composite characters.** Two characters of *Voices UP!* are composites. More than two individuals took part in this research project, and no character represents a single community member’s experience. Composite characters allowed for the co-inquirers to retain some privacy, and the grouping of similar experiences into one character, helping to illuminate the data. The third characters – Ehren – represents the experience of the graduate student. The prominence of the theme of relationships in interviews necessitated dramatization of the co-inquirers relationship with other collective members, as well as their relationship with the graduate student. While the thematic analysis of the data offered little room for the graduate student to speak of his own experience, the script allowed the co-inquirers’ and graduate student’s experiences to be explored simultaneously. For example, a sketch from the graduate student’s research journal informed several monologues spoken by Ehren, surrounding his apprehension as a first-time researcher (Figure 10).
Figure 10. Drawing from the graduate student’s research journal. “The Fearchers”. First-time researcher fear.

**Considering Experiences of Collective Playmaking: A Discussion**

Considering the collected data more broadly, several factors contributed to the success and longevity of the *Voices UP!* production. As an offering of the Learning Exchange’s Learning Lab program, *Voices UP!* was a “drop-in” activity, designed to present few barriers for individuals who wanted to get involved. Attendance was not mandatory, and community members could choose the manner and extent to which they participated in the project. From helping to paint the set for a single afternoon, to taking part for the production’s nearly two-year duration, community members were free to choose when and how they were involved. Although this research project focuses on the experiences of co-inquirers who performed in *Voices UP!* and were involved in the project for more than a year, it should be noted that the production
would not have been possible without the efforts of numerous community members who participated in many other ways.

For those community members who were interested in taking part in performances as cast members, attendance at rehearsal was encouraged. Nonetheless, if they wanted to take a break for several weeks or even months, they were free to do so, and could return whenever they wished. Even without mandatory attendance, no cast members missed a performance, and absences from rehearsal were rare.

**Positive art: Collective creation and wellbeing.** Lomas’ (2016) reviewed art in therapeutic contexts and proposed five benefits of “positive art”, including offering opportunities for “sense-making”, “enriching” experiences, “aesthetic appreciation”, “entertainment”, “bonding” (p. 172). These benefits capture some, some but not all, of the benefits co-inquirers pointed to in this study through the experiences they shared. Participating in *Voices UP!* offered the chance for co-inquirers to:

- have a fun, arts-based experience;
- develop social relationship;
- explore tools for communication;
- contribute to a goal-focused, evolving production;
- build diverse skills, as well as a sense of efficacy;
- explore multiple means of collective and individual creative expression;
- cultivate a sense of group membership and contribution.

**Social connectedness and belonging.** *Voices UP!* offered co-inquirers the opportunity to develop close relationships with other collective members, and a sense of group belonging. Social support may encompass various kinds of connections, from a close relationship to support...
received within a group (Harel, Shechtman, & Cutrona, 2011) or community (Sarason & Sarason, 2009) context. Social support and group membership have been linked to a range of health and wellness impacts.

Recent research has pointed to group membership potentially contributing to individual’s sense of self-determination (Cruwys et al., 2015), self-worth (Jetten et al., 2015), and personal identity (Haslam et al., 2014). A sense of group membership may also mitigate experiences of depression (Cruwys et al., 2013; Cruwys, Haslam, et al., 2014), and rework maladaptive beliefs (Cruwys, Dingle, et al., 2014). Social connectedness and group membership have been shown to be impactful on health and wellbeing across different age groups (Heinze, Kruger, Reischl, Cupal, & Zimmerman, 2015), as well as diverse cultural and ethnic identities in Canada (Puyat, 2013; Richmond, Ross, & Egeland, 2007; Syed et al., 2017). Chinese immigrants facing change within the career sphere have pointed to social support as beneficial in navigating this transition (Zheng, Amundson, Borgen, & Butterfield, 2013).

