

**What is 'progress' in the English
secondary school system?
Perceptions of secondary school
leaders**

**A Thesis Submitted for the
Degree of Doctor of Education**

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Abstract

The idea of ‘progress’ in the English Education system has become defined by Government policy to create a performative measure for which teachers and school leaders can be held to account. The introduction of the Progress 8 measure, whereby schools are accountable for the progress that students make, between end the Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4, has had an impact on the perception of progress in the English Secondary School system. Taken as a burden of proof policy decisions are made at all levels in the pursuit of ‘progress’ shackling all involved in the English system to an economic view of ‘progress’. Systems connected to the performative measures which are used to contrast schools in league tables, students one against the other and hold teachers accountable creating competition, which allows for accusations of failure to progress. Literature on the idea of ‘progress’ spans centuries and has been the discussion of philosophers, economists, teachers, and politicians with the perception being affected by historical context. Literature points to the way in which the performance measures have become a technology that has impacted the policy decisions and agenda of government in attempts to drive up standards, create robust systems and compete globally.

In the current understanding of the impact of the introduction of the ‘progress’ measure there is the need to understand how the perception of ‘progress’ has changed over time as well as covering key policy agendas with an exploration of perceptions of School leaders in the English system. The contribution this study makes is to present a view on how School leaders have managed the policy of ‘progress’ in their work and the extent to which there is a resistance to the centralised performative view. This study also addresses notions of ‘fantasy’ and how through fantastical logic policy decisions can be made and the impact they have on the education system in England. This thesis contributes an understanding of how ‘progress’ is perceived and looks to disrupt the acceptance of the prevailing orthodox through which right wing behaviourist fantasies have been the driving force, with a focus on discipline, and a model of delivery to ensure that policies are proven to succeed. This thesis considers how ‘progress’ has become part of that ‘fantasy’ and the effects on the students, teachers, and society.

In addition, through the method there is a personal approach using biographical links and visual images that have been created to explore thinking through a novel attempt at theorised subjectivity. These explore how the research came into being and why a focus on ‘progress’ was decided upon as well as how my own perceptions around ‘progress’ in the English system

have been affected. There is the exploration of family history and educational experiences as a practitioner and student which supports the originality of this thesis due to the approach. The use of images to develop this thesis adds to the contribution to knowledge, through this innovative and alternative approach as a driving factor in the research design and analysis.

At this point in time this thesis matters as a contribution to the direction of education in the English system where the pursuit of 'progress' has become a pursuit of numeric targets. Through this research there is the chance to listen to the perspectives of a group of school leaders and reflect on their experience to rethink what 'progress' might be.

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Table 3: List of abbreviations	
CAGS	Centre Assessed Grades
DCSF	Department of Children Schools and families, Government department under New Labour, 2007-2010
DfE	Department For Education
EdD	Educational Doctorate
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
IOE	Institute of Education
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
KS1	Key Stage 1 Years 1-2
KS2	Key Stage 2 Years 3-6
KS3	Key Stage 3, English Secondary school years 7-9
KS4	Key Stage 4, English Secondary School Years 10-11
KS5	English Secondary School Years 12-13
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
NC	National Curriculum for England
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
P8	Progress 8
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate of Education
PP	Pupil Premium
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SATS	Standardised Assessment Tasks taken at the end of Key Stage 2 in English Primary schools
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SHP	Schools History Project
SOSE 2010-14	Secretary of State for Education 2010-2014

1 What is ‘Progress’ in the English Secondary School system? Perceptions of Secondary school leaders

1.1 Why focus on ‘progress’?

Over time in the English Education system ‘progress’ has become a mechanised performance measure with the introduction of ‘Progress 8’ in 2016 through the reforms driven by the Secretary of State for Education 2010-14 (Michael Gove) and the Conservative party. The SOSE 2010-2014 was a key individual in the reforms that took place, as architect of the design process, targeting ‘a move away from soft and airy fairy subjects towards more rigour and the best which has been thought and said’ (Ball,2017:16) From that position the government challenged the education establishment and sought to see incisive changes to education at all levels. The influence is to be seen throughout the education policy covering the period from 2010 and the time over which I carried out this thesis. Although not the education secretary throughout, certainly the philosophies and ideologies of the SOSE 2010-2014 continue to be found in the education system. Throughout this research there are references to their time as education secretary which at points may appear personal but due to my positionality are more due to my being at odds with the policy approach.

Through such an instrumentalist approach to education teachers have found themselves lambasted and heads removed from post due to perceived limits to the ‘progress’ that was being achieved. This reductionist view of ‘progress’, that narrowly ties ‘progress’ to examination results which are predetermined through a bell curve, statistical normal distribution of student performance, teachers and leaders have become shackled to the ‘delivery chain’ (Barber, 2007:85). Results of students in other schools affect where the pass lines lie, and the performative race is now even more competitive than ever, as schools look where to place best on the curve. An approach from government that attempts to guarantee outcomes, considers outliers as deviant and in need of rectification, with guarantees of a national workforce, that aspires to the national good, and fulfils a ‘fantasy’ of the present and future. Through such a ‘fantasy’ there is also the connection to ‘progress’ and where the focus of education is centred on a focal point that is perceived as being superior to the starting point. My concern is that in presenting this ‘fantasy’ of ‘progress’, teachers and school leaders in the English System along with the students, are being bound to a system that is focussed on a right-wing political agenda. An agenda that looks to sustain a status quo with regards to power and decision making at the

highest level, fettering the rest to a lifetime of servitude, disguised as freedom, has been established in the quest for ‘progress’. My use of the word fetter is in reference to Browning’s poem Andrea del Sarto where in considering freedom he writes.

How strange now looks the life he makes us lead,
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are,
(Browning, 1970:54)

I use this reference as someone with a belief in the emancipatory and transformative impact that education promises, yet from a critical perspective, someone who is of the view that there is the placement of shackles to control and direct. The notion that education can lead to freedom and choice is part of the policy agenda, yet what I will argue is that through the technocratic control and logic around ‘progress’, there is not the freedom that is hoped for. Saul considers power and the control of the technocrats and the control of and access to knowledge.

In reality we are today in the midst of a theology of pure power — power born of structure, not of dynasty or arms. The new holy trinity is organization, technology and information. The new priest is the technocrat — the man who understands the organization, makes use of the technology and controls access to the information, which is a compendium of “facts.” (Saul, 2012:37)

The organisation and administration of the examination system, the decisions of what knowledge is needed, and access to the information granted, controls the education system in England and the policies that support such control are enacted in schools across England. Through subjugation to the idea of ‘progress’ the forces of control have decided the meaning of ‘progress’ and the way in which socially we are bound to pursue a dominant perspective. By this I mean that the perspective of ‘progress’ that is presented through policy and performance measures, is then dominant as a perspective for teachers, students, and parents.

From spending time with Gert Biesta in seminar sessions I became aware of how I had taken for granted terminology such as ‘learning’ or ‘learner’ and if I was truly interested in what I perceived to be the liberating impact of education I perhaps needed to be more critical. Biesta states that ‘Critical pedagogy has helped us to see that there is no individual emancipation without societal emancipation’ (Biesta, 2005:55). I believe this supports my position of criticism when it comes to ‘progress’, as I would argue unless there is a societal rethinking of ‘progress’, then individuals will continue to be bound and shackled to the dominant perspective. The dominant perspective in the case of ‘learning’ means that ‘claims like these – which almost sound like threats, ‘You will not be able to meet life challenges unless you

become a lifelong learner! Society will not be sustainable unless it becomes a learning society! (Biesta, 2013:4) are possible. The ‘horrible narrative’ is shared and presented in schools and through education, to build compliance to the idea that ‘learning is intrinsically good and desirable’ (*ibid*). It is my estimation that ‘progress’ suffers from the same effect with threats of lack of ‘progress’, or no ‘progress’ ringing in the ears of students, whereby failure is the curse to be endured.

This thesis considers the historical notion of ‘progress’ as an idea and how at various époques ‘progress’ has had different meanings and points of focus, as religious and political philosophies have had an impact. Ownership of the aim of ‘progress’ has meant that society has been led to a point that has been chosen by the ruling classes, through their own aims driven agenda, of a ‘fantasy’ or illusion of a better state of being which is perceived as ‘progress’. During the last twenty years of the 20th Century and first twenty of the 21st Century, teachers and school leaders have been compliant in such aims of education through government policy, supporting the promises. Later in the thesis through the literature review and my method I make clearer why I make such a claim as to the role that teachers have had.

I have been motivated to use my voice within education, and to bring attention to the extent to which there are signs of authoritarianism and a challenge to democracy by pursuing ‘progress’ unquestioningly. Through reduction, education has been seen by policy makers as a source from which to mine resources as

At first sight, education—regardless of ideological perspective—seems to involve thinking in terms of progression: it concerns an individual whose cognitive development is facilitated, an individual whose potential should be found, extracted, and exhausted (as we do with any other potential we find on Earth) (Zamojski,2023:1073)

And that we are then

Encouraged to use the opportunities it creates for emancipation and social mobility, and it also concerns the social and economic ‘progress’ that various states and international (or transnational) organisations treat as the very purpose of education’ (*ibid*)

My criticism is that the economic ‘progress’ of the state, the production and output approach to policy, means that there is less chance for mobility and freedom. In my method section I include my illustrations and a clearer explanation of how I have come to this point.

To meet the demands of ‘progress’ from this reductionist perspective, there is the construction of curriculum and my own thinking around curriculum and ‘progress’, which in my professional role, has been influenced by John White. I am a Senior Leader in a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) where my chief responsibility is the curriculum from Reception to Year 13 and has meant looking across all subjects and key stages. From this I have become much more aware of the overall experience of the children and the way in which their encounters affect their education. My first encounter with White was through his book *‘The aims of Education Restated’* (White, 1982), a book which made me contemplate why education was necessary but also what education looks to achieve. The book helped me to consider some of the wider aims of education, and how the intentions of teachers and school leaders are affected by philosophical considerations and implications. Through my professional education as a teacher, the importance of routine, uniform, classroom control had been the fundamentals, but I had bigger questions that I believed needed considering.

What I took from White was that it was right that I questioned some of those areas of my work and their impact, and that although they appeared to make my professional life easier, were undermining my own view of what education is for and how it should be experienced. One example would be the adherence to rules and regulations in a school environment, and the way in which they are pursued to ensure uniformity. However, these conflict with my more liberal ideas and that education is not a choice for young children but forced upon them through law. What White did with his work, was to make me reconsider the way in which I had presented the role of education, the importance of the school curriculum and then how I shared this in the classroom setting. My second encounter was through a paper he had written with Michael Reiss entitled *‘An aims-based curriculum: The significance of human flourishing for schools’* (Reiss and White, 2013), which not only made me consider the reasons for this thesis but has influenced my work in school. In the paper there is consideration given to ‘An aims-based curriculum’ (Reiss and White, 2013:1) where they state schools ‘aims are the same as those of the home with children’ (*ibid*) which is ‘to equip each child: 1. To lead a life that is personally flourishing 2. To help others to do so too’ (*ibid*). When parents and schools share their aim there is potential for better communication of purpose and support for the students. The simplicity of this message is one that I have taken into my work as a school leader, and it has helped to unify the school and the parents in strengthening the purpose of the school in their children’s lives. I have also found an affinity with the work of John White through his book *‘Intelligence, Destiny and Education’* (White, 2006), as not only was it relevant to my thesis

but the style and tone in which it was written has helped me in trying to communicate my own work.

Using historical reference points to support the need for this research to take place has been a source of confidence for me and helped me to find my own voice. The work of Stephen Ball has been of great use for me, as it has helped me to grasp the chronology of some of the ways in which performativity and educational systems have come about. In addition, the style of the writing that Ball uses has also helped me to write in a way that is engaging for the reader, as I aspire to continue writing about education. Part of my inspiration came from reading Ball's book, *Foucault, Power, and Education* (Ball, 2013) where he reflects on his own journey into academic writing, alongside his understanding of the work of Foucault. The approach that he takes in writing the book involves rewriting 'the history of education policy' (Ball, 2013:37) where Ball states that he would be 'working on myself, trying to reposition or rewrite myself in relation to what sort of practice education policy analysis might be' (Ball, 2013:39). I found it of interest that through the writing of this thesis there would be a way in which I may be repositioned, but also, that I could consider a way in which historical, philosophical and the sociological domains might converge in my own sense making.

There is a 'novel' attempt at working towards a genealogy of 'progress', and then trying to pull together the perspectives of school leaders, whilst considering my own perspective throughout this thesis which supports the originality of the work. Therefore, also emerging from this research there is the attempt at a 'formation, of a critical ontology of the self' whereby 'it is possible to formulate an ethical standpoint from which individuals can begin to resist the normalising force of the government of individualisation' (McNay, 1994:282). Therefore, there is an approach in this thesis that may resemble, Theorised Subjectivity:

which requires the constant, critical interrogation of our personhood – both intellectual and personal – within the production of the knowledge, which starts by recognising the value as in worth (rather than moral value) – both positive and negative – of the subjective (Letherby and Davidson, 2015:345).

There is much to be gained from the subjective and accepting our subjectivities as part of the research process rather than setting out for a purely objective truth. My sense in this respect comes from the novel *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) by Christopher Isherwood a modernist writer that I read whilst at university. In the opening lines he writes 'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking' (Isherwood, 1997:9) setting the main character

out as a purely objective observer of what is happening around him. There is however subjectivity at play through the direction the camera is pointed, the framing to ensure what is in the shot is what the photographer wants to record. Outside of the framing is what the photographer has consciously opted to leave out, and so the level of objectivity is questionable through the choices that have been made in the taking of the photo. A similar analogy would be the documentary maker, who claims objectivity and to be simply following the action, yet there is an editing process and the control of the camera. Throughout this thesis I have reflected on my personal encounters with the research I have carried out and included elements of my biography and personal thinking. It is my assertion that this level of subjectivity is something that makes this research original and supportive of a contribution to new knowledge. Through theorising my subjectivity in my method and analysis, I believe that the reader will be able to gain insight into the impact of the way in which ‘progress’ has impacted upon education. From this they may well be able to draw their own objective conclusions, or alternatively consider their own subjectivity in the matters addressed.

Through reconsidering ‘progress’ there is the opportunity to resist the economic calculation of governance of the population through education, and for individuals to break the chains of the prevailing orthodoxy of ‘progress’, thus determining ‘progress’ outside of performative targets. Ball’s book on Foucault has been an access point for me to try to engage with Foucault’s ideas, and Ball suggests that ‘he regarded his intellectual endeavours as a way of working on himself; he was always a work in ‘progress’, always unfinished, restless and angry’ (Ball, 2013:7). I would lay claim to this thesis as being part of the way in which I am working on myself, and certainly when it comes to considering the English education system. I am restless and at points I am angry, with the source of my restlessness and anger coming on the behalf of the students, who I believe are involved in an education system that views them as produce to be sourced. Less and less, through my own experience, is the language of the policy maker about the young people with whom I work, but focussed on production needs and economic policy aims.

Organising and shaping the school curriculum to achieve the best outcomes for students has become part of the performance management structures of the English system, with Senior and middle leaders tasked with taking the lead in their schools to achieve national benchmarks. The ambition and fantasies of different policy makers has impacted on the landscape with ‘progress’ as a numeric, measurable concept for which jobs can be won and lost. Through the question ‘What is progress in the English Secondary School System? Perceptions of Secondary

School Leaders’, I have investigated how government policy has created a ‘fantasy’ that all stakeholders are now part of, which claims to empower and emancipate but, in many ways, does the opposite. As Wright states there is a policy agenda claiming to give ‘empowerment’ (Wright, 2011:280) by ‘constructing a ‘fantasy’ in which the parent, and more recently the teacher and the school leadership are seen to be freed’ (*ibid*) by removal of National Curriculum levels and academisation. It is my assertion, through this research, that such empowerment is not present, and that the focus on data and performative targets means the school leaders are less free than ever.

Research and the agenda of government to secure a burden of proof to support the policy decisions is part of my consideration as to why this research is needed now. Lyotard considers that a ‘fundamental aspect of research, the production of proof’ (Lyotard, 1984:44) is ‘in principle part of an argumentation process designed to win acceptance for a new statement’ (*ibid*). In respect of recent education policy and government led initiatives the search for compounding proof that demands acceptance has been central and a part of the prioritisation of a system of performativity. Lyotard suggests a switch occurred as ‘the need for proof became increasingly strong as the pragmatics of scientific knowledge replaces the traditional knowledge based on revelation’ (*ibid*) which he then suggests means that wealth becomes a dominant factor in production of proof as ‘No money, no proof – and that means no verification of statements and no truth’ (*ibid*). He continues to explain that in the period of the 18th and 19th century ‘the games of scientific language become the games of the rich, in which the wealthiest has the best chance of being right. An equation of wealth, efficiency and truth has been established’ (*ibid*). This is important to my research as in the consideration of ‘progress’, proof of ‘progress’ and the direction that is understood to be ‘progress’, is tied to performance. The system that has been engineered is built to supply proof of the actions that the policy makers have tried to establish, and society is tasked with enacting them. Education has become a technology and therefore ‘A technical apparatus requires an investment, but since it optimizes the efficiency of the task to which it is applied, it also optimizes the surplus value to be realised’ (*ibid*). Although Lyotard goes on to tie this statement back into research funding I understand this approach is where the efficiency of education and measurement has become the obsession of government as they seek a burden of proof for investors, in this case the taxpayer, as to the value for money of the policy decisions. As ‘performativity increases the ability to produce proof, it also increases the ability to be right’ (Lyotard, 1984:46) which gives government the evidence it requires to use ‘the evidence as proof’ (*ibid*). It can be argued that through the

burden of proof, political policy makers have ‘access to scientific knowledge and decision-making authority’ (*ibid*). Therefore, the education profession is tied to evidence, and is then forced through state engineered initiatives to follow through with actions that accept that authority.

Since 1997, Schools have increasingly become independent identities with the evolution of Academies some of which have now become Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), through successive government policies, in creating a marketplace that is seemingly independent of the government in decision making, yet through the system of performativity all are linked to central policy. As Gerwitz states ‘a key post-welfarist assumption is that in a devolved system of provision, school managers and teachers are primarily responsible for the success or failure of schools’ (Gerwitz,2002:95) a failure which Ball says allows the government to act tough’ (Ball, 2017:131). The more evidence and proof the harder it is for those working within the system to deny the ‘fantasy’ that has been created through policy, as it is repeatedly shown to be a reality, where ‘Teachers and learners were positioned within systems of inspection and comparison and ”terror”’ (Ball, 2013:42). The league tables and data spreadsheets denoting the level of worth, the intensity of inspection framework which changes repeatedly and in more recent times the “payment by results” (*ibid*).

Through this research I set out to understand, perceptions of School Leaders tasked with enacting a government policy built around a ‘fantasy’ of ‘progress’ and the extent to which they believe they have agency. As school leaders, they need to make decisions within their institutions that will provide the best outcomes possible yet adhere to the rigorous and unbending system of qualification. ‘progress’ and what ‘progress’ means is just one aspect of the system in England and so in this thesis I have explored a definition of ‘progress’ and an understanding through a qualitative, interpretive approach, of the impact of policy on the leaders I interviewed, and how they enact it.

1.2 My ‘progress’ into education research

As part of this thesis, I am interested in exploring how the ontology of my ‘self’ may have a role to play in the writing and communication of why I have taken on a Doctorate in Education, and why what I have to say can contribute to new knowledge. By reflecting on the experience of this Doctorate in Education, it should be apparent how my study has shaped and developed

this thesis and indicate where my future interests in education research may lie. In doing so it will also help to answer the questions that I am raising regarding 'progress' in education on the national level, with a direct tie to my own personal experience. Through this consideration I will make 'petite generalisations' in order 'to make sense of situations' (Kushner, 2017:56) as the study I am doing relates directly to me and my daily work as a leader in an English secondary school, as well as understanding the impact on others. Something that the experience of the EdD has shown me is the importance of biography, and to share how I have arrived at this point as a way of developing an understanding of how my current 'Self' has come in to being and establish my position within the thesis. In this view of the 'self' I am more inclined to consider my 'self' chronologically and located in a 'period of time' rather than multiple 'selves'. Through a chronological view I find it easier to present my position as it is now, and as it was then when making sense.

I started my career in education in 2003 when I enrolled onto the Post Graduate Certificate of Education at Canterbury Christchurch University to train as a teacher of History. In doing so I discovered that I had a much stronger connection with education than I had previously thought, and so started a line of career progression which has led to me working as a school leader. The Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) was a very positive and formative experience for me and one that I still reflect on, as the contrasting experiences shaped some of my later career choices and taught me how my own professional development would be central to helping me to become the best teacher that I could be. My first placement was based in a school where perhaps the aspirations were low, as due to the local system of grammar schools the school was considered a second choice. Some of the students carried with them a negative view of themselves, as having failed the 11+, they felt intellectually inferior, leading to low aspiration, which meant that in the classroom I learnt more about what I believed to be behaviour management. Students appeared to lack belief or interest in what they were learning, and they were not convinced that what was being offered in the classroom was going to help them in their futures. I now reflect on this as an error of judgement as what I then learnt at the second school was through well planned lessons, which mean something to the students in the room, behaviour takes care of itself as the students are invested in what is being taught. The aspiration of the students can equal that of the teacher when presented in the right way, showing the students care and consideration.

