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Development of a Method of Short-Session, Task-Divided Therapeutic Songwriting

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Development of a Method of

Short-Session, Task-Divided Therapeutic Songwriting

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Abstract

The benefits of therapeutic songwriting (TS) in the context of music therapy sessions are well-documented. As music therapists are sometimes given brief periods in which to work, a method of therapeutic songwriting wherein the music therapist divides the writing process into multiple short sessions would be useful. This capstone thesis details the development of such a method. The researcher enacted this method with a group of youth who participated in an arts program in Massachusetts that utilized a resource-oriented approach. After each TS session, the researcher recorded the participants' reactions to the intervention's application. The researcher coded the reactions using inductive analysis and found themes. Results indicated that the most common reactions of the participants were engagement and pleasure. As resource-oriented music therapy counts engagement and pleasure among its aims, the researcher concluded that the developed method had potential benefits as a TS intervention. Quantitative research into the relative efficacy of short and long-session songwriting interventions and task-divided (TD) and full songwriting sessions is recommended.

Keywords: therapeutic songwriting, music therapy, resource-oriented, mental health

Introduction

"All songs are love songs." – Pete Seeger

John [name changed], 42, was on a motorcycle stopped at a traffic light when a pickup truck slammed into him from behind. The accident resulted in a traumatic brain injury (TBI), which left John with cognitive challenges as well as speech issues. I met John when I was a first-year intern at a facility in the Boston area that provided day services to adults with developmental disorders as well as those with TBIs. John and I worked together in music therapy sessions once a week for several months, during which we composed a song about John's happier times riding with his motorcycle club. The sessions lasted one-half hour and included a vocal warmup and a closure conversation. After the song was composed, I recorded the backing tracks on Apple's Logic recording software, and then John set about recording vocals with my guidance.

I was concerned that such short songwriting sessions (15-20 minutes) would not be productive, as songwriting and recording could be a lengthy and involved process. However, I found quite the opposite. John loved the song we made during our time together. He shared the completed recording with staff members at the facility, who approached me, sometimes in tears, so moved by John's progress (when he first entered the program, he was unable to speak) and the pride with which he shared his creation. John also shared the song with his family and with his motorcycle club, who reportedly played it over the loudspeaker every time John came into the clubhouse.

Baker and Wigram define therapeutic songwriting as "the process of creating, notating and/or recording lyrics and music by the client or clients and therapist within a therapeutic

relationship to address psychosocial, emotional, cognitive and communication needs of the client" (2005, p. 15).

This power has not gone unnoticed: the number of studies on TS has grown steadily from 1990 until the present (Baker, 2015). These studies demonstrate the therapeutic power of songwriting (SW) in many settings, with many clients, and with many therapeutic aims. For example, therapists have used SW with veterans living with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bronson et al., 2018). Another publication relates the power of TS to help caregivers of those with dementia increase their sense of connection, motivation, and wellbeing (García-Valverde et al., 2022). In another example, Viega (2018) details the humanistic use of technology in SW with adolescents who lack self-esteem and a sense of agency. Finally, while much of the research on the topic of TS is qualitative, there are quantitative studies that demonstrate TS's efficacy in working with those living with TBIs (Roddy et al., 2020) and bereavement (Myers-Coffman et al., 2019).

Having had a successful songwriting experience with John, I began my second-year internship at an arts immersion program (AP) in Massachusetts in September of 2023, intending to engage in TS with the clients there. This program served youth from the ages of six to eighteen years old. Sessions with the youth occurred in groups and were generally one hour long; sessions included explorations in music, movement, and visual arts modalities. As visual arts were a significant component of all AP sessions, the music portion of the sessions went for roughly fifteen minutes. Due to my experience with John, I knew that songwriting in short sessions, wherein the songwriting process was divided into specific tasks and spread across several sessions, could be an effective intervention. However, I had tailored John's songwriting intervention specifically for his particular set of challenges, such as cognitive limitations and

breathing issues. For my sessions at AP, I would need a method designed best to utilize the resources of a broader range of participants. I searched the literature for an extant short-session, task-divided therapeutic songwriting method (STTS). I found no literature on this subject.