Based on co-inquirers descriptions of their experiences, *Voices UP!* encouraged social support and a sense of belonging through collaboration on a collectively created theatre project. Agreeing with findings that older adults reported “positive changes in self-esteem and confidence” after taking part in a drama workshop (Moore et al., 2017, p. 7), co-inquirers in this study described gaining “courage” and “self-esteem” as they moved through the process of creating and performing a show together. Similar to Salzano and Lindemann (2013) study exploring the impacts of collectively created visual art-project with social workers, after creating a piece of art together, co-inquirers expressed connectedness with their fellow collective members. Other research points to self-confidence increasing capacity to manage change in individuals who have immigrated to Canada (Koert, Borgen, & Amundson, 2011), which could
mean that the self-confidence co-inquirers gained through *Voices UP!* will help them navigate change and transition in other areas of their life.

**Puppetry as an act of relationship building.** The co-inquirers pointed to puppet-making and puppetry as a means of communication and relationship building. In counselling psychology and related disciplines, puppetry has been utilized by various approaches, including play therapy (Hartwig, 2014), narrative therapy (Butler, Guterman, & Rudes, 2009), and drama therapy (Stolfi, 2010). Save Stolfi’s (2010) clinical account of using therapeutic puppetry during a weekend retreat for men, the limited literature available focuses on puppetry’s therapeutic use with children or adults with serve mental illness (for example, Greaves, Camic, Maltby, Richardson, & Mylläri, 2012; Nutting, 2015). Recognizing puppetry as a means of expression and communication tool, these previous studies also deal with puppets that have already been made. One of the unique contributions of the current study is to explore the experiences of adults in a community setting who engaged in both the making of puppets, as well as script-creation, rehearsal, and public performance with the puppets. Based on the co-inquirers reported experiences, several key elements led to the puppets acting as a means of communication and relationship development within the group:

- engaging in a shared sense of play and fun through puppet creation;
- helping each other make the puppets;
- the freedom to create a puppet in whatever way they wanted;
- taking on the identity of the sock puppet during script creation, rehearsal, and performances;
- creating a personally relevant character and story for the puppets.
**Creative expression, skill-building, and efficacy.** Creative expression is a core component of *Voices UP!*, and many other workshops and activities at the Learning Exchange. *Voices UP!* is unique, however, in that it offered such diverse creative experiences to collective members. Rather than a workshop on acting or set design, *Voices UP!* allowed community members to explore the multiple forms of creative expression inherent in theatre production, from writing the script, to drilling set pieces, to performing with sock puppets.

As Westwood and Gordon (2016) propose, co-inquirers reported that rehearsal allowed them to develop a sense of competency before performing publicly. Public performances then brought a sense of achievement and efficacy – performances allowed them to recognize their own success in putting on a production. Skill-building is often a focus of counselling psychology interventions, particularly in career counselling. The broad definition of career presented in chapter two encompasses any interest and passion that an individual devotes time to, alongside the more traditional understanding of career as paid employment. Such a definition is particularly important for those interested in theatre in Canada, as individuals may not able to depend on theatre as their primary source of income (Mytnowych, 2016). A consequence of this, as suggested by a co-inquirer: theatre may be explored after retirement from the workforce.

Collective creation encouraged the emergence of strengths of individual group members to contribute to the overall production, allowed the production to evolve, and supported the production’s sustainability. As stated in the previous chapter, the idea for exploring puppets came from Eagle Sky, and the puppet scene was added after the first performances. The addition of puppetry points to the evolving nature of the script and performance, and highlight that none of the collective members, including the graduate student, could have predicted the shape or content of the script that would emerged from the collective creation process. Furthermore, the
graduate student’s background in theatre did not include puppetry or set making experiences. As suggested by *Give Me Your Hands*, these elements of the production drew on the strengths, skills, and leadership of other collective members. Set making reflected the interest of several community members and so the project evolved to include workshops in which the group learned how to make a set together. In this way, *Voices UP!* allowed each collective member to be leaders and experts in different areas, facilitating different aspects of the production.

*Voices UP!* also offered specific and tangible goals, that were accompanied by some sense of anxiety or pressure for collective members, as explored in the thematic analysis, as well as several lines from *Give Me Your Hands*. From the start of the project, the collective knew they would perform publicly. After completing their first performance, the group planned for the next, ensuring they were always working towards a public presentation. The public performance also allowed collective member to meet, communicate, and be in relationship to groups from outside of their own community.

