



Linking lives through collective narrative song creation

by Sara Portnoy, Mieke Van Daele and James McParland



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James McParland is a consultant clinical psychologist at University College London Hospital, working with people living with health conditions. His family roots are Irish, which brings with it a rich appreciation of stories, music and community. He is interested in ways anti-oppressive practices and social justice can be foregrounded in professional health care contexts. James's solidarity team includes: the narrative practitioners who have inspired him, including colleagues past and present, and his family of origin, chosen family and wider LGBTQIA+ community. He has appreciated exploring new musical territories through this practice and has drawn inspiration from his co-authors and the people who have taken part in the events described in this paper.

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Abstract

This article describes a creative narrative practice using music and song. It draws on collective narrative practice, rescued speech, and poetic and collective documentation, and fuses these with musical performance to create a new practice: collective narrative song creation. We share practical descriptions and stories of the enlivening process of developing a song and the transformative nature of linking lives through performing together. Creating lyrics affords opportunities for people to document hardships and honour resistance; performing the song using instruments and voices as a group can be joyful, connecting and powerfully sustaining. Songs connect with memory, allowing richer storylines to be recalled quickly and to reverberate past the initial performance. This paper outlines the steps involved and invites readers to consider incorporating the ideas into their practice, encouraging them to cross borders into unfamiliar territories and seize the opportunity to revisit and expand their musical biographies.

Key words: *music, song, songwriting, rescued speech, poetic documents, therapeutic documents, collective narrative practice, narrative therapy*

Musical biographies

From birth, we are surrounded by sounds, voices and music. These build up a unique *soundscape* (Schafer, 1969, 1994). Our starting point for working with groups of people is that everybody has a musical biography. We will introduce ourselves through ours.

Sara

My childhood bedroom was above the family piano, so I would often wake up to the sounds of my father playing Chopin nocturnes. My father played the piano by ear, so as I started listening to Brian Ferry, The Beatles, he started to play their music. Later, as each of my children were born, a different album became associated with each of them: Eric Clapton's *Unplugged*, George Michael's *Older* and Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge over troubled water*. As those children have grown up, they have introduced me to so many more artists. My dominant story was "I'm not musical and I can't sing. Only those with abilities like my dad's can claim to be musical". However, I have loved the opportunity to co-create collective narrative songs with a number of different communities. I find myself improvising percussion instruments and singing along with participants. An alternative story of reclaiming my musical abilities is emerging.

Mieke

I was active in music early on: playing the piano, learning to play the violin and singing in the choir that my father conducted. Classical music, church songs and Gregorian stood out. Mozart, Bach, Ravel, Schubert got company from Belgian rock groups and folk musicians, but soon many others enriched my musical world. Singing in a modern classic choir introduced me to

Hindemith, Messiaen, Debussy, Goethals and others. Travelling around the world brought many more musical influences. Recently, through electric guitar lessons, I have been discovering the worlds of the blues, bossa nova and jazz. Music is fusing with my professional identity as I have completed my training as a music therapist, witnessing the powerful effects it has for people creatively retelling the stories of their lives.

James

Through my heritage, I was surrounded by Irish music, and I played tin whistle in a traditional music group. Despite my lack of skill and dedication, I experienced the sense of being part of a wider project and enjoyed contributing to the collective. My mother is a wonderful singer and was lead of an Irish country and western band, so I've always appreciated country and folk music, alongside artists like Shania Twain, Stevie Nicks and The Corrs. When the Eurovision Song Contest was held in Birmingham, my hometown, this was a significant moment of acceptance for LGBTQIA+ people as it was won by a transwoman, Dana International. Music connected me to other aspects of my LGBTQIA+ identity and friendships, finding belonging and refuge through artists like Tegan and Sara, Bloc Party and Madonna. I have experienced the power of collective narrative song creation and performance in sparking effects of joyfulness, movement, rhythm and noises (not only traditional singing), which are transformative.

We invite you to bring to mind your own musical biography and to trace the roots of its stories. These biographies aren't "fixed" identities; they change over time, place and context, crossing geographical, cultural and musical borders, linking our lives and identities to others.