I therefore developed my own STTS method. In applying my method with a school group served by AP, I found the results successful both in terms of the enthusiasm and engagement of the youth with whom I practiced this method and the quality of the song that resulted from its application. One of the youth participants expressed that they had no idea the song would come out as well as it did. In another session, a student asked if the group could skip the visual arts component of our session and spend the whole time on songwriting. A staff member with the school group noted that the kids were particularly engaged with the songwriting portion of the session. I should mention that although I developed this method in my work with youth, I did not design the method *for* youth. Rather, it is an intervention suitable for all ages.

In this capstone thesis, I review the extant literature on TS, discuss the gaps in said literature on the subject of STTS, detail the development of an STTS method, discuss the application of this method and the responses by the students to this process of STTS, and suggest areas for further research.

Literature Review

Published studies on TS often include data on the numerical and demographic makeup of the subject pool, the theoretical basis of the interventions utilized, the pathologies the interventions seek to address, and the number of sessions in the intervention. Often, studies omit the length of the sessions. When session length data is included in the literature, the sessions are most often between 45 and 90 minutes long. However, music therapists are frequently given less time, as little as fifteen minutes, to work (*Session Structure*, n.d.). Music therapists may find

such short sessions challenging when seeking to implement a songwriting intervention. In this capstone, I will detail the development and utilization of a short-session, task-divided therapeutic songwriting method and argue for its effectiveness.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Resource-Oriented Music Therapy and Humanistic Therapy

Most of the youth I served at AP had mental health and behavioral health issues. However, as AP followed an arts immersion model, AP did not focus on any diagnoses that the youth may have brought with them from more typical mental health practitioners and institutions. Instead, AP aimed to increase their youths' self-esteem, self-worth, inner strength, and connections with others. This mission was in line with Rolvsjord's (2009) resource-oriented music therapy (ROMT), which is "oriented towards the client's resources, strengths, and potentials" (Gold et al., 2005).

In Rolvsjord's seminal work, *Resource-Oriented Music Therapy in Mental Health Care* (2009), she acknowledged that her approach was "deeply rooted in a humanistic tradition." As such, the philosophy behind ROMT shared much with Carl Rogers' client-centered therapeutic approach. Rogers believed that the seeds of their healing lie in the client's self-knowledge and that the therapist's role was to help the client access this knowledge in a nondirective, supportive fashion and in the context of a genuine, supportive therapeutic relationship (Rogers, 1951).

Indeed, music therapy (MT) is a natural fit for a more resource-oriented approach, as music-making has been shown to empower, motivate, increase the quality of life, and improve self-esteem (Creech et al. l, 2023; Dassa, 2023; Short, 2013; Grocke et al., 2009). This is not to say, however, that ROMT denies the existence or importance of psychopathology. Instead, Rolvsjord expressed that "clearly, strengths and problems both have a place in therapy…These

need not be treated as separate parts of the therapeutic process, but might rather be seen as interacting aspects" (Rolvsjord, 2009, p. 177).

Baker and Ballantyne (2013) demonstrated that ROMT-oriented TS was an effective therapeutic tool in working with older adults. Baker and Ballantyne discussed a qualitative research study using TS with adults in a retirement community in Brisbane, collecting data from video footage, song lyrics, journals, interviews, and a short answer questionnaire to determine the efficacy of TS. Results indicated that study participants found the TS process pleasing, meaningful, and engaging. I believe the results confirm the power of TS to improve quality of life (QOL), one of the chief goals of ROMT (Edwards, 2017).

Short-Session Therapeutic Songwriting

An extensive review of available literature turned up only one short-session TS intervention: Marsh's 2019 Lesley University capstone thesis (Marsh, 2019). Marsh engaged a group of clients in three thirty-minute songwriting sessions. Her findings showed positive results in self-expression, social interaction, and skill-building. These findings supported the efficacy of STS through an ROMT lens. However, Marsh's method consisted of completing a song in each of the three sessions. Hence, her paper did not address the concept of task-divided TS.

Task-Divided Therapeutic Songwriting

I propose that songwriting be broken into separate tasks (writing a verse, chorus, bridge, or melody) and that one task be completed per session. As to whether dividing sessions into short sessions would compromise the ability of a group to complete each of these tasks, I would point to Parkinson's Law (which, though there is truth behind it, is not a law at all), which states that work expands to fill the time available to complete it (Shantz, 2008). Given a specific period in

which to fulfill a task, I have found that my clients have fulfilled this challenge fairly

consistently.

