



Prabu is a consummate performer.



Prabu has filmed with India's Sun TV. He is here with Tamil star Sathyaraj.

Birch and Lohan were saddled with overbearing parents who are said to be the cause of their career breakdowns.

This brings us to the question of at what point does the line between encouraging a child's talent and pushing them to perform blur?

"I think if there's a lot of pushing, reminding, a lot of restrictions," says Melvina Phua, a mother of two. "Instead of encouraging, parents scold and command." Her eldest son dances and plays the drums, an instrument that he requested to learn himself.

"If a child can perform, then why not encourage them? But there is no point pushing a child if they're not interested," Phua adds. "If a parent is too pushy, negative things might happen."

Iqbal agrees, adding that parents should be able to differentiate between what they want and what the child wants. "Some of these cases are parents trying to get their children to do what they wanted to do," he says. "A child should achieve things because they want to, not because their parents want them to."

The owner of Creative Music Centre, Melanie Chan, agrees that the above does happen. "Expectations are quite high on children nowadays, whether they are gifted or not," she says. She does point out that more and more parents are getting involved in their children's music interest, and some are willing to make sacrifices for their gifted children.

"Unfortunately, while some parents squeeze their children too hard for a semblance of talent, others may never know of their child's gifts.

"There will always be the question of accessibility. There may be students in public schools who are gifted, but how will anyone know? Their families cannot afford to send them for private lessons, and public schools do not provide music education," laments Chan.

A FUTURE OF POTENTIAL

Prabu is still young and excited about what he will do next. When asked what he would like to be when he grows up, he cannot decide whether he wants to be a pilot or a performer. His parents evince surprise when he says this, as before this he had constantly answered, simply, "pilot". Perhaps he is getting used to the entertainment life.

His parents have begun sending him for English and piano classes with the help of a non-governmental organisation, Pertubuhan Perkembangan Entelek Malaysia, something they were not able to afford previously.

"We only speak Tamil at home. That's why we're sending him for English lessons. We don't want him to be left behind. We're having a tough time, because I'm not very rich," Prabu's father admits.

His parents clearly want the best for their son and his inherited talents provide a way to achieve that.

"We give him the freedom to decide what he wants to be," Sritharan says of the boy's future. "We will help him along the way. If he wants to be an artiste, go ahead. We will make sure he becomes somebody."

The skinny little boy smiles cheerfully.

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Fun workshops for children

WITH the school holidays upon us, nothing seems more frightening than the thought of children with too much free time, energy and nothing to do. Fear not! There are workshops your children can take part in to nurture their creativity, help them acquire knowledge and necessary skills and, importantly, keep them occupied.

For a child who has a penchant for writing, he can take part in a Creative Writing Workshop. Sri Wahyuni Mohamed Kham, the facilitator for this workshop says, "Writing is a natural skill possessed by every individual. Everyone always has things to write but the fear has always been, 'Am I writing it well?' In this workshop, children will learn to let go and let their imagination roam freely. It focuses on developing children's confidence towards writing. They are encouraged to explore within themselves and express their feelings through writing."

The children will start by writing a poem and then go on to develop a puppet show by creating the script, characters and the backdrop. The children will also learn to describe a town which they've created themselves.

"This workshop also incorporates fun elements such as the use of colours, playdough and other art materials in motivating children to write creatively," says Sri Wahyuni, a teacher, teacher-trainer and English lecturer.

If a more hands-on approach is preferred, then the Clay Modelling Workshop promises to be a lot of fun. KL Yap from LMW Intertrade explains that in this workshop, the topic is about dinosaurs and the time they roamed Earth. He says, "This workshop will help children express their inner creativity through various exciting and innovative activities."

One of these activities includes creating a miniature dinosaur using specially moulded clay. The focus, says Yap, is to teach a child not just what he should know. "We also teach thinking techniques and, basically, how to think."

As for the child who needs to learn to be money-savvy and prepare for a future of successful financial management there is a two-day Money Smart Camp workshop. Tiffany Tang of Treasure Mind, the facilitator for this workshop, will help children make smart financial decisions, create personal budgets to monitor and maintain their financial health, learn to save and channel a portion of their savings into income-generating assets.

"Children are encountering



Creative Writing Workshop
By Sri Wahyuni Mohamed Kham
Tomorrow and Tuesday. (Ages 7 to 9 years)



Clay Modelling Workshop
By KL Yap, LMW Intertrade
Tomorrow and Tuesday.
(Ages 10 to 12 years)
Nov 20 and 21.
(Ages 7 to 9 years)



Smart Money Camp
By Tiffany Tang, Treasure Mind
Nov 25 and 26.
(Ages 10 to 12 years)
Nov 27 and 28.
(Ages 13 to 16 years)

money earlier and earlier in life," says Tiffany, a Kuala Lumpur-based financial adviser. "Not knowing how to manage money will put them at a disadvantage. This can lead to future problems with credit card debts, uncontrollable spending habits, and under-accumulation of wealth. With fun games, scenario simulations and group activities, your children will have an enjoyable and productive time learning how to be financially wise."

Aneeta Sundaraj