Our history of collective narrative song creation

The initial idea of creating a collective song with a group came to us (James and Sara) when we were working with young people with a diagnosis of cancer. We were regularly running a one-day workshop called the Beads of Life (see Portnoy et al., 2016), which we co-delivered with previous participants who had become peer-trainers. We noticed that during breaks in a Beads of Life workshop, some young people played with the various musical instruments that were available in the room and others joined in singing. When designing a workshop to thank the peer-trainers for all the help they offered us, and to create community among them, we decided to use the medium of music as it seemed to hold particular resonance. In line with principles of collective documentation (Denborough, 2018a), we wanted to write lyrics that would be multi-storied and tell of our peer-trainers' experiences of hardships as well as their skills and knowledges in responding to these hardships. We were hoping that the experience of co-creating a song would address the isolation created by a diagnosis of cancer and the necessary treatments, linking the lives of our peer-trainers and telling the stories of those who contributed to the song. We also hoped that when others heard the song, the themes would resonate. We encourage you to listen to the song: <https://jtvccancersupport.com/2016/12/bead-it-out/> (Carrington, 2016).

Our collective narrative song-creating journey continued when James and Sara ran a songwriting workshop at the 2019 European Narrative Therapy Conference in Antwerp. The theme of that conference was "crossing borders, linking lives". We needed someone confident in their musical ability (firmly not part of Sara's and James's musical biographies) to help us cross borders of language, musical confidence and geographical distance. We were extremely fortunate that Mieke was brave enough to accept our invitation (see Portnoy et al., 2019). Since then, we have co-created songs with young people with a diagnosis of cancer, with staff at team away days, and to

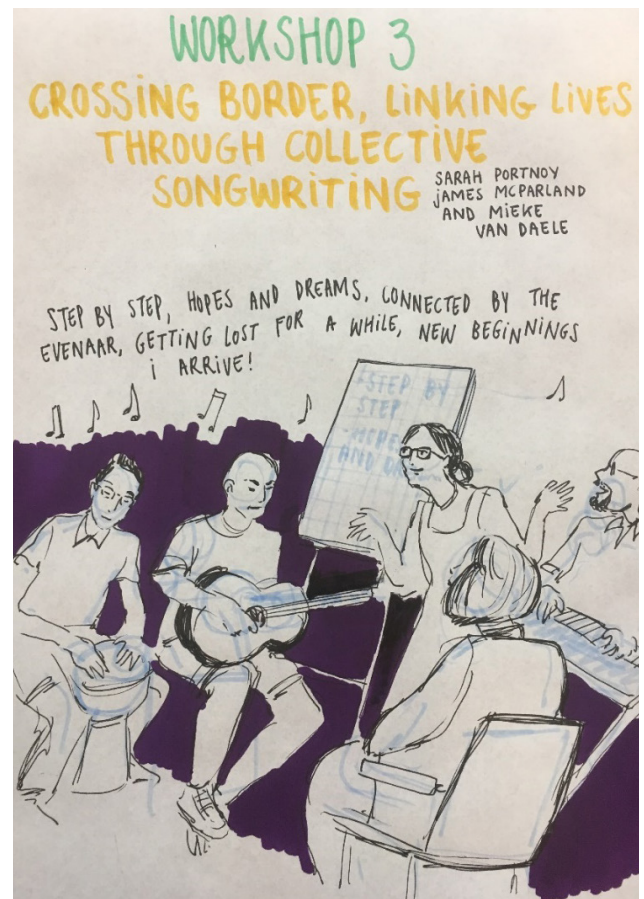


Figure 1. The authors' workshop at the 2019 European Narrative Therapy Conference by Mila Van Goethem

close the 2024 Institute of Narrative Therapy conference (see Fredman et al., 2024). Most recently, we ran a collective songwriting workshop at the 2026 NDC2 European narrative therapy congress. The three of us have experienced a lot of joy and have learnt so much from each of our collaborations.

In this paper, we want to share these learnings. The green boxes share a practical example of us working with a group of young people with a diagnosis of cancer as a way of connecting the theory to practice. We feel this also introduces the reader to the way we have written the paper.

Why songwriting?

Speaking and moving in rhythmic and melodic ways forms a basis for all human communication, including the sharing of emotional experiences, which is termed "communicative musicality" by Malloch and Trevarthen (2009); this positions music as an "interactive and performative phenomenon" (Bonde, 2019) that creates shared

understandings, community and a deep feeling of *togetherness*.

People's musical biographies have strong links to memory. This allows for entry points into people's landscapes of identity and for exploring meaning-making through song. People often connect over music, with shared fandoms and appreciations of types of music leading to connecting conversations. As in Maund's (2021) "Soundtrack of Your Life" practice, through recalling significant songs, people can trace important connections, making visible "shimmering moments".