**Collective creation and positive psychology.** From a positive psychology standpoint (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), co-inquirers painted *Voices UP!* as a “valued subjective experience” (p. 5) in their descriptions. Positive psychology holds “strengths” such as “courage”, “interpersonal skills”, “perseverance”, as well as opportunities to experience “insight” (p. 7) as possible “buffers” against challenges to an individual’s wellness. Co-inquirers pointed to experiencing these strengths, from trying something new, like theatre, to all manner of creative insights and inspirations – for example, turning a sock into a puppet, and turning a puppet’s name into a meaningful personal tribute.

Some authors have argued that positive psychology “needs to be thought of as just plain psychology” (p. 107) – in other words, focusing only on the positive aspects of individual’s
experiences is no more beneficial than focusing solely on the negative (McNulty & Fincham, 2012). McNulty and Finchman argue that calling “processes … positive or negative” is meaningless without consideration of the context. In the present study, we see that some co-inquirers described experiencing anxiety prior to the public performance, but they overcame this anxiety to perform, and then celebrated the successes of the group. Although most of us would consider anxiety negativity, in the narratives of Voices UP! co-inquirers, anxiety was not cast as a particularly negative aspect of the experience – rather, simply a part of it.

**Significance of Research Results**

Research-based theatre is a methodology that attempts to bridge an embodied art form with scholarly writing, and few counselling psychology authors have explored the space between art and inquiry. This study is offered as an example of how research based-theatre can be utilized by counselling psychology researchers as means of capturing experiences that may be difficult to present in traditional academic writing.

Expanding our conceptions of therapeutic work to include diverse settings and practices, such as the rehearsal hall and the stage, supports our efforts as clinicians and practitioners to make relevant counselling experiences accessible to a greater number of community members in diverse contexts. The research presented here also suggests that community members can be co-creators of an experience that is potentially creatively fulfilling and ripe with value to wellbeing. Co-creation means collective art-making can be adapted to whoever is in the room – acknowledging and embracing diverse identities and backgrounds, drawing on the groups strengths, and encouraging shared growth.
Limitations

As qualitative research methodologies, narrative research and research-based theatre do not lead to generalizable results. This research project was conducted in a specific community, within a particular organization, and involved individuals who were interested in creating and performing a play. The data and narratives presented here are not meant to be reflective of all patrons of the Learning Exchange, or all community members of the DTES. Furthermore, as each theatrical process is unique, a different organization engaging in collective creation may generate different experiences than those presented here.

Implications for Further Research

Considering the experiences of co-inquirers who took part in Voices UP!, future projects could investigate the impact on staff and students who participate in such projects. Following on the description and advice of the co-inquirers who stated that evaluation should be left to the audience, future studies could also examine the impact on audience members who witness collectively created performances by community members. Another line of inquiry could explore the benefits participants report from taking part in collective creation projects of shorter durations, for example, for several days or several weeks.

Conclusion

No epilogue, I pray you; for your play needs no excuse.

–Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night’s Dream

Theatre is meant to be performed. Although reading Give Me Your Hands provides some insight, the script is only a starting point that is meant to lead to a witnessed story-sharing in a communal gathering. One possible aspiration for narrative inquiry and research-based theatre is to ignite dialogues – or “conversation” (Josselson, 2006, p. 7) – connecting individuals and
communities in interactions which transmit, share, and create knowledge. Staging research-based theatre projects such as *Give Me Your Hands* may help to start such dialogues, encouraging other researchers, clinicians, artists, and community members to explore the therapeutic potential of creating communal art.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

Consent Form for Voices UP! Experiences of Collective Playmaking

Principal Investigator. Dr. William Borgen, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, University of British Columbia.

Co-Investigator. Chris Cook, MA Student, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, University of British Columbia.

The data from this study will be used in Chris’ thesis dissertation.

