

Tune Your Mood™

Music ~

Across the ages 5 to 25 - The Whole Person:

Learning, literacy, mental, emotional and psychosocial development and wellbeing



Sherrene Teh is an Associate of Tune Your Mood™. She has a busy private practice working with children and young people who have special needs.

I make house calls, often traveling distances of 60km return and on the busy roads of Kuala Lumpur to make music with my clients. I am inspired by the children, young people and families I meet and work with. Here I'd like to share Yohan's story.

"I'm finding my voice through music"

Yohan is a 13 years old boy diagnosed with severe cerebral palsy. His left-brain was greatly affected during birth. As a result he does not speak. His limbs are thin and long. His right hand and both feet are curled up. Every movement he makes seems laboured. At birth, the doctor advised his mum to be prepared for a challenging journey to care for her son.

Yohan sits in a wheelchair and is wheeled into the house to meet me. I greet him with a smile and wait for his response. He returns a smile after a few seconds.

Since August 2013, Yohan and I have had 36 music therapy sessions, through which we've interacted through singing and instrument playing. Being a family-centered music therapist, I also wanted Yohan's mum to learn and do what she had observed during the sessions so that she and Yohan are able to musick* together outside music therapy sessions.

Familiar Chinese nursery rhymes are used when we sing together. At times mum would sing along with us too. It seems that vocalizing is Yohan's way of singing. We also use instruments like the guitar, bongo, xylophone, tambourine, and shaker in our sessions. In spite of having limited mobility, Yohan would extend his left arm and reach out for the instrument of his interest. He would move his arms to hit the bongo or xylophone, or place his palm on the guitar strings to indicate that he wants to strum the guitar.



Through vocalizing using familiar songs, Yohan has become aware that he has a voice. He is also exploring the different pitches of his voice.

These days his mum reports that he appears to be more alert in responding to questions and instructions. He is motivated to join in conversations at the dinner table. What's more, Yohan and his mum even have "singing time" before he goes to bed.

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What happens when we engage with music...

Research shows that when we engage with music, it is a particular form of intentional human action, to achieve an experience and expression inherent to music. Music engagement also has other goals – like communicate our thoughts, feelings and ideas, change our moods, to be by ourselves and with other people.

Musicking gives us a sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness, meaning and purpose. Musical experiences and expressions promote valuable human experience, such as self-growth, self-knowledge, and enjoyment. When we musick, we have the opportunity as human beings to reflect these desires.

“Songs express who we are and how we feel, they bring us closer to others, they keep us company when we are alone. They articulate our beliefs and values, and they bear witness to our lives. Songs weave tales of our joys and sorrows, they reveal our innermost secrets, and they express our hopes and disappointments, our fears and triumphs. They are our musical diaries, our life stories. They are the sounds of our personal development” (Bruscia, 1998 p. 9).

Dr Carmen Cheong-Clinch, Tune Your Mood™

*musick – forms of music engagement and activity (Elliot, 1995; Small, 1998)

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