Preface

All I want to be is
Washed out by the sea
No death-star over me
Won’t give me any peace
All I want is light relief
But the crazies on the street
Give them guns and feed them meat
They’ll shoot the death-star down
Dig a hole and put it down
Thousand miles underground
(From Strange News from Another Star, Blur 1997)

In 2000 Rob Fisher and I discussed the idea of holding a conference with the intent of addressing the perceived lethargy of the educational status quo. The conference was to challenge orthodox opinion. We hoped to see some forthright and intellectually stellar papers. However we realised that the conference could harbour the demise of our aims in that the event might become too disparate to be academically untenable. It was genuinely our own ‘death-star’ but one we wished to become successful in wiping out at least some of the more pointless traditions of education. We were also aware that the conference might attract many on the fringes of education with futile agendas to pursue: we could have been handing the crazies on the street all the guns and meat they needed. However we felt this was a risk worth taking for was hoped our death-star would destroy much educational orthodox madness. In addition, as death-star commanders we felt we could always edit out some of the truly crazed. As it turned out this proved unnecessary as the crazies did not respond to our offer and all the papers that arrived sought to challenge rather than simply to annoy. What did drop into our (electronic) mailbox was a collection of papers that were clearly from interesting and unique individuals with deep and meaningful concerns for the ‘Idea of Education’. As a consequence the conference was one of the most enjoyable and stimulating we have attended.

This book represents a ‘position statement’ from the intellectual vibrant and challenging debate that emanated from the conference entitled ‘The Idea of Education’ held at Mansfield College, Oxford in July 2002. Although the general feeling at the conference was warm and accommodating, it would be true to say that a wide spectrum of views of ‘the idea of education’ were conveyed. Perhaps though as the sessions went along all of us became aware that ‘the idea’ was not as straightforward as it may appear on the surface. It seemed that the
universities were not alone in this apparent uncertainty of definition. Further Education seems equally nonplussed as regard its purpose or raison d'etre. Furthermore, even for those within the sector, it appears to be a point of much contention as to where Further Education ends and Higher Education begins. In discussion with Colin Trotman and Heather Pudner it became clear that they seek a radical realignment such that the delineation becomes a pointless exercise. It was a similar story in the field of schooling where Bob Grant suggests that much of what passes as schooling is at best unnecessary and at worst detrimental to our children. The last session of the conference consisted of a round-table and here much plain speaking took place. For me, the most significant remark in this lively atmosphere was made by Seth Agbo who in summing up said ‘I came here thinking about what the idea of education is. I had some misgivings about my thoughts but basically I felt I had a grip on what this idea was. I will leave this conference further away from this idea than I when I arrived’.

In selecting the chapters for this book I have tried to preserve some of this individuality and strength of opinion felt at Oxford. It should be apparent that some individual contributors find unacceptable much of what others in the book have to say. However there is hopefully some sense that the authors of the twelve chapters have come to at least identify and respect this difference.

The book is divided into three main sections: The Current Structures of Education, Issues within Contemporary Education and The Ambitions of Education. The three sections consist of five, three and four chapters respectively.

In Chapter One Muir Houston, Hazel Knox and Anne McGillivray examine one institution’s attempts to formalise and create a role where responsibility for matters of quality, equivalency and accountability is to reside. It is located within a context of increasing external monitoring of issues regarding the quality of institutional provision. It also engages with issues of increasing academic workload and line management in a collegiate setting. Through use of a staff survey, it examines the tensions between policy and implementation.

In Chapter Two Seth Agbo debunks the role of the traditional university and calls for universities to rethink their role in methods of teacher preparation by developing new attitudes, new organizational structures and improved practices to match the pace of knowledge increase and exponential growth of information in recent years. The author introduces a university/school partnership model that leads to transformational learning of teachers, students and university faculty by linking teacher preparation with veteran teacher development and school improvement. The partnership model is basically an illustration of how to develop symbiotic relationships among pre-service teacher preparation,
veteran teacher development and the improvement of academic standards of students.

In Chapter Three Peter Long, Tony Tricker and Margaret Rangecroft examine the increasingly prevalent notion of the student as a customer of Higher Education, expecting quality services from the provider. This perspective has led to a need for appropriate and sensitive evaluation instruments. Such tools have been developed by other service providers. Based on one of these the authors have developed a tool for evaluating student satisfaction with postgraduate distance learning. This tool, which has been designed to be delivered electronically, is described and discussed in this chapter.

