

HM  
1136  
11164  
2010

*STORIES, UNSUNG: USING MUSIC THEATRE TO EMPOWER ISOLATED FAMILIES*

By

Catherine Moher  
B.A.A. E.C.E., Ryerson University, 1982

A Major Research Paper

Presented to Ryerson University

In partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Masters in Arts

in the Program of

Early Childhood Studies

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2010

© Catherine Moher 2010

## Author's Declaration

---

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this major research paper.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this paper to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholar research.

  
Signature  

I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this paper by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of Scholarly research.

  
Sig  

# STORIES UNSUNG: USING MUSIC THEATRE TO EMPOWER ISOLATED FAMILIES

© Catherine Moher, 2010

Master of Arts  
Early Childhood Studies  
Ryerson University

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the impacts of a musical social theatre program entitled *Stories, Unsung*. The findings are based on the experiences of one group who participated in this program in Calgary, AB (N=8). This study uses a grounded theory and design to explore how useful musical social theatre can be in reducing the social exclusion of marginalized people. Findings indicate two factors are critical in enhancing the social inclusion of those who are isolated: 1) a change in understanding of self and 2) a change in the relationships with others. *Stories, Unsung* was successful in changing the participants understanding of self and others both critical elements in removing the barriers associated with social exclusion. It is recommended that practitioners working with families in family support programs consider musical social theatre as an effective strategy to engage those families who are socially excluded. Implications for future policy development and research are discussed.

Key Words: social exclusion, social inclusion, marginalization, social theatre, empowerment, voice, families, family support practitioners

## Acknowledgments

There are many who shared in this journey they call graduate school. First and foremost, I must thank Donald McKay, my mentor, my colleague and my friend who started me on this journey and stayed with me right to the bitter end. I am forever in your debt for providing me with the privilege of being part of your research and work in *Stories, Unsung*. Thank you for choosing me to tell the *Stories*.

Secondly, my sincerest gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. Mehru Ali for her guidance, feedback and her constant words of encouragement as she guided me through the MRP process. I could not have done this without you.

My sincerest gratitude also goes to:

My second reader, Dr. Marni Binder for her ongoing support and enthusiasm for my work.

My cheerleading squad, Martha Lee-Blickstead, Melissa Johnson, Valerie Kenny, June Pollard and Susan Howson.

My dear friend and colleague, Trish Hunt. Thank you for your unique problem-solving capabilities, your intellectual curiosity and your ability to help me focus again and again.

My wonderful staff at the Gerrard Resource Centre, Monica Cumberbatch, Erica De Ocampo, Stacey Layne, Nabanita Ray, Rosetta Racco, Helena Raimundo, Astrid Soto, Amy Yu for always encouraging me and “holding the fort” while I made this journey.

## Dedication

For my husband Ken,  
my children, Colin and Garrett,  
and my mother and father, Roger and Margaret Kilpatrick

No words will ever express how thankful I am for your unconditional love and support. I could not have done this without you by my side. Thank you for your patience and putting up with me throughout this journey. Thank you for believing in me even when I did not.

For the Families at  
The Parent Link Centre in Calgary, Alberta

This research project could not have happened without your support. Your willingness to so openly share your experiences and your *Stories* with me is deeply appreciated. I am forever indebted to you all.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Literature Review</b>	3
Social Exclusion	3
Impact of Social Exclusion	3
Policy Responses to Social Exclusion	9
Service Provision	12
Social Theatre	17
 <i>Stories, Unsung</i>	 20
<b>The Research Question</b>	25
<b>Methodology</b>	26
Sampling	27
Data Collection	28
Data Analysis	29
<b>Findings</b>	31
Changes in Self-Perception	32
Recalling painful experiences	33
Acknowledging the limits of their own experiences	33
Acknowledging personal biases	34
Increasing self-confidence	34
Changes in Relationships with Others	37
Acknowledging experiences and knowledge of others	38
Improved prior relationships	39
Building new relationships	41
Potential for greater community involvement	42
<b>Implications</b>	44
Implications for Those Working with the Socially Excluded	48
Implications for Policy	53
Implications for Future Research	54

<b>Conclusion</b>	55
<b>Appendix 1</b>	58
<b>References</b>	59

## Introduction

### *Stories, Unsung: Using Music Theatre to Empower Isolated Families*

*When a person realizes he has been deeply heard, his eyes  
moisten. I think in some real sense he is weeping for joy. It  
is as though he were saying "Thank God, somebody heard me.  
Someone knows what it's like to be me".*

*David Myers, (1993).*

For those of us working in community based organizations, it is not uncommon to hear about individuals or groups of people who ‘fall between the cracks’. This is often about people who are isolated, socially excluded and/or marginalized. Those who are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion include: women, ethnic minorities, refugees, the elderly, disabled and homeless people. Their circumstances may include: poverty, poor quality housing and health, family breakdown, unemployment, criminal environments and limited life chances (Edwards, Armstrong & Miller, 2001). These circumstances prevent them from fully participating and benefitting from social institutions (Stewart, Reutter, Makwarimba, Veenstra, Love & Raphael, 2008).

Some critics argue that social exclusion is simply a euphemism for poverty. According to Davis & Wainwright (2005), this is partially due to the fact that social exclusion was initially grounded in issues related to poverty and unemployment. While some view social exclusion as a term that refers to issues of low income, many scholars now include issues of gender, ethnicity, ability, age, and sexual orientation in this concept (Burchardt, Le Grand & Piachaud, 1999; Davis & Wainwright, 2005). The concept of social exclusion has also been expanded to include social and political exclusion (Wilson, Eyles, Elliott, Keller-Olaman & Devcic, 2007). It is now widely recognized that social exclusion diminishes human dignity, denies people their human



rights and leads to marginalization and deepening inequalities (Edwards et al., 2001). Academics and advocates also recognize that regardless of the source of exclusion, its consequences go beyond the material effects of exclusion (Wilson et al., 2007). Many marginalized individuals experience stigma and discrimination, low social status, low self-esteem, internalization of blame, stress, poor health, powerlessness, and ‘voicelessness’ (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Wilson et al., 2007; Stewart et al., 2008; Ward, 2009). Some academics have suggested that a much broader approach is required in the definition and understanding of the process of social exclusion, and we must go beyond a focus on the material factors such as income, housing and goods and services and consider the discursive factors such as discrimination and power relationships that impact on social exclusion (Milbourne, 2002; Ward, 2009). Isolation, marginalization and social exclusion are concepts that are used interchangeably in this paper.

The purpose of this study is to explore programs that support families who are socially excluded. I am investigating the impacts of a musical social theatre program entitled *Stories, Unsung*. I will study the experiences of one group who participated in this program in Calgary, AB, to find out how useful musical social theatre can be in reducing the social exclusion of marginalized people. The key question that guides this study is: How far can musical social theatre help to reduce the social exclusion of participants in the program? The subsidiary questions are: What did the participants learn from their experiences in *Stories, Unsung*? How did they use their learning to reduce their social exclusion?

## **Literature Review**

In the following review I define social exclusion, assess its impact, and consider some policy responses and service provisions to address this issue.

### **Social Exclusion**

According to Burchardt, Le Grand, and Piachaud (1999), the term social exclusion is a much contested term, but probably has its roots in France where it was used to refer primarily to those who slipped through the social insurance system and those who were administratively excluded by the state. Americans use the terms ghettoization or marginalization to refer to the underclass. In Canada, we acknowledge the existence of marginalized groups in our society by talking about social cohesion as a goal (Beauvais & Jenson, 2002).

Ward (2009) provides two contrasting academic and policy oriented definitions:

Social exclusion....involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals, and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole (Levitas, Pantazis, Fahmy, Gordon, Llyod & Patsios, 2007, as cited in Ward, 2009, p. 239).

Social exclusion is about more than income poverty. It is a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas have a combination of linked problems, such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime and family breakdown. These problems are linked and mutually reinforcing (Cabinet Office, September 2007, as cited in Ward, 2009, p. 239).

### **Impact of Social Exclusion**

What these definitions demonstrate is that there are many factors at play in the process of social exclusion. These are often referred to as “linked up problems” (Milbourne, 2002, p. 287) and include such issues as low income, lack of employment, low skills, low self-esteem, poor

health and housing conditions, mental illness, family breakdown, and high-crime environments. These issues accrue over time and lead individuals to gradual withdrawal from community networks and to decreasing social resources (Milbourne, 2002; Ward, 2009). The impact of social exclusion can be profound (Bastian & Haslam, 2010). There is an abundance of literature focused on social exclusion and poverty and its detrimental effects on individuals and their families (Davis & Wainwright, 2005; Stewart et al., 2008; Ward, 2009, Bastian & Haslam, 2010). According to Bastian and Haslam (2010), humans have a fundamental need to form and maintain relationships; social exclusion frustrates this need and can have devastating psychological effects. There is also strong evidence that social ostracism undermines people's sense of belonging, control, self-esteem, meaningfulness, reduces pro-social behavior, and impairs self-regulation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarrocco, & Bartels, 2007; Bastian & Haslam, 2010). Research on the experiential impact of social ostracism found that when this kind of interaction occurs, individuals become indifferent, distant and lack genuine relatedness. Twenge, Catanese and Baumeister (2003) have referred to this as a "cognitive deconstructive" state where the individual moves into this state as a defense against emotional distress and aversive self-awareness in order to avoid the negative consequences of rejection. In this state, individuals were found to demonstrate reduced empathy, cognitive inflexibility, lethargy, and an absence of meaningful thought.

Bastian and Haslam (2010) examined the relationship between social exclusion and the experience of dehumanization. Traditionally, research in this area has highlighted various ways that people perceive other groups as less than human, but none has looked at the experience of the "target" or those being dehumanized. Using two dimensions of humanness referred to as Human Nature attributes (refinement, civility, morality and higher cognition) and Human

Uniqueness attributes (emotionality, agency, warmth and cognitive flexibility), Bastian and Haslam (2010) engaged participants in two experimentally induced situations. In the first study, participants completed a questionnaire on their experience where 1) they were socially excluded and 2) they experienced rejection. In the second study, participants were engaged in a computer simulated ball-toss game known as Cyberball. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two versions of the game; the inclusion condition where they received the ball 33% of the time and the exclusion condition where they received the ball twice and then never again. In the first study participants were then asked to rate the degree that they possess Human Uniqueness and Human Nature traits and the degree to which others possess these traits. At the conclusion of the second study, participants completed the same questionnaire as well as rating 12 new items assessing the attribution of Human Nature and Human Uniqueness and the related forms of Humanness Denial. The results of both the first and second study supported the prediction that people see themselves and others as less human when they are socially excluded compared to when they have neutral interactions or when they are included. Across these two studies, researchers found strong support for the dehumanizing consequences of social ostracism. Further, the research indicated that being socially excluded is a dehumanizing experience whereby the recipient feels less human when they experience exclusion, see others who exclude them as less than human and believe that they are viewed as less than human when they are excluded. These findings may also provide a better understanding as to why cycles of inhumane behavior continue and why those who feel excluded continue to demonstrate destructive and antisocial behavior (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bastian & Haslam, 2010).

Social isolation has also been linked to poor health outcomes (Wilson et al., 2007; Stewart et al., 2008). Wilson et al., (2007) cite numerous studies that demonstrate the

detrimental effects of social exclusion on health. These ill effects include cardiovascular disease, respiratory illnesses, and psychiatric disorders. It has also been linked to reductions in healthy lifestyles, increased mortality in males, and increased risk of coronary heart disease. Research on the links between social exclusion and health is gaining momentum. Health Canada and a number of Canadian researchers have identified social exclusion as an important social determinant of health and are leading a series of projects to explore the links between health, social and economic exclusion (Wilson et al., 2007).