Even those who have a shy story about their musical abilities can contribute to creating a song as it requires many different skills: holding a rhythm, creating lyrics, playing melodic instruments, singing, recording and so on.

Narrative practices have been combined with music in different ways. David Denborough (2008) connected with aspects of folk culture through the creation of a community songwriting practice with people who had experienced trauma. He has described how the interplay of melody and lyric can counter challenging experiences (2008, p. 172). When a person's own words become lyrics through narrative songwriting and are matched to a melody, the effects can be transformational. These songs can convey sentiments of hardship alongside second stories of hopes, dreams and knowledges (Denborough, 2008). Creating musical expressions can contribute towards resisting hardships and lead to experiences of liberation (Afuape, 2011).

The "Rhythm of Life" narrative metaphor (Müller, 2013) suggests that we each embody different musical instruments, playing our own music, but in linking together, we have the potential to create a rich and harmonious orchestra. Hegarty (2009) used narrative song writing with group members at an addiction centre. She interviewed them about the possibility of a less drug-filled life, rescuing their words (Newman, 2008). Between sessions, Hegarty created a song using the group members' words, which she performed at the following session. Wever (2009), has created songs that celebrate survival and resistance in

prison contexts, linking lives as the lyrics, music and emotion resonate across different worlds. Wever similarly created lyrics through rescuing participants' words, then wrote, sang and recorded the song herself before sharing it with the participants.

Our collective narrative song creation riffs off these earlier practices. It draws on aspects of collective narrative practice, rescued speech, poetic and collective documentation (Denborough, 2018a; Speedy, 2007), and ideas from music therapy. Whereas previous collective narrative songwriting projects have involved participants in part of the song creation (Denborough, 2018b), we aim to stretch the collaboration across the entire endeavour. The participants devise the lyrics, create a rhythm and melody, and then participate in a recorded performance.

Gathering around a theme

The choice of theme depends on the community we are collaborating with. Sometimes a theme has been provided, for example by conference hosts; sometimes the theme is created collaboratively at the beginning of a workshop. With the young people in the example we will share, we discussed themes that connected with their shared experiences: Beads of Life, change and transformation. There is discussion of thoughts, words and phrases connected to the theme.

Creating a musical playground

The Hungarian American researcher and psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1985) has written about *action* as a central feature in play and how it can lead to experiences that induce "flow": a state in which one is absorbed in something that brings a strong feeling of being in the "here and now". "The flow experience is both very motivating and boundary-breaking" (Stensaeth, 2019, p. 114). In narrative song creation with groups, we have experienced flow while playing music and creating songs together. If we want flow to happen, we need to take into account work on two levels: a more external one in which we create an environment with action possibilities

and challenges, and a more internal one wherein abilities to act can emerge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1985); collective song creation challenges limiting self-stories through action.

When preparing the context for collective narrative song creation, we want people to enter a *vibrating*, colourful playground where there are different kinds of instruments. We create an environment in which everyone is welcomed and encouraged to take part in any of the musical offerings. We try to create a safe space in which people feel able to go beyond self-limiting or constraining stories and dare to *play*.

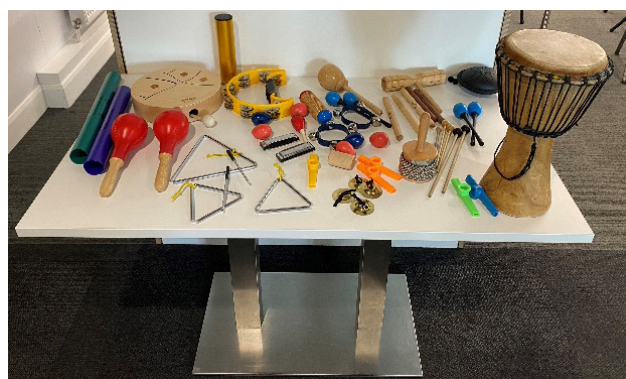


Figure 2. Various percussion and melodic instruments

We invite each young person to choose from a selection of instruments: percussion instruments like shakers, tambourines, maracas, woodblocks, djembes, and self-made instruments including jars filled with rice and boxes filled with beads; melodic instruments such as recorders, ukuleles, mouth organs, guitars and keyboards. We invite participants to play their instruments and experiment.

