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# Reclaiming nobler goals of education

**SOUL-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP:** Need for teaching, leading, governing universities with a heart

**I**N the first world conference of Muslim Scholars, in Jeddah in 1977, Syed Muhammad Naquib presented a paper — Preliminary Thoughts on the Nature of Knowledge and the Definition and Aims of Education — which was well-received by the Muslim world and beyond.

But then, it was a time before the Internet, before globalisation, liberalisation, internationalisation and the ranking game.

The work remains relevant now, as Muslim, Christian, East Asian, and secular scholars alike battle for the soul of education, specifically, higher education.

There is an evolving body of literature criticising the "soulless" institutions of higher learning, and urging for "humaniversity" — for human governance.

Among the books are *The Trouble with Higher Education* (Trevor Hussey and Patrick Smith, 2010); *Academic Tribes and Territories* (Becher R. A and Trowler, P- 2001); *Education without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* (Pilar Mendoza); *The Lost Soul of Higher Education: Corporatization, the Assault on Academic Freedom, and the End of the American University* (Ellen Schrecker, 2010); and *Excellence without a soul: Does Liberal Education Have a Future?* (Harry Lewis, 2007).

The impact of league tables, ranking systems, decision-making for world class excellence, the rating game, the marketing of higher education, rigid bureaucratisation, managerialism, technicalism, and false professionalism are among the troubles facing higher education. The criticisms indicate the struggle for the soul of higher education and the clarion call for change and renewal.

Like its predecessor, the National Institute of Management and Leadership — Institut Aminuddin Baki, AKEPT — the Higher Education Leadership Academy has taken the baton to champion the rebalancing of the purposes of education, in form and substance, in university teaching, student learning experi-

ences and in rebalancing modern concepts of university governance.

On Feb 17, 2014 AKEPT held a forum on Soul Driven Leadership, and is now preparing a framework and road map for higher education founded on Qalb — the Heart.

Teaching, leading, governing, and administration with soul are now being addressed, as for instance discussed in *Towards a Spiritually Responsive Transformative Pedagogy* by Randeep Lipson Lawrence and John M. Dirks.

A large number of leading educators from all disciplines and from various universities voice concerns and support for a movement with urgency, to reclaim the higher nobler goals of education.

There are already many best practices internationally and nationally for deep change reframing, as led by leaders like Arfah Salleh, Asmah Ismail, and Murad Merican, with materials on Qalb generated by scholars like Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, Wan Mohd Zahid Noordin, Mohd Majid Konting, Zainal Abidin Sanusi and the AKEPT team are the catalysts to the response for soul-sentient, heart-qalb driven leadership in higher education.

The contents of renewal are to be driven by soul leadership — leadership beyond rankings and Key Performance Indicators — inspiring leadership which care for the cleansing of the soul and the cultivation of noble intellectual character. The agenda is set for a movement of sorts to reframe and renew the higher purpose of education and the idea of the university.

Amidst the enthusiasm, optimism, and call for change, voices of caution called for empowerment and understanding the uniqueness

of each institution, its history, demography, and cultural mix.

The goal is to transform awareness of the need to focus on the sentient heart to understanding the essence of the heart. The shared understanding of the sentient heart is to move the collective will towards comprehensive, inclusive, creative, discovery of Qalb, allowing for contextual differences.

The heart will be the centre for the circle of virtue, synergy, and harmonisation of the interconnected, cross-civilisational understanding of the human quest for excellence.

The challenge is enormous. There is diversity in the student body of both public and private universities as there is heterogeneity among academicians.

The silos of specialisations of academic disciplines are spread across all institutions. It is clear that those who are to lead change must be those who are endowed with patience, wisdom, and understand the phenomena of mind-sets, trapped minds, and the already closed minds.

A whiff, a breath, a breeze, a storm of inspiration is needed, in ideas, in role models, in contagion passion to create collective acceptance.

If the idea of soul leadership is hijacked by dogmatic ideologies or self-styled arrogant know-all leaders with personal agenda, there will be resistance, disillusionment and the noble idea of Qalb leadership will come to pass, unfulfilled, unrealised.

If the change movement is led by impassioned enlightened champions, there may be the creation of refreshing change, a new paradigm of higher education and new hope for authentic scholarship.

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Educators are trying to 'rebalance' the purpose of education through inspired leadership founded on Qalb — the Heart.