A recent study undertaken by researchers at the University of Alberta, University of Toronto and University of British Columbia explored the experiences of exclusion and inclusion of both low and higher-income people within a social determinant of health framework. In phase one of the project researchers interviewed 60 high-income and 59 low-income participants in two large urban cities, Toronto, ON and Edmonton, AB (Stewart et al., 2008). In phase two of this project, 1671 higher and lower income participants were interviewed by phone. The findings revealed that inadequate financial resources, ill-health, and unwelcoming behaviours inhibited participation in community activities among low-income respondents. The qualitative interviews provided some insights into the nature of social exclusion. Equal numbers of people from low and high income groups participated in cultural and educational activities. Both low and high income respondents reported that these social, leisure and family activities increased their sense of belonging, control and happiness; while this common experience also fostered feelings of connection. However, fewer than half of the low income respondents noted the positive impact of their participation whereas the higher income respondents reported increased self-efficacy and inclusion as a result of their participation (Stewart et al., 2008).

Building on the notion that social exclusion is an important social determinant of health, Wilson et al., (2007) examined social exclusion and its implications for health at the local level in two adjacent yet socially contrasting neighbourhoods in Hamilton, ON. The researchers used a comparative neighbourhood study to address how the characteristics of social exclusion vary within one city through the use of a cross-sectional household survey which contained questions on attitudes towards the neighbourhoods in which people live, social and community networks, health status as well as socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. In depth interviews were also conducted with residents living in both neighbourhoods referred to as North and South. The survey and interview data were analyzed using a framework of social exclusion proposed by Burchardt et al., (2002) who argued that social exclusion takes place when individuals do not participate in key societal activities. These activities include: *Consumption* – the ability to purchase goods and services; *Production* – connected to involvement in social and economic activities; *Political Engagement* – participation in local or national level decision-making; and *Social Interaction* – involvement with family, friends and the broader community. Because the researchers focus was exclusion at the local level, they replaced the category of *Political Engagement* with *Neighbourhood Engagement*. This referred to the individual's participation in formal and informal neighbourhood activities and decision-making processes. The results indicated that the residents in the north neighbourhood seemed to be experiencing more aspects of social exclusion and they were also experiencing higher levels of social exclusion than those in the south neighbourhood.

The results of this study revealed differences in both the characteristics and level of social exclusion between the neighbourhoods. Overall, the levels of social exclusion were higher in the North than the South and residents from the North appeared to experience multiple dimensions

of exclusion with respect to *Neighbourhood Engagement and Social Interaction* as well as *Consumption and Production*. The research confirmed that social exclusion involved a connection between a lack of economic productivity, consumption of necessary goods and services, neighbourhood engagement and social interaction. Further, the results suggested that the local level is relevant in shaping social exclusion and that policy makers must do more to acknowledge the role of the local areas in shaping the quality of life including health. Burchardt et al., (2002) also suggest that exclusion/inclusion is part of a continuum with individuals potentially falling below some threshold level on some items and above on others supporting the notion that social exclusion is more than material deprivation. For example, there were individuals in the North who did not feel socially excluded and conversely there were residents in the South who did not feel socially included.

In the UK, researchers and policy makers are thinking about social exclusion and deprivation beyond the notions of income and poverty. They are considering that poverty is more than a lack of financial capital. An individual could be living in circumstances of poverty due to their inability or capacity to secure the type of resources that would enable full, participation in activities and have the living conditions and amenities that most people would enjoy within the society to which they belong (Wilson et al., 2007). This notion alludes to the activities and conditions that might affect a person's social relations and capital and their participation in society in general. The focus on social exclusion or inclusion may be viewed as an attempt to "bring these issues into conceptual coherence" (Wilson et al., 2009, p. 128).

In her research with the gay and lesbian community, Ward (2009) presents an analysis of social exclusion that she refers to as the "material discursive perspective." Ward (2009) considers both the material and discursive factors inherent in social exclusion. Discursive factors

shape our understanding and construct our perceptions of the world and occur naturally within our social interactions and engagement with others. Ward (2009) claims that experiences where an individual feels marginalized or socially excluded are continually shifting and are relative to the situation rather than fixed. In other words, people may feel included in one setting and feel excluded in another. As policy makers and/or service providers we must consider social exclusion as an “essentialising concept which infers a condition, but also as a process that impacts differently on different individuals, at different times and in different settings” (p. 245). Other scholars also remind us that hard to reach or socially excluded groups are not homogenous. They are individuals who come from diverse backgrounds, cultures and linguistic groups and hold different values in relation to material and familial values (Pinderhughes, 1995; Milbourne, 2002). Hence, communities will need different solutions for different individuals and their communities. A “one size fits all” strategy may not be the solution to social exclusion and/or marginalization (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003).

### **Policy Responses to Social Exclusion**

Many states around the world are developing social policy frameworks in an attempt to reduce social exclusion (Edwards et al., 2001; Milbourne, 2002; Marinaro, 2003; Wilson et al., 2007; Hunter, 2009; Ward, 2009). In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Tony Blair created the UK Social Exclusion Unit within his Cabinet Office whose goals it was to coordinate policy-making to prevent social exclusion, reintegrate those who were excluded and provide basic minimum standards of living for everyone. The European Union has also established an agreement to combat social exclusion (Wilson et al., 2007). In Canada, more attention has been focused on social cohesion as the way to lessen the impacts of social exclusion by creating a more socially inclusive society (Beauvais & Jenson, 2002). In Canada, social exclusion of



individuals and groups is viewed as a major threat to our social cohesion and economic prosperity (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). However, these well intentioned policy reforms tend to be fragmented and have come under harsh criticism by social service professionals, academics and researchers (Milbourne, 2002; Hunter, 2009; Ward, 2009). The first policy debates occurred in France during the 1970s, amid growing concerns about those segments of society that were excluded from the welfare state (Wilson et al., 2007).

According to Ward (2009) even with their apparent understanding and recognition of the multitude of factors and 'linked problems' as seen in their definitions of social exclusion and/or social inclusion, we continue to see policy directives and program delivery focused on the elimination of poverty and the use of strategies that are economically driven (p. 239). For example in the UK, the creation of employment programs to improve employment opportunities for the very poor and even the opening of the Sure Start early years programs that support both children and their families are viewed as long-term strategies to address social exclusion (Pugh, 2001; Clarke, 2006; Ward, 2009).

There is a push by researchers and academics to study social exclusion beyond the concepts of poverty and deprivation, which focus solely on material deprivation (Milbourne, 2002; Ward, 2009). In Ward's (2009) critique of the European Union's (EU) policy responses, she notes that although the EU recognizes the social aspects in their definition, they continue to emphasize the material and individualize the problem. For example, the EU acknowledges that they have five key challenges:

To eradicate child poverty by breaking the vicious cycle of intergenerational inheritance; to make labour markets truly inclusive; to ensure decent housing for everyone; to overcome discrimination and increase the integration of people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants; and to tackle financial exclusion and overindebtedness (EUROPA, 2008).

Four of these five relate to economic or material factors. Discussions at the European Union (EU) level in relation to social exclusion have analyzed the processes that lead to inter-related situations of unemployment, poverty, unequal access to education, low social status, powerlessness and denial of rights. In 1997, when the new British Labour government established the Social Exclusion Unit within the Cabinet Office, it was given the task of essentially reducing social exclusion by creating these “joined-up solutions to joined-up problems”, (Edwards et al., 2001, p. 418) whereby government departments, local authority services, health and social care services, public, private and voluntary organizations work together to solve the problem of social exclusion. There is growing consensus that the ideal response is one that involves a multi-dimensional approach that reflects the complexity of factors involved rather than a collection of fragmented policies that target the separate manifestations of inclusion (Edwards et al., 2001; Marinaro, 2003; Ward, 2009). Edwards et al., (2001) believes that social exclusion can only be ameliorated if it is tackled in a holistic way, rather than each issue being seen as separate and unrelated. How are these policy directives playing out “on the ground” in communities that are serving socially excluded or marginalized individuals? Ball (1997) acknowledges that the “matching of policy rhetoric with practice is never straightforward, rather it is highly contextualized, complex and fragmented, engendering and implicating individuals in a process of “creative social action” (p. 270).

## **Service Provision**

In the UK, the policy reforms taking place have certainly had an impact on reshaping the systems of service provision, the forms of organizational control and direction and the relationships between the policy makers, the service providers and those who receive the services (Bagley, Ackerly & Rattray, 2004). The traditional approach of service provision is based on professional group interests and bureaucratic boundaries whereas the new working system referred to as the “modernizing” agenda distinctively targets the needs of individuals, groups and communities (Bagley et al., 2004, p. 596). With this new ‘modernizing’ approach, there is an attempt to deliver programs locally and involve the participants in the decision-making process. Service providers are expected to focus on delivering related services in an integrated, inter-agency manner by pooling budgets, combining resources and working in partnership across organizational boundaries. It is also expected that these services will engage and empower individuals and groups through a variety of “bottom-up” approaches to address social exclusion. Although very little direction or advice is given on how to establish or deliver services at the local level, the government administration has set out a very clear “performance management framework” (Bagley et al., 2004, p. 597) that provides the service provider with clear targets and ongoing monitoring and inspection. For the practitioner or service provider there is a crossing of traditional boundaries in which collaborative and integrated service provision amongst local agencies and organizations is emphasized by new partnerships with government, voluntary groups, private businesses and local communities. It is hoped that these new collaborative efforts and partnerships will provide the “joined-up solutions to joined-up problems” that the Social Exclusion Unit proposed (Edwards et al., 2001, p. 418).

One study undertaken in the UK explored the experiences of social exclusion in relation to mainstream institutions used by non-English speaking women, children and youth and other culturally excluded groups in two inner-city areas. Researchers interviewed community groups, parents, children and youth in an effort to shed further light on the current UK approaches to social exclusion. Staff expressed much frustration with the “lack of cohesion between new schemes and different local government departments” (Milbourne, 2002, p. 295) despite government policies that stressed the need for cohesive approaches. This study highlighted contradictions and gaps between policy intentions to address social exclusion and the experience of local implementation by service providers leading to continued fragmentation in the delivery of services.

Well for me, it is another shambles. Been there before! What do they say? We need to think joined up, but for the people who have nothing else...it is dishonest to make promises and then take all away (Greg, Community Worker) (Milbourne, 2002, p. 295).

Although community workers felt the burdens of their own work demands, they claimed that both the hardship and adversity experienced amongst their user groups, those who were most excluded and marginalized, were not understood. Milbourne (2002) notes that although the social justice motivation is evident from the government statements and desire to eradicate poverty and address social exclusion, the requirements for inclusion such as language, professional skills, knowledge of work appear to exclude the hardest to reach. This study is a clear demonstration of the service fragmentation occurring and the “push and pull” that is occurring between the policy maker, the service provider and the service-user. Service providers have been directed to use ‘bottom-up’ approaches that engage service users in the design and delivery of services while simultaneously attempting to meet targets and outcomes set by funding agencies.

The new ‘modernizing’ approach to service delivery and provision has left some practitioners in a quandary as to how to best engage or include service users in a meaningful way (Bagley et al., 2004, p. 596). According to Pinderhughes (1995) family practitioners must become more competent in working with people different from the white, middle-class norm which traditionally informed professional practice and understanding of human personality and functioning. While we have come a long way from the colonialist structure where those with expertise and strength (the colonizers) must take charge to protect those without strength (the colonized), there still remain several levels of involvement and engagement, from tokenism and manipulation to empowerment and user-led services (O’Keefe & Hogg, 1999; Pushor, 2007). Providing service-users with a ‘voice’ in program design and service delivery is not a new concept in efforts to enhance social inclusion (Stewart et al., 2008). Service-users sometimes become involved as volunteers in organizations, or take on advisory roles on committees and boards of directors, or assist in program delivery and evaluation. However, one must ask if these experiences truly enhance social inclusion and the individual’s sense of belonging or connection to others.