Whether productivity (measured here by the number of songs created per unit of time) is

an accurate measure of therapeutic efficacy is a valid question. I would suggest that increased

productivity leads to an increased sense of efficacy and self-esteem and an increased number of

artifacts of the process, which are also of therapeutic benefit (Baker, 2015).

García-Valverde et al. (2020) conducted an exploratory study wherein caregivers of

people living with dementia participated in a twelve-session music therapy program. The

researchers conducted the study at the National Reference Centre for Alzheimer's Disease and

Dementia Care of Salamanca. Four of the twelve therapeutic sessions were devoted to creating

one song. The researchers applied appropriate inventories to measure state-trait anxiety,

depression, self-esteem, and quality of life, both before and after the intervention. Results

indicated decreased anxiety and depression and an increase in self-esteem and certain subscales

of the quality-of-life measurement instruments.

The results of this songwriting intervention, modeled after Baker's (2015) experience-

oriented approach to songwriting (García-Valverde et al., 2020), supported the idea that a task-

divided (TD) songwriting process can be therapeutically efficacious. The only limitation of this

study in supporting my method lay in the ninety-minute length of the songwriting sessions. As

such, this study did not speak to the efficacy of short-session TS.

Myers-Coffman et al. (2019) conducted a mixed methods study on TS and bereavement,

positing that Sandler et al.'s Contextual Resilience Model (2008), which asserted that self-

expression, coping and self-esteem were all protective factors in processing grief, indicated that

TS would be a fitting intervention for grief (Myers-Coffman et al., 2019). With this in mind,

Myers-Coffman et al. developed the resilience songwriting program (RSP). The program, completed by ten participants, was informed by cognitive behavioral therapy (Baker, 2015) and ROMT (Rolvsjord, 2009), and it was eight sessions long, each lasting 1.5 hours. The participants were to write two songs in those eight sessions, with the last session being the song listening party or performance.

Myers-Coffman et al. collected and analyzed data from the participants using appropriate scales for the quantitative data and interviews and journaling for the qualitative data. On the quantitative end, there was no statistically significant improvement in grief, coping, self-esteem, or meaning-making, apart from individual score trends, where the RSP seemingly improved grief. Further, the data showed an increase in inhibition of emotional expression. On the qualitative side, however, there seemed to be "a sense of togetherness, a way to safely express grief-related emotions and experiences verbally and nonverbally, and opportunities for strengthening music and coping skills (Myers-Coffman et al., 2019). The positive results of the qualitative analysis of Myers-Coffman et al.'s study spoke to the efficacy of the task-divided approach to TS, though the long sessions (90 minutes) did not serve to confirm the effectiveness of short-session TS interventions.

Towards Inclusion

I find writing a song from scratch, both music and lyrics, the most challenging type of songwriting. It requires acumen, generally in terms of instrumental and compositional ability. Further, conforming a lyric to a melody may force the writer to choose between what they want to say and what will sound good with the melody. This compromise is unnecessary with rap music, which generally does not include a melody, leaving the lyric writer free to compose their words to a set rhythm. Hence, rap music is a natural fit for therapeutic songwriting interventions.

Richards et al. (2020) did a qualitative study in a prison in Missouri using "rap therapy" (RT), wherein the researchers engaged ten incarcerated individuals in five 90-minute humanistic therapy-informed RT sessions. During these sessions, the researchers focused on themes such as cohesion, trust, risk-taking, vulnerability, forgiveness, and letting go of negative experiences. After each session, the primary researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the subjects. The researchers then coded the findings, and several themes emerged: "(a) affirmation and reflection of identity; (b) connection to others and building relationships; and (c) escape from the present" (Richards et al., 2019, p.483). All participants reported that the RT sessions were positive experiences.

These findings are important because the backing music for rap can be created with a computer and software using extant recorded loops or simply played through a speaker. Thus, the therapist is not required to have instrumental skills or prior training. Further, as rap tends to be spoken and not sung, participants don't need to be able to sing. This affords more people the opportunity to use this therapeutic intervention. Further, due to current music trends, the utilization of rap music will enable therapists who are typically white, older, and middle class to "reach" a more diverse clientele in terms of age, culture, and socioeconomic status (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022; Lin et al., 2018). One limitation of this study is that TS was only one of several interventions undertaken in this therapeutic process.

