The most fundamental issue to be determined before talking about education is the question of “Who owns the child?” The answer you provide for this question will reveal your definition and orientation of education as well as your value system regarding education.

This is a question that we have repeatedly raised in all our schools; to make sure that we remain committed to upholding the principles of holistic, total transformative education.

We repeat the question from time to time because we believe that anything that is good must be repeated. People become champions in sport because of repeated exercises.

Let us, therefore analyze this question: To whom does a child actually belong?

In a communist country, children belong to the Communist Party. So the entire system of education is meant to fulfill the

By James Riady

Education Must Be Holistic to Create Well-Balanced Life
interest of the Communist Party. Even at home, children are raised and taught in that direction.

In Indonesia—a society based on state ideology Pancasila (five principles), children are perceived to be owned by society. So, children are taught to comply with what society wants. And we are living in an era where society is controlled by business and industry people.

Everybody seems to agree that children must be taught to get a good job and nothing else but that. Never mind being part of a broken family, so long as one can be productive, it looks fine to society. Never mind divorcing one’s spouse and never mind consuming drugs or leading a free-sex life—as long as one is productive, it sounds good enough to society.

This is the philosophy driving society’s perception about education. The result is a society where holistic education is absent; as the teaching-learning process is confined to imparting knowledge and skills in order to satisfy transactional—instead of transformational—education.

In Eastern culture, to whom does a child belong? Some say children belong to their parents. In the practical reality, the child belongs to the father.

Education from home to school is carried out in the way the father wants it to be and this is problematic because every father has his own view about it and every one of them has his own plans for his children.

One father says he wants his son to be a politician; another says his son must be a banker; and one more says he wants school to groom his son to be a scientist, while another one says his son must grow to be a famous and rich man.

You ask every one of them and you will get different answers. So what kind of education can meet so many different aspirations of Oriental fathers? Now you see how difficult it is to formulate a system of education that can fit so many different interests!

The next problem is because they believe that a child belongs to his father, the father acts as the supreme authority over the child, so he can do anything to the child and nobody can interfere.

In Pelita Harapan schools, including Universitas Pelita Harapan (UPH) education is not conducted in such manner.

### In Indonesia, imparting knowledge is being mistaken for education—a perception that we totally reject—because we believe that if education is a matter of knowledge, just give the students computers connected to the Internet and there they are with heaps of knowledge obtained from every direction. If so, why bother to attend university?

Here we strongly believe that children—as do their parents—belong to God.

If we believe that God is the Creator of heaven and earth and children belong to Him, the authority that parents have over the children is derivative. It means that parents derive the authority from God as a mandate for which they must be accountable.

Consequently, parents must “fearfully” exercise this derivative authority in leading children to reach their utmost potential that is to know God as their Creator.

Children must be taught and groomed in such a way that they will—all through their lives—respect God as the Creator.

This being the case, parents cannot arbitrarily exercise their authority in the way they want; they must only exercise the derivative authority in the way God wants them to do.

Sometimes I feel uneasy pondering the fact that we only have three to four years or so to groom students on campus. Furthermore, when they registered with us, they came dysfunctional, unprepared, lacking even the basic understanding of the kind of holistic life that we want them to develop.

Many students have the perception that when they are still in high school, they are restricted from doing what they want; but when they enter university they are free to do anything they want—as if university is a place for unlimited freedom to do anything freely without anybody having the authority to stop them; as if entering university means having the freedom to indulge in free sex, smoking, alcoholism, drugs, and so forth.

This is one of the reasons why at UPH we conduct what we call UPH Festival, meaning that we receive new students in a joyful atmosphere, a festival, a happy beginning, so they begin their academic journey with joy rather than punitive measures which elsewhere are known as “plonco”.

Here every new student must attend academic festivities and they are guided by mentors or senior students. We are trying here to develop the understanding that holistic education means every human being is born with talents to be exposed and developed and life structure to be nurtured.

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A big problem in Indonesia is that education is being reduced to imparting knowledge through rote memorization. What should have happened is to make education a holistic endeavor in that learners are transformed to live a well-rounded balanced holistic life.

What I mean by holistic life is a life that is integrated in all its aspects, a mature and well balanced life. The life of every individual comprises many different slices of life structure like a pizza.

Cognitive ability is just one of those cuts. So education cannot just deal with that one slice, it must deal with the entire life...
structure to transform the learner into a whole and integrated person.

A lack of this wholeness of life is to blame for so many dysfunctions in today’s society. This is why you see a lot of smart people with childish behavior. They may be intellectually rich but very poor emotionally as well as in social relations. Some are really smart but at the same time poor in controlling their sexual life. Some are academically good but very bad in character and integrity.

Some people cannot hide their feelings; for instance when they meet with someone they do not like, their facial expressions confirm their dislike of the person. All these are facts of life that represent the outcome of our system of education.

The life structure of every child consists of so many parts. Can we in the process of education make the children whole and well balanced persons—make them persons of integrity? It means that every one of them must, for instance, be honest round the clock and not just when being supervised.