Internationally, the health care sector has recognized the ‘voice’ of users as an essential component in both the planning and provision of health care services. Some scholars claim that initiatives that include the ‘voice’ of the user can address inequalities, and can be effective in increasing the self-esteem of disadvantaged groups, and increasing their capacity to help themselves (O’Keefe & Hogg, 1999). However, reaching isolated and marginalized people is a major challenge for those attempting to engage service-users. In their efforts to ensure that the voices of house-bound people were heard, one community health council in the UK explored ways of involving older house-bound people, a group traditionally excluded from the planning

and monitoring process (O'Keefe and Hogg,1999). Using a variety of community development techniques and strategies such as surveys, telephone conferencing and face to face interviews in members' homes, this study found that members valued the contact as well as the opportunity to have their views heard. This social contact gave members the interest and confidence to later attend and speak at meetings with professionals (O'Keefe & Hogg, 1999). Researchers also found that most initiatives did not explore the preferences of the people that they expected to be involved and assumed older people to be a homogenous group giving little attention to the diversity of circumstances and needs. This developmental approach enabled the members to define the need and gain confidence during this process as their expertise is nurtured and supported by an infrastructure (O'Keefe & Hogg, 1999).

Some service providers who view the family unit as their service user, define family involvement as "any role or activity that enables participating families to have direct and meaningful input into and influence on systems, policies, programs or practices affecting services or community life for children and families" (Jeppson, Thomas, Markward, Kelly, Koser, & Diehl, 1997, p. 21). However, Silver, Berman and Wilson (2005) remind us that even though working with families underpins the work in family resource programs (FRPs), they can still be sites where exclusion occurs. This exclusion may occur due to attitudes held by the staff or families, lack of staff skills in working with families, logistical issues such as lack of childcare or inadequate time for planning participation (Silver et al., 2005).

In his work with high risk families and their children, McKay (2008b) claims that if families, disempowered by their circumstances, become 'voiceless' they will be unable to advocate for services that meet their needs. Along with numerous other consequences the sense of 'voicelessness' is identified as one of the consequences of social exclusion (Omidvar &

Richmond, 2003). The notion of giving ‘voice’ has surfaced as a strategy used by researchers, politicians, community advocates and service providers to promote social inclusion. There is a strong push by policy makers to engage citizens in the decisions that affect them, their family and their community (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Bagley et al., 2004; Hunter, 2009).

Jeppson et al., (1997) has concluded that family engagement in decision-making provides numerous benefits to families. Some of these benefits include: a sense of belonging, an increase in confidence in the ability to affect change, an opportunity to affect meaningful change, an increase in the development of knowledge and skills, an increase in sense of personal power, and an increased sense of accomplishment. However, family support practitioners struggle to find strategies that involve families and that can build this sense of confidence and self-respect. Again, a ‘one size fits all’ approach does not work for everyone. For example, involvement at the program policy level may be of interest to one family, but of no interest to another.

Even for staff in family support programs that base their practice in empowerment education and a respect for the family’s own values, it is very difficult to overcome systemic obstacles such as chronic poverty, lack of employment, language barriers, and educational disparity (Smythe, 2004). Nevertheless, Berlin (2001) reminds us that individuals who have experienced oppression or exclusion are most likely to improve self-esteem when they gain recognition through self-expression. Social theatre is one strategy that may provide those who experience social exclusion with an opportunity for self-expression as well as some tools needed for problem solving, skill development and personal transformation.

## Social Theatre

*I believe that all the truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of production in the theatre so that the people themselves may utilize them. The theatre is the weapon, and it is the people who should wield it (Friere, 2000, p. 122).*

Social theatre is defined by McKay (2009) as a

form of theatre and dramatic activity that is used for community development and problem solving. It uses the participants' stories to develop theatre pieces that are then used as instruments of change within communities (McKay, 2009, p. 1).

Prentki and Selman (2000) describe social theatre as a form of theatre where the play is directly relevant to the audience members' lives and leads them to deeper understanding and change. The audience or observers recognize the characters and their dilemmas and identify with the people portrayed. Given this opportunity to observe, analyze and form opinions regarding the characters' actions creates a condition where the audience both wants to think and have the opportunity to problem solve in a safe environment.

Social theatre is based on the principles of education of the renowned Brazilian community educator, Paulo Friere. Friere was a radical voice in the world of education who believed that reciprocal dialogue was required in learning models and that "people's vocation is to be more than they are at any given time or place" (Flores, 2000, p. 1). Friere referred to this process of reciprocal dialogue as "*conscientizacao*" (conscientization), whereby poor and exploited people learn to conduct their own analysis of their social, political, and economic reality, and to take action against their oppressors. He wanted his students to not only learn to



read, but become involved in the process of analyzing their reality so they could become critically conscious of their situation. Central to Friere's critical pedagogy was a transformation whereby the prevalent banking model of education (filling students' heads with what experts deem important) was replaced with a dialogic approach to learning (Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 2006). Friere believed that the educator not only teaches, but also learns from the educatee and education is a reciprocal dialogue (Sluyter & Unrau, 2006). The student and teacher are engaged in joint inquiry that promotes critical thinking, the clarification of contradictions, the redefining of problems, and action toward personal and social action (Pinderhughes, 1995). In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Friere (2000) emphasizes the importance of dialogue in any transformative educational process. This emphasis is found frequently in the rhetoric of community development, if not always in its practices (Prentki & Selman, 2000).

Howard (2004) provides the most succinct and articulate description of the link between the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire and the interactive performance practice of Augusto Boal. According to Howard (2004)

Advocates of critical pedagogy recognize that (1) (*learners*) must be actively involved in and responsible for their educational processes and that (2) the (*pedagogical*) process is distorted by various social, political, cultural, and economic boundaries (p. 217). Ibid.

Within the critical pedagogy paradigm, education should encourage students to think critically, to analyze social conditions, and to evaluate information – particularly information related to power, identity and representation. Howard (2004) asserts that the combination of critical pedagogy with interactive performance practice provides the most optimal environment whereby a learning community that empowers participants is created, generating critical understanding and promoting understanding – all goals of critical pedagogy and interactive performance techniques.

Augusto Boal's book *Theatre of the Oppressed* not only pays homage in its title, but also draws a direct link between Friere's dialogic learning model and Boal's social theatre process. Boal successfully facilitated community growth in impoverished Brazilian communities using this 'forum theatre' technique. There it was used to address social inequities, solve economic problems, reduce community violence, and help develop strategies for confronting social or political oppression (All Nations Theatre Society, 2005; McKay, 2009). As both a drama theorist and a director, Boal was intrigued by the relationship between the spectator and the actor. Boal believed that life and theatre were related enterprises. He believed ordinary citizens are actors who are simply unaware of the play, and everyone can create theatre (Weber, 2009). His approach to theatre provides the venue in which participants come to understand the oppression and try out strategies to counter their oppressive situations (All Nations Theatre Society, 2005).

A critical tool in Boal's social theatre, which is interactive, embraces the notions of exchange, participant ownership, reflection and action (Prentki & Selman, 2000, All Nations Theatre Society, 2005). It is a theatrical process created with, by and for the communities involved in the issues they seek to address. Boal's model of social theatre called Forum Theatre has been used in communities all around the world. In Canada, it has been used by All Nations Theatre Society in Calgary with "communities in crisis...which include schools, seniors groups and immigrant service agencies" and in Toronto with street youth and university settings, with similar results (McKay, 2008b, p. 4). As well, Foundation Lab in Calgary has utilized Boal's methods in programs that range from sexuality awareness for seniors to dealing with bullying in primary schools. *Headlines Theatre* in Vancouver, *Mixed Company* in Toronto and *Playback Theatre* in Montreal are other examples of theatre groups that have used the methodology of

social theatre. Prentki and Selman (2000) also describe this as “theatre for development”. It is the use of theatre as part of a community development process. Some would see this as the most radical expression of popular theatre, as it is unquestionably grounded in long-term, grass roots development efforts. Prentki and Selman (2000) sum this up as an “overt use of theatre processes to achieve non-theatrical ends” (p. 13).

### *Stories, Unsung*

*Stories, Unsung: Using Music Theatre to Empower Isolated Families* is one example of a project based on Augusto Boal’s Forum Theatre, techniques from opera education and the transformational theatre popularized by Foundation Lab in Calgary, AB called, *Rehearsal for Reality*. *Stories, Unsung* was designed as a response to the identified isolation of children, youth and their families who are not well served by traditional institutions. McKay (2008b) hypothesized that by utilizing music, dance and drama to validate their stories, the families will be empowered to communicate their needs and make the best use of the resources available to them. The project was based on the following premises:

1. Socially excluded families do not have enough opportunities to tell their stories and share the richness of their life experiences.
2. Music, theatre and dance are vehicles for facilitating communication.
3. Current resources and services do not take into account the needs of socially excluded families.
4. Language barriers, poverty and educational disparity are obstacles to communication.
5. Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Family Resource Programmes, and Early Years Centres could potentially be used to help such families communicate their needs and make the best use of resources available to them (McKay, 2008b).

In this variation of social theatre, group members work through a series of games and exercises and group conversations under the direction of a Facilitator/Director. These games and exercises lead to 1) a process of interactive dialogue about their concerns and 2) the creation of a performance or theatre piece. *Stories, Unsung* differs from other forms of social theatre by adding a musical component to their performance piece. *Stories, Unsung* is ultimately about the conversations that the activities instigate. In this process, participants are encouraged to engage in four different types of conversations. These conversations include: *Conversations with Self*, *Conversations with Partners*, *Conversations with Group* and *Conversations with Community*. *Conversations with Self* are those conversations that are held with oneself and is about opening up dialogue about old ideas and beliefs that one holds, and allowing for the possibility of change. *Conversations with Partners* are those conversations with a partner and is about trust, opening up and allowing others in, taking risks in small doses. *Conversations with Group* are those conversations about group dynamics, leadership and decision-making. Lastly, participants are encouraged to encompass others outside of the workshop experience by engaging in *Conversations with Community*.

*Stories, Unsung* began at the Heart of the North East Community Solutions Resource Centre (HOTNE) within their Parent Link Centre in September 2008. After a four week recruitment period, there were eight (8) participants ready to take part in the social theatre process. Sessions took place once a week over a ten month period. Each session began with a Check-In period. This open ended process allowed group members the opportunity to share their experiences during the past week and any thoughts or concerns that they might have. This allowed the group to start in unison, ask questions and make comments. After the check-in

exercise, this group used music as a warm-up exercise. Then the group moved into a series of games, exercises and techniques which included: Activation Games, Getting-to-know-you Games, Focusing Games of Imagination, Trust Games, Group Building Games, and Image Theatre/Play creation techniques. The games and exercises, based on a guide entitled *Rehearsal for Reality*, are the “building blocks” used to create a space for creativity and open communication (Sluyter & Unrau, 2006, p. 11). Each of these activities is followed by a five to ten minute debriefing session.

The *Activation Games* provide opportunities to “level the playing field” while having fun (Sluyter & Unrau, 2006, p. 17). An example of an Activation Game is *Walk, Stop & Go*. The group begins by walking silently having no physical or eye contact with each other. When the facilitator says “stop” each participant must stop moving and freeze and when he/she says “go”, the participants continue to move. The facilitator then instructs the participants to stop when he/she says “go” and go when he/she says “stop”. Other confusing directions are added. At the debriefing session, the following issues are highlighted: confusion, impulse control, personal space, saying one thing and meaning another, personal expectations, mischievousness, and lying. In groups where linguistic diversity is an issue, this game serves to highlight the struggles in a new community. It also serves to level the playing field as no one can get it right.

