



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

The right philosophy of education

MOVING on from the earlier columns on decision making, in this column we turn to the issue of the right philosophy of education as the route to nurture future leaders.

Why do we need to revisit the philosophy? Because in academia, we are trained to focus on the trees rather than the forest. We tend to be consumed with the detailing to exact decimal points rather than with the larger concern of life. Ask any academician if he starts his new term lecture by inviting the new cohort of students to share their purpose in life. Chances are that even we as academics do not really reflect on our very own lives although this is one core aspect of life dynamics. Hence we refer to external norms set by our organisations in performing our duties without having to relate to our purpose in life.

Of course I hope I am wrong. We still have hope for the future generations. But I would still suggest that we (re)-read literary theorist and critic Terry Eagleton's *The Meaning of Life – A Very Short Introduction* where he intellectually highlighted the death of intellectuals as based on PhD titles of top-notch universities. I connect to his candid anecdote about the world of academia today. There are also scholar Naseem Taleb's *Antifragility*, philosopher Noam Chomsky's *How the World Works* and many more writings that also quiz academia's status of intellectuality. But my motivation to visit this issue in my first discourse on nurturing leaders is more experiential in nature.

This was what happened:

Very recently, I had an opportunity to attend a discussion with representatives from almost all if not all universities and university colleges in Malaysia on how to move forward with issues regarding quality of teaching and learning. However, based on the feedback raised, I gathered that somehow what mattered most was the score that each institution was accorded based on the rating exercise that we were subjected to. So you may ask, "What is wrong with that? Since rating and ranking scores are what the public desire, why shouldn't we then manage the numbers?"

If such is the perception, then we truly need to reflect. Education entails taking the right path to nurture students'

moral values (first) as the underpinning value before developing their skills set. Education is not an end in itself for one can never be educated enough. We need to view education as a verb to draw out what is inside the students so that they can transform their internal selves. Anyway, back to the issue of rating and ranking, wouldn't we take it as ludicrous if an educational institution declares that its purpose is only to get a high rating and ranking score? Yet we moan when we don't get one, as if rating or ranking is the only reason for existence.

At the end of the day isn't it our graduates'

ability to live life as whole human persons and actualise proper conduct contributing to societal well-being that counts? How many of us would take pride being the teacher of one who makes all the money in the world but through deceit? Yet again it is we who do not teach them about *adab* (proper behaviour and morals) during their student lifetime with us, what more about their purpose in life? This reminds me of what Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen wrote in *How Will You Measure Your Life?* about his former Harvard mate being behind

bars for the Enron fiasco. Isn't it about time we go back to the beginning and re-chart the right path? The current doctrinal system needs replacement – we need a system that is based on the right philosophy of life.

But lest we educators cannot let go of our herd mindset, waiting for others to start first, I implore that we take a lesson or two from national badminton coach Hendrawan. On 1 May he courageously declared to the press that he would train his junior charges according to his way – no more participating in frequent international tournaments although

this counts to the players' world rankings.

He just wants to build the core strength of the players first as the path – the philosophy – to see them win. So what does this tell us? Aren't rating and ranking all but consequential? This is something that our interior constitution must adjust to.

And vital in this interior journey is to discern that the right philosophy of education as the path to an outcome is what counts. And what we are discussing here is not merely academic.



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