Can they remember their faith at workplace—so even when they are working, they realize that this too is part of implementation of their faith? So in whatever situation they continue to hold on to their faith. This is what I call “transformation toward holistic education.”

These are some of the reasons why I think it is necessary for parents and faculty members to regularly meet and exchange views and experience. Do not allow children to deceive you. Some would say such and such lecturer is not doing well, or the way he teaches makes them easily feel bored. Do not jump to hasty conclusions when you hear this kind of explanation from your children.

We realize we too have our own weaknesses, but what we are doing is so far so good. We have the philosophy of “Already but Not Yet.” Compared to where we started off, we can say we have already done well. But compared to what we aim to be, we would say we have not yet reached the goal.

Without many parents realizing it, the spirit of “demos” in democracy has permeated so deeply into the life of the educated community. We here do not reject democracy because compared to
other forms of civic life, democracy is better still. But we reject and do not believe in the spirit of democracy, the kind that developed out of John Dewey’s philosophy of education, out of his book *Democracy and Education*.

Among two or three factors that ruin education most devastatingly over the past century are the ideas of a person named John Dewey who is being “worshipped” in Indonesia as a god of education.

At our university—UPH—we are blessed with the spiritual eye that may see how Dewey’s ideas have destroyed the essence of more classical education all over the world.

This renowned American professor from Columbia University was the first person to combine democracy and education in a book he published in 1916. He brought the spirit of the “demos” in democracy into education and has thereby ruined education until today.

Democracy comes form the Greek words of “demos” and “kratia” where demos means human beings—the majority; and kratia means the way to rule or the ruling. Combined, they carry the meaning of “ruling by majority human beings.”

Consequently, God becomes irrelevant in a democracy. The belief that existed before Dewey introduced his theory—which upheld God as the Supreme Source of wisdom and knowledge—was immediately taken out of the context. Theocracy immediately became irrelevant and spirit of democracy rules.

As a consequence the individual stands above tradition, culture, religion, and even God. This is why atheism flourishes and spreads out to many corners of the globe, because education adoring physical rationality leads people to sever reliance on God.

This is part of the reason why so many educational institutions in the West that were established as Christian centers are now centers of atheistic and agnostic ideas.

This also is the reason why “imposter faith” spreads so easily in society. Fake religiosity grows so well that hypocrisy is mistaken for genuine attitude in almost all sectors of life. Imbalance replaces wholeness of life so severely that integrity becomes a very rare trait in our society today.

So, be extra-careful with the spirit of democracy because it teaches that man is God. Democracy being applied today is not the best system; it is only a better one compared to all the bad systems available! In a secular system, everything becomes relative—nothing is absolute.

True freedom, in my view, is one which can free someone from all forms of bondage, to the extent that he can reach the peak of his true potential. Freedom must lead learners to attain their maximum capacity and potential—so it must not be a kind of freedom that allows them to freely do anything at all that they wish; to become addicted to free sex, narcotics, cigarettes, liquors, etc.

If now people believe that they can practice all these bad habits in the name of democracy and human rights, it is because of the acceptance of the spirit of democracy in society including in the domain of education.

I wish to say that in holistic education, the pride of every teacher and professor is when they see naughty and problematic students become models of good behavior; when they see ignorant students transformed into persons who understand their calling of life. Such students understand their potentials and how to utilize them for good purposes.

Every student has scores of talents, but God has given each one of them two or three big talents. Our responsibility is to help learners develop their biggest talents in order to empower them as responsible individuals.

If a person’s biggest talent is not in medical science, and his parents force him to study at the medical school, he may eventually graduate as a medical doctor, but he will not be able to compete against those whose biggest talent is in medical science. He may still work as a doctor but will not find as deep satisfaction as that experienced by those whose biggest talent is in medical field. He may only become a money-machine medical practitioner but not a caring doctor who understands his calling.

Another issue is comfort zone. Students who are kept in their comfort zones will not develop a heart to see beyond themselves and to pay attention to others. They will not care about the plight of their immediate community. Service learning is important to arouse their awareness of society’s problems. They need to be made aware of their calling because only then can they sincerely contribute to society.

There is also the subject of dating. Our relationship with others should only fall into one of three boxes: friendship, or dating, or marriage. We must test and ensure that each of our relationships with others clearly falls into just one of the three boxes.

Never allow them to be in a gray area. If they are ready for marriage, dating is okay. But if they are not ready yet, do not experiment with love relationship, because it is not something that needs experimentation. This is not entirely a matter of age. Some people are ready at the age of 17; others are not ready yet even at the age of 45.

So education must deal with all these issues. What is the use of having university diplomas or even cum laude recognition if your daily life is dysfunctional?

What is the use of being recognized as an intellectual or an academician if one does not have a well-balanced holistic life? The duty of educators—from home to school—is to make sure that learners develop their maximum potential as well-balanced individuals.