*Getting-to-know-you Games* provide opportunities for the group to bond and work together. An example of this type of game is *Knots*. Everyone is asked to stand in a tight circle and raise both their hands. Participants are asked to reach across the “bunch” and hold someone else’s hand, until both of their hands are held by two different people. Then together as a group, members are asked to untangle themselves, without words. The activity ends when everyone is facing each other standing, holding hands. This exercise is followed by a debriefing session on

physical closeness and may involve discussions about problem solving, group dynamics and leadership.

Essential to the process of *Stories, Unsung* is trust. *Trust Games* are introduced to build and solidify the bond between group members. An example of a Trust Game is Walk Into the Wall. In a large open space, participants are asked to form a line and walk with their eyes closed toward the wall on the opposite side of the room. Then the facilitator creates an “energy” wall. The facilitator creates this invisible “energy” wall by physically moving their hands where a wall might be. The participants are asked to walk with their eyes closed toward this “energy wall” and stop when they *feel* it (energy). In the debriefing session, members discuss trust, intuition and connecting to each other with all the senses.

Creating a sense of hope and reminding participants that they have power to change is pivotal to the transformation process. *Focusing Games of Imagination* provides opportunities that “Plant the seeds of possibility” (Sluyter & Unrau, 2006, p. 18) and set the stage for change. An example of this exercise is Point and Turn. Participants are asked to close their eyes and point to a corner in the room. Participants are asked to spin their body and go toward that point. Using only their imagination, participants are asked to imagine turning further and further until they are wound up like a spring. Then participants are asked to twist their bodies as far as would be physically possible and then come back to neutral. What participants see is the power of change. This along with the power of the imagination, pushing your limits and seeing themselves do the impossible are discussed in the debriefing session.

*Group Building Games* take participants a little deeper in the bonding process. An example of this game is Journey. In this exercise, participants walk around in pairs, taking turns to either lead or follow with their eyes closed. The leaders vary, change directions, and are even encouraged to take some risks. The followers have to trust the leaders to move smoothly without accidents.

The opportunity to take emotional risks is provided by the *Image Theatre Improvisation* exercises which are an essential element of this work. An example of this is the Magnetic Image. In this exercise, participants identify a real life situation where they felt disrespected or unsafe. They are asked to think about where they were, what time it was, who was there, what happened, just before, and just after the event. One participant begins by ‘sculpting’ his/her body into a posture that represents the strongest feeling at that moment. Several others do the same. The remaining group members are asked to sit next to images that tell a story similar to their own. The debriefing session helps find the connections among the groups’ understanding that we have very similar stories even though we come from different places. This is a key experience in the development of Forum Theatre.

Many of the games and exercises are enacted in silence so that no one person dominates the group. Boal (1992) believed that images work across language and cultural barriers demonstrating unexpected universalities as well as creating a democratic process whereby participants who are more verbally articulate are not privileged over those who are not. The dialogue that follows each game or exercise provides the opportunity for all participants to have “voice” and engage in the many Conversations with Self, Partners, Group and Community (Sluyter & Unrau, 2006, p. 5).

During the ten (10) month program, participants work with the Director/Facilitator to create a performance or theatre piece which is performed in front of an audience of invited guests at the end of the program. Participants work with a composer and/or lyricist to create the music that accompanies the performance. It is not uncommon to engage participants who have limited to no previous singing experience. Hence, the composer/lyrist often plays a major role in providing support to the participants as they develop their sense of musicality and overcome their

fear of singing publicly. This performance is not about individual script-writing, top-down direction, but the process of theatre creation using group games, image-making, improvising and collective creation. The composer supports the development of the musical portion of *Stories, Unsung* by collecting the stories and words of the participants and creates the music and lyrics for the performance. There is a constant checking in process between the composer and the participants to ensure that the thoughts and feelings of the participants have been captured by the composer through the music.

### **The Research Question**

The research question that guides this study is: How far can musical social theatre help to reduce the social exclusion of participants in the program? The subsidiary questions are: What did the participants learn from their experiences in *Stories, Unsung*? How did they use their learning to reduce their social exclusion? The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform the practice of family support practitioners in Canada and elsewhere. I investigated the experiences of one group who participated in this program in Calgary, AB to find out how useful musical social theatre can be in reducing the social exclusion of marginalized people.



## Methodology

An application was submitted and approved by the Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University as required when human subjects are involved. A qualitative approach was selected for this study because its primary purpose was to understand the experience of the families involved in this project. A qualitative research design has several strengths. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), the goal of qualitative research is to better understand human behaviour and experience from the participant's perspective. Researchers using this approach seek to grasp the process by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are and enables the researcher to collect concrete incidents of human behaviour to more clearly understand the human condition. Further, some qualitative researchers who study marginalize people also hope to empower their research informants. They engage in dialogue with their informants about analysis of observed and reported events and activities thus helping them "discover" and articulate and ultimately gain control over their realities.

I am interested in how the experience of *Stories, Unsung* assisted families in addressing issues, struggles and challenges in their personal lives and in their communities. I am also interested in identifying those strategies and techniques that helped the families strengthen their relationships with their family members and members of their community. For the purpose of this study a grounded theory design was used to inform a theory concerning the use of *Stories, Unsung* as a programming strategy that family support practitioners can utilize in their work with socially excluded or marginalized families and their children. This theory was first articulated by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 who held that theories should be "grounded" in data from the field and these would include the actions, interactions and social process of people. The intent of grounded theory is to "generate or discover a theory, an abstract

analytical schema of a phenomenon, that relates to a particular situation” and is grounded in the views of the participants in the study (Creswell, 1998, p. 56; Creswell, 2003). In a grounded theory study the researcher collects data primarily through interviews, makes multiple visits to the field, develops and interrelates categories of information and writes theoretical propositions or hypotheses of the theory. Two primary characteristics of this design are the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and the theoretical sampling of different groups to maximize the similarities and differences (Creswell, 2003).

### **Sampling**

The participants recruited for this research study were participating in the program entitled *Stories, Unsung*. The site selected for this research was Aspen’s The Heart of the North East Community Solutions Resource Centre (HOTNE). HOTNE is a family support program run in a culturally diverse community in Calgary, AB. The techniques of social theatre have been popular for the last ten years, however, few interactive practitioners have published their experiences, choosing to “do” rather than to “speak” (Howard, 2004). The opportunity to critique and analyze the outcomes of social theatre is critical if practitioners wish to build a theoretical base from which to explain the usefulness of social theatre beyond the performance setting. The participants learned about *Stories, Unsung* through a multi-pronged outreach strategy undertaken by Aspen Family and Community Network Society and the artistic team. This outreach strategy to recruit participants included the posting of flyers in a variety of community settings, housing cooperatives and door-to-door outreach in the neighbourhood. The flyer was also translated into several languages. During the third week of outreach, three people came to find out about the program. During the fourth week of outreach, five more people came

from Aspen's Parent Link program. These eight (8) individuals were recruited by the Principal Investigator to participate in interviews.

### **Data Collection**

The data for this study was collected over a three (3) day period. All data collected was gathered through interviews. The participants were interviewed in pairs both as a time saving measure, but also to provide a level of comfort to some participants who were more comfortable being interviewed with their partner or another participant in the program. These interviews lasted between thirty to forty-five minutes.

### *Instrument and Procedure:*

I set up the interviews to coincide with the program hours so that participants did not have to be concerned with rearranging their families' schedules or travelling to the HOTNE on another day. The interviews were held at the Community Centre that housed the program. One interview took place in the Atrium of the Centre and the remaining three (3) interviews took place in an office provided by HOTNE. Child care was provided while the interviews took place. All of the participants agreed to be audio-taped during the interview. The interviews were partially structured in that they were guided by a list of eight questions (Appendix 1). The use of a set of questions relating to the research enabled the researcher to stay focused. At the same time the loose structure of the guide allowed me to probe further if needed, ask for clarification or request for an example to illustrate a point. The participants were also invited to share their additional comments during the interview. They were also free to choose not to respond. All of the participants answered the questions freely, however, in some instances further explanation or clarification was needed. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim from the audiotapes.

One copy of the transcript was filed and several copies were made of each to be used in the data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The process of data analysis in grounded theory research is systematic and follows a standard format. This format includes three phases of coding: 1) open coding, 2) axial coding, and 3) selective coding (Creswell, 2003). Open coding occurs when the researcher forms initial categories of information about the phenomenon being studied by segmenting information. Axial coding involves the selection of the categories and positioning them within a theoretical model. Selective coding occurs when the researcher explains the story from the interconnection of these categories (Creswell, 2003).

#### *Open Coding*

The coding process was started with the interview that provided a rich, thick description. This enabled the formation of some general categories and subcategories relevant to the study. Guided by the data, I continuously created categories and began to sort the material by these categories (Creswell, 2003). Using certain words, phrases, described patterns of behavior and the participants' way of thinking, certain regularities and patterns began to emerge (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). These became the initial categories in sorting and coding the data. For example, phrases such as "we didn't know we could reach this point", "Our biggest problem we don't actually listen", and "taking your shoes from someone else" were categorized as change in self. Care had to be taken to not simply answer the questions that had been asked, but remain focused on the patterns of behavior and the participants' way of thinking by asking what patterns are emerging. Once responses were coded, I then selected only those themes that provided evidence in relation to the research questions.

### *Axial Coding*

As I reviewed the open codes repeatedly and tried to identify the emerging patterns, two major sets of categories emerged revolving around the theme of change. This was the central phenomenon being explored. The two major themes: 1) Change in Self-perception, and 2) Change in Relationships with Others with several core categories in each theme. The Change in Self-perception focused on the individual participant's beliefs and values, the impact of their experiences both positive and negative, acknowledging the limitations of their experiences, their level of confidence, and stereotyping of others. The Change in Relationships with Others referred to: the knowledge and experiences of other participants, the anticipated response of others including racism and stereotyping, how we connect and relate to others, accepting and understanding the behavior or actions of others, and developing trust with others.

### *Selective Coding*

During this final stage of the data analysis, each interview was examined once again. This time I reviewed the data looking specifically for illustrative examples for the core categories I had already identified. Each relevant statement made by the participant was placed within one of the core categories identified. Finally, I reviewed the data in each core category and tried to construct a coherent description of each category within each of the two themes. In the following section, I first briefly introduce the research participants and then describe the changes they experienced as a result of their participation in *Stories, Unsung*.

## Findings

This study involved the eight participants who participated in *Stories, Unsung*. This included seven (7) women and one (1) man. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the confidentiality of the participants in this study. The following provides some information about each participant and some background on his or her family life and responsibilities.

**Sharee** is married and has no children. She has been married to **James** for about 10 years. This is Sharee's second marriage. She emigrated from India in her early teens.

**James** is married to **Sharee**. Together they struggle financially. James has been able to find work as a lawn cutter and snow remover.

**Sonia** married in her late teens. She has one two year old child and is pregnant with her second child. She moved to Canada five years ago from Lebanon. Her husband's family lives in Canada and her family lives abroad. Sonia works part-time.

**Miki** was born in East Asia, but attended high school and university in Canada. She is married with a one year and a three year old. Many members of Miki's extended family live in Calgary, Alberta. She works part-time.

**Bininder** was born in South Asia. She attended college and university in Canada. Until recently Bininder lived in a small city in Ontario where she worked as a public health nurse in the educational system. Five years ago she retired and moved to Calgary, Alberta to support her family by providing child care for her two grandchildren, 4 and 8 years of age. She is currently in a long term relationship.

**Tamra** came to Canada as a refugee from the Middle East with her family. She is married with one child who is 20 months. She has a large extended family in Canada including her sister, Nazia who also attends the program. Tamra works part-time.