Gaps in the Literature

The above literature points to TS's success with fomenting self-expression, self-esteem, efficacy, and camaraderie; the literature also demonstrates that TS is effective at addressing issues of depression, grief, and anxiety. However, although music therapy sessions tend to be between 20 and 60 minutes long (Schmid & Ostermann, 2010), I have found only one

songwriting intervention designed to be practiced in sessions of length at the lower end of that scale. This intervention was Marsh's (2019) method. However, Marsh's method did not include task-divided songwriting sessions. Further, in Marsh's method, Marsh wrote the music for the participants. I found no peer-reviewed articles on short-session songwriting or a comparison of task-divided versus full-song songwriting sessions. As there are often time constraints on MT sessions, and as it is challenging to complete the writing of a song in one short session, I needed to fill these gaps. I thus developed a short-session, task-divided therapeutic songwriting method. I believe the method I developed has much promise and points the way for future research.

Method

My internship at AP provided me the opportunity to co-lead creative arts therapy sessions at a day school (DS) in Massachusetts. As I have extensive experience as a songwriter and recording artist and have used songwriting as an intervention in several therapeutic environments, I chose to explore the development of a TS method.

Due to the above-detailed gaps in the literature, I resolved to develop a short-session TS method wherein the process was task-divided to enable the composition of more complete and complex songs and where participants had a hand in the creation of the musical component of the song, as I felt that having a hand in the music composition would provide participants with an increased sense of agency as well as another avenue of self-expression (Baker, 2015).

That I only found one instance of short-session songwriting is significant. It may be that music therapists working in shorter sessions do not attempt to utilize songwriting as an intervention because they feel they don't have enough time to complete the task. It would benefit these therapists to have a songwriting method in which they could engage in short sessions and

still complete the composition (and recording, if warranted) of a song. I have developed such a method. It is detailed below.

The DS where I developed this method took a trauma-informed approach, serving youth with challenges such as generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), emotional disability (ED), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and major depressive disorder (MDD). The school's attendees were between the ages of 13 and 21. The participants in the development of this method were between 14 and 18 years old.

The sessions I co-led with two AP staff members occurred on Thursday mornings from 10:30 to 11:30 AM. Class attendance at this school was not mandatory, so the attendance list was somewhat different each week. Six participants were reasonably consistent in their attendance. The total number of participants in the songwriting sessions was twelve. No demographic data regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or other facets of identity were officially collected and are not reported here to avoid assumptions. Sessions at DS were structured so that the first 15 minutes were for MT and the remaining 45 minutes were for visual arts. In the sessions which took place at AP, the music portion took place in the final fifteen minutes.

Locations

Sessions one through six took place in the art room of the DS, roughly 15'x15', with windows looking out upon a wooded area. The room contained a potter's wheel, a spinning wheel, several easels covered with works of art, and a table roughly 4'x8'. Sessions nine through twelve took place at the AP facility. They occurred in the music room, a small (8x8) room with an iMac, a shelving unit filled with recording equipment and hand percussion, an electronic keyboard on a stand, and several chairs. When it was time for the songwriting sessions, more chairs were brought in to accommodate the participants.

Preparation

For sessions one through eight, before the participants' arrival, I taped a piece of paper 5' x 3' to the table and placed a thin-point Sharpie on the paper. For session nine, I prepared several possible verses and bridges for the song we were writing and had them each on their own track in a Logic document. For session ten, I recorded the song written in prior sessions in two different keys. For session eleven, I recorded the bass and guitar parts for the song using the selected key. For session twelve, I mixed the vocals recorded in session eleven into the mix and produced the final track.

Procedure

When the students arrived for the first session, they were seated around the table. I informed them of the word they would use as the basis of their first brainstorm. The word I presented was "autumn." I chose autumn because I felt it was emotionally neutral, and I wished to avoid triggering any adverse reactions from students living with pathologies such as trauma, depression, or anxiety.

With "autumn" presented as the song topic, I played several guitar grooves. The first had a slower, folky feel, influenced by Phoebe Bridgers' song "Scott Street" (Bridgers, 2017). The second groove was mid-tempo, inspired by Stevie Wonder's "Superstition" (1972), and the final musical suggestion had a grunge/metal style inspired by Joe Jackson's "Got the Time" (1979). I selected the three styles to give the group a broad palette from which to choose. I asked the group which style felt right for the inspiration word I suggested, "autumn." They selected the Phoebe Bridgers groove.