That is not to say that I did not approach behaviour from quite an authoritarian perspective in my first role which was to a degree encouraged by more senior staff. My first teaching role was in West London, as an idealistic young teacher who wanted to make a difference, in an inner city comprehensive with an altruistic view of education and what could be achieved. In my role I took on additional responsibility as a pastoral leader but found that such a role detracted from what I really wanted to achieve as a classroom teacher. As a pastoral leader, I had become entrenched in resolving behavioural issues, and was often seen as a problem solver who could talk down a student and reach resolutions swiftly, but I had come into teaching believing in the importance of History as a subject. Through the behavioural system of the school, it would often result in my involvement in the application of sanctions, and parental meetings or even forced removal of students from classrooms. From this position I had to support the imposition of rules and regulations which schools enforce, to ensure uniformity and conformity. Although I was told that I was good in the role, and that I had potential to work at a senior level, what I wanted, was to concentrate on the way in which the History curriculum could be delivered, and how I, as a head of department, could design such a curriculum. Part of my reflection on this time in recent years, is the way in which I feel that perhaps my naivete meant that I was unable to live up to my own convictions, that had bought me into teaching. I had no real understanding on my entrance to the career about the roles and responsibilities of staff, (something that I would argue young people seem much more aware of in the present through social media memes around SLT and high vis jackets), and when I looked for promotion and responsibility, I was surprised at how people were willing to put faith in me to succeed. I had moved to London and was without ties and so committed to my role and willing. It is now that I have the luxury of looking back that I can consider this formative stage of my career in this way.

In my willingness and belief of those around me, I was involved with actions such as removal and isolation of students, reprimands, and parental meetings where the behaviours were deemed as unacceptable by the institution. I was proud that students would tuck their shirts in on seeing me approach and that in my classroom there would be silence on entry and exit. In my own self esteem as a professional I was pleased that I did not have to suffer some of the indignity of colleagues through 'poor behaviour' or lessons that were disrupted. There are of course many sides to this, from the perspective of some students who were perhaps glad of the quiet and order in the room, the disquiet of those who it bought anxiety, but I now consider how perhaps opportunity may have been lost. In this respect I mean for my own growth as a teacher, and for students with whom a dialogue or a more equitable relationship may have been

more satisfying for all. This is of course all conjecture, but I think demonstrates the way in which I personally reflect on education and my career, and how through becoming more involved with the academic research and theory I can carry this out.

My next appointment as a Head of History, was in Fulham and taught me much about how the challenges of government policy and Ofsted impacted on a school. The school was on the edge of National Challenge status whereby the then New Labour Government ‘introduced strategies to help schools where fewer than 30% of pupils achieve 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths’ (Gillies, 2008:2). In my time at the school, I felt that this was something to be feared, as our middle leadership meetings would discuss the threat of challenge status. Meetings would focus on students who were perceived as underachieving and how to secure the best performance possible to survive another year. The school went through the process of being federated with the girls’ school from the same borough with the intention that there would be a preservation of single sex education, but that resources could be shared which led to the appointment of an Executive Head Teacher across both schools. As a Head of History, I became aware that I needed to justify my decision making on more than my own belief and started to take an interest in academic research into history teaching through the Schools History Project (SHP). Based at Leeds Trinity, and established in 1972, SHP is an organisation that has shaped history teaching in England through the work of people such as the of Ian Dawson. Through collaboration and sharing of practice the SHP has supported history teachers, with curriculum development and approaches to classroom practice. In their vision they clearly state that ‘The project provides a clear and distinctive voice for history in schools, based on its belief that history should be a diverse and fascinating subject enjoyed by everyone’ ([Schools History Project](#)). At the time there was also a forum where lots of these ideas were discussed, and I enjoyed participating and learning more about approaches to History teaching, and how to engage young people. In a simple way I was engaging with pedagogical ideas that would help to develop me as a practitioner and school leader.

With this influence in mind, I worked on ways to make the study of History more than a run through a timeline and was fortunate to be involved with a project with an organisation called the ‘Creative partnership’. In the project I reconsidered an area of the curriculum for my then Year 9 and designed a sequence of learning on a local history project. The project was a study into a local theatre impresario called Oswald Stoll who when denied planning for a theatre in Fulham, next to Stamford Bridge Football ground, built a number of homes for veterans of

World War I. Rather than a standard assessment at the end of the sequence in the traditional essay writing sense, the boys and I created an advert for the charity, with the support of the partnership. The charity still houses veterans today mainly those from the most recent conflicts that the UK has been involved with, and the boys were able to meet with some of them and ask them questions. What was really striking for me in this situation was that some of those students' families had also been affected by the conflicts. The boys were learning about mental health problems caused by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as well as the history and techniques in filming, recording, animation and much more. What we were doing went beyond the notion of a National Curriculum level and was working towards what I believed was a much more enriching learning experience. In some respects, a different kind of educational 'progress' with less focus on grades or potential qualification rather than the experience of learning and working towards a completed project.

This interest was further developed as I mentored teachers through the PGCE and supported them with their Initial Teacher Education (ITE), which brought me into contact with members of the team at the Institute of Education (IOE). When mentoring, it made me consider more carefully my own practice and approach to history teaching, but also the need to support my convictions with some evidence as part of their professional development. It is my belief that this led me to where I am now, as I started to ask myself questions about why I was pursuing specific educational aims, and the extent to which policy change that was being discussed, with an incumbent government, was impacting on my own decision making at a curricular level.

It was at this point in 2010 that History and History teaching was coming very much into the focus, leading to much debate about what should and would be included in the revised National Curriculum. The pressure of a nationalist view of the past and the way in which the policy makers were making decisions, made me question the extent to which as a curriculum leader I was able to resist such pressure. This narrative of my own career is important to my positionality, and how I have come to carry out this research because at this early stage of my career I was looking to develop my praxis, within a system that was feeling increasingly restrictive. My own ambitions as a teacher were built around a sense of freedom to develop experiences, and understanding which would allow those I taught, to make choices and for me as a professional to find purpose.

For various reasons I decided that I needed to move again, mainly due to having a young family and a long commute, which led me to my next move to a Faith School in West London, where I have worked ever since initially as head of history, but now as a senior leader with responsibility for curriculum. When I joined the school, it had just converted to Academy Status as part of the Coalition Government's initiative that allowed Outstanding schools to convert. In my current role I am charged with developing the whole school curriculum from Reception to Year 13, (age 4 up to age 18), which has meant developing a bird's eye view of the education of children from start to finish, rather than through one subject, but across them all. In using the expression 'birds' eye' I am trying to explain how through a broader view of a school curriculum and through leading upon it I am no longer in a 'silo' (Reiss and White, 2013:42) with regards to focussing just on History, but now having to take a position on other subject disciplines as well from Key Stage 1(KS1) through to Sixth Form alternatively referred to as Key Stage 5 (KS5). By mapping out the curriculum and discussing the intentions, I have become more aware of how threads appear, and subjects overlap, interweaving with each other. I have also become aware of the junctions as students move through phases, and how the manner of assessment impacts upon them, with regards to what they are taught and how they are taught. As a school there are aims based around the faith elements, as well as students achieving academic success, and the ambitions of their parents, as well as responding to government policy.

Through this experience and in my current position, I have found myself questioning why colleagues can become so entrenched in their discipline and are unable to see the broader curriculum aims of the school, that students can be so focussed on the academic goals that they misunderstand the ethos. There is a fixation on the road to 'progress' along with a concentration on results, but perhaps miss the broader educational aim of the school in which we work with regards to the outcomes we aspire to. This thesis has allowed me to investigate the extent to which my own perception is shared or contrasted with the perception of others. The school has also been central to my development in education research by supporting me in my academic endeavours, firstly towards my MA in Education at Brunel. During the MA I became interested in the notion of social justice, and the way in which perspectives of education can be coloured by education policy and experience. At the conclusion of that period of study, I became aware of the EdD and was interested in understanding how I might be able to pursue my interest in research and continue to learn more about education. With this thesis I believe that pursuing that interest has been of great value to me as a person, and the way in which I can work in the

classroom and the school, whilst also negotiating with my personal views about policy and education. Throughout this thesis my personal experience is present and coupled with that of the participants, my reflection on the policy decisions surrounding ‘progress’ on the national level and how School leaders enact them.

1.3 A personal history

There is a particular strand of my own family history that I believe fits into the wider narrative of ‘progress’ and what ‘progress’ can be perceived as, when considering issues such as ‘Social mobility’ or ‘Social Justice’. In being so focussed on the present in education it is possible to forget that the aim is very much future based, and a long-term future at that. It has perhaps become even more amplified in recent times the need for immediate answers and solutions, but as Hume considered, ‘Men are not able radically to cure, either in themselves or others, that narrowness of the soul, which makes them prefer the present to the remote.’ (Hume, 1740:537) In other words, I would argue, that in the present educational system, there is so much focus on the here and now that the more complex questions are being ignored. Preference is given to the immediacy of the data that is produced through the assessment system as the proof of the policy impact. In the English system it could be argued that this has occurred through:

The result of the twin obsessions with accountability and autonomy in England is a disproportionate pressure on school leaders to ‘account for’ their pupil’s academic achievements and find quick fixes where standards are below national benchmarks. (Godfrey, 2016:304)

I believe, this thesis will show that by focussing on the obsession of ‘progress’ as a performance measure the immediate is being given more attention, with the longer term being neglected, ignored, or even removed from focus entirely to develop a compliant national workforce. In doing so ‘the shift into neo or advanced liberalism and globalisation stresses, motivation, aspiration and personality as central psychological markers of the appropriate kind of care of the self’ (Walkerdine and Bansel, 2009:49). This means that ‘the individual must understand the need to refashion themselves constantly in order to be employable’ (Walkerdine, 2011:256). The challenge for educators, parents and students is that the education being provided is unlikely to link directly to a career choice for life. As global trends and services change there is the need for the workforce to refashion itself to serve a purpose within the economy.

Approaches to education policy and performativity in England have led to a ‘fantasy’ idea of ‘progress’ surrounding grades and beliefs about the significance of academic achievement over the wider aims of education. My personal, perception is that there was a broader moral case for education in the past, whereas in the present, financial security and the immediacy of funds dominates time and space. Consideration of ‘progress’ and what it might be, concerns me as I grapple with my own perception of social justice and mobility, and whether education is transformative. My own view is that rather than promoting social mobility, or offering hope, education has become about maintaining the social, political, and economic order of the country.

According to Walkerdine ‘In the 1950s and 1960s, the moment of post-war Britain, there was considerable emphasis on the possibility of escape from the working class on the basis of an upward mobility’ (Walkerdine, 2003:237), which ‘fitted neatly with a clear concern about the male manual worker as the bearer of working-class identity’ (*ibid*). It is my own sense of class whereby I have found it difficult to place myself, as my parents through their work and life were very much middle class but came from working class backgrounds. Walkerdine asserts that in

such families, they argue, suffer serious material deprivation which means lack of material supports to education but also face, a cultural barrier of low aspirations and scepticism about education, the feeling that education is by and for other people, and likely to let one down(Walkerdine, 2011:256).

In my own experience there was not such material deprivation but there was scepticism about education and the extent to which education was going to benefit. My parents often stressed the positives of ‘service’ in the military or police as opportunity for work by leaving education sooner rather than later and working my way up. One moment that stood out most vividly was when at A-Level Options evening my history teacher tried to sell the subject to which my mum replied ‘what will he do with that? Become a History teacher’. I left that evening in the view that History A-Level was not for me and signed up for a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in Business Studies, which my parents believed had better job prospects. In the end on receiving my GCSE results I changed path and did go on to study A-Level History as a subject I enjoyed.

It was once I made my way to university that I found myself in a position where I was not sure why I was there. My education coincided with New Labour and the understanding that a

university education would be the norm with Walkerdine stating ‘jobs in the 21st century require higher-order skills. A successful education in the sixth form and university will be the norm, they state, not the alternative’ (Walkerdine, 2011:256). The ‘they’ in Walkerdine’s article refers to the ‘Department of Children Schools and families’ (DCSF), who believed they were focussing on ‘lack of aspiration as the central tenet and the need to raise it’ (*ibid*).

Swept along I chose a university but had no understanding of what lay in store, neither did my parents as I recall my mum expecting a parent’s evening or some sort of report. I had no grasp of how degrees were graded and became isolated despite joining the rugby team where culturally I found a complete change of dynamic. My aspiration and those of my parents had got me there, but once there I did not know what to do or how to be. It led to me dropping out and returning home to take up a role in a call centre. After a period, I chose to return to university, one I could study at locally, to be able to live at home. Through this experience I believe I was able to straddle the versions of myself in terms of class and the societal shift I needed to take to complete my degree.

There are times in lessons when students may comment on their perception of me and an assumed level of knowledge and education and maybe to an extent class. Whenever this occurs, I respond by explaining that they see me as I am now, not as I was then and I believe that to chain the notion of ‘progress’ to academic success or failure, to compare that account with prior generations is to misunderstand the power that education has had in altering lives over the last one hundred years. Since 1900 the growth of the state welfare system has been one of the most important sub plots, from my own perspective, of British history, from the National Efficiency at the time of the Boer War in 1899, through the social reforms of which education has become a central part. The way we live our lives and the compulsory element of education that has come about over those one hundred years, means that there is an experience which can be considered as within living memory.

My own interest in History and Society has made me consider how events have led me to the point where I am today and what has made me who I am, and why I feel the need to contribute to education as a teacher but also as a researcher. In sharing this personal aspect, I believe my motivation and concern with ‘progress’ is manifested as I look beyond my ‘progress’ to that of my family lineage and that by growing up in Britain, I do have a preoccupation with class. Here I believe it is possible to show a level of ‘progress’ but in part due to major societal shifts,

with my concern for future generations being that such mobility may have stalled thus leading to a lack of social justice. When 'progress' was to lift people from poverty in the first half of the 20th Century my own view is that it was easier to see the change, whereas in the 21st Century this is more complex. Therefore, when I developed my own view of 'progress' it is one that questions what 'progress' is and how society attempts to achieve it and is 'progress' now about sustaining the way we live.

On my mother's side there is very limited information with regards to the parents of my grandmother, but what is known is that her mother was born in about 1885 and placed into Darenth Asylum for Imbeciles in Dartford in Kent. In the 1891 census she appears aged seven but with no record of her parents suggesting that perhaps she was abandoned. In 1911 she appears as being in the London County Lunatic asylum in Bexley in Kent before on the 18th of August 1914 entering the Lambeth Workhouse, the same day, she gave birth to my grandmother. One area of clarity on the education of my great grandmother is that she was illiterate as on my grandmother's birth certificate she signed with a mark, as unable to write her own name. She went on to have two more children who along with my grandmother were taken away from her, as she was placed in another asylum deemed to be for 'severe lunatics' in Caterham, Surrey. She remained there until she died in 1943 with her death certificate stating cardio-vascular degeneration and idiocy as the cause. 'Boarded out', a government initiative started in the latter part of the 19th Century where rather than needing to hold children and families in the workhouse or district schools, they were placed in a foster family. I have very little understanding of that experience, as my grandmother would not talk about it, but within the family there is an understanding that she had perhaps suffered abuse at various points in her upbringing.

My maternal grandfather was born in Ireland as the son of a peat farmer and had minimal education to the age of 12. He came to England with a small amount of money and found work in pubs and bars before meeting my grandmother in a munitions factory during World War II. They settled and he became the landlord of a pub in Mortlake and then in Battersea, having two daughters, and establishing a life together. My mother ended school with two qualifications at the age of sixteen and went straight to work in a bank before getting married and becoming a mother herself. She opted to stay at home and raise me and my brother.

My father was also brought up in London, growing up in Fulham, also with an immigrant father, who had come to live in England from India along with his extended family. My grandfather's family can be traced back to the 1700s in India, initially migrating from Ireland and then working on the railways. The family had migrated to England in 1949, as although in India for generations they were in some ways outsiders, as part of the Anglo-Indian community that was viewed as neither British nor Indian. My Grandfather initially worked in the Merchant Navy before working in factories and eventually as a post man and had little time for education. His expectation of my father was that he would go to work as soon as possible and follow in his own steps, certainly not to aspire to university. My Grandmother was born and brought up in Fulham, where her own mother worked as a cleaner working for various houses and families in the area. Her father I know little about other than he had served in World War I, and that in hindsight, according to my father, suffered with post-traumatic stress disorder. My father recalls his education in the 1950s and 1960s as being a mixed message of aspiration but also crushing rejection as he was told he was not the right type by the teacher at his school when it came to applying for university. Instead, he found his way into Insurance Sales where he forged out a successful career for himself which again had an impact on his view of education. Over time I would argue this has changed but whilst I was growing up the conversations around my own education were very much about how to access a regular, well paid, line of employment.

My brother and I both went on to complete A-Levels before being the first in the family to go on to higher education and complete degrees, mine, in History and Literary Studies, and his, in Popular Music. The step to achieving my degree was however more challenging than the two lines above suggest, as outlined earlier I dropped out and stepped away from higher education before returning to complete a full degree course. I found the experience of university both lonely and isolating despite being part of the rugby teams and in a town where I had some family nearby. The experience was one I was not prepared for, nor did I understand how the system worked with regards to how I was supposed to go about studying. I had in many respects made the 'progress' expected of me by the system in the way in which I had transitioned from GCSE to A-Level and then onto a degree course, but stepped into a world for which I was not prepared. It eventually took courage for me to return home and reset, via a period of full-time work, to then return to my studies and complete the degree. It was through having what I had lost that I understood what I had to gain and how I could become as a person, and ultimately that perhaps working with young people, was something I would like to do.

The point I am trying to make is that through this one strand of one brief family history there is evidence of social mobility and the challenge of overcoming social injustice that could be construed as 'progress'. It is my assertion that this journey I have presented contrasts with the performative view of 'progress' as presented by policy makers, as it is neither immediate nor measurable by the systems that their logic prefers. Taken on the proviso that 'progress' is defined by betterment then my life chances and situations are and were certainly superior to those of my great grandmother. There is disadvantage, economically, socially, and educationally, that has been overcome over time and through generations. One could argue there is evidence of successful social 'progress' with the result of my brother and I attending university, but it took approximately a hundred years to be able to see that social 'progress'. Viewing social mobility as 'progress' is problematic as an empty promise or disavowal, something I explain more explicitly in my method chapter when considering 'fantasy'. For if everyone is socially mobile, against what, is that mobility compared to, or do we live our lives as in my reference to Walkerdine, earlier in this chapter, with a need to 'constantly refashion ourselves' (Walkerdine, 2011:256). Societal change is rarely immediate and when education reform or ideas focus purely on the immediate, they are neglecting to reflect on what has come before to help to guide them in the present. By drawing this line directly between myself and the past it gives a chronology of one family story against which the increase of government legislation and involvement could be matched.

For my own understanding of my 'self' it helps me to explain why I am concerned with educational aims of current policy makers in England and the impact of the changes they have made to the system, with increased accountability and instrumentalization. My concern has been increased over the course of my career thus far, where I have had to contend with multiple changes to the National Curriculum and exam system at KS4 and KS5. In addition, there has been the regular switch in focus from the inspecting body Ofsted as well as changes in government, where immediate results have been sought to influence the present. Between 2010 and 2025 there have been seven different Prime Ministers with policy decisions based on austerity, economic stability, Brexit, and the national emergency of Covid-19. In a fifteen-year period, particularly over the last five years, there have been rapid changes to government when comparing to the fact that between 1979 to 2007 there were just three prime ministers in Thatcher, Major and Blair. With limited time in office, due to instability within the ruling party, focus for policy makers has been on immediacy, prioritising short-term demonstrable results which present them as electable and thus maintaining their power and control.

In producing this account of my own educational journey and family background, I have also made myself into an artefact or object of the past, a conduit through which it is possible to track some of the twists and turns of the latter part of the 19th Century up to and including the present. The ‘ethic of compulsion’ through my attendance of school but also that I should have felt the compulsion of Higher Education through the political narrative is apparent in the story. There is also the source of my disquiet and the motivations for me pursuing this thesis and the angle from which I am trying to present my arguments. I am deliberate in my intention to disrupt the system by presenting the taken for granted nature of ‘progress’ as part of the educational experience and to try to establish a counter perspective. In my method chapter there is a deeper explanation of how these experiences, have shaped my view through the visual representations that I have made.