Simple percussion instruments are useful for participants who are less comfortable in their musicality: they cannot be played “out of tune”, so perfectionism and having to do it “right” can move into the background. They can help participants take their first steps out of their comfort zone.

We have noticed that questions about ability rise to the surface: Do I need musical ability to take part? Am I qualified enough? Will my musicality be judged (by others, by myself, by old voices)? People may be carrying musical biographies that have been influenced by narrow descriptions of their abilities through experiences where they felt uncomfortably compared to traditionally valued vocal and instrumental aptitudes. So, creating a comfortable musical playground is important.

We work hard as co-facilitators to model making all sorts of noises with the instruments, and we use lots of encouraging words:

Pick up the instrument you’re curious about.

There’s no right way to play,
just make sounds.

You could even use your bodies to clap,
stamp feet, click fingers or use your voice.

No musical ability required!

Through encouraging people to “have a go”, we are hoping to initiate a *flow* experience. We make it clear in the invitations to these workshops that no musical skill or knowledge is required – but people are welcome to bring instruments.

Building common ground: Rhythm as entry point

Life is full of rhythm. Research in music therapy shows that rhythm is an effective gateway to the creation of safety, stability and relaxation. It has both anxiety-relieving and activating effects (Bruscia, 1987; Frohne-Hagemann, 2007, p. 83). Playing rhythmically together in group contexts, such as drumming circles, supports “feelings of connectedness, community and the opportunity

to release emotions in a healing manner” (Deraney et al., 2017, p. 528). By playing simple yet powerful rhythms together, people have immediate experiences of collaborative sound-making. Often, fun and humour emerge. This is a “critical element in terms of engagement and safety” (Faulkner, 2017, p. 634). When fun and flow show up, a steady and safe space is established for the later more intensive work of song creation.

After the participants have chosen an instrument, we invite them to make a sound with it that resonates with the theme they have chosen: “just bead it”.

When we sense that they have found a pace, we ask them to walk around and listen to other rhythms that are being played. When they hear a rhythm being played by someone else that they are curious about or connect with, they are encouraged to move towards it, add in their instrument, play together and find “common ground”. Through this action we are embarking on a process of “linking lives”, as people join each other in a rhythm.

This continues for a few minutes, then the rhythm being played by the group is recorded using a mobile phone. It is then replayed to the group. In listening back, an emerging beat can be heard, and everyone is then encouraged to play a collective rhythm over it. This new rhythm is recorded and used to underpin the song.

Composing

Once we have the rhythm, we then map out the rest of the song-making process. In line with Denborough’s (2002) suggestions, this includes the creation of a simple melody line to form a memorable chorus, which we hope people will go away singing in their heads so the effects of our collective narrative song creation will ripple

into their lives. The other part of the process is creating lyrics based on the participants’ words and metaphors.

If the group is large (more than 12) we often invite participants to choose to work on either the lyrics for the verses or the melody for the chorus and a chord progression for the rest of the song. However, when we are working with young people, we stay together and they contribute to both the lyrics and the melody. If the group is large (e.g. staff away days, conference workshops) we all brainstorm words that connect with the theme to form the chorus, before dividing into separate teams. We explain that we will come back together to compose the song, perform it and record it.

We ask participants what words and phrases spring to mind when they think of “just bead it”. Participants are encouraged to use the language they prefer (words in languages other than English can enrich the song). The ideas generated are written up for everyone to see. These words become the lyrics of the song’s chorus.

Finding a melody

The melody team work together with a facilitator. As the chorus will be sung, it is important to find a melody that is at an easy pitch and fits with the rhythm recorded earlier. A strong melody helps with recall compared to words alone (Denborough, 2002).

As a facilitator of the melody team, one needs to be able to hear rhythm and pace in what people are creating and closely listen to the melodies suggested in order to set a chord progression to ground the melody. This requires comfort with playing a melodic instrument, such as a keyboard or guitar, so that it is possible to play and talk at the same time. Two or three chords can serve well as a base for a song. Using one’s singing voice helps when fusing together the separate musical

ideas that come from the group. When there are participants present who can play instruments, we encourage them to play. During this phase, generative chaos can be present because the process is led by the participants while the facilitator is decentred, which enables the groups' ideas to flourish. At a certain point, the facilitator needs to become influential (White, 2005) and guide the participants to use their metaphorical pruning shears! Decisions need to be made because there are always infinite ways to go with a song. The tight timing often stops us dwelling on all the possibilities.