In the second session, we brainstormed on autumn. During the brainstorming session, I strummed the guitar groove the group had selected. A co-leader of the session wrote down the

words and phrases that the participants offered during the brainstorming session. I then told the group we would choose a title for the song from one of the brainstormed words or phrases. I suggested they choose a title with imagery or that spurred their imagination. I read the brainstorming results aloud one by one, and the participants slapped the table when they heard a word or phrase they felt would serve as a good title for the song. I circled each "slapped" entry and then repeated the voting process with the circled words in the next round. Another round narrowed the choice down to two and then one. They selected a title. We ended the session there.

In the third session, I taped another piece of blank paper to the table and reminded the students of their chosen title. We then had a brainstorming session as I played the selected music groove, wherein the participants relayed any words or ideas that the chosen title evoked. One of the AP staff members in attendance wrote these brainstormed ideas on the paper taped to the table. We ended the session there.

 I brought the brainstorming paper back to AP's central facility, where I, with multicolored Sharpies, parsed the words and phrases into categories of chorus, verse, and bridge. I grouped the themes into present (first verse), past (second verse), overarching theme (chorus), and lesson taken (bridge).

When I arrived for the fourth session, I taped the brainstorm back to the table and presented the themes to the group. The group constructed a chorus from the words and phrases I had decided were for the chorus. Between sessions, I wrote a melody for the chorus.

I began sessions five and six by playing the chorus. The students wrote two verses in sessions five and six based on the themes and ideas they had brainstormed in the second session. In session six, as the song the participants were writing had an ocean theme, one participant plugged in a noise machine with an ocean wave setting. I recorded the sound of the ocean waves

on a Blue USB microphone plugged into an Apple MacBook, using Logic as the recording software.

In session seven, we tried to write a bridge but were unsuccessful.

In session eight, we composed a bridge from the brainstorm theme list.

The last lyric writing session of the fall semester, session eight, occurred at the end of December. As per AP's normal process, this group of students attended AP's facility for the spring semester instead of having AP staff and interns visit the DS. Therefore, sessions nine and beyond took place in the AP music room.

Before session nine, I created a Logic document with seven options for the verse chords and melody. I recorded three different options for the bridge chords and melody.

In session nine, I presented the attending youth with the different verse and bridge options, and they chose their favorite verse and bridge.

Before session ten, I created two instrumental demo versions of the song, one in the key of Bb and the other in the key of C.

In session ten, two participants who expressed interest in recording the song sang along to the demos in both keys to determine which key best fit their voices. We decided that the key of Bb would be best.

Between sessions ten and eleven, a music therapist from DS and I recorded the bass and guitar parts for the song.

In session eleven, the two singers in the group added their vocals to the recording. I mixed the recording after the session and played the final recording to the participants in session twelve. I then provided the staff at DS with a copy of the recording to disseminate.

Data Collection

After each session, I wrote recollections of the experience in my journal, noting verbal responses to the process by participants, school staff, and my co-facilitators, as well as nonverbal reactions by all, including myself.

I then analyzed my journal entries for recurring themes using inductive analysis. I collected every word or phrase that indicated a participant's perceived reaction. I then grouped these reactions into themes and charted the findings. I shall detail my findings in the results section.