**Nazia** came to Canada as a refugee from the Middle East with her family. She is married with one child who is 18 months and is expecting her second child.

**Sharon** was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta. She is married to a very supportive husband. She is a stay at home mother with one three year old child. She has some extended family in Calgary.

The recurring theme of change was evident throughout the interviews with the participants. Two significant themes were identified: 1) Changes in Self-perception, and 2) Changes in Relationships with Others. Each of these themes is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

### **Changes in Self-Perception**

Many of the participants identified the games and exercises as the catalyst that enabled them to change their self-perception by: recognizing their unresolved issues and painful emotional issues, acknowledging the limitations of their own experiences that impacted on their own world view, acknowledging personal biases and increasing self-confidence. According to Sluyter and Unrau (2006) the activities and games are meant to “instigate, to stir up and inspire” (p. 4). One participant describes how this experience acted as the catalyst that brought about change.

There is a lot of experiences she had done with us before to get us prepared. It was amazing. At first, I don't understand why will this help us? Okay if she wants to play a game, we'll play a game, I'll play. See what happens. But now we have the foresight ummm, right? Why she was doing that and that is really important. We learn in life to teach kids, then just don't do it because I say so. But through some experiences you know like games and then teach us lessons (Baninder).

### **Recalling painful experiences.**

As the program began to unfold, participants began to acknowledge and recognize very painful experiences in their lives. Some of the participants had deeply buried the memory of these experiences. Bringing these experiences to the surface by acknowledging and sharing them was new and painful, yet cathartic for them. The following quotes are illustrative:

Like people all my friends tell me their problems to me like keep them secret perfect. I just found myself, I never share what is painful for me to someone else....some of the games we played...just how it make you think about life .... we talk about lots of stuff just really it hurts at the same time. But it made you see life (Sonia).

I think part of the process, I had to look at my own past and deal with that. Actually it showed me I hadn't finished dealing with some issues that had happened to me in the past. So that wasn't a pleasant experience, but it was good that it was dealt with and done...whereas before it was kind of unfinished and just wanted to get forgotten so it was good to actually face that and get passed it (Sharon).

One participant alluded specifically to how other members of the group participating in *Stories, Unsung* had helped her to work through some painful emotional issues.

It works for my emotions lots. Like at just when I was at home I was at home I was bored. I cry, cry at home that I couldn't do this and that. I had lots of emotion thing at home like my own family is back home. I have my husband's family here, but I miss my family. My emotions is too...I start crying. Right now I am okay...also especially in my own life, I am very happy and maybe there is some sickness was coming with me. I am happy. This group they helped with me too much. I spend lots of happy time and also good time here (Nazia).

### **Acknowledging the limits of their own experiences.**

Some of the participants realized that their perceptions were based on their own prior experiences, which were not universally shared. This insight helped them acknowledge the limitations of their experiences. They seemed to understand that these limitations may not allow them to see a problem from multiple perspectives.



I sometimes know that our experience may limit us. One game a scenario we did where we were suppose to guide a person through different experiences to go to the beach, to go to a waterfall, to go boating and there was one where my partner brought me canoeing. We had our eyes closed. My partner, she was guiding my hands to use the oars, to stroke the water, but I had no idea what that was and I thought it was something else so yeah, but it was eye opening (Miki).

### **Acknowledging personal biases.**

Some participants acknowledged that they both judge and stereotype others. They were often aware when others were stereotyping them, but had not been aware of their own tendency to do the same. A woman who recognized this stated:

I always try to not judge people by how they look, but sometimes you just do it without thinking about it. I hate this habit about me and like I think I mentioned that there was one girl and I used to judged her. Actually at the end she was very nice and I love her so much. So it just I am starting to never never judge someone just from the first look (Sonia).

Another participant realized that she was unfairly describing all Canadians as unfriendly and believed that she would be laughed at when she spoke English. She stated:

We say Canadian is not is really friendly just whatever they want to do. But when we get here, they are so nice especially like Mary is looking after our baby. Oh my God changing...diaper.....No we didn't know no one. First week we did in a group we feel like everyone is like us. No one is laughing at our English. No one is staring at what you are doing. After that we got like really very good (Nazia).

### **Increasing self-confidence.**

Lack of self-confidence was very common amongst many of the participants. Several participants identified situations where they felt uncomfortable and lacked confidence in doing anything in front of people, talking about themselves, dealing with parenting issues, “sticking up for themselves” and making friends. Three participants described themselves as “very shy” and another participant explained that “I was very quiet about myself”. Some identified the games

they participated in as the vehicle which provided opportunity to develop the confidence that they lacked. Two participants explained:

Lots of games. I actually was confident to say stuff and to express my feelings. And even stuff I don't want people to know about me and we had so much games, like awesome games. It helped my confidence a lot to speak up for myself (Sonia).

There was one where we played a game where Mariette asked us to close our eyes and point to a point in the room like a corner. Then we were asked to spin our body and to go towards that point. Then they asked us to close our eyes and imagine us reaching further and further until we are wound up like a spring and so at the end we were able to do it. If we can see it in our mind that we are able to reach that goal. So I think that's very good because it applies in life. If you can see it, you can actually reach others (Miki).

Tied into the whole notion of emerging self-confidence is the ability to speak out and express oneself. Sluyter and Unrau (2006) explain that social theatre is intended to raise important questions and create a space where individuals may have a 'voice' and explore their issues to find active solutions. The whole notion of 'finding their voice' both symbolically and literally was a recurring theme. One participant clearly stated:

I think everyone has a voice and I sometimes it takes something to happen for you to come out of your shell and to speak what you believe in (Miki).

This process helped people find both their singing voice and their speaking voice. In finding their speaking voice, participants strengthened their skills in communication in both the ability to express their opinions, their feelings, and find solutions to their problems. What they discovered was the skills necessary for effective communication. They realized through this process that one needs to listen to others, refrain from judgment, and be empathetic.

In finding their 'voice', participants expressed their new found sense of confidence. This lead them to believe they could overcome challenges in their lives, solve problems, stand up for

themselves and state their views or opinions on a subject. Most notable was the confidence to state their views without fear of criticism or reprisal from others.

I think ummm it gives you some confidence, some esteem, self-esteem to see it that everybody is an equal and nobody is wrong, nobody is right, but you just have to express yourself to make sure you are heard and see what other people say (Miki).

When asked to describe how they became involved and unprompted by specific question about confidence, one participant conveyed how this process had raised her confidence:

At first I was nervous because to do anything in front of people is not my personality at all. So I was ...I am going to stick it out and challenge myself and I am going to learn how to sing because I figured I can sing and to act in front of people so I am committed now so I will challenge myself to do this and the stories were important enough they had to get told so I think it raised my confidence just as a person a lot (Sharon).

Another participant responded:

Right now I'm okay. I feel better. Very good. I am confident by myself now. I am perfect woman now (Nazia).

Five of the participants identified their new sense of confidence that they had gained during *Stories, Unsung*. This increase in their confidence led participants to believe that they could overcome any obstacle or find solutions to their problems. Two participants explain how they can solve their problems, and stand up for themselves.

It help my confidence a lot to speak up for myself. Like especially my play was (reference to character she played) ...I didn't stuck up for myself, my in-law thing, but in my real life helped me to stuck up for myself..before I didn't, but now I am doing. A lot of games we played I actually stood up for myself (Sonia).

We can solve our problem and we can share our feelings with everybody. Then we thought yes we can have confidence by ourself. We can do something. (Nazia)

All participants recognized and acknowledged the new skills acquired during *Stories, Unsung*. These skills included: the ability to listen effectively to others, the ability to express one-self publicly, the ability to reflect, the ability to act, sing and write stories and lyrics, and the ability to problem solve. *Stories, Unsung* is a program that creates a space for transformation.

Many of the participants came into this experience with no training in singing or acting. Participation in *Stories, Unsung* required participation in not only singing and acting, but also in the writing of the script or story line and the songs that would be sung during the performance. Many of the participants identified singing and the writing of lines as a new found skill, one which they never imagined they could accomplish. Some were absolutely in awe of what they had experienced and what they had accomplished.

Even the words we say, we actually wrote them which is awesome. We create the play. We didn't know we would reach to this point now. Honestly, I'm amazed we just had a little part we added and you put them all together and they fit perfectly. And just an awesome experience (Sonia).

Right now we are very excited to do our program (laughs). Really we didn't believe that we can do this, but right now the day after tomorrow what we are doing we are really excited (Nazia).

### **Changes in Relationships with Others**

Many of the participants also acknowledged the change in their perceptions of others. They identified the games and exercises and the dialogue that followed as opportunities to learn more about and change perceptions about other group members. They acknowledged that it was very likely that some of them would never have met due to the differences in their ethnicity, age, or life circumstances. *Stories, Unsung* brought together a very diverse group of individuals. It included those who were parents and those who were not, those who were grandparents and

those who were not, those who were newcomers and those who were not, and those who represented a wide age range. In this context, participants were exposed to a diversity of belief systems and a world view different from their own. They were exposed to the life experiences of individuals which opened their eyes to the many inequalities and injustices that others had experienced. Social theatre provided the opportunity for them to discover, to learn, and to understand others' lived experiences. The opportunity to "step into their shoes" helped them to understand how one's experiences shape and construct their perception of themselves, others and the world around them.

### **Acknowledging experiences and knowledge of others.**

Exercises that involved 'listening to both sides' provided not only the opportunity to develop understanding, but also to learn from the experience of others.

I should always listen to both sides. Even from before, but sometimes you know the situation is really getting worse and you just blowing off... I am seeing everybody is telling different things and you learn from others (Nazia).

Once again the games and exercises highlighted these different experiences and the value in seeing things from a different point of view. Participants acknowledged the importance in hearing the opinions of others and the importance of this in developing an understanding of others.

...the one game where we had to go on a journey. That just that we all come from different places so what I see someone else might not see it the same way I do. So that was helpful in understanding that what got us here is different for everyone. We won't all see even if it is the same thing in front of us. We won't all see it as the same thing. It might have different meaning for every one of us (Sharon).

An important part of the process was the sharing of information. The opportunity to engage in conversations with each other helped participants to acknowledge the experience of the other

person and understand how this had impacted on their world view or opinion on a certain topic. It also provided participants with insights and an understanding of the behaviour of others. The opportunity to share stories, ideas and opinions developed a common understanding between participants. They recognized the value in having these kinds of conversations with people in their lives i.e., partners, friends, neighbours, etc.

Sometimes we have the games and we have the stories and there in the morning would come. What did happen to you? What did you do? We listened to each other. Right. What they are saying I realize that maybe we are doing something wrong. We shouldn't do that? We stop ourselves not to doing from jumping on somebody. So we learn from lots of things from the group (Nazia).

In these conversations, participants also discussed their experiences with racism and stereotyping and an understanding of how these situations could occur. One participant shared her experience:

I came from Lebanon. I used to work in a clothes store and one girl told me, you guys are from so terrorist. She didn't know me. When I see this play and I see how people are racist to me. Even they don't know me. I love my country, it is an awesome country in my opinion, judging just because I come from there, it just really hurts. They are going to think I am a terrorist or something blah blah blah. It just now I am so proud of myself and for everything. There is someone bad from the country, it doesn't mean everyone is bad from the country. There is lots of white people who do bad stuff, it doesn't mean all white people are bad (Sonia).

### **Improved prior relationships.**

Some of the participants identified a closer connection and relationship with others. In one instance, a woman clearly stated that there was a distinct change in the relationship between her and her husband. She described:

Before when he said something I just threw everything at him. We have lots of bad times after the baby...he is happy with me now (laughs). Sometimes he says “my God you changed really you change” (Nazia).