Maybe the most important skill for the facilitator is to really enjoy creating and composing together, in full consciousness that it is **not** about creating a technically perfect song but about the experience of connecting as a collective through music.

Group members are asked to sing a low note together that feels comfortable, followed by a high note that feels comfortable. The melody should be somewhere between those two notes. Some of the young people start creating a melody with their voices, a couple who are confident playing the guitar start picking out chords. We then ask: Is there anyone else who feels confident to play a melodic instrument? Is there anyone who is confident enough with their singing voice to lead the melody? Would anyone like to be responsible for holding the rhythm alongside the melody with their percussion instrument? It is helpful to have more than one volunteer for each part.

Creating a chorus

Once there is a melody and rhythm, it is time for the melody group to create and fit the words for the chorus on to that melody and rhythm.

Earlier, the whole group generated a list of words and phrases connected to the theme. We replay

the rhythm and melody while looking at this list of words and phrases.

The participants start to choose some words and phrases over others and continue to edit words in ways that fit with their chosen rhythm and melody. Then they settle on the chorus:

Feeling you're not alone

There's always someone there

Confidence is growing

Give beads to show we care

The rest of the group loves it and rehearses so that singers, musicians and percussionists have a good feel of the chorus before moving on to create the lyrics for the verses.

The chorus should be memorable (Denborough, 2002). This connects with the music therapy concept of "anchoring" (Bruscia, 1987, pp. 537 & 555). Music offers a particular type of anchoring as it connects strongly with memory: music and songs stay with us, we repeat them in our head, singing them for ourselves long after we hear them for the first time. Through music, one can recall a first dance with a friend, a holiday with family, a moment in community. Music is a medium through which strong connections can be created and special moments of togetherness remembered. With a good chorus, the song can remain in people's minds and bodies and be recalled.

Stories make lyrics

For the verses, participants are interviewed about the chosen theme. Drawing on concepts from collective documentation (Denborough, 2008), questions are asked to encourage the interviewee to tell stories about hardships, the effects of hardships, their responses and the skills they

have gained. The intention is that these stories will resonate with others who have experienced similar hardships so people's experiences become linked. There is a move from individual to collective experiences and a sense of commonality. It's useful for the facilitator to be comfortable with narrative interviewing, as well as working with witnesses who are positioned to listen in active ways to support the creation of the final chosen lyrics. As with the music, there can be infinite lyrical possibilities.

To generate words and phrases, facilitators ask the young people questions like:

- Please can you describe a personal experience of taking part in the Beads of Life workshop?
- In what ways has this been important to you?
- What special skills, knowledge or values did you gain from this?
- What is the history of this skill, knowledge or value? How did you learn it and who from?
- How is this skill, knowledge or value linked to collective traditions (familial/cultural/community)?
- Are there proverbs/sayings/stories/songs/images from your family/community/culture with which these are linked?
- How did you overcome any hardships?
- Can you describe any sparkling moments? (questions drawn from Denborough, 2024)

The rest of the group prepare to capture the participants' words, as a way of "rescuing the said from the saying of it" (Newman, 2008).

The participants are invited to tune into evocative language, drawing on Speedy's (2007) suggestions for poetic documents:

- to capture vibrant expressions, phrases, words, idioms, grammar and metaphors that stand out during the interview
- to listen out for the skills and knowledges that have sustained the person while enduring hardships
- to listen for language that conveys actions taken, pivotal turning points or captures the senses
- to listen for words that have a rhythm and "talk that sings" (Bird, 2004).

People have their own "poetic biographies". Earlier education can feed into limiting stories when the word "poetry" is used. Some people enjoy poetry, and others may have a more uncomfortable relationship with it. The facilitator explains that those who are capturing words have the important job of capturing the actual words, rather than interpreting, paraphrasing or creating their own images. They also explain that capturing words is an editing process as poetry can be a form of concentrated language.

As Speedy (2007) has suggested, when words are re-presented to interviewees in poetic form, it provides opportunities to exoticise that which the interviewee may have considered mundane. Speedy has also written about multiple listening. This involves listening for tone of voice, silence, pauses and space between words, words that seem hard to come by or conversely rush to the verbal surface, and talk that appears to move the individual emotionally.

