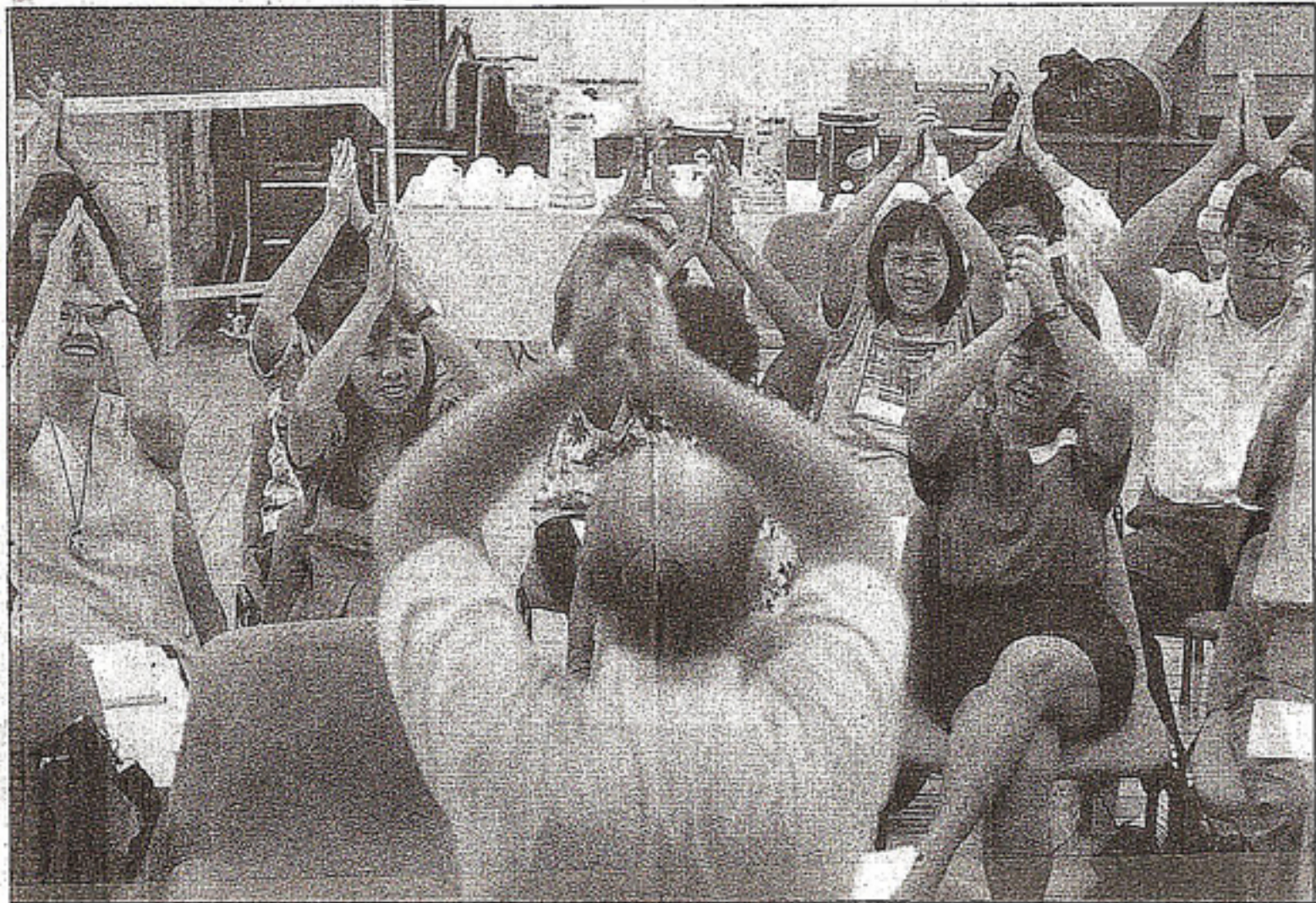


Music a bridge to reach disabled children



Song and dance are serious business for teachers who are learning how music can help disabled children to learn more effectively.

By Geraldine Kan

BANGING on drums, blowing on recorders and strumming guitars are not done just for fun in schools for the disabled. If used properly, music can help teachers reach difficult students whom other people despair over.

This week, a US music therapist is in Singapore at the invitation of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) to help more than 100 special education teachers do just that.

Dr Arthur Harvey, executive director of the Music for Health Services Foundation in Hawaii, said that music therapy goes beyond ordinary

music classes.

"Everyone relates to music. It's the starting point at which the therapist begins the relationship with the student. Music is the bridge and the instruments are just a vehicle," Dr Harvey said.

With music therapy, for example, children can learn the alphabet by singing it and it can help teachers, including those who are not musically trained, establish rapport with a child and use the child's interest in music to improve communication and social skills.

Through ensemble playing, for instance, children learn to express themselves through music; they learn hand-eye coordination and co-

operation and they learn to respond to stimuli such as sound and rhythm.

Music also enables children to release emotions they might otherwise not know how to express.

Dr Harvey conducted a workshop here on music therapy in 1992 and is now back for a second workshop.

Yesterday's session, at the Asian Women's Welfare Association at Norris Road, was the start of a three-day workshop for teachers who attended his 1992 classes.

The current workshop discusses teaching methods, how music affects the brain as well as how teachers can develop their own programmes for various degrees and types

of disability.

On Thursday, Dr Harvey will start another three-day workshop for teachers who have not attended a workshop before.

Although music therapy is very new here, he said teachers who were interested could seek more training, or get help from qualified therapists here.

There are three music therapists in Singapore but only four out of 14 special schools have music therapy programmes.

The four are: Margaret Drive, Katong, Chao Yang and Jervois special schools.

Miss Eudora Chiu Yu, 30, a music therapist who has conducted programmes at the

Chao Yang and Jervois special schools, was at yesterday's workshop.

She said she had seen dramatic changes in some of her students, including a nine-year-old boy with autistic tendencies who did not communicate or make eye contact.

First, she taught him to play drums and cymbals, and was able to observe his behaviour more closely and establish rapport.

She taught him progressively more difficult tasks and at the same time gained his trust. One-and-a-half years later, the boy made regular eye contact, smiled and laughed. He also started taking part in class activities.