She attributed this change to her participation in *Stories, Unsung*. Participation in the games and exercises and the subsequent discussion were identified as the learning opportunity that helped develop a deeper understanding of others. One participant said:

I remember there was one game when Mariette guided us through and we had to pretend to be the people who most affected our lives who we are really in disagreement with and because of the strong feelings and about certain issues we were able to step into their shoes and really feel what it seems like and react to it from another side. It was an eye opening situation (Miki).

The ability to empathize or “step into their shoes” was enhanced during this process. Five participants discussed the importance of understanding the feelings of others. Further, they acknowledged and recognized the ability to empathize as pivotal to enhanced communication and their ability to solve problems with family and community members.

One participant even acknowledged that the ‘space’ that *Stories, Unsung* created provided a break or ‘respite’ from her daily responsibilities. *Stories, Unsung* provided this space where she could relax and return to caretaking responsibilities relaxed and happy. Her relationships with both her child and her husband improved as a result of this time of “respite”.

I would come here and spend lots of fun time here right from 9 to 1. I am free from baby. I just enjoy myself and after that I can take time to spend time with my baby, spend time with the house and I am waiting for my husband, he is coming and we are going outside somewhere. Just it change because I have a good time before I have enjoyed it. This is the reason that I am connected with my husband (Tamra).

Another important skill participants identified was the ability to listen to others. Participants identified the development of listening skills which they were able to transfer into their relationships with those in their close personal circle such as partners and friends.

We had to play games...you had to wait your turn. We can't talk. It remind me of my husband. Stop you had to wait your turn. Stop talking and our biggest problem we don't actually listen, we don't let the other person finish his talking, we just talk we..Mariette ask us oh what is the hardest thing about games. To wait. To not talk. It actually really like just made me think about life. We always jump about each other and we talk we don't wait 'til the person finished talking (Sonia).

### **Building new relationships.**

In the context of this program, friendships developed. Some of the connections made within *Stories, Unsung* extended outside program hours. Some of the friendships developed because they shared their experience of parenting. From this shared experience, a sense of community developed. Participants explain:

We used to after each play, we meet at someone's house. I actually made friends from this group like cause everyone has kids so we understand each other. Cause I kind of lost my friends because I am the only one with a kid now and they don't understand my kid, the hardest kid in the group and she (points to Sharon) always calm me down and she's really great. My wish is we always even though it is finished we meet here or in someone's house. We are going to come to the Parent Link and always meet together. It is really nice (Sonia).

It is true that if you don't have friends with kids it is difficult to relate to them. You know kids do change your whole schedule in life. It is good..to have friends that you know and are close. We are all fairly close in area (Sharon).

Friendships developed over the course of the program because they came to understand the people within the group and shared a common experience. It provided an opportunity to get to know one another, get support and develop networks amongst people.

Before the summer...winter every Tuesday we went to one of each house. We don't know before it. We don't know where they are from here, how they feel. After this program, every week after this program a Tuesday program we go to meet each other house and have fun....we inviting our birthday party, we invite our friends. When I had a birthday party, we all invite our friends. Before we don't know who are they (Nazia).



I think it was very good. It's an opportunity to get to know one another, experience what we had experienced and share, a lot of networking and support. Because we see each other every week, we do play games, we interact, we learn from each other and then we eat (Miki).

In some cases, they met people that they probably would have never met due to their different ages, different backgrounds and different stages of life. However, in this setting and sharing this experience they developed friendships with a very diverse group of people.

No I don't think [we would have met], we are so different. Different age, different background, different stage in life (Miki).

There was a common wish amongst some participants to keep their "community" going whether that was participation in Parent Link, meeting at someone's house or involvement in a new program. Their experience within this small "community" was positive and gave them the desire to both engage with their new friends in the community as well as move beyond. There was a real sense of camaraderie amongst the participants and participants were eager to share what they enjoyed about the experience.

A community...hopefully it will keep like the same (Nazia).

I am really hoping we do not do this play once and that is it. I am really hoping we'll even like once a year we keep always connected and we always do it (Sonia).

Five participants clearly stated their joy in singing and acting. This was a new experience for all of the participants.

I am thankful I was one part of it. I enjoyed acting. I love acting (Sonia).

Most enjoyable...the games and we never thought we gonna someone would do piano for us and when we singing (Nazia).

### **Potential for greater community involvement.**

Some of the participants were looking forward to more opportunities to get involved and be engaged with their community. One participant explained:

We really appreciate to work in those groups. Since before we came to Canada we always works and only have 8 months class too. Just working, just stay in the home, not making friends not learning new things. After this we want more and more new activities and to join a group. Hopefully we get something new again because this course is going to be finished. I was worrying “what shall we do after this”? (Nazia).

This experience also opened participants’ eyes to the endless possibilities before them. Their perception of self was transformed into individuals with skills and abilities and the confidence to undertake these challenges.

We learned that everybody can do in his or her life everything that they want. I was thinking that I got married I got a baby so I will be staying home nothing to do, just cleaning, just sleeping and taking care of the baby. Nothing. No when we came here we have a right, we still, we didn’t know. We are immigrant. In our country we did not have an opportunity for all women like this. After Mom, we could not do something in our own country, but here we did. We are proud of ourselves. We can do something (Nazia).

Some participants expressed their desire that *Stories, Unsung* and the performance piece that they had created would have an impact. One participant stated that “the story needs to be told”, however, they were also concerned that it create change within their community.

I keep thinking okay well after it’s done if we can actually make an impact on some people and have them change their views. I would be really proud of that if we can actually have that kind of impact (Sharon).

## Implications

This study explored what participants in a musical social theatre program entitled *Stories, Unsung* learned from their participation in the program. Through this investigation, it became evident that change was a predominant theme for the participants. These changes included: 1) Change in Self-perception, and 2) Change in Relationships with Others. In the following section, the adaptations and implications of musical social theatre as a strategy in reducing the social exclusion of the participants in the program are discussed.

Both an understanding of self and an understanding of others is a critical element in enhancing the social inclusion of those who are isolated or marginalized. Without this understanding social exclusion simply continues. In developing an understanding of self, participants went through a process of 1) recalling painful experiences, 2) acknowledging the limits of their own experiences, 3) acknowledging personal biases, and 4) increasing self-confidence.

Participants acknowledged that many of their lived experiences caused them pain. They identified the games and exercises and opportunity for dialogue in *Stories, Unsung* as the vehicle which enabled them to acknowledge these difficult experiences and move on. Participants who recognize these painful experiences are going through what Paulo Friere (2000) refers to as ‘*conscientization*’. By engaging in the process of reciprocal dialogue, a person identifies and analyzes the oppressive situation that is causing them pain. When painful experiences are not acknowledged interaction takes place at a very superficial level. In superficial relationships pain is ignored. According to Twenge et al., (2003) in an effort to protect themselves against the negative consequences of exclusion, people move into the defensive state of “cognitive deconstruction” and negative behaviours continue (p. 409). Consequently, social exclusion is

mutually reinforced. *Stories, Unsung* enabled participants to share their past experiences without fear of judgment or reprisal. The conversations that follow the games and exercises are intended to provoke dialogue about lived experiences, old ideas and beliefs, and exchange different ideas that lead to new perspectives (Sluyter & Unrau, 2006). The opportunity to recall and express this pain is an important first step toward deeper and stronger bonds with others. According to Howard (1999), Boal was encouraging people to think about and analyze their problems rather than simply feeling and reacting. Participants in social theatre also come to understand that if they want to make change, they must connect with the problem and find solutions rather than waiting for someone else to bring about a resolution to their oppressive situation.

Acknowledging limits of experiences creates a route for moving beyond those experiences and seeking new experiences. Participants admitted that they had a tendency to stay in their comfort zone and not see the problem for what it was. By taking risks and stepping out of their comfort zone, participants had the opportunity to draw on the experience of other group members and learn from this experience and at the same time explore their own biases and assumptions. The techniques used in *Stories, Unsung* like Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed focus on the need for personal, social and political change (Howard, 1999). Acknowledging personal biases can also help people realize why they have those biases and why others may have them as well. Instead of rejecting those who have biases, understanding and challenging them can reduce social exclusion. But all of this cannot be done without self-confidence.

Lack of self-confidence was common amongst all participants. They provided numerous examples of how this experience had increased their self-confidence. Through the games and exercises, the "seeds of possibility were planted" (Sluyter & Unrau, 2006, p. 18) and participants believed that they could set and reach new goals. The conversations provided opportunities for

participants to gain confidence in expressing themselves whereby they learned that their ideas were heard and valued by others. Lack of confidence may be the greatest single barrier to social inclusion. Much of the family support literature highlights the numerous barriers that may exclude families. Researchers suggest that the following are potential barriers for family involvement and can create situations of exclusion: inadequately prepared staff, attitudes held by staff or other parents, logistical issues and structural barriers such as social class, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity (Silver et al., 2005). Although increased confidence is identified as a benefit of inclusion or engagement within a program, lack of confidence is not identified as a potential barrier to social inclusion (Jeppson et al., 1997).

*Stories, Unsung* created a space for the participants to take risks both at the physical level and a vocal level through the conversations and dialogue. The games and exercises provided the opportunity to gain inner confidence. It is this process of “physicalization” that nurtures and strengthens the body so that the mind can engage in the necessary conversations. It is this very deliberate process of ‘physicalization’ that sets *Stories, Unsung* and social theatre apart from other forms of community engagement. According to Sluyter and Unrau (2006), forcing dialogue or conversation too soon can hinder the process of reflection or the *Conversations with Self*. Allowing the body to feel enables the participant to engage at a visceral or kinaesthetic level and where the teaming of mind and body occur.

Participants identified the acquisition of numerous skills during *Stories, Unsung*. These included: ability to listen to others, the ability to reflect, the ability to act, sing and write stories and lyrics, and the ability to problem solve. These new skills increased the confidence levels of the participants even further. These new skills were visible demonstrations of their capabilities

and strengths. As confidence levels increased so did their ability to express themselves and find their 'voice'.

Staff in family support programs often claims that acquiring confidence and self-efficacy in parenting can have a positive spillover effect into other areas of life. They have heard parents say "if I can do a good job at the challenging job of parenting then I can surely undertake other challenges and experience success too" (Kenny, 2009, p. 6). According to Kenny (2009) with this sense of confidence and empowerment, parents may begin to contemplate their own next steps on the continuum of life-long learning. *Stories, Unsung* clearly demonstrated its ability to further increase confidence levels of the participants.

In developing an understanding of others, the participants went through a process of 1) acknowledging experiences and knowledge of others, 2) improving prior relationship, 3) building new relationships, and 4) seeking opportunities for increased community involvement. *Stories, Unsung* provided the opportunity for the participants to hear the lived experiences of others. This understanding was developed through the *Conversations with Partners* and *Conversations with Group*. These conversations led to a deeper understanding of the experiences of others in the group and an acknowledgement of the value of these diverse experiences. Conversely, the participants had their own experiences validated in the process demonstrating the reciprocity inherent within this process. Participants identified their ability to listen more effectively to partners and group members. According to Born (2008) listening to others, entering into their meaning, and joining creative energies to dream of real solutions leads to engagement. The participants came to recognize the importance of listening to others and engaging in meaningful dialogue with others. It was also about listening that went beyond words, but included body language and picking up on silent cues and reacting to them (Sluyter &

Unrau, 2006). The process of dialogue or having conversations engages participants in the process of “meaning making” whereby participants came to understand the meaning systems that came from their experience and their learning that shaped their thinking and beliefs (Born, 2008). This led to deeper understanding between people and a willingness to openly share their assumptions and views in an environment where they felt safe enough to do so. Conversations enhance relationships which become the metaphors for connecting to our society and eventually the community-at-large (Sluyter & Unrau, 2006).