1.4 Aim and purpose of this study

The aim and purpose of this thesis is to build an argument that seeks to understand the ways in which Senior and Middle leaders have needed to enact policy to meet a point of predetermined ‘progress’. From my own point of view ‘progress’ can be an illusion or ‘fantasy’ which generates a focal point to deliver policy aims and objectives as part of a ‘delivery chain’. The concern I have is that the current ‘political class’, view education from the stand that is a tool to enhance position within the global marketplace, with Gavin Williamson (Secretary of State for education 2019-2021) pledging ‘£120 million for new specialist institutes in a bid to “overtake Germany” in delivering the best technical education’ (Busby, 2019:40). Mary Bousted, joint General Secretary of the NEU responded in an article in the TES at the time ‘He’s barely begun. He’s set himself an ambitious target to be better than Germany’ but in her estimation ‘generally is a continuation of the current direction of travel’ and a system of ‘high stake exams and largely a continuation of the current accountability framework’ (Gibbons,2020:18). There is a nationalist tone to the statement setting out educational aims against another country, to compete against them, making winning that competition the mark of success. To deny Williamson’s aim could therefore be seen as unpatriotic and lead to accusation of not wanting students in English education settings to have better chances. The polarisation that has been experienced through Brexit is apparent here as political and educational aims are set in a way that can be seen as for or against, with limited room for a seat in the middle. Where earlier I mention the term ‘political class’, I do so in the belief that there

is a distinct character to British politics in recent years, not in the manner of the ‘popular complaint about the political class’, that it, ‘is feckless unrepresentative, immoral and elitist’ (Allen and Cairney, 2017:18). I think that politicians do believe they are trying their best, but there is also a political class that is made up of ‘the political elite, the professionalisation of politics and political careerism’ (*ibid*) that is so fixed in its own ideological struggle, they are bouncing from policy to policy. In my estimation Education has been barraged with reform that is made by career politicians, that are trying to build names for themselves and to prove their worth to their political parties. My running example through this thesis has been the former Secretary of State for education (2010-2014), who enacted such deep reforms to demonstrate their potential, culminating in their failed attempt to become the leader of the Conservative party. For me personally, they became someone to resist, as I found their language and approach towards the teaching profession aggressive and derogatory. I also believe my sense of objection is also affected by being involved in strike action at the time due to pension reforms that the government were trying to force through. For my own positionality this is important to recognise to understand why I am critical of the way in which the policy decisions of that time period have affected education in England. It is also important to recognise that the Former Secretary of State was not solely responsible but was the face of the reforms that were largely supported at the time by the Conservative party.

Ball states ‘performance has no room for caring. These are not simply things done, as in previous regimes of power. These are things that we do to ourselves and to others’ (Ball, 2003:224). My own thought here is that there is a conflict between personal freedom and security of the individual against the personal freedom and security that the state wants to see. There are many issues around an economy centred education as noted by White where he stated, ‘an economy centred education may well try to restrict his expectations, trim them down so that he fits neatly into an occupational role’ (White, 1982:61). He goes on to state that the economic educational ideal needs ‘a ready obedience to authority’ (White, 1982:62). This highlights the tension between the educational aims and economic as to be morally autonomous but unquestionably obedient, as ‘Classroom social relations inculcate students with the attitudes and dispositions necessary for acceptance of the social and economic imperatives of a capitalist society’ (Giroux, 1983:84). Here is where I would begin to argue the oppressive nature of the use of ‘progress’ as the measure in the current system being endured in England. Being measured, compared, and contrasted by instruments that would make students accept such treatment in the workplace. Arguably the measure is not there for the benefit of those who

are passing through, or even operating it but for the policy makers to be able to provide evidence as proof of their own achievements and support the actions they have taken.

The idea of ‘progress’ has become a policy of ‘progress’ in England through the performance system of ‘Progress 8’, which is what I have explored in this thesis. For ‘progress’ to be part of policy this way I have set out to consider how teacher agency may be established to challenge the policy and through their actions challenge the economic logic of ‘progress’ in education. There is a lived experience to be investigated here and how teachers have handled and are handling, the conflict and tension in the system that is in front of them. I return to the concept of security and freedom and how that has been challenged with a nationalist pull, which puts the National security at the centre of policy over individual liberty. Sumption reflected on this during his Reith Lecture in 2019 on ‘Law and the decline of Politics’:

The great 17th century political philosopher, Thomas Hobbs, believed that political communities surrendered their liberty to an absolute monarch in return for security. Hobbs has very few followers today, but modern societies have gone a long way towards justifying his theories (Sumption, 2019:8).

Although there was no surrendering to the monarch, the willingness to surrender liberty to a ruling group was exemplified with the restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 outbreak of 2020, whereby people were asked to relinquish personal liberty for the security of the Nation. Questionably such a surrender was not necessarily followed by all as perhaps exemplified through the ‘party gate’ scandals, that became synonymous with the Johnson government. I return here to the notion of ‘banking education’ whereby the ‘dominant elites utilise the banking concept to encourage passivity in the oppressed, corresponding with the latter’s submerged state of consciousness with slogans which create even more fear of freedom’ (Friere, 1970:68). In recent times under the Johnson Premiership in England perhaps ‘Getting Brexit done’ is one such slogan where Europe was presented as an enemy that was holding back freedom. For the young people impacted by Covid-19 there was the apportioning blame the notion of the ‘Mutant algorithm’ (Coughlan, BBC, [2020](#)), to deflect blame from a government which arguably lacked a coherent plan. Passivity was expected from the masses, as the government removed itself from blame in relation to the results and in the case of Brexit blaming their European counterparts and ‘Remainers’. Potentially ‘progress’ can be considered as an authoritarian concept with the ruling elite determining what they want ‘progress’ to be, beneficiaries supporting the vision of ‘progress’ whilst the masses provide the means.

For example, the National can override the personal as the policy makers seek to carry out their work to fulfil their vision of the State, thus selling the idea that the greater security gives freedom. The separation is perhaps explained when considering the work of Mills and the idea that ‘the power to make decisions is now so clearly seated in political, military, and economic institutions that other areas of society seem to side and, on occasion, readily subordinated to these’ (Mills, 1958:32). From Mills point I construe that the three operate on the National level putting national interests first whilst pertaining to be for the benefit of the public and therefore personal. In the past ‘Political freedom and economic security were anchored in small independent properties’ (Mills, 1958:38), whereas one might argue that through centralisation such independence and freedom is bound to the central political and economic decision making. This means that there is a need for ‘free associations standing between families and smaller communities and publics on one hand, and the state, the military, the corporation on the other’ (Mills, 1958:40). Such free associations, become evident in moments when national security impacts on individual and personal freedom, as they are bound to the central state which one might argue acts as a corporation. Historically a comparison may be made with the system of relief in operation during the 18th Century, whereby parishes cared for those who needed support. Local areas through Parishes, had scope to determine the means of support without interference but as England industrialised and urbanised, it was no longer in the interest of government or the factory owners for such permissive means of relief to continue. As centralisation grew the balance swung more towards the national interest as determined by central government, influenced by economic factors and the interests of the wealthy. Freedom is reduced, taking away from the personal needs, and prioritising the national.

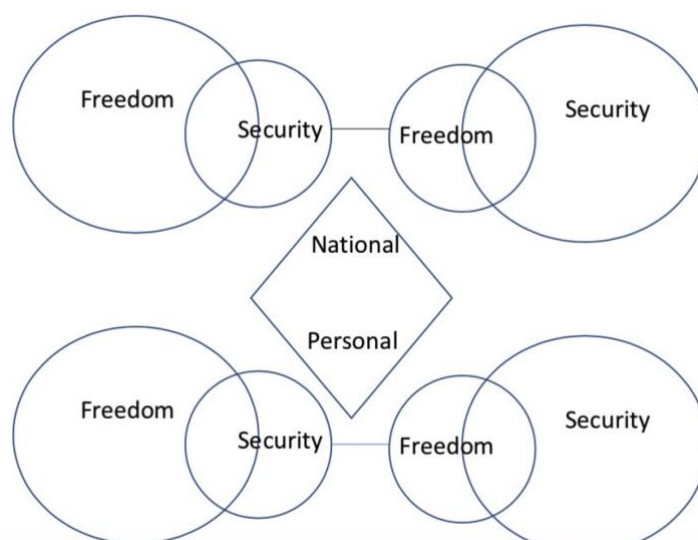


Figure 1, Diagram showing the tensions between Security and Freedom

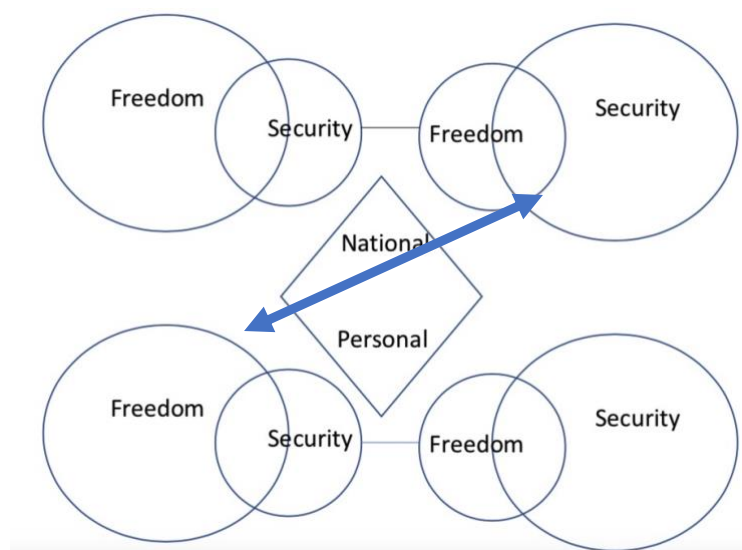


Figure 2, Diagram showing tension between National and Personal

When discontent grows there is the need to adjust to reduce the tension, with government policy reflecting the desire of the people to sense greater freedom. It is when the threat to security is perceived to be the greater issue, both personally and nationally, that we see greater acceptance of extremist ideologies such as fascism, which readily present the danger of the other and harm to the national identity (*see figure 1 and figure 2*). For the English system, the fear of a lack of ‘progress’ encourages a system that is more concentrated on learning by rote, with a disciplinary and behavioural focus, along with a determination to enforce the compulsion of schooling on the family. Parents, Students, and schools are drawn into the tension of ‘progress’ being vital to the future economic security of the nation, but also the individual. Therefore, there is a surrendering of what ‘progress’ means and an acceptance of the ‘fantasy’ as presented by the ruling class. Personal ‘progress’, or an individual sense of ‘progress’ is overpowered by a national agenda, that sees the role and purpose of ‘progress’ being the sustained power of the State, with an efficient body of workers to support the means. ‘Progress’ in the education system has been instrumentalised and ‘monetised’ using data so that schools, students, and parents view ‘progress’ as an economic income and outcome, therefore failure to achieve ‘progress’ is presented as potentially perilous to the economic future and so all are needed to ensure that that failure is not accepted, and that ‘progress’ is the focus for all. In education I think that there is the determinator, the beneficiaries and the means, which come together to deliver what is then understood to be ‘progress’ (*see figure 3*).

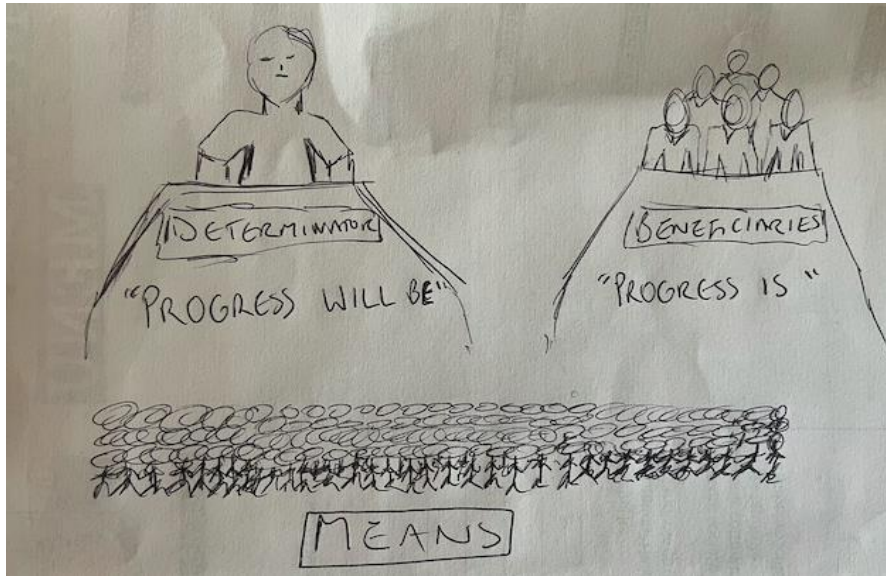


Figure 3, Determining the focal point.

The ‘Determinator’, my own word, akin to the fictional character the Terminator, is the body that creates the overarching vision of what ‘progress’ will be’ and their focal point is shared either explicitly or implicitly through policy decisions and macro considerations. These considerations relate to economic policy considerations and challenges for which education policy is seen as a source. Beneficiaries are those who are bound to the ‘Determinator’ and gain reward from supporting and helping to bring the ‘Determinator’s’ vision into being, whilst the ‘bodies’ are the means for the former two beings to achieve their ends. The bond between the Determinator and the Beneficiaries is contingent on the extent to which there are mutual rewards, as both are expendable when the power relation breaks down. In this explanation I am trying to get across my own thinking and reconciliation with the way in which ‘progress’, or lack of ‘progress’ is either heralded or bemoaned, as well as envisioned and experienced. By considering ‘progress’ in this way I believe I can argue that the way in which it has become normalised needs to be challenged and reconsidered if those working within education are to be able to respond and act. Through the literature review I have pulled the history of ‘progress’ together with evidence of how ‘progress’ has been presented and the impact it has had on the way policy has been affected.

1.5 The assessment of ‘progress’ – Why this thesis is relevant now?

In March 2020 in a short parliamentary statement Gavin Williamson (Secretary of State for Education, 2019-2021) put schools into lockdown and simultaneously announced the

cancellation of examinations in England. In one moment, the ‘vortex’ (see 1.5.1 where I explain the importance of the ‘vortex’ to my research), that young people were heading towards at A-Level and GCSE closed with students staring blankly at the space where it had been wondering how they were to get through to the other side and who might open it for them. Teachers too were left bewildered as to what might happen now. Would the performance measures stand, how would they be judged now that the examinations had gone. Eventually a plan was drawn up and schools were asked to record Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) to be sent to the exam boards and an algorithm would decide the fate of the young people. Many astute observers suggested at this very point that there would be a fatal flaw with the disadvantaged being let down by the system. Teachers were unsure what to do, should they inflate their students’ grades so that they were not letting them down by going too low, or did they need to hold grades down to avoid being picked out for leniency. As time ticked towards August 13th Teachers, students and parents waited to find out their fate and as predicted by some, the inequality of the award of grades was laid bare. ‘Private schools received more than twice as many A*-A as comprehensives after standardisation’ and that ‘48.6% of students received an A*-A grade compared with 21.8% of students at comprehensive schools’ (Duncan et al, *The Guardian*,[2020](#)).

The ‘vortex’ had opened for the privileged and privately educated but had been closed to the many, as if a side door had been slid open whilst the rest faced forward wondering. A panic ensued and a U-turn by government over what it had called robust grades saw the ‘vortex’ reopened but many of the places at the universities had gone. The government U-turn was applied to both A-Level and GCSE as Williamson claimed ‘allocating of grades has resulted in more significant inconsistencies that cannot be resolved through an appeals process’ (Weale and Stewart, 2020:1).

The measures are there to show how much ‘progress’ has been made at both GCSE and A-level, with the performance of schools held against it, to rank and file them. Through Covid-19 the measure was broken, perhaps beyond repair as the supposedly objective examinations which generate targets, had not taken place. Students sitting their GCSE in 2025 have not taken their Statutory Assessment Tasks (SATs) from which the KS2 data used to create their target is not present and so a ‘progress’ score cannot be created. It seems that perhaps the time is right to reconsider what ‘progress’ means and exactly what is being looked for in the English school system. Maybe such a break in the system will allow for a discussion to take place. It may be

cliché and something of an obsession for researchers in the wake of the 2020 pandemic but the way in which such an event will impact on how people live their lives is not something that can be ignored.

When major pandemics have occurred there has sometimes been radical change to the way people live their lives, for example the Peasants revolt after the Black Death and the challenge to the order of society. Foucault considers the impact of plague in *Panopticism* from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault, 1977) relating to the 'political dream' with 'the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life' (Foucault, 1977:198). After a period where people were willing to give up their freedom to gain the security and safety and protect their neighbours and families what changes might there be. The loss of liberty is a stark experience and to witness the fragility of a system, that is purported to be the portal to greater freedom and prosperity, may well see those involved questioning even deeper the aim and purpose of it. Parents have been embedded in their child's education and are perhaps more aware than ever about the challenges faced and the complexity of the activity. How might this change their perception and what they are willing to accept in the next phase of their child's education? The 'vortex' is opening back up, but it does not need to be a simple reboot with the same path to follow and leap of faith but could be ready for a rethink. Through this research the aim is to challenge the thinking behind 'progress' scores and the measurement particularly as in 2025 there will be a cohort of students completing their GCSEs for which the prior data used to generate their targets does not exist. How then to measure the 'progress' of the 'Covid-19 generation'? Is it possible to use the same measures to reach the same conclusions? The answer is that it is not and therefore what will be designated as the marker of 'progress' that supports the affirmation of all involved, so that as per the prevailing orthodox of 'progress', there is a betterment.

1.5.1 'The Vortex', a recurring image

The image of 'The Vortex' has become a central part of my thesis and as this is the first mention, I feel it is important to explain why I have chosen 'The Vortex' (*see figure 4 and figure 5*) and what it symbolises.

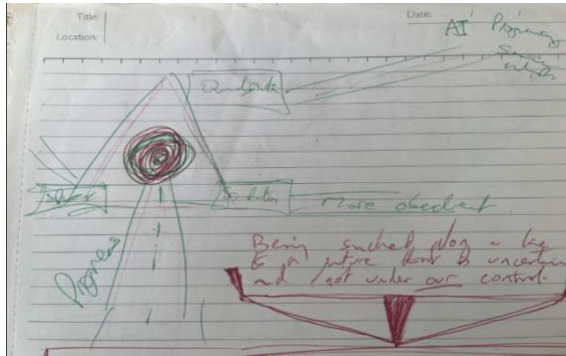


Figure 4, Initial drawing of 'The Vortex'

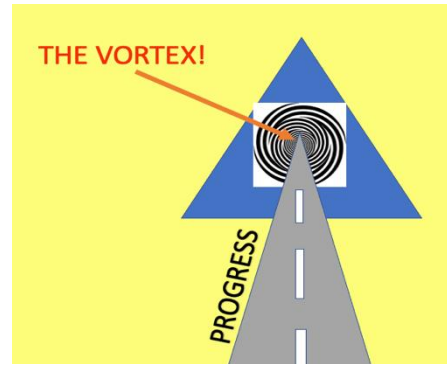


Figure 5 'The Vortex'

As an image connected to travel and dimensions the 'vortex' is one that I believe is one I have seen on many occasions to the point that it was whilst working towards this thesis that the visual became very important to me. The specialist and more scientific definition of a vortex is 'a mass of air, water, etc. that turns round very fast and pulls things into its centre' (Oxford Learners dictionary, 2021) where as I am looking at the vortex from the literary angle which is defined as 'a very power feeling or situation that you cannot avoid or escape from' (*ibid*). I am of the view that for education 'progress' has become about the journey towards the 'vortex', before being dragged and pulled into the centre and arriving to the other side. The students have no choice at the focal point and are thrust into the 'vortex' by the school system in England, without being able to fully contemplate what is waiting for them as the exit on the other side. In *figure 4* I started with a doodle and was considering how the path along which students travel could feel, as though it is out of the control of teachers, students, and parents. The image of the whirling vortex dragging everything in its path to the centre point was a strong one that I could not get out of my mind. Later I took the doodle and turned it into the digital version in *Figure 5* as I contemplated other pressures that I believed would contribute to this visual later.

The visual of a 'vortex' transporting people from one place or dimension to another can be found in films and is where I take some of my inspiration from in using the 'vortex' in the way that I have throughout this thesis. In the 1927 film 'Wings' there is a Vortex (*see figure 6*) used as the background for one scene as a sense of foreboding and impending doom, using the caption 'Like a mighty maelstrom of destruction the war now drew into its centre the power

and the pride of all the earth' (*Wings*, 1927). At the centre is the unknown and the force of the 'vortex' is inescapable as all is pulled towards it.

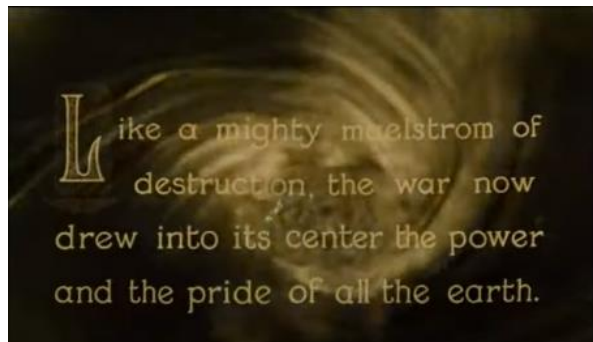


Figure 6, Still from film *Wings*, 1927

Another example of a film with a 'vortex' is the 'The Wizard of Oz' whereby a tornado transports Dorothy to an alternate realm, where she is spun out into another world. Furthermore, when she starts her journey on the 'Yellow Brick Road' and the camera pulls back, the yellow brick road has the visual of a 'vortex' although she spins out from the centre to begin her journey, rather than being pulled to the centre (*see figure 7*). In the recent series of Marvel films, in particular, *End Game*, the use of portals to move between dimensions and time, was an important aspect of the story telling. From my perspective when considering education, I feel that this visual imagery is apt as very much the descriptions around what happens when young people leave school, will often revolve around abstract ideas of movement and place. I return to discuss this aspect of my work in much more detail in my methodology section as this imagery has been a central part of the way in which I have worked throughout this thesis.