Results

Figure 1

Frequency of Themes of Participant Responses to TS Found in Journal Entries
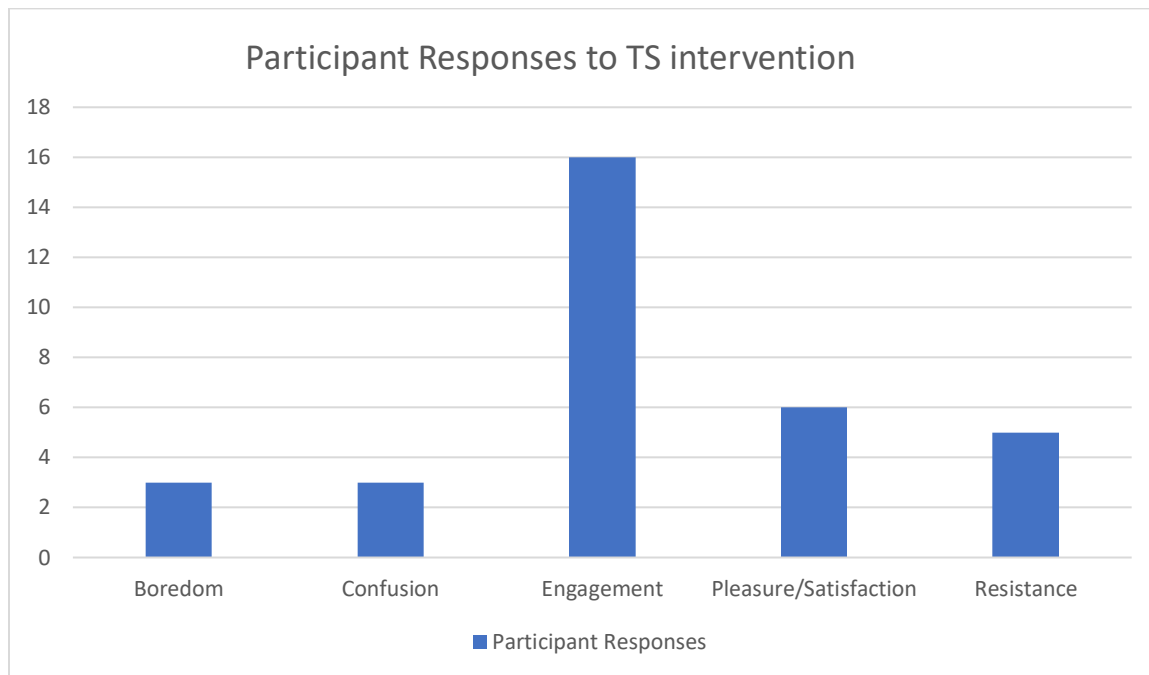
In this capstone thesis, I aimed to develop a short-session, task-divided TS intervention. I practiced the intervention on a group of students from a day school in Massachusetts. I tracked my perceptions of how the participants responded to the intervention and then did an inductive analysis to identify common themes in these perceptions. The most common themes were boredom, confusion, engagement, pleasure/satisfaction, and resistance. By far, the most prevalent theme was engagement. I have charted the results of the inductive analysis in Figure 1.

Sessions

Group 1

Session 1.

Eight students attended the first session. They sat around the table, and I explained what we would do that day. I saw one or two kids' eyes glaze over as I described the songwriting process we would be going through; in their facial expressions, I sensed confusion among some of them about what this process would look like. When I presented the theme word to them and began to play different grooves and feels on my guitar, I saw a look of puzzlement on some faces. Several students slumped back in their seats around the table, which I interpreted as resistance. I was concerned at this point that they would not buy into this process and that my method would be a failure before it had begun. However, three of the eight youths contributed initially, indicating a preference for the groove inspired by Phoebe Bridgers. At this point, the other youths concurred. From their body language, leaning forward, and making eye contact with me during the discussion, I sensed that they were engaged in the work. The only exception was a student I shall refer to as Trent (not his real name). Trent slumped back in his chair and seemed disengaged throughout the session.

Session 2.

Nine students attended the second session. Trent got up and left when he found out we were working on songwriting. I interpreted that as resistance to the process. We then had the participants brainstorm on the theme word as I strummed the chosen groove, and my co-leader wrote down the youths' brainstorm ideas. At first, I felt that the students were undecided about this process. The brainstorming was sparse, with lots of silence between contributions. The

students sat back in their chairs; some checked their phones. From these actions, I sensed the resistance in the room and wondered if the task was too difficult or unengaging for them. It took ten minutes for the brainstorming to produce sufficient results for us to move on to the next step: choosing a title. It was then that I felt the students begin to become engaged. As I read the brainstorming results aloud one by one and the participants slapped the table to indicate their approval, I sensed an enthusiasm in them that I had not sensed up to this point in either session. I felt relief and increased confidence and sensed emotional investment in this process in the room. I perceived a collective sense of accomplishment when the group chose a colorful and evocative title.

Session 3.

Seven attended the third session. These were among the most active participants from the last session. They brainstormed on the title they'd chosen in the previous session. This time, they were more responsive, possibly because the more reticent students, such as Trent, were not in the room, and their energy was not a factor in the group dynamic. I sensed an immediate emotional investment in what the participants were doing. They were beginning to suggest more phrases than single words, and some rhymed. There was a sense of poetry to their suggestions that had not been present in their first brainstorm. Their posture also changed. Some were sitting up and forward at the table, eyes eagerly reading the brainstorming entries as I wrote them down. I experienced a sense of pride and pleasure during this process.

Session 4.