*Stories, Unsung* is really about building a sense of community. It begins with its group of participants who create a small community. They share a common experience as a participant in *Stories, Unsung* and share a common purpose and commitment to develop a performance piece. The participants in this program expressed their desire to bring this issue forward hoping that it would have an impact. What begins as the effect of individual ‘*conscientization*’ has the possibility to expand to the surrounding environment then to “communal illumination” (Sluyter & Unrau, 2006, p. 86). For example, participants in *Stories, Unsung* share their story with each other and then share it with an even larger community in an effort to bring that community to a shared understanding of their issue or concern. According to Sluyter and Unrau (2006), “everyone is continually on a course toward conscientization which Paulo Friere would suggest is consciousness development that has the power to transform reality” (2000, p. 84).

### **Implications for Those Working with the Socially Excluded**

When we discuss or work on inclusion, we must begin with those families who are on the outside looking in (Dei & Calliste, 2000, p. 12).

After a long history of institutional structures and culture based on the colonial model of service provision we have moved at least in our rhetoric, from the expert model where the

professional knows best to a collaborative model of service delivery where professionals work in reciprocal partnerships with service-users, listening and inviting participant engagement. Policy makers are demanding that service providers listen to service-users and make every effort to involve them in decision making in service delivery and planning in order to decrease social exclusion (Bagley et al., 2004). At the practice level, it is necessary to examine our efforts to engage our participants within community-based programs with a goal towards decreasing social exclusion.

In family support programs practitioners continually reflect on ways to improve our practice which includes those families who are not attending programs and we struggle to find strategies to engage those families which are socially excluded. What role could the professional or practitioner play in supporting individual's to form this sense of belonging thereby reducing their sense of isolation? As professionals and practitioners working with those who are socially excluded, we must ask how we can reshape and reconstruct the perceptions of those individuals who are marginalized? How do we create the opportunities for individuals to gain confidence and give power and 'voice' to those who believe that they have neither? According to Silver et al., (2005) professionals and practitioners working in community-based programs must do a better job of understanding the barriers to social inclusion and addressing power, privilege and society's structural barriers that prevent full inclusion.

At the same time, professionals and practitioners need to explore new approaches such as *Stories, Unsung* as a viable alternative to the traditional approaches of involvement and engagement. Participation in a program like *Stories, Unsung* is potentially a very useful way for service providers to explore and understand their own oppressions, the limitations of their own knowledge and experiences, and the institutional cultures and structures that bind them to ways



of service provision that, despite the rhetoric, are still modeled on paternalistic colonial traditions (Pushor, 2007). If the program includes both the service provider and their clients, the latter would learn to better appreciate the experiences, perspectives, strengths, and talents of those they serve. It is quite likely that this fuller appreciation of the other and the stronger relationship will genuinely help them see their clients as equals, and not as 'needy' individuals. This will not be easy to do because it will require the service providers to also take risks in exposing their own vulnerabilities. As one participant in *Stories, Unsung* so poignantly stated:

It is very hard because we are human beings. We are always wrapped up in our emotions and what we feel is right. Because we are always trying to stay in our comfort zone and stay in what we believe. So it is very hard to step out of it and actually see a situation for what it is. But with this experience I think it's given me an opportunity to slow down, calm down and really look at it for what it is and just move on (Miki).

Engaging in alternative approaches requires that practitioners step out of their 'comfort zone' and engage in approaches that provide true reciprocal learning opportunities. The participants engaged in this program increase self-confidence enabling them to enhance their capacity to become fully engaged in their community. Many goals that they try to meet in their own programs can be met more quickly and effectively through programs such as *Stories, Unsung*. The results of *Stories, Unsung* demonstrates that this process can increase the self-confidence of its participants enabling them to enhance their capacity to become fully engaged in their community. This engagement illustrates the positive effects of working through the individual and connecting to the larger community.

It is informed action that moves cyclically from singular learning to plural awareness as well as from communal instigation to individual illuminations (Sluyter & Unrau, 2006, p. 84).

However, there are cost implications associated with the implementation of this program which may be beyond the scope of some family support programs. *Stories, Unsung* employed a facilitator/director with theatre expertise, a composer/lyricist, and childcare staff. HOTNE provided a staff person who was a full participant in the program as well as staff who provided coordination. It also requires space for the program and the childcare. However, are there elements of *Stories, Unsung* that can be implemented if resources are not available? Staff training is an absolute requirement if family support practitioners are to better understand the barriers to social inclusion and further address the issues of power, privilege and societal structures that prevent full inclusion. This training can be provided through existing course curricula at both the university and college level in a number of programs preparing practitioners across a variety of disciplines. Ward (2009) argues that social exclusion is a concept that should be particularly significant in the study and practice of social work as it deals with the processes of marginalization and endeavours to promote inclusion and reduce the impact of inequality. There is no reason why the concept of social exclusion should not be included in the study and practice for those professionals working in the related fields of family support, education, community health where their primary focus is on the support of families and their children many of whom experience social exclusion.

Family support practitioners pride themselves on their sensitivity and understanding of the challenges that accompany parenting and all the compounding factors that can affect families such as poverty, abuse, mental health, newcomer status, special needs of a family member, etc. They also acknowledge that 'reaching out' is a necessary component of our work to order to engage and include those who are isolated. However, is there enough thought given to understanding the experience of social exclusion from the perspective of the person who is

socially isolated? Can *Stories, Unsung* provide a training vehicle for practitioners that enables them to explore not only the experiences of the participants, but also understand what has shaped their own belief systems, perceptions and vulnerabilities. *Stories, Unsung* does not distinguish between participants. The reason a participant plays a part in *Stories, Unsung* is irrelevant to the process. It does not matter whether they join as community member, who is experiencing isolation, or because of a formal role in the host agency. Together participants and service providers explore their experiences, both joyful and challenging through the physical activities and the conversations. Within this context both participant and service providers become engaged in conversations where they not only gain an understanding of their own belief systems, perceptions, and vulnerabilities, but also of each others. Every participant reshapes and reconstructs their experience within their own context. A logical outcome could be to use this as one aspect of training for family support practitioners. Data to support this is needed from further studies.

Those working in family support programs need to assess the effectiveness of strategies being utilized to connect to those who are socially isolated. O’Keefe and Hogg (1999) used a variety of strategies to engage house-bound individuals using community development techniques. How effective were these strategies in reaching the ‘hard to reach’? Is there a continuum of social exclusion whereby there are some families who are harder to reach than others? This further emphasizes the need for a multi-pronged approach to reach families who are socially excluded. For example, inviting families to participate on boards and working committees may provide the necessary support to overcome social exclusion in some instances and participation in an intensive social theatre program such as *Stories, Unsung* will be needed for others.

There will be no argument amongst family support practitioners that parental engagement is fundamental to our work. This parental engagement often focuses on the adult's role as parent and primary caregiver. Some programs would go one step further and view their role as supporting the civic engagement of parents by providing opportunities for parents to develop skills and confidence to become engaged in the community-at-large. Should our mandate also include the process of '*conscientization*' and the analysis of oppression? Do we have the expertise and understanding necessary to engage in the process? This ambitious agenda requires staff that is willing to engage in the reciprocal dialogue and examine and explore their own oppressions, and limitations of their own knowledge and experiences.

### **Implications for Policy**

Under current structures service agencies such as Family Support Programs are funded and assessed on the basis of the service-client model, where the number of clients served is measured rather than the quality or the long-term impact of the service. Programs such as *Stories, Unsung* may not serve a large number of people in a short duration, but the impact is evidently very powerful. Policy-makers therefore need to consider the impact of programs offered by service agencies in making their funding decisions. In many instances, policy-makers tend to look for material outcomes as results of programs in order to assess their efficacy. In this program there were no material gains, beyond the changes in the participants' perceptions of themselves and others, the skills they acquired, the self-confidence they gained, the social networks they established and were interested in furthering. Policy-makers need to invest more in these 'soft' forms of empowerment which will serve participants better and longer than any immediate material gains.

## Implications for Future Research

This program took place over a ten (10) month period, two hours per week. This study explored the impact at the end of the program just prior to the performance. There are several opportunities for future research that include the extension of this inquiry to include a follow up at 3 and 6 month intervals. For example, it would be important to find out if the social networks created during this program were sustained for three (3) months and/or six (6) months. Would the confidence the participants gained be sustained over a three (3) month and six (6) month period and then spill over into the interactions they have with others? Did participants actually begin to participate in community building activities within three (3) months and/or six (6) months?

This study did not include a follow up component. Hence, there was no opportunity to explore the medium and long term effects of *Stories, Unsung* by returning to the site and interviewing participants three (3) months after completion of the program and/or at twelve (12) months. It would also be important to explore whether the social networks and friendships were sustained over time. Did the participants actually become engaged in other community events or activities as they said they wanted to do? What roles did they play within their community-at-large and was their civic engagement? Should *Stories, Unsung* include a formal post performance follow up with participants at a three (3) and/or six (6) month interval?

Assessing the effectiveness of outreach strategies being used to engage those families/individuals who are socially isolated or “hard to reach” provides another opportunity for research. Family support practitioners currently invite parents to become engaged in program activities by volunteering in direct service, committee activities and providing feedback and

evaluation. It should be noted that these opportunities only reach those who attend programs, however, are these effective strategies in increasing a family's sense of belonging within programs? Do these strategies enhance skills, capacities and increase self-confidence? What do practitioners need to understand about social exclusion in order to be most effective in reaching out to isolated and excluded families? Do these opportunities provide the opportunity for what Friere refers to as '*conscientization*' or analysis of the oppressive situation that is causing them pain?

This particular group of individuals bonded over the ten month period and expressed their desire to maintain connections to one another. Five of the members were parents with young children. This desire to maintain these new found relationships is not unusual amongst parents as they often find they lose their connection to friends who do not have children. Are relationships sustained in other social theatre programs where participants do not share this common parenting responsibility? Studies on this and other similar approaches would deepen our understanding of what can be learned from social theatre programs such as this.

### **Conclusion**

Many practitioners working in community-based services work from an ecological perspective and recognize the interdependence of participants' lives and the power imbalances that impact on them. However, those practitioners could do more to better understand and address these power imbalances, privilege and society's structural barriers that prevent full inclusion (Silver et al., 2005). More importantly, practitioners need to empower individuals and families to understand these power imbalances that exist that keep them in situations of isolation and social exclusion.

Pinderhughes (1995) defines empowerment as:

Achieving reasonable control over one's destiny, learning to cope constructively with debilitating forces in society and acquiring the competence to initiate change at the individual and systems level (p. 136).

How do we support individuals or families to identify these 'debilitating forces' and gather the strength and confidence to make the changes necessary? I believe that this goes beyond program participation at a very surface level. This is more than availing oneself of the services that are offered through an agency. This is moving beyond a 'presence' in a program. These must be recognized as important first steps to increasing social inclusion and in making important connections that give an individual and their family a sense of connection. However, alternate approaches are required to provide opportunities for constructive communication that can lead to personal and community transformation. *Stories, Unsung* engaged the participants in this process of identifying and acknowledging those 'debilitating forces' and literally 'acting' on them by creating a performance piece. This experience moved participants from what Twenge, Catanese and Baumeister (2003) referred to as the 'defensive state of cognitive deconstruction' into a new cognitive construction. *Stories, Unsung* enabled the participants to engage in a process of '*conscientization*' or analysis that enabled them to participate in meaningful thought, experience positive emotions and self awareness and become energized leaving behind those negative behaviours associated with individuals who are socially excluded.

Individuals and communities are being bombarded with notice of opportunities to provide their opinion, share their story, and 'voice' their concerns. Researchers are listening to the stories in an effort to understand and share information that can have an impact on policy and program implementation and delivery. Politicians need confirmation that the policy directives are having an impact. Community advocates need to ensure that they are carrying the correct

message on behalf of those needing their advocacy support. Service providers want to affirm their contributions to families and the communities that they serve and to ensure that they are meeting the needs of their participants and service users especially those who are most vulnerable (Silver et al., 2005).