Figure 7, Still from *Wizard of Oz* (1939)

1.6 Research question and intended contribution.

The research question is ‘What is Progress in the English Secondary School system? Perceptions of Secondary school leaders’. To understand those perceptions, I have interviewed senior and middle leaders whereby I have asked ‘What is ‘progress’?’ as an opening question. This opening question provides an initial response which can be understood as phenomenological before following up with questions relating to ‘progress’.

To support my thinking and I have developed a working definition which I am using my research to test and support my contribution to knowledge. The first attempt at writing a definition was in the early stages of the research and was an attempt to help to understand my own perception of ‘progress’. In supervision meetings I had been finding it hard to explain what I defined ‘progress’ as and in discussion had decided that a definition would help me to be able to articulate what I believed ‘progress’ means and how it appears in education.

Progress is an illusion or fantasy that attempts to create a focal point for those engaged in the activity of education to work towards in the belief that on reaching that point the subjects of the educational activity are in superior position to the point they were at in the beginning. In order to succumb to this reductive simplification of progress the educator therefore must believe that their interruption will overcome what is perceived as being a state of inferiority to reach a pre-determined destination.

In this iteration I had begun to read around the idea of ‘fantasy’ and ‘common sense’ as well as having made a concept drawing of the vortex. I had started to consider how ‘progress’ might involve perceptions of how ‘progress’ would be based on improvement educationally but that the point of ‘progress’ itself was predetermined. Through my literature review I reviewed the definition whereby I added to the definition the links to policy makers and the establishment of the performative system of progress.

Progress’ can be an illusion or ‘fantasy’ that attempts to create a focal point for policy makers and educators in England that embeds a sense of order and purpose, working towards a position that is accepted as being superior to an agreed starting point on a national and personal level. To accept this logic of ‘progress’ the policy makers and educators therefore must believe that the system will overcome a perceived state of inferiority to reach a pre-determined destination. A destination that has been established by those in power who establish the points of measurement through setting numeric national standards and targets as benchmarks of success and failure based

on criteria and formula. Thus, the system of performance from the position of the 'fantasy' of policy makers has normalised 'progress' as the determining factor, maintaining order over the education system in England.

In my working definition I am concentrating on the 'end point' as being a construct of 'policy' and of 'fantasy' through a performative system that predetermines progress. In my working definition I have set out where I stand, who I am and why this thesis should be written. The focus is the concept of 'progress' as an educational activity, with a consideration of how this has been appropriated by those who command power to carry out their political aims. It is my intention to argue that these aims come from a point of 'fantasy' of what Britain is and where a version of the future of Britain lies. By holding such a 'fantasy' of Britain there is a 'fantasy' of what 'progress' in education should be and to an extent, what that looks like in the end. For those who are taking part in the system as students and teachers, the road has been laid out with promise of greater security and freedom for all so long as that path is followed. Along the path there is the delivery chain with stock takes to measure and check various points, at the end of which is the 'vortex' through which students will step having made 'progress', but to where that 'vortex (*see figure 5*) takes the individual is unclear. It is not for the individual to question the importance of what is to be studied but to accept that the curriculum laid out is the one that best serves them. Unquestioningly, obediently, they are to follow the line to pass through and be productive parts of the national aims, economically supporting the 'fantasmatic logics' (Clarke, 2012:173) of those in power. I return to discuss this definition in at the end of the literature review and in my final chapter to explain further how I came to define 'progress' in this way.

I also believe my contribution is in the way in which I have presented my research and ideas, through having visual representations as my starting point and references for my position. In my method chapter I present a sequence of images which add an originality to my work that offers insight into my thinking and about the impact of the policy and practices that have affected my own career and the lives of those I have taught. In each image the students are central to what is taking place and ultimately, the students are my concern as they have not asked for the education which they are being given, and in my perception far from sharing in it they are being shaped by it. Therefore, I am looking to cause a disruption in the acceptance of 'progress' in consideration of the potential harm that such acceptance has for those subjugated to the policy of 'progress', for the students and the teachers who are part of the system in England.

2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In carrying out this literature review I began by reading the ‘History of the Idea of Progress’ by John Nisbet. The book is written chronologically with different periods of history considered and was a good starting point as it introduced me to some of the key thinkers and the way in which ‘progress’ had been affected by world events. I used the chronology to work through my own timeline and identified other sources that were either historical accounts or had tried to consider ‘progress’ more philosophically. Through the review I considered the interpretations and in particular the distortions of history and applied these to the reading as a critical element in particular when considering much to the 20th Century. Finally, the review has been influenced through my reading of Stephen Ball and linking to the education policy changes that have shaped the current education landscape in England. This element of the literature review is where the focus was much more on the sociological part of the research and supported the research questions that I went on to develop.

Using chronology was important to my work in this section as a scaffold for my thinking and to help me to organise my reading but was also a feature of the works that I used. In almost all cases the writers themselves had used chronological reference points to present their works and analyse their findings. This was reassuring when approaching the literature, myself as it helped me to recognise features of time periods and individuals that they were referencing. The use of chronology in this was not uniquely a feature of the works on the history of ‘progress’ but also evident in the work of Stephen Ball. Through Ball’s works that I was able to access a much tighter span of time with regards to the English Education system which then helped with my selection of policy moments and key individuals.

When determining which periods of time upon which to focus more than others it was challenging as there needed to be decisions made about the extent to which certain time periods needed to be focussed on. In this literature review it may be noticed that there is less space given to the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, which was decided upon to sustain a focus on the sociological aspects of this work. Additionally, this literature review identifies how some of the recent turns in education can be linked to Calvinism, and the decision was made to

consider this more deeply. To have included a section on monasticism and education would perhaps have detracted from the findings which have been deemed as more important to this thesis. The use of historical theory is also evident in this literature review as I have referenced the work of John Tosh, and in particular three distortions to the study of the past. In my own way through the decisions I made on where to concentrate, there is an interpretation of the past and what I have determined as being more or less important to include.

As noted in the very opening of this introduction some aspects of the literature were very new to me as were the philosophical elements which means there is the work of the novice at play. In this literature review the philosophical is found in the exploration of ‘progress’ across time and how perceptions of ‘progress’ have been established and also through the consideration of ‘fantasy’. ‘Fantasy’ became a focus when I was reading about common sense but then became more central as I discovered literature about how a logic of fantasy may be applied to policy decisions. Through this part of the research, I was drawn to what I understand to be philosophical considerations of education and the way in which a philosophy of ‘progress’ needed to be explored. When reading this literature review it is therefore important to note that there is a process of learning that I myself went through and am still working through with regards to philosophy.

Finally, when reading this chapter there is a turn that the review takes whereby the focus is much more about policy decisions and their impact on the English education system. The turn is linked to the reading and the way in which the focus came to be much more about the sociological and political focus on ‘progress’ which is what the investigation set out to do. When reaching the latter part of the chapter it should become apparent to the reader why this research is timely and why there is a focus on policy and the lived experience of secondary school leaders.

2.2 The Historical view of ‘progress’

‘The first man, who, after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, “This is mine”, and found people simple enough to believe him was the true founder of civil society.’ (Rousseau, 2004:27)

I have started this chapter with the quote above as, I believe this is what I am trying to say about the word ‘progress’ and what it has come to mean in current education parlance. To ‘enclose’ the word ‘progress’ within a particular ideological stance and then to ‘find people to

believe' and accept that enclosure may be considered as oppressive. To organise this review of the literature the chapter begins with some explanation of the way in which history can be affected by distortions before introducing the idea of 'fantasy'. There is then a chronological approach to the idea of 'progress' however, it is in the final section where this pays more attention to the how such ideas relate to education. By presenting the literature this way it has supported with the writing of the thesis and organisation of key themes throughout.

Historically the concept of 'progress' has deep roots with societies at different times having different views on what 'progress' would look like and indeed what they were progressing towards. In the present it appears that 'progress' means to have a way of life or being that is superior to what came in the past. To conceive that when we reach that point, we may be in a worse position than we are now seems to be quite unacceptable in the modern age and so 'progress' has become about a linear movement towards what is notionally considered to be a better point. For Saul there is a deception at play as he considers,

We are now more than four and a half centuries into an era which our obsession with 'progress' and our servility to structure have caused us to name and rename a dozen times, as if this flashing of theoretically fundamental concepts indicated real movement. (Saul,1992:28)

Through institutions and ideologies, he suggests 'we have not moved beyond the basic ideas of the Sixteenth Century' (*ibid*) and so therefore no better off. As someone currently practicing in the English system I concur with this view, as I constantly reflect on whether what I am doing is better than what I did before. I am encouraged through the teaching standards and performance management to consider my work and look for improvement, through the data of my classes to notice where 'progress' is being made. Human 'progress' and development can often be seen as forward-looking but in essence to establish results, 'progress' encourages looking back and comparison with the past, making it an activity of historicism. Condorcet wrote, 'Outlines of an historical view of the 'progress' of the human mind' (Condorcet, 1795:9), breaking history into specific epochs to demonstrate 'progress' and asserted that 'the course of 'progress' may doubtless be more or less rapid, but it can never be retrograde' (*ibid*). There is a deception perhaps, whereby time dictates that I, nor my students, are allowed to 'degrade' which has become the contemporary understanding of 'progress'.

Taking a chronological approach is prudent and something I have created with this literature review is a structure that supports the reader to navigate the issues around 'progress'. In my

own reflections it is the ownership of 'progress' and the control of how that 'progress' is decided upon that highlights power relationships and to a degree the oppression of peoples throughout time. With regards to education for me this can be found in the young people who are pushed through the system that has been determined for them and not by them thus leading to them being silently oppressed. The argument from the policy makers is clear in that through the focus on 'progress' they are offering a brighter future, but this mechanical world view is perhaps an 'un-emancipatory' attempt at emancipation. Is 'progress' greater social mobility and that with each step we move away from a perception of the past as inferior to something much more enlightened? Nisbet refers to this as a 'comparative method' (Nisbet, 1980:26) where the present contrasts itself with the past to show that the now is better. In a school setting one might argue that this occurs through data analysis, by looking at one set of results against another to show the institution has been improved or even class by class. Certainly, it could be argued that performance management of teachers encourages such a comparative method to show improvement or lack of in the teacher themselves. If not through data, it may occur with comparison of inspection reports with the need to demonstrate that things are getting better or improving for example behaviour of students or attendance. Such an approach may well impact on the perceptions of teachers and school leaders in their own understanding of 'progress' and what it means to them.

In Wright's *A Short History of 'progress'* (Wright, 2004) there is such a depiction when considering the way in which people in different time periods viewed the past and their present, particularly in the latter part of the 19th Century to try to demonstrate the fruits of human 'progress'. The portrayal of medieval towns can be found as being of places festooned with human and animal waste and people living in atrocious conditions. The historian of the 19th Century who knowingly lived in a period, where diseases such as cholera and typhus were ripe and life expectancy was quite short yet had a sense of 'progress' and superiority to the period that had come before. Connections to other parts of the world perceived as uncivilised or savage led to an interest in from where man(sic) had come and how he (sic) may continue. Novels such as Conrad's *'Heart of darkness'* (Conrad, 1899) asked questions about the gap between civilised society and those that were viewed as savage as well as questioning whether the colonising nations themselves were any more civilised. Interest in society and those seen as uncivilised is something Wright points to with Gaugin who he says had a 'longing to find what he called the "savage" – primordial man (and woman)' (Wright, 2004:1). 'Progress' was presented as a force that could not be avoided with 'the assumption that a pattern of change

exists in the history of mankind, that this pattern is known, that it consists of irreversible changes in one general direction only, this direction is towards improvement' (Pollard, 1969:V). Pollard gains support for this view from Van Doren who says 'that pattern is, in the long run irreversible in direction, and its direction is toward an ultimate increase or advance in value-towards that which is better. 'Progress', in short, is irreversible meliorative change' (Van Doren, 1967:3) from 'a less to a more desirable state of affairs' (Van Doren, 1967:6) This point is one that I believe this thesis will challenge as it depends entirely on who or what the 'more' is 'desirable' to and the impact that it has on the lives of those who are experiencing that shift in 'state of affairs'.

With regards to education and political policy makers 'progress serves as a strong political concept, frequently used by politicians and leaders to describe many different and often contradicting conceptions of improvement' (Itay, 2008:530) thus leading 'many societies' into 'becoming engaged in trying to measure progress' (*ibid*). Therefore, 'this idea means that civilisation has moved, is moving and will move in a desirable direction' (Bury, 1920:2). which has increasingly become a direction driven and determined by technocratic instruments. This supports the argument that the 'Fantastical logic' is also to be considered, with regards to 'progress' in the way in which it offers control of the narrative of 'progress'.

2.3 Distorting effects

Through my reading surrounding 'progress', it occurs to me that much is dependent on a historical view and so I turned to the work of John Tosh to consider the way in which history impacts on the perception of 'progress'. Tosh works on the premise that 'Three recurrent features of social memory have particularly significant distorting effects' (Tosh, 2002:13) via 'traditionalism', 'nostalgia' and 'progress'. When I consider these three in relation to education it is my assertion that these same distortions may be applied with a ruling class, that have looked to their own traditions first to apply their nostalgic view before determining what 'progress' should be. They have fantasised through their nostalgia, which has distorted the notion of 'progress' and the way in which those in education are tasked with working towards such a vision. Such a nostalgia was apparent during Brexit whereby the 'Leave campaign was built around a series of (populist) 'fantasy' narratives promising freedom, liberation, subjectivity, and agency, that while offering promises of fulfilment and closure were often both highly nostalgic and incompatible' (Browning, 2019:223). The clash with the view of the

supporters of Brexit is contrasted by the ‘British cosmopolitan elites of viewing Englishness as regressive, nostalgic, and anti-modern with such little ‘Englandism’ depicted as insular, backward, chauvinistic’ (Browning, 2019:227). As mentioned previously the SOSE 2010-14, had looked to restore balance to what he had perceived as the tradition of education, but he was also prominent in the leave campaign and therefore it could be argued is representative of such a nostalgic viewpoint.

2.3.1 Tradition

Tradition infiltrates all walks of life ‘from the law courts to political associations, from churches to sports clubs – belief and behaviour are governed by the weight of precedent’ (Tosh, 2002:13). In education one might find such comment in the presentation of the conflict between ‘Traditionalists’ and ‘progressives’ which has a ‘binary nature’ (Wyse et al, 2018:296). In the debate each side characterises the other with ‘progressives as anti-intellectual bleeding hearts’ and ‘traditionalists as pedantic, insensitive crushers of freedom’ (Ackerman, 2003:346). Tosh views tradition in history as ‘an assumption that what has been done in the past is an authoritative guide to what should be done in the present’ (Tosh, 2002:13), which is perhaps what might be the view of the traditionalist in education and is therefore anti-progressive in outlook. Tosh also raises the issue of confusing a ‘respect for tradition’ with ‘a sense of history, because it involves an affection for the past (or some of it) and a desire to keep faith with it’ (*ibid*). From here it could perhaps be considered that this view of the past chimes with the traditionalist view of education, as the focus is seen to be on the ‘best which has been thought and said in the world’ (Arnold, 1869:2). It was from this point that the SOSE 2010-14 looked to build the history curriculum in England which Tosh suggests is part of the distortion of history as ‘an uncritical respect for tradition is counterproductive. It suppresses the historical changes which have occurred in the intervening period’ (Tosh, 2002:13). When history is used in this way to create a narrative of the past from the traditionalist viewpoint to support nationalist identity according to Tosh ‘suppresses difference and change in order to uphold identity’ (Tosh, 2002:16). Direct reference to the personal involvement the SOSE 2010-14 at this point is important as history was one subject, they took direct interest in and had looked to define what and who should be studied.

2.3.2 Nostalgia

‘Nostalgia’ is the second distortion, which ‘is backward looking, but instead of denying the fact of historical change, it interprets it in one direction only, as change for the worse’ (Tosh, 2002:17). Nostalgia perhaps distorts the picture in education, with the initial reforms by the coalition built upon the notion that education was in decline and that a need to return to traditional values and approaches was needed. Nostalgia works as ‘a reaction to a sense of loss in the recent past, and it is therefore particularly characteristic of societies undergoing rapid change’ (*ibid*). Halpin warns against seeing nostalgia as a negative claiming that ‘nostalgia’s positive aspects have become obscured by the fact that as a word it is commonly used....as a derogatory adjective or noun’ (Halpin 2016:32) but suggests ‘in the education context and elsewhere, nostalgia can be the exact opposite, though it is always on the back foot when it tries to be’ (*ibid*). For the Conservative party there was a loss of identity and Britishness that had come through what they saw as dangerous progressive approaches to education, and one could argue this distortion is apparent in the decisions that were taken. An example is how ‘nostalgia about grammar schools has become increasingly fashionable’ seen as ‘wantonly destroyed by ‘progressive teachers’ (Barker, 2012:429). Nostalgia here is lamenting the way that during ‘the supposed golden age of the grammar school, few children entered a sixth form while higher education provided places for less than one-twentieth of each age group’ (*ibid*). Wright supports the notion of nostalgia as ‘we often prefer to think of the deep past as innocent and unspoiled, a time of ease and simple plenty before a fall from paradise’ (Wright, 2004:9). For the Conservative party the Grammar school holds a place of ‘nostalgia’ whereby perceived opportunity to grow and gain reward through hard work was possible, yet through such nostalgia what one is being asked to forget is that the ‘pupil from working-class backgrounds were less likely to be selected for grammar schools’ (Barker, 2012:430). Halpin also registers the nostalgia that Barker is considering and suggests that ‘some forms of nostalgia had no serious reforming ambitions, as they seek instead to accentuate an existing way of thinking and acting that is judged to be under threat’ for which he gives the example of ‘the claim regularly made, frequently by right-wing critics of ‘progressive education about rote-learning and whole-class instruction’ (Halpin, 2016:32).

However, ‘when the past is conserved or re-enacted for our entertainment, it is usually (though not invariably) presented in its most attractive light’ (Tosh, 2002:17). Such a nostalgia may be presented in TV shows such as *Downton Abbey* where societal order and behaviour is portrayed

for the viewer yet ‘encourages viewers nostalgically to ignore the nasty reality that was then the life of being in service’ (Halpin, 2016:34). Nostalgia can also be found whereby ‘Even a simulation of the London Blitz, will prompt regret at the loss of wartime spirit’ (Tosh, 2002:18) whilst encouraging the ignoring of the loss of life and tragedy that also marked that time. The ‘Blitz spirit’ was a feature of political propaganda during the Covid-19 Pandemic, with claims of the spirit of the British in times of adversity.

Margaret Thatcher presented a nostalgia for the Victorian period whereby ‘Mrs Thatcher annexed ‘Victorian Values’ to her party’s platform and turned them into a talisman for lost stabilities’ (Samuel, 1994:330). However, Samuel suggests that Thatcher ‘stumbled on the phrase ‘Victorian Values’ as a rallying cry by accident’ (Samuel, 1994:333). What ‘Victorian Values’ meant to her supporters at the time, and her opposition exemplifies the complexity of such nostalgia. Samuel uses two examples of support but with two different understandings of ‘Victorian Values’. Firstly, there is reference to ‘the candidate for Congleton, who agreed wholeheartedly with Mrs Thatcher’s ‘Victorian Values’ and ‘interpreted them benignly as thrift, kindness, and family values’ (*ibid*). In contrast, ‘Dr Rhodes Boyson, Minister of State for Education, and himself an ex-headmaster (and an ex-historian), argued that they meant a return to strictness’ (*ibid*) presenting a nostalgia for harsh discipline and punishment to keep the population in line. What is notable is that by presenting ‘Victorian Values’ as being desirable what they did was present the opposition Labour party with a clear ideological point of difference whereby ‘Victorian Britain was a place where a few got rich and the most got hell’ (*ibid*). Representation of the past in contrast to the present I would argue, is something that politicians frequently use to justify their actions in the present, with an eye on the future. In presenting the values of the present in a negative light, whilst homing in on perceived glories of the past they can find support for their ideological actions. My comment is justified I believe when supported by the way in which,

Mrs Thatcher used ‘Victorian Values’ as a way of conjuring up lost innocence. Against a background of inner-city disturbances, such as those which swept the streets of Toxteth and Brixton in 1981, she pictured an older Britain where parents were strict, children good-mannered, hooliganism (she erroneously believed) unknown(Samuel, 1994:337).

However, to adopt such a representation of the Victorian period there is a ‘process of selective amnesia, the past becomes a historical equivalent of the dream of primal bliss, or the enchanted space which memory accords to childhood’ (Samuel, 1994:338). Edited out are the extreme

levels of child poverty, the slums, major epidemics of Cholera and other such dirty diseases in favour of a reverence to Christian values and good Protestant work ethic. One might consider that there is a parallel when considering Thatcher's view on 'Victorian Values' to David Cameron and the Conservative Party's focus on British Values. 'Broken Britain' needed to be fixed by the 'Big Society' with a return to 'British Values' based on a version of Britain from yesteryear.