Purpose. You are being invited to participate in this research study because of your involvement in Voices UP!, a collectively created play at the UBC Learning Exchange. We are doing this study to learn more about your experiences of taking part in a collective theatre creation process.

Getting involved. If you have questions, or would like to take part in this study, please speak to Chris in person, at the UBC Learning Exchange, during drop-in hours (Tuesday-Friday, 1 pm to 5 pm). Please talk to Chris prior to August 31, 2017, if you wish to be scheduled for an interview for this study.

Procedures. If you say “Yes,” to taking part in this study, here is what it will involve:

1. You will meet with Chris, the co-investigator, for a one-on-one interview, in which Chris will ask you about your experiences taking part in Voices UP! All interviews will take place at the UBC Learning Exchange, during the Learning Exchange’s hours of operation (Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm). The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

2. You are welcome to bring an object to the interview that represents your experience of taking part in Voices UP! The object can be a prop you made for the show, a found object, or another personal item that you connect to the experience of working on this play. Chris will ask if he can take a picture of the object for use in the study. The photograph may appear in the final dissertation, as well as other articles and public presentations that share the study results. You can choose whether your name or an alias – a made up name – appears beside the photograph in any study results. Your object will not be collected as part of the study. You will be asked to take the object with you at the end of the interview.

Counselling Psychology • Human Development, Learning and Culture
Measurement, Evaluation and Research Methodology • School Psychology • Special Education
If you would prefer that no photographs of your object are taken, Chris can make notes on the object instead.

If you agree to photographs of your object, you may withdraw your agreement at any time during the interview. If consent for photographs is withdrawn, Chris will stop and delete any photographs that have been made, before continuing with the interview.

3. As part of the interview, you will have the option to use art supplies to make a picture that represents your experience taking part in *Voices UP!* Chris will ask if he can take a picture of your art for use in the study. The photograph may appear in the final dissertation, as well as other articles and public presentations that share the study results. You can choose whether your name or an alias appears beside the photograph in any study results. Your art will not be collected as part of the study. You will be asked to take the art with you at the end of the interview.

If you would prefer that no photographs of your art are taken, Chris can make notes on the art instead.

If you agree to photographs of your art, you may withdraw your agreement at any time during the interview. If consent for photographs is withdrawn, Chris will stop and delete any photographs that have been made, before continuing with the interview.

4. Chris will write out any audio recordings from your interview as a transcript. Once the audio recording is transcribed it will be deleted. Chris will ask you if you would like to meet to read over the transcript together. You will only see the transcript from your interview, not the interviews of other cast members.

This meeting is entirely optional. You do not need to attend this meeting in order to take part in the study. You are free to share any comments or feedback you wish to at this meeting. This meeting will last approximately 60 minutes, and will take place at the Learning Exchange.

5. Chris will take the interview transcript, and any photographs of art or objects, as well as the collectively written *Voices UP!* script, and use them to inform the writing of a monologue or scene that represents your experience of *Voices UP!*

6. Chris will ask if you would like to meet to read over the monologue or scene. You are free to share any comments or feedback you wish to at this meeting. This meeting will focus on the question: “Does this monologue or scene capture the story you shared during the interview, and through your art or with your objects?”

This meeting is entirely optional. You do not need to attend this meeting in order to take part in the study. This meeting will last approximately 60 minutes, and will take place at the Learning Exchange.

7. At the end of the study, the results will be published in Chris’ thesis dissertation, and shared at a public thesis defense. The results may also be shared through journal articles, conference presentations, and/or other public performances.

*How much time will you be expected to commit?* The one-on-one interview with Chris will last approximately one hour. Meeting with Chris to review the transcript and the monologue or scene is your...
choice. If you wish to, reviewing the transcript will take approximately one hour, and reviewing the monologue or scene will take approximately one hour.

If you attend all three meetings, you will commit approximately three hours of time. These meetings will be scheduled over the course of the next three months.

Results. The study results will be shared in several ways:
- The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books.
- The results may be presented at conferences and other events.
- A public presentation at the Learning Exchange.
- The results will also be available on a USB Key at the front desk of the UBC Learning Exchange, that you can access when you sign-up for a Drop-In computer.