Nine students attended the fourth session. There was a palpable sense of emotional investment as we constructed the chorus based on the results of the brainstorming session from the week prior. Once the chorus lyrics were complete, I strummed chords and sang a melody

with the lyrics. These chords became the chorus music. There was silence for a moment until one of the participants said, "That's good." The words rang in the room. I felt a sense of relief that the first part of the song was complete and hoped that the rest of the songwriting process would be equally successful.

Session 5.

Six participants came. I was disappointed and concerned that we had such a small turnout. This time, we struggled to put together a verse. During this session, I experienced fear and insecurity, wondering if the successful chorus creation had been a fluke. Again, some students were checking their phones, slouching back in their seats, which I interpreted as boredom. After fifteen minutes, however, we completed the first verse. The energy in the room shifted as I read the verse back to them and then read them the chorus. The students began to seem more interested than they had been at the beginning of the session. One participant asked if we could continue songwriting for the rest of the session. I told him that art was on the schedule and that my co-leaders were there for that purpose. However, I felt pride and relief that I had reached the group, and I interpreted their request as evidence of their engagement in the TS process.

Session 6.

Nine participants came. We quickly constructed the second verse and recorded ocean sounds from a noise machine. I perceived a sense of pride and satisfaction around the room.

Session 7.

Eight participants came, including one who had not attended three prior sessions. I read aloud the lyrics to the two verses and the chorus we had written, and the new person indicated that the verses and the chorus may not go together. I asked the others in the room if they felt the

same way. They disagreed, saying the song worked well as a whole. I sensed some discomfort in the room due to this discord. I took this as an opportunity to discuss the importance of compromise in the collaborative process. We set out to write a bridge for the song but could not come up with anything. I sensed a lack of engagement in the room. I felt that the conversation had brought negative energy into the room and a decreased sense of safety. I felt deflated and insecure.

Session 8.

Six participants attended. I was disappointed and insecure that more students did not show up. However, this small group had an increased sense of intimacy from our previous groups, and we worked well together, constructing a bridge. The students made much eye contact with me, and no one was using their phones. I took these as evidence of engagement. We now had the complete lyrics. I read the full lyrics aloud, and one participant, who had not been at any of the sessions prior, said she felt the song would work well just being read as a poem. I felt pride in that, as did, I perceived, the others in the room.

Session 9.

This session occurred at the AP headquarters in March, almost three months after session eight. During the art portion, I announced that there would be a non-mandatory songwriting session in the music room for those interested and that this session would take place in the last fifteen minutes of their time at AP. Seven people attended. I was relieved and grateful that there was still interest in the songwriting sessions. Constance had not participated in a songwriting session since early in the program. I played verse and bridge music options one by one for them. The group was almost unanimous in selecting both the verse and the bridge music. They seemed very emotionally invested and engaged in the process. For example, when I played the recording

of a verse, they asked to hear it again with the chorus immediately after to get a sense of how the song worked together. One participant, Constance (not her real name) then suggested that the bridge could use some harmonies. When a staff member from her school pointed out that she was in a choir in her community, she shyly admitted this and said she was happy to record the vocals when we recorded the song. I was delighted that she volunteered for this and that we would have some participation in the final recording of the song. I left this session feeling very satisfied, as we had completed the song's music and words and now had only to record it.

Sessions 10-12 took place in the music room at AP headquarters.

Session 10.

Several of the eight participants in attendance checked their phones, and there was some background talking. I interpreted this behavior as boredom. However, the session was fruitful, with the two singing volunteers finding the right key to record the song.

Session 11.

Nine participants joined session 11. Several people in the session expressed interest in the recording process. Constance recorded a lead vocal for the song. Another participant ("Ling") recorded two harmony vocal parts. The students seemed engaged, not talking during the session, even though they were only watching Constance and Ling record. Some were on their phones, however, which I interpreted as boredom.

Session 12.

Nine students gathered in the music room, where I played the mixed recording of their song. I could see the pleasure and surprise on their faces as they listened to the song, and they looked at each other with joy on their faces. Two participants high-fived each other.

Discussion

Influenced by the work of, among others, Katherine Marsh (2019), Melody Baker (2015), and Randi Rolvsjord (2009), I developed a method of short-session, task-divided, therapeutic songwriting. I employed this method with a group of youth associated with an arts-based organization over the course of multiple sessions and recorded my observations of these songwriting sessions.