2.3.3 Progress

The third distortion that Tosh considers is the notion of 'progress' in history sitting in opposition to nostalgia as 'if nostalgia reflects a pessimistic view of the world, 'progress' is an optimistic creed, it asserts not only that change in the past has been for the better, but that improvement will continue into the future' (Tosh, 2002:19). An inevitable view of history and the world 'The concept of 'progress' is fundamental to modernity, because for two hundred years it was the defining myth of the West, as source of cultural self-assurance and of outright superiority in its dealings with the rest of the world' (Tosh, 2002:19). Supporting this assertion from Tosh, Wright considers that 'Our practical faith in 'progress' has ramified and hardened into an ideology' (Wright, 2004:4) and 'has therefore become "myth"' (*ibid*), which also lends to the argument of 'progress' as 'fantasy' as 'Myth is an arrangement of the past whether real or imagined, in patterns that reinforce a culture's deepest values and aspirations' (*ibid*). Tosh suggests that 'Whereas 'process' is a neutral term without implicit value judgement, 'progress' is by definition evaluative and partial; since it is premised on the superiority of the present over the past' (Tosh, 2002:20). There is the temptation to represent the past as inferior in all ways. 'Voltaire, for example, was notoriously unable to recognise any good in the Middle Ages; his historical writings traced the growth of rationality and tolerance and condemned the rest' (Tosh, 2002:20). Wright summarises this more crudely stating that often as 'civilised people, we tend to think, we not only smell better but behave better than barbarians or savages' (Wright, 2004,4). To take such a view means that there can be a failing on the part of the present as 'if the past exists strictly to validate the achievements of the present, there can be no room for and appreciation of its cultural riches', thus 'if the desire to demonstrate 'progress' is pressed too far, it quickly comes into conflict with the historian's obligation to re-create the past in its own terms' (Tosh, 2002:20). Perhaps this is where the challenge of 'progress' in education can also be located as through the politicisation of education and the need of the ruling power to demonstrate their impact on the past there is the inability to 're-create' what

took place on its own terms. The focus becomes about valuing the successes of the present in contrast to failings of the past and that the changes taking place will only continue to promote positive change in the future. 'Progress' in this case is a retrospective concept that rather than being forward thinking, is backward looking with a distortion on past events, looking to prove a civilising hand on an inferior history, to vindicate the actions taken. As Bury puts it 'The idea of human 'progress', then is a theory which involves a synthesis of the past and a prophecy of the future' (Bury, 1920:5).

These distortions I believe are legitimate when considering my research, as 'progress' is very strongly linked to history and historiography, as due to such consensus about 'progress' as a marker, most will look back and assess the route that has been travelled. From this they reach judgements about the extent of 'progress' and these three distortions as presented by Tosh, have helped me to make some sense of the work I am doing here and how I have rationalised it.

2.4 'Fantasy' and 'Progress'

Part of my research has been built around the notion of 'fantasy' in relation to the work of education policy and the perceptions of teachers. To understand what I mean when I use these terms in my own writing there is the influence of the work of John Wilson and in particular his book *Fantasy and Common Sense in Education* (Wilson, 1979). He suggests that the Fantasies of those who attempt to structure education are just that, as each 'fantasy' attempts to bring to force its own version of truth. He states, 'education invites us to 'fantasies' of perfection, or at least changing the (human)world in some rather dramatic way for the better.' (Wilson, 1979:3). Most educators would perhaps concur with this sentiment, as it is hard to imagine someone who would engage in the activity of education with the desire to make the world worse. The Oxford dictionary defines 'fantasy' as a noun that 'a pleasant situation that you imagine but that is unlikely to happen', 'a product of your imagination', 'the act of imagining things; a person's imagination' and finally 'a type of story that is set in a world, or a version of our world, that does not really exist and involves magic, monsters, etc.' (Oxford Learners dictionary, 2021). For the first definition there is the interesting point that as it is 'fantasy' it should be 'unlikely to happen' (*ibid*) whereas in the sense of the policy maker, through the 'fantasies of perfection', as mentioned by Wilson, there is the intent to manifest them into a reality through policy decisions and the implementation of systems. Through policy and

systems ‘management methods are being mistaken for solutions’ and are being ‘pushed on with a long rational stick from point to point around the field’ (Saul, 24:2012) in order for the ‘fantasy’ to be put into reality.

2.4.1 My own perspective

From my own perspective the classroom involves ‘fantasy’ from all those involved, as those sitting behind the desks fantasise about their future careers, lives, loves and simultaneously the person delivering the lesson has their own ‘fantasy’ about where those same individuals will one day arrive. The one sure part of the shared experience is that at a pre-determined point examinations will take place, which play a role in determining the reality that is then faced. Through this research I have considered where ‘fantasy’ plays a role in the way in which the participants navigate their own perspective of ‘progress’.

With the Oxford definition above there is the interesting point that as it is ‘fantasy’ it should be ‘unlikely to happen’ (Oxford Learners dictionary, [2021](#)). In the context of education policy, and the work of those who are engaged in the activity of education, this would be the most forlorn of approaches to imagining the outcome of their work. To imagine a result to the educational experience, that does not contribute a positive outcome to someone’s life, seems unthinkable. Were teachers to approach their work with the view that the outcomes were unlikely the outcome on aspiration could perhaps be catastrophic. To that extent there should be a ‘likeliness’ for that to happen rather than the negative sense that it will not happen otherwise the purpose of that educational activity itself becomes questionable. When looking at the definition of the verb ‘fantasise’ again there is the negative connotation ‘to imagine that you are doing something that you would like to do, or that something that you would like to happen is happening, even though this is unlikely’ (Oxford Learners dictionary, [2021](#)) When a teacher looks at students, they will fantasise about the future of those students, whilst the students themselves will also be engaged in fantasising about what they do next.

If I was to create a ‘fantasy’ in the context of the third definition of a story in a ‘version of our world’, then there would be a classroom where a teacher prepared a curriculum, organised episodes but all the time believing that what has been prepared is unlikely to be fulfilled. To work whilst imagining that the ending will be unlikely undermines the sense of the activity of education. This is perhaps where the concept of ‘belief’ comes into play, where both factions

are compelled to share a belief that what they are doing has a mutual and shared purpose, with the outcome being the likelihood of the ‘fantasy’ becoming a reality. Education thus becomes an act of faith in this ‘fantasy’ classroom, with neither teacher nor student sure of where the reality will come into play. The faith from the students that the teacher understands their fantasies, and through the act of education, the teacher is trying to provide them with what they need to achieve that ‘fantasy’.

An alternate ‘fantasy’, which perhaps for some students in England is a reality, would be a classroom where on entry there is a test of what was learnt the week before. Students answer questions confirming that they have acquired the intended knowledge and can repeat it back to the teacher. On confirming that the test has been a success new information is inserted into the class through activities that have been tested in laboratories and based on the evidence of neuroscience. At the end of the lesson a test is taken confirming that the knowledge has been inserted correctly and students move on to the next lesson. The next day they return to the same classroom where on entry they are tested on the prior knowledge they accrued the day before, the results confirmed, new knowledge inserted, a test to confirm and then they leave again. In this ‘fantasy’ of education there is a production model, encouraging conformity to a cycle that is rigid and mechanical, to meet the measure that has been set out. Such conformity to meet the targets and succeed in meeting the standards, ignores the fact that ‘education is a critical practice’ (Armstrong, 1999:110) where the teacher needs to reflect on what is taking place, and acknowledge that not all learning can be controlled and measured.

2.4.2 Behaviourist vs Relativist

What affects the ‘fantasy’ element is the perception of what the better should be and according to Wilson ‘the real world does not hit us hard enough or immediately enough, if, and when we get things wrong to jerk us out of our fantasies’ as ‘nobody dies on the operating table or goes bankrupt.’ (Wilson, 1979:4). I am considering ‘fantasy’ in my own work in that ‘I do not take it as a defining characteristic of a ‘fantasy’ that it is false to fact’ (Wilson, 1979:14). What there are as fantasies are some that are ‘conceptually incoherent or logically impossible’ (*ibid*). Where this supports my own sense making is with regards to ‘how the common ‘fantasy’ of being totally joined or united to another person may run up against logical difficulties’ (*ibid*). Although Wilson takes this to mean something else, for my own sense it is that it is unlikely that total agreement can be found or should be sought in educational endeavours to err against

indoctrination and allow for emancipation. The ‘Traditionalist’ versus ‘progressive’ debate is well rehearsed, however Wilson uses his own terminology with a ‘Relativist fantasy’ and a ‘Behaviourist fantasy’ which I have taken to using myself. It is my assertion that through the logic of ‘progress’ and ‘fantasy’ the ‘behaviourist’ approach is very much apparent through performativity and measurement.

In the two fantasies the Relativist is marked by ‘terms such as ‘‘progressive’, ‘child centred’, ‘egalitarian’, ‘left-wing’.(Wilson, 1979:31) The Relativist ‘tends to go along with an anti-authoritarian attitude’ (*ibid*). In contrast the Behaviourist is by matter of their position on the opposite pole of the spectrum a rejection of those things. The Behaviourist ‘fantasy’ is marked by success being ‘easily quantified or measured perhaps something reduced to a set of ‘skills’ or ‘performances’ or (and the absurdity of the word gives some of the game away) ‘behaviours’. Wilson characterises the behaviourist as ‘tough minded, scientific, even perhaps materialistic style of thinking being concerned with the hard facts and not with less palpable phenomena’ (*ibid*). The reason for carrying out this thesis is that I very much concur with the view that the ‘behaviourist fantasy’ has become the dominant force in the English education system. When analysing the data from my participants I consider how the ‘behaviourist ‘fantasy’ augments itself in their thinking and application of their work. Additionally, I explore how they try to resist the ‘behaviourist fantasy’ and attempt to establish a view of education that offers an alternative more in line with that of the ‘Relativist fantasy’. In doing so I have had to take care not to present ‘fantasy’ where the participant is very much engaged in their reality, but my argument in this thesis is that there needs to be an element of ‘fantasy’ when working in education, as the educator needs to envisage a future use for what is taking place.

Within my research I drew a picture to represent how the contrasting pillars might sit either side of the road of ‘progress’ to the ‘vortex’ (*see figure 8*) with the ‘fantasy of progress as the arch sitting atop. The road of progress runs through the middle of the ‘vortex’ as in the other image where the students will eventually travel to their next destination. Through the nature of education there are competing forces each arguing that they are operating in the best interests of the students.

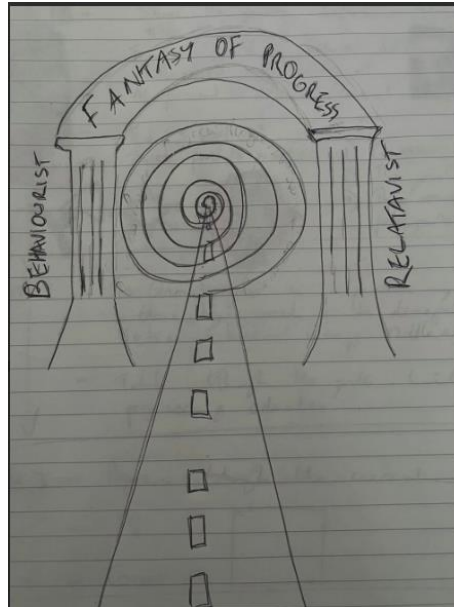


Figure 8, Behaviourist vs Relativist

Both sides offer extremes of ideology surrounding the child and how education should be enacted with most trying to negotiate a position that falls somewhere more towards the centre. School leaders work with policies that at times will be weighted more to one side than the other and need to negotiate their own perspectives to be able to fulfil their professional responsibilities.

Wilson believes that the reason for Educationalists to be able to get away with carrying out their fantasies is due to the 'impotence of children', as, 'they are at the receiving end of fantasies' (Wilson, 1979:31). With regards to what is meant by 'fantasy', Wilson sets out that firstly it is 'more than a simple product of imagination' and is more 'like a story with connected elements' which are 'bound together in a psychological web' (Wilson, 1979:13). The example he uses is of the Nazis and whereby the anti-Jewish element of the ideology was also part of the wider story of blood and race. Secondly, he considers that 'the story or picture is generated not by concern for truth or fact' but 'by the emotional needs of the person in question' (Wilson, 1979:14). To make sense here it is perhaps pertinent that Wilson looks to the Third Reich to explain his point. Certainly, the basis of Hitler's movement can be seen as an ideology based on a world view but there were elements that perhaps we might argue were 'fantasy'. The extent to which the Nazis were engaged in 'any kind of attempt on truth' (Wilson, 1979:14) is questionable as they built their narrative of the insidious Jew plotting the downfall of Germany and the corruption of the Aryan blood. In building their narrative they managed to convince

others and the ‘fantasy’ of an enemy within Germany and the world became accepted. Behaviours and characteristics were drawn up and preferred creating predetermined future pathways for the boys and girls of the Nazi state to live out the ‘fantasy’ of Hitler the Nazi regime. As Wilson points out ‘the extreme paranoid we might say, does not really have a theory’ when it is built upon the notion that ‘everyone is against him’ (*ibid*). Educational success in this sense is that the ‘good Nazi’ understands they are part of the whole and so succumb to the determination of the state.

Some of that ‘fantasy’ was perhaps evident in projects such as ‘Germania’ which were to demonstrate the greatness of the German Third Reich. The grandeur of the project was to be reflected in the design whereby ‘The vast Grand Hall, for instance, close to the Reichstag, would have been the largest enclosed space in the world, with a dome 16 times larger than that of St Peter’s in Rome’ (Moorhouse, 2012:20). Through propaganda there were key themes which were ‘1) appeal to national unity based on the principle ‘The community before the individual’ (Volksgemeinschaft); 2) the need for racial purity, 3) a hatred of enemies which increasingly centred on Jews and Bolsheviks; and 4) charismatic leadership (Führenprinzip)’ (Welch, 1993:3). To support such ideas ‘the Nazis chose to appeal to abstract emotions like pride and patriotism and to focus less on the worker and more on the ennobling aspects of work itself. Slogans proclaimed that ‘work ennobles’ (arbeit erhebt)’ (Welch,1993:6). There was the sharing of a vision of Germany that was to be worked towards with a focus on every aspect of life. The degree to which such propaganda was effective is something that historians’ question but is not relevant to this thesis as my reference point here is that there is evidence of regimes using ‘fantasy’ to ‘progress’ towards a version of a future they wish to create.

Individuals do have the power to resist, and history is laced with people who have shunned, fascist or exploitative regimes as well as those who through compliance took part. A comparison by Gert Biesta of Rosa Parks and Eichmann suggests that ‘We might say that whereas Rosa Parks inserted her ‘I’ in between what she had learned and her actions, Adolf Eichmann withdrew his ‘I’ and thus coincided with the societal order.’ (Biesta, 2020:1020). The educational ‘fantasy’ here is one of obedience against being able to decide to stand against the dominant force, having reached one’s own conclusion about what is right and wrong. The role of ‘progress’ in the English school system has perhaps removed the ‘I’, whereby instead the compulsion for students to make ‘progress’ has been foisted upon all involved. In my thesis I insert my ‘I’ and disrupt through my findings to try to see if it is possible to allow for debate

on what ‘progress’ can be determined as and the extent to which there is agency at the leadership level to allow for this. Through the establishment of ‘progress’ as a performance measure there is a standard created of what ‘progress’ is and should be, creating a behaviourist ‘fantasy’ whereby conformity is valued. ‘Moreover, a standard is a measure of conformity, whereas education is as much, if not more, concerned with non-conformity’ (Armstrong, 1999:109) and in my argument the policy makers are using standards and measures to ensure conformity and therefore perhaps ‘progress’ is about conforming. In my own research it could be construed that I am acting like Rosa Parks as I am placing my own ‘I’ in between what ‘I’ have learnt through my practice and my studies, and in writing my thesis I am attempting to act and disrupt the conformity of accepting ‘progress’ as a performative measure.

2.4.3 Disavowal

In reaching a decision about what is perceived as right there is a sense that ‘fantasy’ works to reassure us of the existence of order and purpose in the world – of the notion that there is some underlying meaning which makes our universe complete’ (Clarke, 2020:154). It reassures that the actions being undertaken are justified and legitimate in the cause to meet the ends that have been established, which in turn can lead us to ‘the psychoanalytic notion of disavowal.’ ‘Disavowal involves a form of double consciousness in which we simultaneously see and don’t see, remember and forget, acknowledge and deny’ (*ibid*). In my research I have had to be mindful of my participants in this respect as, at times what for them are concrete and meaningful actions in the pursuit of a perceived point of ‘progress’, I am interpreting that there may be forgetting or ignoring of the power structure that is in place which has led them to this perception. Clarke explains this further.

We see disavowal at work when, for instance, the role of middle-class values and socioeconomic power in educational success are denied and reframed as purely personal characteristics of aspiration, resilience, and resolve. The consequence of such disavowal is that social discrimination and economic exclusion are rendered invisible in the interests of preserving a punitive but phantasmatic egalitarian meritocracy. (Clarke, 2020:155)

In my own discussion of ‘progress’, there is evidence that ‘progress’ as a ‘fantasy’ is punitive rather than egalitarian offering a more equitable future, the performative measure is working as a distillation of society, through testing. The disavowal that is taking place is that there is any real meaningful challenge to the issues of poverty and inequality rather than the creation of a compliant workforce. Far from trying to bring about equity there is the fixing of social

positions through economic wealth, as it is not in the interest of those seated at the top table to widen membership further. To be wealthy and to feel wealthy there needs to be evidence of poverty, and so in the disavowal as described by Clarke, one could argue that the ‘fantasy’ of being able to reach the elite, sustains the economic system.

The inclusion of ‘fantasy’ and consideration is important however, more because ‘progress’ largely appears as a notion that is very much future oriented and as the future has yet to be lived, there must be an element of ‘fantasy’. Within ‘fantasy’ there is also the need to understand my own potential ‘fantasy’ as a researcher in my pursuit of a qualification and how I perceive myself and what I am trying to do. In my reading I came across a section where the researcher was considering her own sense of ‘fantasy’.

Went into the home of a white working-class family to conduct some research. Where and who was I: the working-class child of my fantasies, or the middle-class researcher who was part of an attempt to tell a truth about ‘the working class’? (Walkerdine, 1990:157)

In my research I am aware that I too could well be involved in ‘fantasy’ or ‘fantasies’ and that through my engagement with others, may be drawing them into my own ‘fantasy’. Such ‘fantasy’ can maybe be in consideration of students, and ‘fantasy’ of what students should be like or learn. There could be ‘fantasy’ around the teacher, their subject, their actions, and the extent to which I share that ‘fantasy’ with my participants. In my research, where and who was I, the researcher, or the school leader, to tell a truth about the lived experience of school leaders.

When conducting the research, I was aware of how my actions were impacting upon me and the way in which I was trying to understand myself in the process and the impact of my ‘identity-biography of the researcher’ (Brooks et al, 2014:9). There was the need to play the role of researcher and even though having worked to the point whereby I was able to engage with my participants, there was still the need to consider power relations. In my own perception I was interviewing School Leaders with whom I had common ground through my own professional standing. This is something that I will discuss more when considering the ethical implications of my work later in this chapter.

2.5 Greek, Roman, and Judaeo-Christian ideas of ‘progress’

In each of the three distortion's Tosh alluded to there are the 'basic constituents of social memory' and 'the real objection to them is that as a governing stance, they require the past to conform with deeply felt and often unacknowledged need. They are about belief, not enquiry' (Tosh,2002:20). 'Progress' in this estimation is built around a need of the present to feel superior to the past and to support belief that something better lies ahead. 'Neglecting to acknowledge the shortcomings of the way in which people lived at the time helps to develop the view that what came before was primordial' (Nisbet, 1980:26). An example here would be to promote the 19th Century as a time of science and great 'progress' whilst neglecting the poverty, high rates of child mortality and lack of clean housing in the big cities.

Condorcet focuses on the 'progress' of the human mind looking back, identifying 'The First state of civilization observable in the human species, is that of a society of men, few in number, subsisting by means of hunting and fishing' and that they lived under 'common rules of conduct, living in families, conforming themselves to general customs that serve instead of laws, and having even a rude form of government' (Condorcet, 2011:10). Condorcet asserts that because of the way society formed 'the 'progress' in this stage must have been extremely slow' (*ibid*). Wright however acknowledges pace of 'progress' does not necessarily define a lack of 'progress' 'All cultures, past and present, are dynamic. Even the most-slow moving, were in the long run works in progress' (Wright, 2004:8). Condorcet raises the notion of property and a 'progress' that occurred from being:

Confined to his household utensils, his arms, his nets, and the animals he killed, is now extended to his flock and next to the land which he has cleared and cultivated. Upon the death of its head, this property naturally devolves to the family(Condorcet, 2011:11).