In Chapter Four Georgia Nikolaidou focuses on the basic features of the music curriculum in the primary school, seeing it as an adaptive interface, which can efficiently couple a teacher's and a pupil's behaviour and attitude within the classroom. Viewing both from the music teacher's and pupil's perspective, music curriculum issues that contribute to enhance pragmatic towards ideal classroom teaching/learning are discussed. The role of ICT in music education is amplified and an ICT-integrated music curriculum in favour of provoking collaborative learning interactions among peers is proposed.

In Chapter Five Nancy Levesque suggests student success depends on active learning, critical thinking skills, and information literacy competency. Partnerships among librarians, faculty and students enable programs that equip students to meet the challenges of a global work force. Librarians working together with teachers and learners can ensure quality library resources and spaces that support study, teaching and life-long learning.

In Chapter Six Heather Pudner and Colin Trotman present case study evidence arising from a four-year community-education development project in an urban area of severe socio-economic deprivation. The project aimed to address the issues of social exclusion and non-participation in post-compulsory education through fostering a new 'needs-based' climate of learning. New learning opportunities were secured through a negotiated curriculum and open collaboration between residents, community-based organizations/representative groups and statutory providers at primary, secondary, further and higher education levels. The chapter discusses the crucial significance of long-term community-based educational development programmes that encourage the involvement of potential student groups. It argues that indicators of social exclusion are only the starting points for widening participation in higher education/adult continuing education.

In Chapter Seven Paul Gallina examines the case of Dr. Nancy Olivieri, a specialist at the University of Toronto's Sick Children's
Hospital, who in 1996 identified an unexpected risk associated with the drug she was testing to treat a rare blood disorder. When she proceeded to inform her patients of this risk, there was an attempt to censor her by those sponsoring her research. Her experience as a whistleblower is assessed in a moral sense which includes academic freedom of inquiry that is apposite to the idea of education.

In Chapter Eight Nikolaos Patsavos examines the ways in which operativity and scientism have been recently re-introduced in design education. Situating stimulating architectural discourse within a new interdisciplinary environment has produced considerable problems. One result has been that both corporations and scientific disciplines have been actually reorganised in terms of an underlying 'aesthetic paradigm'. A discussion of the Architectural Association Design Research Laboratory (AA DRL) provides the necessary 'data'.

In Chapter Nine Tom Claes analyses the institution we have come to call 'a university' and that has been subject to many changes. Figuring predominantly are definitions of what a university really is. These definitions are as much rhetorical in nature as they are descriptive and they play a central role in the discussion on how the present status and role of the university should be evaluated. Charles Leslie Stevenson has labelled this type of argument 'persuasive definitions'. Stevenson's analysis of this kind of definition is used to analyse the structure of the ongoing debate on 'the death of the university'.

Chapter Ten is my own contribution in which I consider the university from an historical perspective. In particular my interest lies in the relationship the university has held with the society surrounding it over the ages. The aim is to question the deterministic nature of much writings on the university. Typical of such arguments is that as society changes (as a result of new technology for example), so must the university. Many instances from the past are pinpointed that contradict such a thesis. At times the university has resisted the forces of inevitability. Furthermore, at other periods society has been completely in tow with the university rather than vice versa.

Jan Parker believes commodification, massification and quality assurance are models of HE which all serve to depress and exhaust teachers by turning them into functionaries serving non-educational goals. In Chapter Eleven Dr Parker argues that aspirational models of teaching, learning and assessment are not only proper but essential to higher education. In addition Dr. Parker offers some such models - of the disciplines as communities of practice, of assessment serving larger educational ends and of teaching as a process of enabling students to find their own voice and their place as disciplinary practitioners.

In Chapter Twelve Robert Grant examines the relationship between ethics and teaching as it relates to the types of schools we should have and the role of the State within education. His analysis draws some
startling conclusions that focus on the function, funding and admissions of schooling.

I am grateful to all the contributors and the Series Editor Rob Fisher for proving so helpful in answering my many queries. In addition I owe an enormous debt to Andrew Bartlett for his recommendations and practical skills in formatting, editing, proofreading and all manner of technological talents.

As ever I am extremely fortunate in being married to my own ‘Hungarian Princess’ and it is her to whom this book is dedicated.

For

Darl’ (Mxxx)

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