Potential risks. We do not think there is anything in this study that could be bad for you. The questions asked in the interview will be about your personal experiences taking part in *Voices UP!* You have the right to refuse to answer any questions you do not want to. A list of counselling services will be provided prior to the interview starting, should you experience any distress during or following the interview.

Potential benefits. One way in which this study may be helpful to you is by offering a chance to think back on the process of creating *Voices UP!* and talk about what you want to take away from the experience.

In this study, you will have the chance to observe a script creation process, which may reflect your interest in theatre. If you choose to attend all three meetings, you will witness the process of a spoken interview and photographs being transformed into a written monologue or scene.

By learning about your experiences taking part in collective theatre creation, this study may also help to support other community groups and individuals to initiate their own collective theatre projects.

Confidentially. You will have the option of:
- Being referred to by your real name in any of the study results;
- Or, if you would prefer, an alias will be used to refer to you in the study results.

If you choose to use your real name, your name will appear in my thesis dissertation, as well as any publications or presentations that come out of this research.

If you choose to use an alias, please know that it may still be possible for others to determine who you are. This study only involves *Voices UP!* cast members. The cast is relatively small, and we have performed the play publicly several times. As such, it may be possible for someone to guess who you are even if your real name is not used in the study results.

Electronic files related to this study will be encrypted and password protected, and stored on encrypted, password protected computers. Files will not be uploaded to file sharing services. Files will be shared between the co-investigator and the principal investigator via UBC email addresses, using encrypted, password protected attachments. A password protected backup of the electronic files will be kept on an encrypted external hard drive, stored in a locked filing cabinet. Both the principal investigator and the co-

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investigator will have knowledge of your involvement in this study.

Any handwritten notes and printed transcripts related to the research will be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

**Contact for questions or concerns.** If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact the principle investigator or co-investigator. Our names and telephone numbers are listed on the first page of this form.

**Contact for complaints.** If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

**Consent and signature.** Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any impact on your access to programs or activities at the UBC Learning Exchange, or your participation in future performances or activities related to *Voices UP!*

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.
- You can choose to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty, and without providing a reason.
- If you choose to withdraw from the study, all audio recording, photographs, transcripts, written notes and other materials related to your involvement in the study will be deleted or destroyed.
- Below, you can choose whether or not to be audio recorded, or whether or not photographs can be taken of your objects or art. You can agree to all, some, or none of these, and still be able to take part in this study.

I agree to be audio recorded during the interview *(please check one):*

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

I agree to have photographs taken of objects I bring to the interview *(please check one):*

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

I agree to have photographs taken of art I create during the interview *(please check one):*

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

______________  ________________
Participant Signature  Date

______________
Printed Name of the Participant

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Appendix B: Interview Script

Preliminary Discussion Points

Confirmation of consent to take part in study:

- Do you have any questions, concerns, or things you would like to discuss at this point, in relation to the consent form, or the study in general?
- Do you consent to proceed with the interview?

Agreement to be audio recorded:

- With your permission, I would like to audio record this interview and then transcribe it. Is that all right with you? If you would prefer that the interview is not recorded, I can take written notes instead.
- If you would rather I didn’t make notes during the interview, I can make them afterwards. What would you prefer?

Agreement to have any objects photographed:

- With your permission, I would like to take photographs of the object(s) you brought. Is that all right with you? If you would prefer, I can take written notes on the object(s) instead.
- If you would rather I didn’t make notes during the interview, I can make them afterwards. What would you prefer?

Agreement to have any art created photographed:

- With your permission, I would like to take photographs of the art you create. Is that all right with you? If you would prefer, I can take written notes on the art instead.
- If you would rather I didn’t make notes during the interview, I can make them afterwards. What would you prefer?
Reminder of the right to end the interview or decline to answer any questions:

- Please remember that your participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose to end your participation at any time without providing a reason, and without impacting your involvement in Voices UP! or any UBC Learning Exchange activities or programs.
- Please remember that you can choose not to answer any questions that you don’t want to during the interview.
- Also, if I haven’t asked about something you would like to tell me about, please feel free to say so.