At this point of human 'progress' Condorcet uses the word 'hordes' to explain how:

'A society consisting of a family appears natural to a man' and that from that starting point 'a family place upon a soil that afforded an easy subsistence, might afterwards have multiplied and become a horde' (Condorcet, 2011:16).

The use of the word 'horde' is interesting as it has a connotation of a group that is tied together but perhaps loosely rather than a society that has strong rules and regulation. What Condorcet sees as being important in the 'First Epoch' is a lack of science with 'The only sciences known to savage hordes, are a slight and crude idea of astronomy, and the knowledge of certain medicinal plants employed in the cure of wounds and diseases' which he said were 'already corrupted by a mixture of superstition' (Condorcet, 2011:18). For Condorcet such a way of

living was visible for those living in the 18th Century ‘in the least civilised tribes of savages’ (*ibid*). There is very much the comparative approach to history evident with the past demonstrated as being savage and primitive in the way in which Condorcet considers it.

In charting human history ‘The Greeks were so fertile in their speculation on human life’ but the impact upon their view of human ‘progress’ was affected as ‘Their recorded history did not go back far’ (Bury, 1920:7). There is here, the interpretation of the Greeks by Bury, that they were constricted by their knowledge of the past and so through speculation they built a picture of the past. One might suggest that this was perhaps partially supplemented through the mythology that pervaded the overall culture of the time and that history was also based on oral accounts, which ‘provided the bulk of the evidence used by those who are now looked back to as the first historians – Herodotus and Thucydides’ (Tosh, 2002:296). Bury is perhaps condescending in his view, based on a belief about the quality of historical writing in the 20th Century however, he does recognise the Greek experience of the world might mean that,

‘The indication that human civilisation was a gradual growth, and that man had painfully worked his way forward from a low and savage state could not indeed escape the sharp vision of the Greeks. For instance, Aeschylus represents men as originally having lived in sunless caves and raise from that condition by Prometheus’ (Bury, 1920:8)

My understanding of the point Bury is making is that there were some who still lived in such circumstances in the Greek period and evidence of this is found in the writings of the playwrights of the time. This means that they would have had some understanding of how people had come to be in the state in which they were in the Greek period just that there are not the written records that we in the present have become accustomed to.

It was more accepted that perhaps ‘progress’ through time was not the same as ‘progress’ regarding life getting better as ‘Good cities may become bad, bad ones good’ (Nisbet, 1980:28). Bury claims that ‘the general view of Greek philosophers was that they were living in a period of inevitable degeneration and decay – inevitable because it was prescribed by the nature of the universe’ (Bury, 1920:9), supporting the idea that although some progress may have been made, largely there was decline. Pollard states that ‘most Greeks held to a cyclical theory of history in which similar situations would repeat themselves indefinitely’ (Pollard, 1968:2) until a point at which the Gods would perhaps return to the earth. I would perhaps argue that such a sense of progress was also affected by experiences of natural disasters or war, which may have

led to the destruction of towns or villages meaning that people would need to start again and as a result create a moment of perceived 'progress'.

Speed of 'progress' is also something that Nisbet touches upon considering Epicurus and states that he saw 'progress' as 'in some matters quickly and in others slowly, at some epochs and time (making great advances) and less again at others' (Nisbet, 1980:35). Bury asserts that 'recognitions of 'progress' were not incompatible with the widely spread belief in an initial degeneration of the human race' as the 'Old legend of a "golden age" of simplicity from which man had fallen away, was generally accepted as the truth' (Bury, 1920:8). The present was in this respect a retrograde step away from a past that was 'the simple life of the first age, in which men were not worn with toil and war and disease were unknown, was regarded as the ideal state' (Bury, 1920:9). There is a nostalgia present in with the way in which the 'Golden age' is presented, as mentioned in the distortion by Tosh, as the Greeks view their present as more problematic than the time that preceded it.

Bury links the Greeks to the Romans through Stoicism citing Marcus Aurelius, 'the periodic destructions and rebirths of the universe, and reflects our posterity will see nothing new, and our ancestors saw nothing greater than we have seen' (Bury, 1920:13). Bury contrasts the view of Aurelius with Seneca, who believed that there would be increased knowledge. 'The day will come when time and human diligence will clear up problems which are now obscure' and that 'Many discoveries are reserved for future ages, when our memory will have faded from men's minds' (*ibid*). Lucretius was not of the same belief as Seneca, and in fact 'Lucretius and the school to which he belonged did not look forward to a steady and continuous process of amelioration in the future. They believed that a time would come when the universe would fall into ruins' (Bury, 1920:16). Bury goes on to add 'it was thoroughly pessimistic and therefore incompatible with the idea of 'progress' (Bury, 1920:17). Pollard views the period as being one where 'man's striving must be individual and internalised, he must solve the problems of living and dying for himself, rather than as a member of a growing hopeful body of humanity' (Pollard, 1967:3).

It was with the Christian and Jewish perception of the 'progress' of humanity that one can find a shift, with new attributes assigned, which Nisbet points to as being 'unity of all mankind' (Nisbet,1980:40). Time is also a key concept here and the control of its flow, speed and power has been assigned to industry. To drive forward and locate next steps, to destroy what is present

now, to march towards a future as a relentless torrent. Nisbet alludes to this when discussing Augustine and states that at the core was ‘destruction, pure and simple. For how can the good, the ideal, be achieved unless the corrosive and noxious be exterminated?’ (Nisbet, 1980:74). Organised religion as recognised by Condorcet, had ‘formed themselves out of the wreck of the old systems of worship’ (Condorcet, 2011:53). As the Roman Empire came into a period of decline the ‘progress’ of this religion of Christ, became more rapid’ and ‘the spirit of the new sect was better suited to period of decline and misfortune’ (*ibid*). In keeping with the consideration of decline Condorcet attaches a ‘contempt for human sciences was one of the first features of Christianity’ and that ‘the triumph of Christianity was thus the signal of the entire decline both of the sciences and of philosophy’ (Condorcet, 2011:54). Perhaps it should not be surprising that a sense of new start, or beginning, should have come out of Christianity when ‘The story, it is true, also begins with a fall from grace compounded by more sinfulness after’ (Pollard, 1968:2). Indeed, perhaps those looking to ‘progress’ were rather more ‘preparing themselves for the expected early end of the world’ as they ‘did not expect to see an evolution of human society in the future, only its apocalyptic end’ (Pollard, 1968:4).

In my consideration of ‘progress’ for the initial period I have selected, ‘progress’ was less of a preoccupation for humanity as an expectation of decline and fall based on a cyclical view of human existence. There was some belief that humanity had made some ‘progress’, as the society of the time was able to recognise ways in which they were living in comparison to the past, but this was limited due to the lack of recorded history. In the next period I believe there was the burgeoning of perception of ‘progress’ that is much more recognisable for the society of the 21st Century.

2.6 Middle Ages to Renaissance and the Calvinist influence

2.6.1 Middle Ages

‘Progress’ of the spirit was a concern for those in the Middle Ages which was linked to the ‘medieval belief of the cumulative increase of knowledge through the ages’ (Nisbet, 1980:87). Certainly ‘there was nothing in the heritage of antiquity to support the idea of human evolution and ‘progress’. Experience did not encourage the belief in an upward movement’ therefore ‘views were more in accord with an empire in decay’ (Pollard, 1968:5). Such a view of ‘medieval pessimism as to man’s mundane condition was darker and sterner than the pessimism of the Greeks. There was the prospect of happiness in another sphere to compensate’

(Bury, 1920:29). A particular point to this is that the ‘the Middle Ages took the form of a universal state and a universal church’ and as such there was an ‘inter-cohesion of peoples as contributors to a common pool of civilisation’ which was ‘when the idea of ‘progress’ at last made its appearance in the world’ (Bury, 1920:24). Pollard considers Saint-Simon’s evaluation of the Middle Ages with the domination of the religious institution ‘They taught reading and writing to the lay population...the clergy founded the first hospitals and the first modern institutions of learning’ but that once the benefits began to run out ‘when they have no more scientific discoveries to make in the direction laid down by the founder, it then becomes oppressive’ (Pollard, 1968:104).

For the society looking backwards such a view supported the ‘condemnation of the Middle Ages as a lapse from civilisation’ (*ibid*) However, ‘it is impossible to halt history or turn back the clock’ and therefore ‘impossible to extinguish the system of ‘progressive civilisation’ (Pollard, 1968:107). Condorcet presents the 8th Epoch as the time whereby ‘the sciences and philosophy threw off the yoke of authority’ (Condorcet, 2011:72). The printing press is often revered as the technological leap allowing for the dissemination of information without the authority of the church and ‘These multiplied copies spreading themselves with greater rapidity, facts and discoveries, not only acquire a more extensive publicity , but acquire it also in a shorter space of time’ (Condorcet, 2011:72). Such sharing of details led to the valuing of knowledge other than that of the religious scriptures which in turn led to questioning of religious doctrines particularly during the Protestant reformation. Through wood cuts and popular religious prints, the authority of the Catholic church was brought into question and therefore changes in belief came about. A technological development that supported the splintering of the established church and religious order, as well as impacting on how Europe evolved.

2.6.2 16th and 17th Centuries

‘Since the Renaissance, few men in the West, at least, have doubted the continual ‘progress’ in knowledge of the environment of man, in the natural sciences and more recently, few have doubted the continued improvement in technology derived from them’ (Pollard, 1968:vi).

Knowledge and the need to hold the greatest cumulative mass of that knowledge as a sign of stature on the global stage has become a preoccupation of policy makers in the present but has roots very much embedded in the 16th and 17th Century. A time that is also recognised as

being the Renaissance with a renewed interest in science and enquiry, Nisbet takes the stance that the ‘concept of a Renaissance is a flawed one’ (Nisbet, 101:1980) as despite the ‘progress’ in knowledge it was indeed a time where ‘belief and fear of witchcraft flourished’ (Nisbet, 105:1980). The 17th Century saw some of the Witch Hunts and in particular the rise of Mathew Hopkins ‘more commonly known as “The Witch Finder General”’ (Knowles, [2020](#)). ‘In just 14 months, Hopkins was responsible for the condemnations and executions of some 230 alleged witches,’ (*ibid*), which perhaps highlights the willingness of the people at the time to still follow superstitious ideas. ‘Education to the masses during the early 1600’s would at best have been rudimentary. Most elementary schools of the times would have been annexed to the local church, and the appointed Vicar or Priest would have been its primary teacher’ (*ibid*). Thus, it might be argued human ‘progress’ was limited through a devoutness to the religious message, yet the Puritans saw human ‘progress’ as leading to a ‘golden future’ (Nisbet, 115:1980), and there was less focus on there being the need for a collapse or catastrophe as hard work would pave the way to glory.

Indeed, the concept of a ‘Puritan’ or ‘Protestant’ work ethic or even ‘the nature of that ethic, has been a source of controversy since Max Weber published *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*’ (Seaver, 1980:35). In the essay he notes that ‘the Puritan minister special emphasis on the duty of working hard on the dignity of labour and more generally on puritan asceticism, appealed to industrious artisans and aspiring peasants’ (Seaver, 1980:36). Hard work being a source of reward for contribution to the community on the path to securing one’s own salvation was popular as an idea. ‘Puritan roots’ (White, 2006:32), along with Calvinism are a part of British history that White focusses on to explain attitudes to intelligence testing and knowledge, along with the notion of ‘predestination – to salvation or damnation, rather than free will’ (*ibid*) My own image ‘The Vortex’ connects to my understanding of this influence with the path laid out in front of the masses, who follow to the end where they meet their destiny.

Through the literature review I consider a key piece of literature from the Calvinist and Puritan period, *The Pilgrim’s progress* by John Bunyan which according to Ryken in his foreword to the book ‘ranked just behind the King James Bible as the most important book in Protestant households’ (Ryken, 2014:I). The story trails the ‘spiritual journey of the protagonist named Christian from the city of Destruction to the Celestial City (meaning heaven)’ (*ibid*). Bunyan was ‘the son of a brazier, or travelling tinker, was brought up “among a multitude of poor

plowmen's children" in the heart of England's agricultural Midlands. He learned to read and write at a local grammar school' (Sharrock, [2025](#)). This is not to get confused with the current Grammar School system but was at a time when 'most schools were grammar schools i.e., they taught Latin' (Lawson, 1967:5). Therefore, the purpose of his education was largely religious. Bunyan's life coincided with the English Civil War and 'in November 1644 Bunyan was mustered (conscripted) in a county levy of the Parliamentary army' (Bunyan Meeting, [2025](#)). In the aftermath of the Restoration in 1660 he found himself arrested and 'This period in prison was used for writing. In 1663 came Christian Behaviour followed in 1665 by *The Holy City* and in 1666 by *Grace Abounding*, his spiritual autobiography' (*ibid*). One of 'the most famous preachers of his day' (Ryken,2014:III) , he 'sometimes travelled all the way from his native Bedford to London to preach' and 'on one recorded event 1,200 Londoners turned out on a cold winter morning to hear Bunyan preach' (*ibid*).

Later in his life 'he became a Baptist preacher. If Bunyan were living today, we would call him an evangelical Christian, but more specifically a Reformed Calvinistic Baptist' (Ryken, 2014:VI). The Baptists had become separated 'on the issue whether Christ died on the cross for everyone or only for the elect' (White, 2006:32). It would be perhaps explained further by the countenance that 'some are predestined to salvation the others to damnation' (White, 2006:36) . White uses an understanding of Calvinism in connection to 'ideas associated with the IQ and with school selection' (*ibid*). Although not an intelligence test, per se, the GCSE system in England with students separated through a testing regime that filters, creating an elect who are valued at one end, with the other end making up the damned. White explores the influence in the work of Galton on intelligence testing as 'On one hand there were the 'gifted', 'the eminent' 'those who have honourably succeeded in life' whilst 'on the other the 'feeble minded', the 'cretins', the 'refuse' (White, 2006:29). In the current system there is not this same language but when considering the way that someone who is a NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) is presented we are not far from using the same derogatory, polarising language. Perhaps such a religious fear of failing to be a member of the elect is also evident with teachers, students and parents alike being 'driven onwards by the thought and shame of diminished life chances in store for them should they at any point fail' (White, 2006:39) as also represented in 'Following the path'. The pressure of the 'fantasy' of 'progress' nudging the students along the path to the 'vortex' in hopes at the promise of success.

Nisbet falls back to reiterate a point when considering the Puritans concept of 'progress'. He suggests that they link the way in which the 'Greeks, centred on arts and sciences; the second the product of Augustinian fusion of Jewish Millenarianism and Greek ideas of unfolding growth into Christian philosophy of history' with 'emphasis upon not knowledge primarily but the spiritual state of bliss' (Nisbet, 1980:127) is the 'first time' (*ibid*) they were united in 'Western history' (*ibid*). Another powerful influence on this period was Calvin with the notion of the 'elect' which had 'already been chosen, there is nothing one can do to save one's soul; a believer no longer had to earn his place in heaven' (Spater, 2019:1967), whereby 'The Calvinist who believed in predestination had to stand before God by himself. The most important thing in his life, what happened after death, was his individual concern' (Spater, 2019:1967).

One thing that does appear to be apparent when considering the religious message of the book is that the 'progress' sought is 'salvation of one's soul as the one thing needful; the substitutionary atonement of Jesus as the basis for the forgiveness of sin; heaven as the ultimate longing of every person' (Ryken, 2014:VI). *The Pilgrim's Progress* as an allegory offers guidance of how that might be achieved as personal 'progress' towards death at a time of plague and short life expectancy in a 'World turned upside down' (*see figure 9*). The execution of King Charles I led to a time of tumult in English history as alternative religions and ideologies came to the fore such as the Ranters and Diggers. In the print shown in *figure 9* there is reference to a world that had been turned upside down where hands have been placed by feet, the hare chases the hound, reflecting what at the time must have been disconcerting for many.



Figure 9 ;The World Turned upside down,
John Smith, 1646

The middle part of the 17th Century in England is marked by the way in which groups tried to make sense of a new world order with some ideas which were viewed as subversive. In one of the *Diggers' Manifestoes* they decreed 'England is not a free people till the poor that have not land have a free allowance to dig and labour the commons' and that 'the poor people's heart be comforted by a universal consent of making the Earth a Common treasury' (Berens, 2006:177). The Diggers would later be immortalised in the lyrics of '*The World turned upside down*' (1975) by Leon Rosselson, using Winstanley's words from the aforementioned quote from the Digger's manifesto. Billy Bragg released his own version of the song in 1985 which 'dragged the Diggers back front and centre by recording the song as part of his 'Between the Wars EP' (Taylor, 2020) as a point of protest 'towards the end of the miner's strikes' (*ibid*). In the final lines of the song the lines go: 'We come in peace -, The orders came to cut them down' (Rosselson, 1975), reference to the Diggers being shot and highlighting how ideas such as theirs were seen as a threat to the ruling classes.

Perhaps against the backdrop of the period Bunyan was looking to focus on the godly. Piper states, in writing about Bunyan's life that he showed 'To live on God who is invisible' is to live upon God in his word' (Piper, 2014:XXXVII) and 'how we shall help those we love get safely to the Celestial city' (*ibid*). The 'progress' on offer is based on faith on the invisible and faith that at the end of life there will be something else. 'Progress' was tightly linked to the celestial and determined how people lived their lives. I choose just one section from Bunyan's

book to exemplify my point that the journey of ‘progress’ was steeped in faith. ‘Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do’ (Bunyan, 2014:5). There are two religious references contained within this both of which relate to following the path to salvation, to find the light. I see here a link to my own perception of the way ‘progress’ in the English Education system has become a line to follow towards a shining light, unquestioningly. To have faith in what has been set out in front as shown in ‘The Vortex’ (see figure 10).

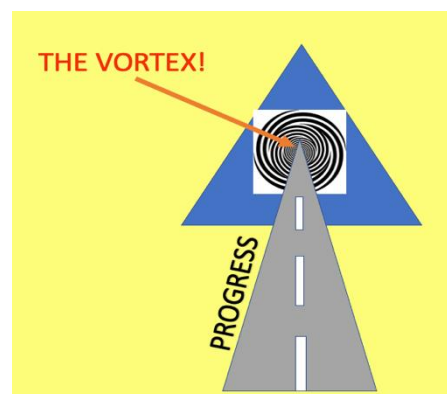


Figure 10 'The Vortex'

The responsibility of ‘progress’ is therefore individualised.

In practice this means that God helps those who help themselves. Thus, the Calvinist, as it is sometimes put, himself creates his own salvation, or as would be more correct, the conviction of it’ (Weber, 1958:115).

Calvin had a strong sense of the role of knowledge ‘bringing about the complete unity in Christ of all mankind’ (Nisbet, 1980:128) in the 17th Century ‘we find Calvin’s stress upon sacred knowledge to include all knowledge including that found in the secular arts and sciences’ (*ibid*) Spater suggests whilst quoting Weber that ‘For the Calvinist, one’s vocation becomes “the technical means, not of purchasing salvation but of getting rid of the fear of damnation” (p. 115). His earthly work thus served as the outlet for his fears about the afterlife.’ (Spater, 2019:1969). ‘Progress’ through hard work and piety as ‘If he could be “good,” he must be among the elect’ (Spater, 2019:1968). It might be argued that some of the current focus on knowledge as a sign of ‘progress’ finds its root within this period and the beliefs that grew out of it. Certainly, when considering obedience and the need to follow the path that is set out by

those who consider themselves to be the elect. This thought is pursued in more detail when looking at educational policy reform in England and the way the system has been shaped in the next section of this chapter.

Scientific and religious knowledge were to be a feature of the work of Newton for despite his work on Gravity also penned the words ‘This most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being’ (Nisbet, 1980:128). Nisbet follows this by referencing Cohen when he states ‘Newton (and many of his contemporaries, and also predecessors of the sixteenth century) sought to demonstrate irrefutably that the Copernican order was the “divine order” ‘ (*ibid*). This is not a unique stance peculiar to science as in early 19th Century Germany the influential history Ranke stated that ‘humanity as it is, explicable or inexplicable: the life of the individual, of generations of nations and at times the hand of God above them’ (Gilbert, 1987:394).

John White considers the latter part of the 17th Century stating that ‘A central intellectual influence on early Puritanism, was the mid-sixteenth century French logician Pierre de la Ramee or Petrus Rasmus’ (White, 2006:91). The appeal of Ramus according to White was that ‘he provided a systematic map of the whole range of human knowledge and detailed guidance on how the items that constitute it can be transmitted from teacher to learner’ (White, 2006:92). The reason for this appeal was that they ‘helped to meet a central spiritual need’ (*ibid*) as ‘ones understanding of the nature of God and of his created world’ (*ibid*) was the path to salvation rather than through the ‘authority of a priestly hierarchy’ (*ibid*). Ramus’ importance is alluded to by Wilson where she explains:

Petrus Ramus who reoriented the arts of logic and rhetoric as part of his aim to reform the academic curriculum within early modern universities, eradicating what he perceived as obfuscations of scholasticism and replacing these with a clear and simple system which a student could apply to any subject in order to obtain a rational understanding of it (Wilson, 2010:56).