During this ten month program, *Stories, Unsung* provided a venue where participants were transformed by providing their opinion, sharing their story and finding their 'voice'. *Stories, Unsung* enabled participants to step outside the confines of their perception of the world and meaningfully engage in a process of positive reconstruction. Through their participation in *Stories, Unsung*, the transformation or change that took place clearly benefitted the eight participants and possibly also those they interacted with. I hope in some small way I have also added to the discussion about musical social theatre as an alternative approach that supports socially excluded and marginalized families. Most importantly, I hope that I have captured the transformation that occurred within this program for those individuals who shared their story and their 'voice' with me because

The stories were important enough they had to get told (Sharon).



## Appendix 1

### *Interview Guide*

The participant/actors were asked to address the following questions:

- Can you describe how you became involved in *Stories, Unsung*?
- Can you describe the most enjoyable aspect/part of *Stories, Unsung*?
- What did you learn from your experience in *Stories, Unsung*?
- Can you think of a time when you used what you learned to solve a personal problem or issue?
- Can you describe a situation where you used what you learned and believe it helped your confidence in that situation?
- Can you think of a time when you used what you learned to help you understand others or understand that person's point of view?
- Can you think of a time when you used what you learned to help you understand yourself physically/emotionally/spiritually?
- Are there any additional comments that you would like to make about *Stories, Unsung*?
- Are there any additional comments that you would like to make about *Stories, Unsung*?

## References

- Ali, M., Corson, P., & Frankel, E. (2009). *Listening to families: Reframing services*. Toronto, ON: Chestnut Publishing Inc.
- All Nations Theatre Society (2005). Retrieved on May 20, 2008, from <http://www.allnationstheatre.ab.ca/forum.html>
- Bagley, C., Ackerley, C. L., & Rattray, J. (2004). Social exclusion, Sure Start and organization social capital: Evaluating inter-disciplinary multi-agency working in an education and health work programme. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19 (5), 595 – 607.
- Ball, S. J., (1997). Policy sociology and critical social research: A personal review of recent education policy and policy research. *British Educational Research Journal*, 23 (3), 257 – 274.
- Barnard, G. (1995). *Cross-cultural communication: A practical guide*. New York, NY: Cassell Wellington House.
- Bastian, B & Haslam, N. (2010). Excluded from humanity: The dehumanizing effects of social ostracism. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46 (2010), 107-113.
- Baumeister, R. F. & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachment as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497 – 529.
- Beauvais, C. & Jenson, J. (2002). *Social cohesion: Updating the state of the research*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Policy Research Networks.
- Berlin, I. (2001). The search of status. In H. Hardy (ed.) *Isaiah Berlin: The power of ideas*. London: Pimlico.

- Boal, A. (1992). *Games for actors and nonactors* (A. Jackson, Trans.) New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. New York, NY: Allyn and Bacon.
- Born, P. (2008). *Community conversations: Mobilizing the ideas, skills, and passion of community organizations, governments, businesses, and people*. Toronto, ON: BPS Books.
- Boulding, C. & Wampler, B. (2010) Voice, votes, and resources: Evaluating the effect of Participatory democracy on well-being. *World Development*, 38 (1), 125 – 135.
- Brockmeier, M. & Harre, R. (1997). Narrative: Problems and promises of an alternative paradigm. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 30 (4), 263 – 283.
- Burchardt, T., Le Grand, J., & Piachaud, D. (1999). Social Exclusion in Britain 1991 – 1995. *Social Policy & Administration*, 33 (3), 227 – 244.
- Cabinet Office (2007). *What do we mean by social exclusion*, London, UK: Cabinet Office.
- Available on line at [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social\\_exclusion\\_task\\_force/context.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/context.aspx). Retrieved on July 8, 2009.
- Clarke, K. (2006). Childhood, parenting and early intervention: A critical examination of the Sure Start national programme. *Critical Social Policy*, 26 (4), 699 – 721.
- Cohen-Cruz, J. & Schutzman, M. (2006). *A Boal companion: Dialogues on theatre and cultural politic*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & French Group.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. London: Sage Publications.

- Davis, A. & Wainwright, S. (2005). Combating poverty and social exclusion: Implications for social work education. *Social Work Education*, 24(3), 259 – 273.
- Dei, G. & Calliste, A. (2000). Mapping the terrain: Power, knowledge and anti-racism in Dei, G. & Calliste, A. (Eds.). *Power, knowledge and anti-racism education: A critical reader*. Toronto, ON: Fernwood Publishing, Inc.
- Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., & Deal, A.G. (eds.) (1994). *Supporting and strengthening families: Methods, strategies and practices*. Cambridge: Brookline Books, Inc.
- Edwards, R., Armstrong, P. & Miller, N. (2001). Include me out: Critical readings of social exclusion, social inclusion and lifelong learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20 (5), 417-428.
- EUROPA (2008). 'Social exclusion' Available online at [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/spsi/poverty\\_social\\_exclusion\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/poverty_social_exclusion_en.htm) retrieved on July 8, 2009.
- Flores, H. (2000). From Friere to Boal. *Education Links*, 61-62, 41-42.
- Friere, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed: 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*. New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Gargiulo, T. L. (2006). *Stories at work: Using stories to improve communication and build relationships*. Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger.
- Hartman, A. (1995). Ideological themes in family policy. *Families in Society*, 76 (3), 182 – 192.
- Howard, L. A. (2004). Speaking theatre/doing pedagogy: Re-visiting theatre of the oppressed. *Communication Education*, 53 (3), 217-233.
- Howard, L. A. (1999). Primitives, progress, politics, and pedagogy. *World Communication*, 28, 3-16.

- Houston, S., Magill, T., McCollum, M., & Spratt, T. (2001). Developing creative solutions to the problems of children and their families: Communicative reason and the use of forum theatre. *Child and Family Social Work*, 6 (4), 285 -293.
- Hughes, A. E., Stevenson, J. & Gershovich, M. (2006). Community through discourse: Reconceptualizing introduction to theatre. *Theatre Topics*, 16 (1), 85 – 101.
- Hunter, B. (2009). Indigenous social exclusion: Insights and challenges for the concept of social inclusion. *Family Matters*, No. 82 (8), 52 – 61.
- Huseman, R., Stockmayer, D., Lahiff, J., & Penrose, J. (1996). *Business communication: Strategies and skills*. Toronto, ON: Harcourt Brace.
- Ibrahim, S. & Alkire, S. (2007). Agency and empowerment: A proposal for internationally comparable indicators. *Oxford Development Studies*, 35 (4), 379 – 403.
- Jeppson, E., Thomas, J., Markward, A., Kelly, J., Koser, G., & Diehl, D. (1997). *Making room at the table: Fostering family involvement in the planning and governance of formal support systems*. Chicago, Illinois: Family Support America.
- Kenny, V. (2009). *The family resource program as a locus of community inclusion*. Unpublished paper: Toronto, ON: Ryerson University
- Levitas, R., Pantazis, C., Fahmy, E., Gordon, D., Lloyd, E. & Patsios, D. (2007). The multi dimensional analysis of social exclusion. Cited in Ward, N. (2009). Social exclusion, social identity and social work: Analysing social exclusion from a material discursive perspective. *Social Work Education*, 28(3), 237 – 252.
- McKay, D. K. (2009). *Story telling using “social drama” – Workshop at School of Early Childhood Education conference: Beyond the brown crayon: Creative arts and diversity*. Toronto, ON: Ryerson School of Early Childhood Education.

- McKay, D. K. (2008a). *Stories, Unsung: Concept paper*, Toronto, ON: Ryerson School of Early Childhood Education.
- McKay, D. K. (2008b). *Stories, Unsung: Using music theatre to empower isolated families. An action research project with families: Concept paper*, Toronto, ON: Ryerson University School of Early Childhood Education.
- Marinaro, I. C. (2003). Integration or marginalization? The failures of social policy for the Roma in Rome. *Modern Italy* 8(2), 203 – 218.
- Milbourne, L. (2002). Unspoken Exclusion: Experiences of continued marginalization from education among 'hard to reach' groups of adults and children in the UK. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23 (2), 287 – 305.
- Munier, A. & Etherton, M. (2006). Child rights theatre for development in rural Bangladesh: A case study. *Research in Drama Education*, 11 (2), 175 - 183.
- Myers, D. (1993). *The Pursuit of Happiness: Discovering the pathway to fulfillment, well-being, and enduring personal joy*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishing Inc.
- O'Keefe, E. & Hogg, C. (1999). Public participation and marginalized groups: the community development model. *Health Expectations*, 2 (4), 245 – 254.
- Orbe, M. P. (1998). *Constructing Co-Cultural theory: An Explication of culture, power and communication*. London: Sage Publications
- Omidvar, R. & Richmond, T. (2003). *Immigrant settlement and social inclusion in Canada*. Toronto, ON: Laidlaw Foundation.
- Paterson, D. L. (1995). Theatre of the oppressed workshops. Retrieved on May 20, 2008, from <http://www.wwcd.org/action/Boal.html>
- Pinderhughes, E. (1995). Empowering diverse populations: Family practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Families in Society*, 76(3), 131 – 140.

- Pugh, G. & Duffy, B. (Eds.). (2006). *Contemporary issues in the early years*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Pushor, D. (2007). *Parent engagement: Creating a shared world*. Invited Research Paper: Ontario Education Research Symposium, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK.
- Prentki, T. & Selman, J. (2000). *Popular theatre in political culture: Britain and Canada in focus*. Bristol, U.K.: Intellect Books.
- Prins, E. (2008). Adult literacy education, gender equity and empowerment: Insights from a Freirean-inspired literacy programme. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 40 (1), 24 – 39.
- Silver, S., Berman, R., & Wilson, S. (2005). *What participants value: Practices and outcomes at family resource programs*. Toronto, ON: Ryerson University.
- Smythe, S. (2004). Understanding family support programs. *Perspectives in Family Support*, 1(1), 5 – 14.
- Sluyter, M. & Unrau, M. (2006). *Rehearsal for Reality: A manual for the creation process of theatre for transformation*. Calgary, Alberta: All Nations Theatre Society.
- Stewart, M., Reutter, L., Makwarimba, E., Veenstra, G., Love, R., & Raphael, D. (2008). Left out: Perspectives on social exclusion and inclusion across income groups. *Health Sociology Review*, 17 (1), 78-94.
- Sullivan, D. A. (2002). *Discovering our capacities*. Ottawa, ON: FRP Canada.
- Sullivan, J. & Lloyd, R. S. (2007). The forum theatre of Augusto Boal: A dramatic model for dialogue and community-based environmental science. *Local Environment*, 11 (6), 627-647.
- Twenge, J. M., Baumeister, R. F., DeWall, C. N., Ciarrocco, N. J., & Bartels, J. M. (2007). Social exclusion decreases prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(X), 56 – 66.

- Twenge, J. M., Catanese, K. R., & Baumeister, R. F., (2003). Social exclusion and the deconstructed state: Time perception, meaninglessness, lethargy, lack of emotion, and self-awareness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(3), 409 – 423.
- Ward, N. (2009). Social exclusion, social identity and social work: Analysing social exclusion from a material discursive perspective. *Social Work Education*, 28(3), 237 – 252.
- Weber, B. (2009). August Boal, Stage Director who gave a voice to Audiences, is Dead at 78. *New York Times*, May 9
- Wilson, K., Eyles, J., Elliott, S., Keller-Olaman, S., & Devicic, D. (2007). Linking social exclusion and health: Explorations in contrasting neighbourhoods in Hamilton, Ontario. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 16 (2), 126-148.