Denborough (2002) has suggested that lyrics should reflect both the sorrow of hardships and the joy of alternative stories and sparkling moments. All group members contribute to

creating and editing the verses. We write the spoken-word lyrics for the verses on a big sheet of paper and allocate each group member some lines to read out during the performance and recording.

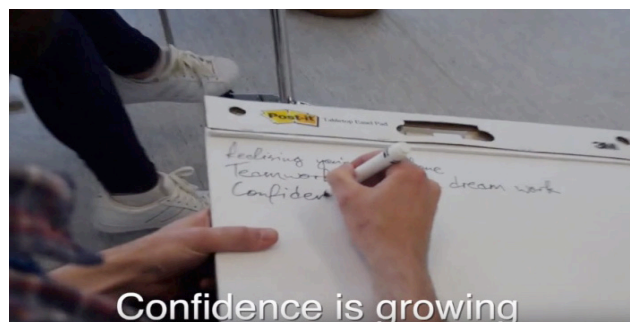


Figure 3. Writing lyrics for all participants to see (from Carrington, 2016)

Be seen and heard through performance and recording

The young people have created a rhythm, melody, chorus and verses. So, it's almost time to perform together.

The melody team teaches the chorus to everyone in the group. The lyrics team shares the verses and decides who is going to read which line of each verse. They then practice the verses as spoken word with the chord progression underneath.

There are other collective decisions to make: How should we structure the performance of the song? How are we going to start? How many times are we going to sing the chorus? Where do the verses fit in? Will there be some improvised instrumental parts? How will we end the song? Will we work with dynamics: start silently and raise volume, add sudden silences, end loud or quietly?

Then there is the first rehearsal to bring the whole collaboration together. Chaos and laughter surround this. However, after a few run-throughs, participants begin to

feel more confident, with some playing the rhythm, all singing the chorus, and each line of the verses being spoken. Then there is the final performance, which is recorded with permission of the participants on a mobile phone.

In this final stage, certain leads need to be taken. The music group might need conducting (for starting and stopping, cues for instrumentals or small solo parts). The lyrics group may need cues to start reading out the verses, hand the microphone over and so on. Everyone participates in this creative moment and is featured in the recording. Some are playing instruments, others are reciting the spoken lines and most are singing the chorus. It is always surprising how being present in the “here and now” allows the group not only to create a coherent song but also to discover the freedom to improvise and enjoy playing together.

The process of singing together and recording the song allows both an “inside” connection with thoughts, memories, feelings and experiences and an “outside” connection with other people. This deepens the potential “anchoring”, as participants can later on hear the music and immediately be back in that shared moment. It allows participants to replay and reconnect with their own thoughts, memories, feelings and experiences of creating the song. The whole song is a form of collective document. As people listen to each other, they realise they are not alone in experiencing some of these hardships. This decreases their experiences of isolation and grows a sense of being part of a collective. The recording of the song is important for “spreading the news” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 237) of the workshop and sharing the knowledges and wisdom contained in this collective document with a wider audience, some of whom may have experienced similar hardships. The recording can be very low tech, using a mobile phone. In fact, it can be more difficult when you try to finesse too much. Our

observation from one group was that trying to centre the recording decentred the togetherness of the collective experience. After the session, we send the audio file of the final recording to all of the participants, usually via email.

Limiting stories can resurface when people begin performing and singing together, such as memories of not being allowed to sing solos in a choir. We remind people that this moment is an opportunity to have fun and feel the pleasure of doing this together. It's not about producing a "perfect" song or performance – it's more about being part of the collective. Taiwo Afuape (2011) has reflected on the possibilities that emerge for identity when engaging in singing, which can help counteract a limiting positioning for individuals as subjects of hardship. She specifically described how this expression enables an experience of being an *active force* in the world, as creators with freedom. Through this part of the collective narrative song-creation process, we are inviting people to take up such positions and expand their identity stories.

Going beyond "I-identity", the group develops a "We-identity" (McAdam & Mirza, 2009). In our experience, performing together is often a particularly glittery sparkling moment of joyfulness, creativity, laughter, smiles, movement and connectedness; it can be transformative and make a disparate group of people feel part of a community.