In presenting his logic through a diagrammatic form there was ‘the spatial presentation of their ramifications in an immediately accessible form’ (White, 2006:93). There was an appeal to the Puritans of the time as ‘It appeared to prove a simple method, by moving in thought alone from general to particular’ and that ‘rather than getting lost in fruitless disputations, it could be employed in the service of discovering ultimate truth’ (*ibid*). White refers to Miller further when considering the influence of the Puritans concluding that ‘it might seem that the chief

function of Puritanism in the development of modern civilisation was the education it gave to a segment of the British public' and ultimately that 'Puritan education did not intend that the students think for themselves but it did intend that they should take in the vast quantity of received and orthodox information' (Miller,1939:87). What I believe this suggests is that there is still a residue of this thought in the current practices and beliefs of those who have been shaping education policy in England. The Conservatives found a logic of knowledge that they believed was the core of what needed to be known and potentially the expectation on the students has been like that expressed by Miller of a need to know not necessarily to question.

2.7 18th and 19th Century industrial 'progress'

The 18th and 19th Centuries saw increased Nationalism as the signifier of 'progress' of one nation against the other particularly in the search for Empire. In considering the 19th Century and 'progress', Hobsbawm's book *Age of Empire* sets the scene well when he remarks that 'they called it 'patriotism' and the essence of the original 'right-wing' nationalism which emerged in already established nation-states was to claim a monopoly of patriotism for the extreme political right and brand everyone else as some sort of traitor' (Hobsbawm, 1987:143). Perhaps similar tones have been experienced in recent British Political history since the 2016 referendum where to suggest that Brexit was questionable and that the result was not necessarily in the best interests of all has divided opinions creating the 'Brexiteer' and 'Remainer' motifs. Polarisation is also apparent in the education debate with clear lines of difference established by the competing parts whether that be politically through left versus right or the traditionalist versus progressive debates. To speak out for one side or the other posits one as a traitor to the cause for one or other end of the spectrum and allows for reductionist attacks which denigrate the view of the other.

2.7.1 'Progress' as inequality and diminished freedom

'The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not lacking in historians, scientists, philosophers and in general intellectuals who considered freedom and liberty sacred' (Nisbet,1980:179). Rousseau was one, who wrote the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*' in 1774. In the notes of the edition, it is claimed that 'Rousseau's career as a thinker began suddenly' when 'he read that a contest was to be held' involving 'the question 'Has the 'progress' of the sciences and arts contributed to the corruption or the improvement of human conduct?'' (Borosan, 2004:V).

For Rousseau the consideration was that ‘man is by nature good and that only our institutions have made him bad’ (*ibid*). I return to that same sentence again to exemplify my thinking around property and ownership when he said that ‘The first man, who, after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, “This is mine” and found people simple enough to believe him was the true founder of civil society’ (Rousseau, 2004:27). In my thesis I am of the view that the word ‘progress’ has been enclosed and owned and that society is having to live with accepting such ownership. He sees the time that such ownership of property was ‘the epoch of the first revolution, which produced the establishment and distinction of families, and which introduced a species of property, and long with it perhaps a thousand quarrels and battles’ (Rousseau, 2004:30). The ‘progress’ of ownership of nations, and of clans for Rousseau appears to be problematic. He identifies the need to control power by the rich to secure their position ‘The rich on their side begin to taste the pleasure of their old slaves to acquire new ones, they no longer thought of anything but subduing and enslaving their neighbours’ (Rousseau, 2004:37). He also asks the question as to whether ‘the perfect happiness of a state consists in the subjects obeying their prince, the prince obeying the laws and the laws being equitable and always directed to the good of the public?’ (Rousseau, 2004:43). Towards the end he states that ‘pursuing the ‘progress’ of inequality’ it will become evident that ‘the establishment of laws and right of property was the first term of it, the institute of magistrates the second, and theirs and last the changing of legal into arbitrary power’ (Rousseau, 2004:47). It is ‘those vices that which render social institutions necessary that also render the abuse of such institutions unavoidable’ (*ibid*). Rousseau’s assessment is prophetic in some respects as it of course predates the raft of social reform that occurred at the end of the 19th Century and start of the 20th Century. Government led institutions spawned rapidly to centralise and control the populace in with the economy at the forefront, and the wealth of the nation at stake. With human ‘progress’ of ownership and creation of administration and law freedom is diminished and inequality deepened. For Rousseau the ‘progress’ of humankind suggested an entrenched and deepening inequality where ‘The citizen is always in motion, perpetually sweating and toiling and racking his brain to find more occupations still more laborious, He continues to drudge to his last minute’ (Rousseau, 2004:51). I encapsulated this in a series of drawings to help me to conceptualise that citizens are not in control of their futures and are forced to grind out an existence. Through the compulsion of being educated, they become docile bodies rather than self-determining individuals fulfilling their role in the machinery of the state. I include both images here in *figure 11* and *figure 12* but it is in chapter 3 where I explain in more detail how they have come to be part of the overall thinking in this thesis.

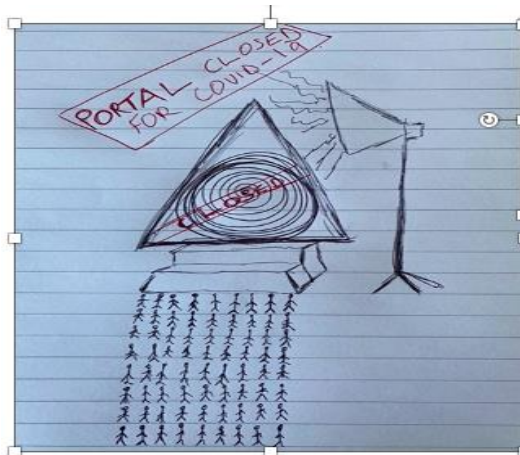


Figure 11 'Waiting on the steps'.

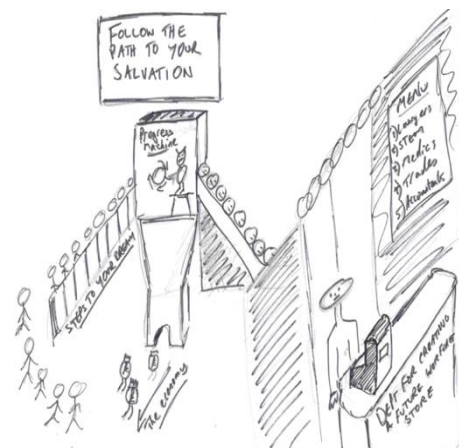


Figure 12 Grinding a future.

2.7.2 Turgot and the Orient as an example of a lack of ‘progress’

Much of the focus in this thesis has surrounded Western and European ideas on ‘progress’ but many of those who have shown an interest in ‘progress’ used comparison with other societies and civilisations to enhance their own view. One example of such a comparison is Turgot who I will briefly touch upon here, with his views on how a lack of ‘progress’ was evident to him, through the Chinese. Turgot, writing in the 18th Century according to Nisbet, saw ‘progress’ as having three stages, ‘ascent to the stage of hunting, pastoralism followed by the stage of agriculture and then navigation and commerce’ (Nisbet, 1980:182). It is possible to understand why he would have held such a view as by the time in which Turgot was writing the ‘Golden Age of Exploration’ through historical figures such as Columbus and Drake had taken place. Thriving markets across Europe, with exotic goods had become well established, with the world mapped out. The aspect of Turgot’s focus on human ‘progress’ that I consider here is the role of language as a reason for ‘the failure of given nations to ‘progress’ beyond a certain point’ (Nisbet, 1980:183). Turgot used the Chinese as his example, claiming that:

If a language which is stabilised too soon may retard the people which speaks it, a nation which attains stability too quickly may for a similar reason find the progress of its sciences is arrested. The Chinese were stabilised too soon’ (Turgot, 1973:111)

His suggestion is that by having fixed the language they are then unable to embrace ‘progress’ in the sciences as ‘There was so much respect for their barely sketched out science, and they

retained so much for the ancestors who had caused these first steps to be taken, that it was believed that nothing remained to be added' (*ibid*). The attitude of Turgot towards the 'Orient' is seemingly dismissive perhaps due to his own experience of the world around him whereby the ideas of Newton and other scientists, were changing perceptions. He goes so far as to say 'The protection given to the sciences in the kingdoms of the Orient is what has caused their ruin: by burdening them with the rites and transforming them into dogmas' (*ibid*). Turgot is suggesting that there is a limitation to the 'progress' that can be made and viewing the Oriental culture as being behind that of the European. However, this does not mean that for Turgot 'progress' is not possible, perhaps far from it as he also claimed:

Progress, although inevitable, is intermingled with frequent periods of decline as a result of the occurrences and revolutions which come to interrupt it. Thus, progress has been very different among different peoples (Turgot, 1973:88).

In this respect it could be understood that what Turgot is perceiving with China, is a period of decline where the 'progress' is held back but that there could be a circumstance which would lead to 'progress'. With regards to this thesis, I think the last line is connected to 'progress' in the 21st Century whereby there is the will and attempt to remove the difference in experience of 'progress'. Through economic competition, technological advances and the global knowledge economy, there is a march towards 'progress' whereby perhaps the meaning and understanding is more common than before.

2.7.3 America's 'Progress'

'Progress' as a pursuit to demonstrate how Europeans saw themselves as more advanced can be understood when considering America and the Westward Expansion of the 19th Century.



Figure 13, 'American 'progress' by John Gast,(1872)

The story of America's 'progress' is illustrated in the painting by Gast in 1872 entitled 'American progress' (see figure 13). Within the image there is the depiction of an Angel rolling out telegraph wires with one hand whilst holding a bible in the other. The Plains Indians are retreating into the dark as the trains roll west with the land being cultivated by the settlers. The movement west coincided with 'Rationalism' which 'stressed the sufficiency of human reason to comprehend the universe and allowed men to adjust gracefully to nature and to exploit the natural environment for their increased happiness' (Marcell, 1974:54). Therefore the 'rationalist conception of 'progress' rested on the premise that the laws of nature were stale, uniform and discoverable by applying empirical science and the right reason to the study of natural environment and natural history' (*ibid*). For 'progress' to take place it was that 'man's growing understanding of himself, his society and universe' from which 'knowledge of human nature grew correspondingly' (*ibid*). The challenge that was posed to any 'progress' was 'outmoded customs and institutions based on the irrational and unnatural' (Marcell, 1974:55). One could argue that in the story of America such a group living with 'outmoded customs' that could be viewed as 'irrational and unnatural' at that time were the Plains Indians.

In the view of Marcell 'Happiness and hence 'progress' derived from man's achievement of the creator's intention and design' (Marcell, 1974:56), which gave weight to the view of 'Manifest Destiny' and the God given right to settle the West as 'the central proposition that 'progress' meant the fulfilment of God-given faculties rather than the creation of some new human dimension' (Marcell, 1974:57). The Puritans find their place in the story of America and the perception of 'progress' as they had believed that 'God had chosen America as the stage for the recreation of Zion and had chosen them as the case for this last act in the long

drama of Christian history' (Marcell, 1974:65). Such a position allowed for the destruction of the lives of the native people as 'progress' in establishing the grounds for the settlement of the West.

Turgot had an admirer in Condorcet who saw 'progress' as being greater equity in the world which would come about through 'laws which have brought mankind to its present advanced condition in the civilised parts of the world and not be missed of a constantly intensified education available to all. Education properly directed' (Nisbet, 1980:211). Condorcet considered the impact of perfection on population and the issue of a surplus of people to food believing that there would be a reduced procreation on moral grounds as people would believe it to be a 'puerile idea of populating the earth with unhappy beings' (Condorcet, 2011:136). An idea that perhaps gained traction in Britain in the first half of the 20th Century when considering Utilitarianism.

2.7.4 A Rakes Progress

Perhaps comparable to the painting by Gast would be '*The Rakes Progress*' which are a set of eight paintings by Hogarth, and also turned into an opera by Stravinsky setting a libretto by WH Auden and follows the story of Tom Rakewell. Through the allegory 'Hogarth gave a comprehensive account of the ruination of man' whose 'own vices fostered by family history and circumstances, the viciousness of society and destiny itself all conspire in his destruction' (Lawson, 2010: 400). He begins by depicting the inheritance and ends with Rakewell in the mad house as 'the final scene is a representation in local, topic and human terms of universal tragedy' (Lawson, 2010:412). 'Progress' has not been presented as in the painting by Gast but 'to be seen in the history of Tom Rakewell, is the grave metaphor. The civilization or the individual that destroys itself is the darkest end' (*ibid*). Given how my own family history began with the asylum and my great grandmother it is interesting how in this instance 'progress' is given a representation of leading to destruction. Through each image, stages of Rakewell's life are depicted as he finds then squanders his riches before finding himself in prison and then the madhouse. What is questioned is Tom Rakewell's moral ability to understand his wealth without the need to work to attain it before squandering it through vice. He is portrayed to lack the moral strength as he drinks and gambles his money as well as having a child out of wedlock. I have selected two of the images (*see figure 14 and figure 15*) that bookend the tale to include here to show the contrast between the enthusiasm and potential before the fateful

downfall. The rhetorical question that I ask myself is that given the potential at the start of the education journey as one moves through the steps it is not always a given that the end point is one of success.



Figure 15, 'The Heir', Hogarth, Printed 1735



Figure 14, 'The Mad House', Hogarth, Printed 1735

2.7.5 'Progress' towards state education

The 19th Century was a period marked by a greater centralisation by the institution of government and state as the step away from 'Laissez faire' political approaches and indeed as Condorcet had believed necessary, with education becoming increasingly important to the state. In the present the state is front and centre when it comes to education but in the 19th Century 'education had long been regarded as a family decision, an issue of freedom from the state' (Ball, 2017:69). However in that latter period of the 19th Century 'compulsory education was supported by the unions, notably the mineworkers, and by the newly formed Trades Union Congress, held at Birmingham in 1869' (Gillard, 2018), and due to changes in working conditions it was also supported by 'some industrialists, partly because factories had new more complex machinery and therefore no longer needed child labour' (*ibid*). The 1870 Education Act as put forward by William Forster can potentially be seen as 'progress' in the story of the system of education in England. The focus was very much on the funding of the buildings and management of schools which was a central part of the growth of centralisation in the latter part of the 19th Century. Following acts in 1876 and 1880 led to compulsory attendance in schools but one might argue the more significant acts occur in the early part of the 20th Century. What was clear at the end of the 19th Century, was a revaluation of the childhood experience was underway and compulsory education has been an important part of that across the last part of the 19th Century and then the 20th and 21st Centuries.

Ball states that ‘State education emerged in the 19th century in response to the need to manage the new urban working classes and to accommodate the social and political aspirations of the new middle class ’ (Ball, 2017:64). The 19th century had forced the political elites of the time to reconsider the way in which the approach to poor relief and a mobile population was evolving rapidly and by the end of which the solution of a welfare state had begun to come into fruition. The moral status of the population as the cause of poverty as the prevailing orthodoxy was becoming replaced by other theories but still ‘Forms of disorder that were regarded as threatening political stability were manifested in crime, juvenile delinquency, changing kinship structures and relations, ‘race’ immigration and general immorality’ (Ball, 2017:65). There was the Great Reform Act of 1834 which came on the back of the Royal commission into the Poor Laws of 1832 which had seen extensive surveys with volumes of reports giving light on the state of the poor. However, these were beset by scandal as the system was open to corruption and abuse giving rise to the Andover workhouse scandal of 1847 where inmates were found to be in conditions that were seen as inhumane. All the time that the reasons for poverty were linked to the morality of the population, policy was built to engender fear of the workhouse through less eligibility and therefore reduce the amount being spent on relief. It was towards the end of the century where the health of the nation was thrown into the spotlight as recruits for the army to serve in the Boer War were found to be ineligible due to poor health. ‘Rowntree noted that of 3,600 volunteers seeking enlistment in York, Leeds and Sheffield between 1897 and 1900 26.5 per cent were rejected as unfit’ which ‘reinforced a general concern that the British working people were somehow operating at a less than efficient level’ (Rees, 2016:139). Impetus for change in Britain in the 19th Century was affected by rapid urbanisation, major challenges to health through outbreaks of cholera and other such killer diseases, greater centralisation of policy and the concerns for sustaining an Empire. What needs to be considered is the extent to which such change can be considered ‘progress’ and the perception to those living through the experience. Education is also integral to the story of the welfare state and the impetus for change as debates on National efficiency ‘encouraged policy makers to look more closely at social and economic policies that were being implemented by Britain’s competitors and to calculate which were the most effective and could be implemented in Britain’ (Rees,2016:140). Education has become an area of economic policy where comparison with competitors has become an obsession of policy makers.

2.7.6 Towards an administration of things

During the 19th Century there were major changes that took place socially, economically, and politically, some which built on each other, but there needs to be careful consideration as to whether these can be considered 'progress'. Van Doren explains that 'The five subordinate issues in the special controversy all concern specific ways in which 'progress' manifests itself in human products or institutions. The different respects in which 'progress' is said to be made are in, '1. Knowledge, 2. Technology, 3. Wealth or economic goods, 4. Social and political institutions, 5. Morality' (Van Doren, 1967:15). In this section of the literature there is a consideration of how 'progress' became more acutely linked to science and economics.

The 19th Century saw an 'economic growth and scientific advance', which, 'as a result, the idea of 'progress' was held more widely, more strongly and unselfconsciously than before' (Pollard, 1968:96), as 'all three leading systems of thought, nationalist liberalism, revolutionary socialism, and transcendent idealism, held to a doctrine of progress' (*ibid*). To take such a view of 'progress' is perhaps in part to the influence in the early part of the 19th Century, through Saint-Simon who 'constructed a theory of historical knowledge, which justified neglect of details and extolled the birds-eye view of history, the thumbnail sketch, and the sweeping generalisations as the highest possible achievements' (Simon, 1956:312). According to Pollard, Saint-Simon held to the view that:

politicians or generals' benefit, at best, one part of humanity at the expense of the other, the scientist, engineer or artist, benefits mankind as a whole and it is he who is the real author and creator for the 'progress' of humanity(Pollard, 1968:98)

The suggestion is that the politicians and generals benefit the ruling classes, whereas the others benefit humanity much more widely. Pollard explains further a belief that 'social science itself was about to enter the stage', and now the 'expert could use his knowledge to make predictions. In a deeper sense, history is the march of progress laid down by God, and the object of human endeavour is to make human intelligence approach ever closer to divine foresight' (Pollard, 1968:98). In my reading, I take this to mean that 'progress' is that the knowledge and understanding of man would lead to being able to determine the future and for 'progress' to be almost predetermined. Such 'progress' was to be achieved via the 'administration of things' (Pollard, 1968:100), through which Europe would 'extend the blessing of 'progress' to the rest of the world' and 'populate the globe with the European race, which is superior to all human

racess to make it accessible and habitable like Europe' (Pollard, 1968:101). To support my claim Pollard suggests 'Saint-Simon was centred from first to last in the inevitability of the 'progress' of humanity' (Pollard, 1968:101).

This last quote about Saint-Simon I believe encapsulates the attitudes of the time and the way in which during the first half of the 20th Century, against the background of such thinking, grew the social and political views that enabled, authoritarian and eugenic thought to be accepted. On all sides of the political spectrum concern for the morality of society, the health and state of the nation, were tightly linked to notions of Britain and Empire, and the view of 'progress' leading into the 20th Century.

2.8 'Progress' in the 20th and 21st Centuries

The first half of the 20th Century involved two major conflicts through the two world wars, along with major economic crises impacting on the way in which 'progress' was perceived and latterly pursued. The second half of the period can perhaps be viewed as a social and cultural response to the upheaval, with promises of never again and a better future for all. In more recent times some might argue the promise of the post war years has been replaced by austerity and the valuing of resilience in the face of such challenges. Society is asked time and again to shoulder the economic burden and pull together in response to financial crises, war, and pandemics with the promise of 'progress'. In Britain the evolution of the welfare state continued and by the end of World War II the NHS had been established on the back of the Beveridge report 1942. However, in those initial post war years there was the need for society to accept a level of austerity through rationing but also at other times across the century and into the 21st Century. Being asked to put aside aspiration and tighten the belt for the good of the nation because of economic challenges has contributed to an education system that is sometimes seen by politicians as an instrument to building a workforce that will sustain the national position in global economics. In the post war world of the mid 1940s, the 1944 Education Act there was an attempt to construct a system to answer the bigger questions.

The national debate about what sort of education system the country should have when the war was over focused on four key issues: the existence of public schools, the arrangements for secondary education, the school leaving age and the dual system of local authority and voluntary Church Schools. (Gillard, 2018: <https://www.education-uk.org/history/chapter09.html>).

The impact of World War II and the 1944 Act is something I return to later in this chapter, to support the chronological structure, but what I recognise here is that who should be educated and to what level has been part of this debate in the English education system and affects the perception of ‘progress’ that has developed. In this chapter I aim to consider how ‘progress’ over the 20th and 21st Centuries has come to point of a measure through ‘Progress 8’ and the pressure on schools to show that they are making ‘progress’.