An inductive analysis of my recorded observations of the sessions indicated that, according to my interpretations of the participants' responses to the intervention, the most common reactions were engagement and pleasure/satisfaction. The preponderance of perceived instances of engagement and pleasure/satisfaction in the process of implementing this TS intervention with attendees of AP suggests to me that the method is a useful one in the context of a person-centered, resource-oriented approach (Aitchison & Withington, 2023; Cooper & Di Malta, 2024; Gold et al., 2005; Rogers, 1951), which seeks to address the whole individual, uncovering and emphasizing their strengths instead of focusing on their pathologies (Rolvsjord, 2009). Further, if my perceptions of participant responses are correct, they affirm Baker and Ballantyne's (2013) findings that TS increases a sense of engagement, which, according to Seligman (2008), is one of the hallmarks of good mental health.

Another possible indication of the success of this intervention was the reaction of members of the AP staff upon reading the lyrics to the song written by DS participants. For example, one said, "This is amazing." Another said, "I can't wait to hear the music."

The reader may question whether the quality of the finished song is relevant and suggest that the process is more important than the product in arts-based interventions. Baker does not

concur, writing that both process and product are therapeutically valuable (Baker, 2015). Baker notes that while the process of writing a song is useful for delving into the client's psyche safely and helping them process troubling emotions and thoughts without being overwhelmed by them, having a completed song serves several purposes. One such purpose is that the writers have an artifact of their efficacy. This artifact can serve them at each listening and communicate their internal worlds to others who may otherwise not have insight into the writer's challenges (Baker, 2015; Viega, 2018).

In addition, it should be noted that with the short-session, task-divided TS method I have detailed above, the completion of each song section (verse, chorus, etc.) can engender feelings of mastery and accomplishment, whereas, for a long session, full song TS intervention, the completion of each section becomes only part of the larger songwriting challenge. This increased sense of mastery and accomplishment may indicate a therapeutic advantage of my method. On the other hand, my method requires that participants have the patience to wait many sessions (which in a weekly format could translate to several months) to get the full payoff of the completed song.

The perceived success of the intervention developed for this thesis would seem to affirm Garcia-Valverde et al.'s (2022) findings that TS increased participants' self-esteem and QOL. In addition to the above positive impacts of TS, the above study found a lessening of depression and anxiety (García-Valverde et al., 2022). These results, along with other studies such as that of Dalton and Krout (2006), indicate that TS can be applied in both pathology and ROMT-oriented contexts.

Questions and Limitations

Though one could interpret the inductive analysis of my post-intervention observations as affirming the efficacy of this TS when viewed through an ROMT lens, this was not an experiment. My method was the only one applied; I did not collect data, and there was no control group. Therefore, one can arrive at no definitive conclusion as to the method's efficacy compared to other TS interventions, other MT interventions, or any other interaction. The shifting number of participants in successive sessions for the group could be used as evidence in the determination of the efficacy of the intervention in terms of engagement. After all, inconsistent attendance may imply a lack of engagement, which would counter the conclusions I've come to based on the inductive analysis of post-session journaling. However, the TS sessions occurred in combination with visual arts interventions. In the absence of interviews with participants, it is impossible to determine whether attendance varied from week to week due to a lack of interest in or resistance to the sessions, and if so, which part? Further, the inconsistent attendance creates another barrier to drawing conclusions from my inductive analysis.

Also, as a white, cisgender, able American male, my songwriting style has been strongly influenced by European musical forms. My songwriting style may not appeal to those of other cultures, which may limit my ability to use TS in the absence of multicultural musical training.
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Finally, due to the time constraints of the AP format, I could not lead sessions to compose the music from scratch. Instead, I presented participants with musical choices for the verses and bridge.

Areas for Future Research

Due to restrictions associated with the capstone thesis guidelines, I could not conduct pre-post-intervention measurements to determine the method's efficacy. Nor could I compare the effectiveness of STS and standard-length TS interventions. Further, I could not compare the therapeutic efficacy of task-divided and full-song songwriting sessions. Given the opportunity, I would conduct research to remedy these gaps.

Conclusion

This thesis details the development of a short-session, task-divided therapeutic songwriting method. I applied this method to a group of youth associated with an arts immersion program in Massachusetts. Using inductive analysis of my post-session meeting journals, I determined that my developed method may be an effective TS intervention. I intend to utilize it in future therapeutic sessions.

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*Short Session, Task-Divided Therapeutic Songwriting:*_____

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor:___*Basel Zayed*_____ _____