Figure 4. Young people performing their song together (from Carrington, 2016)

Our learnings

Expertise, agency, comfort and discomfort

All three of us have a shared comfort zone in working with groups, be it with trainees or persons we meet in clinical practice. We hold some knowledge of how to begin workshops, work with group dynamics, be attentive to vulnerabilities and facilitate growing processes. In collective narrative song creation, our comfort lies on different terrains: James and Sara both have a dominant story that they are not musical but feel more comfort interviewing people and assisting people to be witnesses and reflectors. Mieke finds pleasure in playing and creating music and holds confidence in working with groups but is less comfortable with the interviewing part. We all had to open our windows of comfort, find each other and discover where this cooperation might lead us. It required us to share our own dominant stories to bridge narrative therapy with music therapy.

During the process of developing and running these workshops, we have needed to jump into the unknown and overcome fears. We needed to cross borders, link our different abilities and find pleasure in connection. We had to rely on each other and be confident about our abilities to create connection. We shared encouraging words that through working together we could make it work. These experiences were parallel processes to those of the participants who experience similar challenges, fears and inhibiting elements. People often arrive with dominant discourses such as "I can't sing in tune", "I'm incapable of keeping a rhythm" or "I have no creative talents". They are stepping out of their comfort zone, so we give them lots of encouragement.

Through the process of collective narrative song creation, we have noticed that participants often surprise themselves. Those less confident in their musicality may begin with a tentative shake of a maraca, or a low humming or speaking the chorus. Or they find that they can hold the melody on a xylophone or that they enjoy playing the rhythm on a djembe. We see confidence grow and the look on their faces suggests a transforming of emotion and the arrival of joyfulness.

Structure and timing

Our groups with young people have lasted about three hours. However, the workshops with adults have tended to be completed within one or two hours. This means that the session needs planning to ensure things run smoothly. This article describes a structure (see Table 1 below) that can enable facilitators to collect rich ideas relatively quickly and be able to finish with a song that can be performed. Although time pressure is challenging, this structure has helped us cut through the brainstorming process and come to decisions. It has also stopped us being tempted by perfection.

Table 1. Stages and structure of narrative song creation

Creating a musical playground	
Gathering around a theme	
Rhythm as entry point to common ground	
Composing	Writing a chorus
	Finding a melody
	Stories make lyrics
Performance and recording	

It’s about the process, not the product!

As stated in the beginning of this article, our process of song creation is an entirely collective endeavour. The goal is that participants are in the foreground, making contributions and developing the content of the song. Facilitators work from a decentred position in terms of content and an influential position in terms of process. This requires an attentive attitude towards all the suggestions that come from the group as well as listening out for the quieter voices.

From a musical perspective, this means that our own perfectionism must be curbed. We have noticed that when the desire to create a high-quality product dominates, it starts to increase anxiety and stress, restrict our creativity and block social connections. We align with Denborough’s (2008, p. 170) view that “nothing about the writing, singing or recording of these sorts of songs is about perfection”.

Denborough’s song-creation process requires only one facilitator who captures the words, creates the song and then teaches this to the community. Our process requires more than one facilitator, including “nonmusical” facilitators. It also affords an opportunity for the group to hear not only their words, but also their own rhythms, sounds and melodies.

We agree it is important to foreground inclusion, and to privilege an ethic of participation over one of performance (Denborough, 2002). This demands an attitude of curiosity about where the process might bring us. We explore what possible music we can co-construct in this moment, in this amount of time, on this topic, with this specific group of people. What has struck us as facilitators is how different each session has been and how the creativity of the group always shines through. It is about the process, not about delivering a product.

Outro

A song often concludes with an *outro* or coda to mark the final moments, orienting the listener to the approaching ending point. We’d like to leave you with some final words and hope they spark future musical compositions as you take these ideas forward.

Songs have a rich history of affording sustenance, resilience and togetherness in the face of hardships and injustice. Songs of resistance, defiance, freedom and peace echo through generations and across time and place, illuminating the skills, abilities and responses that buoy people up through musically telling their stories in ways that make them stronger (Wingard & Lester, 2001). A recent example is the joining together of physically distanced but socially connected people singing together from their balconies during COVID-19 lockdowns. Collective narrative song creation draws on these ideas and offers a way of bringing people together to enjoy a shared experience of creation, performance and connection. The stories told can become richly described alternative stories about responses to hardship. The process links lives and crosses

borders in multiple ways, enabling a powerful togetherness that sustains and endures past the initial moment, through the recalling of melodies and lyrics. We would encourage you to think about incorporating these ideas in your practice, to reach out and search for collaborations with people confident about their musical abilities. We are excited for the possibilities you may find emerging through these collaborations.

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