

REPORT

# Report on the Music Therapy/Songwriting Workshop:

## RUSA 2.0 – Promoting Mental Health in Schools: A Collaborative Mental Health Program in Chennai

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### Introduction

#### **Background**

Music therapy has a rich history of working with children and adolescents, offering potential benefits for meeting their social, emotional, and behavioural needs. Extensive research has demonstrated the positive impact of music interventions on various skills, indicating their potential to support educational processes and children's development. Music therapy provides a platform for children to identify and focus on higher-level social and academic skills such as empathy, turn-taking, compromise, and problem-solving in social situations.

#### **Purpose**

This report presents the outcomes of the Music Therapy/Songwriting training workshop, conducted in Chennai, India, and held online from August 3<sup>rd</sup> to August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021, funded by the Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), a centrally sponsored program by the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. The workshop aimed to familiarise participants with the concept of music therapy, introduce various music therapy intervention models, and specifically focus on the role of songwriting. The selected participants included students from various departments who attend the University of Madras and were chosen based on their expertise in music, language, and psychology.

## **Workshop Details**

### **Objectives**

The workshop aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- Enhance participants' understanding of music therapy and songwriting.
- Improve songwriting and composing skills.
- Compose songs relevant to the syllabus of the 6th to 8th grade.
- Foster collaboration and group cohesiveness among participants.

### **Workshop Structure**

The workshop was divided into two segments:

- **Main Sessions:** Resource persons explained the songwriting process and methods for enhancing composed songs.
- **Follow-up Sessions:** Participants re-presented and re-performed their songs, incorporating suggestions from the resource persons.

### **Workshop Activities**

#### **Day 1**

The resource persons provided an introduction to songwriting, covering topics such as its definition, target audience, applications, and the elements of songs (melody, rhythm). They also discussed songwriting elements, including lyrics, tempo, rhythm, melody, and practical aspects of lyric writing.

#### **Day 2**

An interactive session engaged participants in brainstorming lyrics based on a theme demonstrated by the resource persons. They also received practical guidance on composing music, including structuring lines to fit a melody. Participants were asked to generate ideas for songs based on given themes.

#### **Day 3**

Participants developed their lyrics and explored different melodic interpretations of a single song demonstrated by the resource person. Improving lyrics and content written on Day 2 based on given themes was also emphasised.

#### **Day 4**

The focus was on understanding the relevance of songwriting and music therapy for school children, particularly related to the school curriculum. Participants were introduced to concepts and strategies for composing music aligned with the curriculum.

#### **Day 5-8**

The sessions were primarily centred around practical activities aimed at enhancing participants' skills in content writing, song development, and composition. To facilitate a collaborative learning environment, the participants were divided into groups. These groups worked together to compose songs that revolved around different themes aligned with the syllabus.

The themes chosen for the song compositions were diverse and included topics like nutrition, plant awareness, and matter (solids, liquids, and gases). By incorporating these themes into their songs, the participants were able to explore and convey important academic concepts in a creative and engaging manner.

To further enhance student engagement and comprehension of the concepts, some groups decided to incorporate popular tunes into their compositions. By using familiar melodies, they aimed to captivate the students' attention and make the learning experience more enjoyable. This approach not only stimulated creativity but also allowed students to relate to the songs more easily, facilitating better understanding and retention of the educational content. One group showcased a creative approach by utilising the popular South Indian song "*Why This Kolaveri Di*" and adapting the lyrics to explain the concept of the three states of matter. By substituting the original lyrics with content relevant to solids, liquids, and gases, they were able to make the learning experience both entertaining and educational. They replaced the lines "*Why this Kolaveri, Kolaveri, Kolaveri Di?*" with "*Three states of matter are solid, liquid, and gas!*" and incorporated verses that highlighted the characteristics and examples of each state.

## **Workshop Outcomes**

### ***Group Cohesion and Expanded Perspectives***

Throughout the workshop, the participants developed strong group cohesion. Engaging in practical activities such as content writing, song development, and composing together fostered a sense of unity and collaboration. As the participants worked in groups, they had the opportunity to exchange ideas, share their unique perspectives, and contribute to the creative process. It also helped expand the participants' perspectives on the potential of music therapy. By exploring diverse themes aligned with the syllabus, the participants were able to witness firsthand how music can be effectively utilised in educational settings and gain a deeper understanding of the role of music in enhancing learning experiences. They discovered that music can be a valuable tool not only for entertainment but also for facilitating comprehension, engagement, and retention of academic content.

### ***Utilisation of Online Webinar Format***

The use of an online webinar format for the workshop proved to be highly beneficial in several ways. Firstly, the online format provided convenience for the participants, allowing them to attend the workshop from the comfort of their own homes or any location with internet access.

The webinar environment offered a conducive platform for the demonstration of compositions and collaboration among the attendees. Through the use of video conferencing and screen sharing capabilities, participants were able to present their compositions in real-time, showcasing their creative ideas and receiving immediate feedback from both the workshop facilitators and fellow participants. This interactive and dynamic setting encouraged active engagement and sparked further creativity among the attendees.

The online format allowed for seamless collaboration among participants. Virtual breakout rooms and collaborative document-sharing tools enabled group work and idea exchange, simulating the experience of working together in a physical setting. The participants could brainstorm, refine their compositions, and collectively contribute to the creative process despite being physically separated.

## Conclusion

The Music Therapy and Songwriting workshop funded by RUSA effectively achieved its objectives of familiarising participants with music therapy concepts and enhancing their songwriting skills. The compositions created during the workshop offer valuable resources for children in school settings. The webinar environment paved the way for the participants to come up with creative ideas for the demonstration of the compositions.

Overall, the workshop proved to be a valuable learning experience for participants, expanding their perspectives on music and its therapeutic applications in education.

## About the Authors

**Deepa Iyer S** is a Project Fellow for “Promoting Mental Health in Schools - a collaborative mental health program in Chennai, India” funded by the Government of India. She is a Ph.D. Scholar at the Department of Indian Music, University of Madras, having completed her BA, MA, and MPhil in Indian Music. Additionally, she holds a PG Diploma in counselling and psychotherapy, and her research centers on the efficacy of receptive Carnatic music therapy in managing mental health. ORCID: [0000-0003-3585-1238](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3585-1238)

**Dr. S. Thenmozhi** holds a Ph.D. in Counselling Psychology from the University of Madras and is a Washington State Certified Clinical Supervisor. She specializes in working with children, adolescents, and adults, addressing issues such as Developmental Disabilities, Learning Disabilities, and more. Her extensive experience includes roles as a Psychological Counsellor at the Madras High Court, Chennai, India and as a Director at Srishti Special School, Chennai, India. Dr. Thenmozhi is an active member of various professional associations and offers counselling and psychotherapy services while also providing supervision and training workshops. She is one of the principal investigators of the RUSA 2.0 initiative “Promoting Mental Health in Schools - a collaborative mental health program in Chennai,” funded by the Government of India.

**Dr. Rajshri Ramakrishna**, with 35 years of experience in teaching South Indian classical music, is among the principal investigators of the RUSA 2.0 initiative, “Promoting Mental Health in Schools - a collaborative mental health program in Chennai,” funded by the Government of India. She hails from a lineage deeply rooted in the Karaikudi bani tradition and has been influenced by esteemed gurus. Currently, she serves as an Associate Professor and Head in charge at the University of Madras, with degrees in music and multiple publications. Her expertise spans Carnatic music, particularly Veena, Voice, and Music Theory, and she has also explored music therapy from an Indian music perspective.