Confirmation of how the participant would like to be identified in published materials:

- In published documents and presentations related to this study, how would you like to be credited? Would you like your name to appear next to any quotes or photographs from this interview? Or would you prefer if I used an alias – a made up name – to refer to you?
- If you choose to use an alias, please know that it may still be possible for others to determine who you are. This study only involves Voices UP! cast members, and because the cast is small, and we have performed the play publicity several times, it may be possible for someone to guess who you are even if your real name is not used in the study results.
- If you choose not to use an alias, I will use your real name in my thesis dissertation, as well as any publications or presentations that come out of this research.

**Orienting Statement**

The following orientating statement will be used to begin the discussion of co-inquirers experiences of the play:
I would like you to think about your experience taking part in *Voices UP!* as if you were telling a story. First, think about the parts of the story. From the first thing you remember about the project, until now. How would you start telling the story?

**Optional Prompts**

The following are examples of other prompts that may be used to generate further dialogue:

- If you were going to break your story of *Voices UP!* down into separate parts – a beginning, middle, and end – think about what those parts might be.

- How would you tell the beginning of the story? What title would you give the beginning of the story?

- What’s a specific moment you can remember from when we were just starting the project?

- How would you tell the middle of the story? What title would you give the middle of the story?

- How would you tell the point of the story that we are at now? What title will you give it?

- How do you think this story will end for you? What would you like to take with you – from this story – and carry into other parts of your life?

**Optional Prompts for Visual Art**

- You are welcome to use the art supplies to create a picture of your experience.

- What is the title of your art work?

- How would you describe this work?

- In what ways does this artwork connect to your experience of *Voices UP?*?
Optional Prompts for Brought Objects

- How would you describe the object you have brought?
- In what ways does this object connect to your experience of *Voices UP*?
## Appendix C: Transcription Formatting

### Notation System (Based on Poland, 2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silences.</th>
<th>(...) minimal pauses are represented by ellipses. [Pause] signifies major pauses.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Laughter and other non-verbal sounds, etc.</strong></td>
<td>The action is described in brackets, “[laughing]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cut off speech.</strong></td>
<td>A hyphen notes a cut off in speech, either by the speaker themselves, or another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interjections.</strong></td>
<td>Use the hyphen, as above, to indicate where the overlapping begins. Include “[interjection]” before any speech spoken over top of another person’s speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unclear speech.</strong></td>
<td>Mark by brackets, followed by a question mark – “[crumpled?]” “[stumbled?]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emphasis.</strong></td>
<td>Mark by CAPITAL LETTERS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Held sounds.</strong></td>
<td>Mark by repeating the letter of the sound that was held – for example, “Yeees”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paraphrasing others.</strong></td>
<td>Use quotations, and mark with “[taking on voice]”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Co-inquirer Resources

Voices UP! Counselling Resources

Thank you for agreeing to take part in our study exploring your experiences of collective playmaking. Although we do not anticipate that taking part in this study will cause you distress, the following list of free or low cost counselling services are available to you should you desire support.

**Family Services of Greater Vancouver (FSGV) Counselling Services**
Provides counselling to individuals on a sliding-scale. Counselling is available in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Hindi, Punjabi, and Spanish.
Call 604-874-2938, or visit:  
[www.fsgv.ca/find-the-support-you-need/counselling](http://www.fsgv.ca/find-the-support-you-need/counselling)

**Scarfe Free Counselling Clinic**
Offers free counselling to individuals. Counselling is provided by graduate students in the Counselling Psychology program at the University of British Columbia. All students are supervised by a registered clinical counsellor or psychologist.
Call 604-827-1523, or visit:  

**The Adler Centre**
Provides subsidized counselling services from registered counsellors or counselling interns. A sliding scale is available for counselling with interns. All interns are supervised by a registered clinical counsellor.
Call 604-742-1818, or visit:  
[https://adlercentre.ca/](https://adlercentre.ca/)