
Music Facilitator's Tamtamtada Method

From the perspective of a musician, it's no secret that singing could be a form of therapy. People sing to ease their pain when they are sad and angry. Some sing at the funeral of deceased loved ones, while others scream along to their favourite metal song to release their anger. Before music became advanced and the modern music industry was established, singing was already part of our lives in many situations. We sing in many different forms, but often for the same purpose, to overcome any kind of hardship.

While most people sing existing songs that are close to their hearts or represent their feelings, few others sing the songs they create, using their own words and melodies. The idea of creating our own song for our own needs is not something new. It could be as simple as a mother humming a random melody with a few praising words to soothe her baby; it doesn't require anything fancy or advanced skills. Therefore, the one-day songwriting workshop that was planned as a part of the school intervention in the Resilient School Hubs project made sense to me.

As a songwriter who has worked in the fields of art and commercials for years, I have written songs using many methods. Later, during my children's song project called Tamtamtada, I tried to find an easier method that would let me create songs with children. That's how I formulated the Tamtamtada method that I used in this project to facilitate the workshop with the female middle school students in Palu. Its objective is to provide a songwriting method that is easy to follow by children who have no experience in songwriting. This was proven to be effective in Palu as the students who mostly started the day shy and confused became empowered, enthusiastic, and happy.

Emphasizing creating the hook of the song before anything else, it is a writing method in which a hook is expected to represent what the song is about. The hook according to [recording-history.org](https://www.recording-history.org) is, "that catchy musical idea or motif that grabs the attention of the listener and lingers in the mind long after the song has ended. Often a short riff, phrase, or a compelling melody, hooks are integral in popular music to captivate an audience". In this method, the hook takes the form of a phrase which becomes the heart of the song, as it acts as the guide for the students to continue developing the full set of lyrics.

To begin the writing process, we discuss with the participants what kind of songs they want to create and what the purpose of the songs will be. A clear purpose would help them focus on their aim in writing the song. Encourage them to decide their purpose, but don't push or intervene too much, just give them a clue or example. When everything is decided, ask them to write a hook, which can be a phrase or even only a word that they imagine to be the hook of their song. For example, in 'Heal The World' by Michael Jackson, the purpose of the song is to encourage people to create a better world for a better future, while its hook is the first line of the chorus that says, "Heal the world, make a better place". Provide examples like this, either from a popular song like this or create something that fits with the participants' context.

The second step is to find the melody. For my method I used another facilitator as a music player; they recorded or took notes of the chords the participants were experimenting with and played them live to give it a more musical feel. In this session, we encouraged participants to try to hum a random melody or sing the hook they had created. Again, give them examples so they can follow easily. In Palu's workshop, when someone came up with a catchy melody their friends tended to be excited and tried to repeat it. Let them decide which melody they want to keep, and which not. The result of this session is a melody for the hook and a few other melodies to be explored later with the rest of the lyrics.

In the third step, put them in groups to write lyrics together. In Palu, we suggest they write whatever came to their mind, long or short. Some wrote a short line while others wrote a short poem; both were fine. The collection of these scattered words was later arranged together to make the lyrics of the song. Collect their writings and write them along with the hook on a whiteboard or a piece of large paper for everyone to see. This is where the structure of the song takes shape.

Their writings might be random and unrelated to each other. They need to, discuss and arrange them as a whole. There will be writings that need to be edited out, to be shortened, or even changed. The goal is to make a whole set of lyrics for the song, so let them be flexible. They will need to analyse what they create line by line, to make sure everything flows nicely. Only give suggestions - let them decide on their own songs. It's going to feel like they are playing with word puzzles. One thing to remember, if they start to have writer's block, go back to the hook and the purpose of the song to inspire them. In the case of Palu, the key principles of resilience that were provided for them could also help.

In the next step, they fit all the elements together: the lyrics and the melody, so that the music player can accompany them. First, let them sing the hook a few times, then continue to explore the lyrics with some melodies they have made before. Don't hesitate to change any melody or lyric and create new ones that fit better. In Palu, I found some shy girls became high-spirited in the last sessions and didn't hesitate to give input without being asked personally. There would be a lot of exploration, so just guide them, but don't dictate to them. Give them the freedom, but keep them on track. Just lead them in singing again and again until the whole thing is created and everyone is happy with their song.

After all, in the context of post-disaster the quality of the result of this kind of workshop is not the most important factor. As a facilitator, I didn't pursue a result with a high standard but rather focused the work on the creative process. What matters is how the students can explore their thoughts and their feelings, be creative, and feel happy about what they jointly produce. The result might only contain four lines, but four lines that are meaningful for them are better than pushing with too many requirements. At the end of the day, it is their song, which we hope will help them in their post-disaster journey.

About the Author

Asa Rahmana (aka Asara Panyalai) is a singer-songwriter, maker, and educator. She completed her bachelor's degree at the University of Gadjah Mada and has worked with various artistic mediums. Currently, she is experimenting with ancestral music in her work while pursuing her passion for creating children's songs.

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