2.8.1 Dewey and ‘progress’

Dewey wrote about ‘progress’ in 1916 and it is not surprising when considering the date of publication that he recognised that ‘Some persons will see only irony in a discussion of ‘progress’ at the present time. Never was pessimism easier’ (Dewey, 1916:311). Dewey was writing about preparation of teachers in the USA and through his works was sharing what he viewed progressive education to mean and look like. Writing against the backdrop of World War I Dewey considers ‘progress’, and how perceptions had reached a point where a reconsideration was necessary. The war to end all wars, World War I destabilised Europe economically, politically, and socially as twenty years after it ended the world was plunged back into war in 1939. Out of the First World war came the Soviet Union, and the fear of capitalism that the world would descend into communism, with the Red Scare in America and a commitment to protecting capitalism. Within the British Empire grew the challenge to rule overseas with the nationalist movement in India and the home rule leagues leading to contemplation about the future. Domestically the arrival of universal suffrage offered a challenge to the traditional ruling classes as the opening of the franchise gave voice to the masses. The Fabian Society had countered the prevailing orthodoxy surrounding poverty prior to the war, through the ‘Minority Report’ and post war the Labour party had become a force, offering the working classes a political outlet to represent their views.

For Dewey the war brought forth ‘revelations of our stupidity and the carelessness it brings with it’ from which a ‘more responsible faith in ‘progress’ than that in which we have indulged in the past’ (Dewey, 1916:312). From his own consideration ‘We confused rapidity of change with advance’ (*ibid*) explaining that ‘rapid change in conditions affords an opportunity for ‘progress’ but is not itself ‘progress’ (*ibid*). In Dewey’s estimation ‘Two things are apparent. First ‘progress’ depends not on the existence of social change but on the direction which human beings deliberately give that change. Secondly, ease of social change is a condition of progress’

(Dewey, 1916:313). For Dewey at the time of writing, he believed that the power to pursue ‘progress’ was in the hands of humankind with the potential to determine the direction of ‘progress’ and make social changes. ‘While the modern man was deceived about the amount of ‘progress’ he had made, and especially deceived about the automatic certainty of ‘progress’, he was right in thinking that for the first time in history mankind is in command of the possibility of progress’ (Dewey, 1916:314).

There was the ‘possession of a method which enables us to forecast desirable physical changes and set about securing them’ (Dewey, 1916:315). Indeed, for Dewey ‘progress’ is not automatic; it depends upon human intent and aim and upon acceptance of responsibility for its production’ that is ‘executed in sections’ (*ibid*). In this assertion ‘progress’ is no longer something that occurs through nature or the cosmos but is planned for and organised resulting from decisions made. ‘We have to recognise that it is a human and intentional product’ (*ibid*), stating that ‘progress’ ‘depends upon deliberate human foresight and socially constructive work’ (*ibid*). Dewey considers how ‘scientific discoveries into inventions which turn physical energy of sun, coal and iron to account’ which were due to the ‘human devotion and application of human desire’ (Dewey, 1916:318). ‘Progress’ in turn has become a deliberate and intentional product that in education teachers and students are being held to account for attaining.

From this point Dewey then problematised ‘progress’ in a way which is how I am problematising ‘progress’ within this thesis, as ‘progress’ is ‘a problem of discovering the needs and capacities of collective human nature’ (*ibid*), and then how the ‘available powers operating for the satisfaction of those needs’ (*ibid*) operate. My argument is that the dominant needs are determined by the political autocrat who tends to ‘benefit, at best, one part of humanity’ (Pollard, 1968:100), in the present, the instrument of education is purposed to meet a set of needs based on a foresight around power and control and economic strength. Dewey was writing ‘under the dominion of a laissez-faire philosophy’ which he suggested ‘trusts the direction of human affairs to nature or providence, or evolution or manifest destiny – that is to say, to accident’ (Dewey, 1916:318).

Overall, for Dewey the ‘guarantee of progress’ lay in the ‘perfecting of social mechanisms corresponding to specific needs’ (Dewey, 1916:312), which in my own estimation has been filled by state education as a means for generating societal results in the name of ‘progress’. Social mechanisms or instruments have been tuned, over the last one hundred years to the status

of the system we have today and the way in which ‘progress’ is reported. In the context of this thesis the performativity measures that have been applied to ‘progress’ have impacted on the lived experience of school leaders in England.

2.8.2 The first 90 years - Generation of a centralised education system

In this section the story of ‘progress’ will be more tightly linked to education and how the development of the state education system has arrived at the point where schools’ effectiveness is now judged by a measure called ‘Progress 8’. Education has historical roots that span millennia, but the system that we have inherited today is still relatively young when considered historically and has undergone reforms and changes regularly across the last one hundred years.

2.8.3 Early educational aims in the first half of the 20th Century

For the political classes of the late 19th Century and early 20th Century there was a need to respond to

a growing sense of collective responsibility for serious social problems and an awareness that nineteenth-century England had failed to achieve a fair distribution of wealth. Membership of trade unions doubled from two million in 1900 to four million in 1915 (Gillard, 2018:1).

And that ‘Education which was now a public service became a contentious issue between the political parties and began to feature in election manifestos, both local and national’ (Gillard, 2018:2). For the start of the century ‘the watchword now became National Efficiency, a programme for redefining and extending the powers of the state through reforms in government, industry and social organisation as well as education’ (Donald, 1992:27). For state and government to extend such powers ‘the provision of welfare went hand in hand with the extension of surveillance and the gathering of information – the strategy for policing families’ (Donald, 1992:28).

One of the key groups behind such a concern for National Efficiency were Sidney and Beatrice Webb of the Fabian society and authors of the ‘Minority Report’. Donald calls the approach of the Webb’s ‘social imperialism’ (*ibid*) and explains that they were believed there was the requirement of,

a rationalised administrative machinery, the improvement of industrial production by the application of scientific expertise (and hence the extension

of scientific and technical education) and again the improvement of the nation's physique and the fitness of its population (*ibid*).

'Progress' is tied into these very ideas about education and the apparatus of the state in being able to develop and build what was seen as necessary.

The development of school curriculum and a system of certification assessment has emerged with compulsory education now to the age of eighteen. To allow policing, there was also the acceptance of the moral need to send one's child to school as 'families took on the responsibility of sending their children to school. Parents were quickly recruited to and classified in relation to the ethics of compulsion' (Ball, 2013:43). In essence the understanding of education became an acceptance to the compulsory state of it and that to oppose the machination, was unethical and immoral, therefore it normalised the systemic education of children. Such development is part of the overall picture of 'progress' throughout the 20th Century and start of the 21st Century with the centralisation of government, that has viewed education policy as future proofing the status of the nation.

The century began with the decision that,

Each of the new state secondary schools created by the 1902 Education Act was to teach, English language and literature, at least one language other than English, geography, history, mathematics, science, drawing, manual instruction (boys), domestic subjects (girls), physical exercise and organised games (White, 2011:151).

When considering the current set up of secondary education there is much of the familiar in the list, particularly when considering the national curriculum of 1988 and that 'it's ten compulsory subjects almost identical to Morant's list in 1904' (White, 2006:125). The subjects included in the 1988 National Curriculum were,

1) Subject to subsection (4) below, the core subjects are - (a) mathematics, English and science; and (b) in relation to schools in Wales which are Welsh-speaking schools, Welsh.(2) Subject to subsection (4) below, the other foundation subjects are -(a) history, geography, technology, music, art and physical education;(b) in relation to the third and fourth key stages, a modern foreign language specified in an order of the Secretary of State; (HMSO, 1988:3)

Most students follow an almost identical range of subjects in the present curriculum with the addition of Computing, but in the main, the same range of subjects. In England subsequent changes and developments have led to the aforementioned 'social mechanisms' being altered

and impacting on how ‘progress’ in education is perceived, pursued, and assessed. Curriculum is central to how the education system has been built, as through the curriculum decisions about who should study what, when and how, has then led into a system of qualification that attaches value judgements to the level of success enjoyed personally, institutionally, politically, and more recently internationally. In 1904 there was a ‘deep division between the two systems’ (White, 2006:8), of secondary and elementary education with those not expected to go beyond the elementary to follow a ‘curriculum designed to prepare them for work with their hands not their brains’ (*ibid*). From this system there was also the valuing of intelligence with ‘Webb’s arguments for selective educational institutions’ meant that ‘The outcome was a system based on segregation. Bright children as identified by mental measurement, were to be separated from other children’ (Donald, 1992:29). White is highly critical of such segregation.

Henceforth, for the next sixty years and in part through to our own day, England’s education system would be highly selective. A small minority of children would at least in intention receive a broad professional – university-oriented education at secondary schools (later secondary grammar schools), while the vast mass would experience the academically undemanding curriculum of the elementary (later secondary modern) school(White, 2006:8).

In respect of the notion of ‘progress’ one could argue that the system itself was constructed to maintain and sustain the divisions expected with only the ‘Exceptionally able children to pass into selective schools’ (*ibid*) through the 11+. Education. Therefore, rather than a liberalising force, it could be construed as having been built from a position ‘to moralise the working class, - disciplining it, studying it, diagnosing its ills and inadequacies, tending to its welfare (Donald, 1992:29).

It would be possible to level such a claim against more recent government interventions in education with judgements made by policy makers evolving from moral concerns of a lack of ‘Britishness’, the need to identify the ‘gifted and talented’, STEM (Science, Technology, Maths), all perceived deficits of the young people who are in the education system. For the Conservative Right of the English political system ‘strategies of nation-building and governing that language and literature took on a political importance’ (Donald, 1992:53). Donald references a speech by Kenneth Baker (Secretary of State for Education and Science, 1986-1989) where he explicitly states, ‘English language is our greatest asset as a nation, it is the essential ingredient of the Englishness of England’ and that:

The thing that has held them together over the centuries and would still allow an Englishman transported back a hundred years, or two hundred years, or four hundred years if you have a good ear for accent to recognise that he was in the same country (*ibid*).

Donald explains that ‘Here is Englishness as heritage, a mythical identity, as the sensual experience of an imagined past’ (Donald, 1992:54). I will return to this when I consider more deeply the changes that took place from 1988 to 2015 and the way in which a ‘protection’ of ‘Britishness’ is evident but also impacts on the perception of ‘progress’ and the way in which government policy has created instruments to predetermine ‘progress’ but also to sustain and maintain a nationalistic view.

I return here to the word ‘nostalgia’ in consideration of how heritage and identity can be considered as promoting feelings of nostalgia for those who find themselves as feeling foreign in their own land. I am using the word land metaphorically, as in the 21st Century we inhabit multiple spaces and can feel alienated when confronted with a space we do not understand. Nostalgia, ‘In the 1830s – was associated with military medical diagnosis, specifically to describe the intense homesickness felt by some soldiers and sailors on active service in faraway places’ (Halpin, 2016:33) whereas today, one might apply such a feeling to how people may feel about their place and space in society. This has become apparent with online and social media spaces where parents and older generations can feel as outsiders and thus foreign and alienated. In some respects, this lends to the view of lost values and the need to return to a better time through a nostalgia of a better place. One might argue that for the process of education policy, for the Conservative Right, there is a nostalgia as there is a symmetry to Baker’s view and that of the Conservative party in the 21st Century. Education is a means of promoting feelings of nationhood and soothes ‘the yearning need therapeutically to re-engage with something that is lost, or from which one is reluctantly parted’ (*ibid*).

2.8.4 Intelligence and segregation

Prior to World War I the view of ‘progress’ was tinged with pessimism as Pollard explained due to ‘historical experience’ with ‘The mind of a whole generation scarred by the patent futilities of mass unemployment’ (Pollard, 1968:182). Education was recognised as a way of bringing about change societally whilst there was also the input of the Eugenicists and social Darwinists, along with commissions that looked to define and categorise the populace. One such commission was the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble minded,

more commonly referred to as the 'Radnor Report' of 1908. In their conclusions they gave consideration to 'prevention of mentally defective persons from becoming parents' stating that doing so would 'diminish the numbers of such people in the population' (1908, Vol VIII:185), however they also 'condemn any legislation directed chiefly or exclusively to the prevention of hereditary transmission of mental defect by surgical or other artificial measures' (*ibid*). According to Ball, 'This literature became embedded in basic pedagogical practices and orderings – the lists, sets, "tables", streams and bands etc – of schooling, and in the separation of the "special" from regular schooling,' (Ball, 2013:80). One such way to do so was through intelligence testing, which Cyril Burt supported stating 'It is essential in the interests alike of the children themselves and of the nation as a whole, that those who possess the highest ability – the cleverest of the clever – should be identified as accurately as possible' (Burt, 1959:117).

Influencing Burt and someone who had a significant impact was Francis Galton, the cousin of Charles Darwin, who founded the Eugenics movement in England, a movement that was to influence the ideas of social reformers such as Marie Stopes, as well as Sidney and Beatrice Webb. With regards to education, Galton can be tied to the ideas around intelligence and certainly inherited intelligence, where he stated that 'intellectual capacity is so largely transmitted by descent that, out of every hundred sons of men distinguished in the open professions no less than eight are found to have rivalled their fathers in eminence' (Galton, 1865:318) and he believed that 'hereditary influence is as a clearly marked in mental aptitudes as in general intellectual power' (Galton, 1865:320). To acquire such attributes Galton was concerned with breeding and the points at which marriage could influence the inheritance of intelligence or genius. The influence of Galton's ideas can be found in current approaches to intelligence testing as 'Galton was interested in mapping and scaling psychological measurements along a single dimension, the familiar bell-shaped normal distribution curve on which most scores are bunched around the mean' (Stobart, 2008:37). In taking this approach to intelligence testing students are then filtered whereby, 'the focus then becomes those with superior intelligence and especially those with low intelligence' (*ibid*). I would argue intelligence is still approached in this way many school environments in the present. Through a sifting of intelligence data groups can be arranged and attributes credited from which the educators then make judgements about potential or lack of it among their student bodies. Schools use Cognitive Ability Tests (CATS) to supplement the data they receive from primary schools and use this to adjust targets and arrange groupings. Students identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN), are highlighted, and targeted with interventions or

alternative provisions. In addition, schools will also look at other data such as Pupil Premium (PP) or Free School meals (FSM) as well as ethnicity, all in a bid to reach the best performance whilst sifting and segregating their community.

White tells us that it was ‘Alfred Binet, the French psychologist, who invented the first intelligence test as we now know it – and who influenced Burt’ (White, 2006:10). To explain differences of intelligence means an acceptance that some were outside of the required level of intelligence. Burt was influenced by Galton who was his ‘intellectual hero’ (White, 2006:11), and had been ‘influential in shaping Burt’s first ventures into psychological research’ (*ibid*). Such categorisation can also be interpreted as a means of sifting out those seen as useful with a spectrum of ‘the genius at one end and the backward or “retarded” at the other’ (Ball, 2013:72). To predetermine the educational results and the process driven approach to education with economic benefits Ball quotes Thorndike who said, ‘It is surely unwise to give instruction to students in disregard of their capacities to profit from it, if by ingenuity and experimentation we can secure tests which measures the capacities beforehand’ (Thorndike, 1922:7). In the early part of the 20th Century there was the concern to be able influence and organise society and in Thorndike’s estimation ‘Education is one form of human engineering and will profit by measurements of human nature and achievement’ (Thorndike, 1922:1). Measurement of the masses enables the segregation to take place whereby ‘it measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the nature of individuals. It introduces through this ‘value giving’ measure the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved’ (Foucault, 1977:183). ‘Progress’ has been given quantitative terms and can measure success, ultimately forming a hierarchy of attainment based on a standard deviation each year that the exams are taken. The implication in the 21st century is potentially the manner in which the words ‘attainment’ and ‘ability’ are used interchangeably perhaps demonstrating a residue of the ideas as expressed by Thorndike.

The prevailing orthodoxy was that aspects of intelligence were innate and terms such as ‘feeble minded’ were used to explain poverty and criminality. Groups characterised and organised morally, socially, and ethnically with values attributed that were used to explain the way in which lives were being lived, which made discrimination appear scientific and purposeful. The mind and intelligence being part of the construction Terman considered.

not all criminals are feeble-minded, but all feeble-minded are at least potential criminals. That every feeble-minded woman is a potential prostitute

would hardly be disputed by anyone. Moral judgment, like business judgment, social judgment, or any other kind of higher thought process, is a function of intelligence. Morality cannot flower and fruit if intelligence remains infantile (Terman, 1916:11).

Through such a focus on measurement in education, economic concerns appear in the considerations such as

The educational measurements reported by the federal and state and municipal governments up to 1910 concerned chiefly time and money, the number of teachers and students engaged, the number of days they spent, the value of buildings and grounds, the cost of books and supplies. The abilities of those who were educated and the betterments of intellect, character, and skill which were produced in them were left to speculation and faith (Thorndike, 1922:1).

Here Thorndike appears to be suggesting that through the measuring of intelligence, decisions can be made allowing for a predetermination of investment into education. As mentioned previously, Thorndike was of the view that not all should have educational instruction, giving perhaps even more strength to the view that education was not necessarily something for the masses but to be targeted and organised. The Victorian views were also still prevalent and moral judgements were still popular with the feckless and lazy, as well as the feeble-minded, seen as a blot that were costly and ‘the population as a resource had to be garnered and nurtured’ (Ball, 2013:44). Those who did not fit were seen as outsiders, as being at fault, with a sense that intelligence was inherited, and intelligence testing the way in which to separate the desirable from the undesirable.

2.8.5 Education as economics

In the sense of how such ideas connect to the idea of ‘progress’ in the early 20th Century is through the way in which economics came to be central to ‘progress’ and the way in which economic ‘progress’ a preoccupation. Pollard explains ‘belief in ‘progress’ is perhaps best bought out by the divergent attitude of economists on the one hand, and historian-philosophers on the other’ (Pollard, 1968:184). The speed of advance and change meant it was the ‘philosophers of history who were assured of unending ‘progress’, while the economists believed that humanity had reached its ideal social framework’ (*ibid*). After the two, major ‘World Wars’ of the first half of the century there was a switch and ‘it is the economists who have plunged full into the stream of ‘progress’. Their unquestioning certainty of its existence, with but few exceptions, has allowed them to concentrate single-mindedly on the means of achieving it’ (Pollard, 1968:185). This presentation of ‘progress’ and the focus on the economic

I believe helps give credence to what White was claiming when he wrote ‘The education system is sometimes treated, especially by politicians, partly as a means of maintaining or improving the economic life of the country’ (White, 1982:61) and that students through ‘an economy-centred education may well try to restrict his expectations, trim them down so that he fits as neatly as possible into an occupational role’ (*ibid*). White writing in the 1980s goes on to explain how many ‘jobs in our ‘kind’ of advanced industrial society are pretty unattractive’ (*ibid*), and education plays a role in preparing socially for this inevitability of the working life. Therefore, the political role of education is constructed to as Dewey suggested a ‘guarantee’ of ‘progress’ through a workforce that will toil.

Through Carl Rogers such a view comes from the political will to control with,

‘The strategies for holding and exercising this power are (1) the rewards of grades and vocational opportunities, and (2) the use of assertive punitive and fear-creating methods as failure on exams, failure to graduate and public scorn’ (Rogers, 1983:187).

In the demands of the economy the system is churned to supply the workforce to allow the economy to grow continually and at speed. The purpose of the worker is to ensure that economic ‘progress’ is delivered with the focus on growth as an infinite aim. Rather than reaching a sustainable point that benefits all, the economists are perhaps working towards a blackhole that continues to swallow and needs relentless feeding.

Within the economic focus on ‘progress’ Pollard suggests there are two parts, ‘One often designated “economic growth” ‘ (*ibid*) and ‘The other, often described as “economic development” deals with the path of the traditional and “underdeveloped” economies towards the industrialised Western type of society’ (Pollard, 1968:186). Writing in the 1960s the context of Pollard’s book is at a point when the division between East and West was caught up very much in the aftermath of World War II, with the communist East and ideological divides. Perhaps something I too need to consider, is how the way in which I perceive ‘progress’ and the way in which those I interviewed understand ‘progress’ is coloured by this part of history. The supposedly ‘more developed’ also to a degree saw ‘progress’ developing in other countries based on the experience that countries such as Britain had been through as ‘they need only to recreate in some rough form what the more developed countries already have’ (Galbraith, 1964:2). In the 1950s consumerism and changes to living standards were taking place rapidly meaning that there was the belief ‘that growth will bring inevitably in its wake such other

desirable developments such as greater democracy, more education and higher status in the international community which will promote further growth' and 'that without economic growth and the social improvement which this makes possible, all hopes of any other 'progress' are doomed from the start' (Pollard, 1968:189). Taking such a view of the West as the more developed has been propagated by

The abundance in social sciences of foundations and government agencies dedicate to such concepts as "underdeveloped" "modernisation" and "developed" is tribute to the persisting hold of the idea of 'progress' in the west' (Nisbet, 1980:308).

One thing that can be ascertained is that with the idea of 'progress' comes the interest in the future according to Nisbet a legacy of 'the idea of 'progress' of old is the great vogue of what is called futurism or futurology' and 'seizing on some seemingly dominant aspect of the present and then projecting it onto the future' (Nisbet, 1980:309). Here perhaps is evidence of the human intent that concerned Dewey and the use of the logic of 'progress' to imprint a future view.

2.8.6 Thatcher and Neo Liberal origins

After World War II the organisation of the English education system took shape with assessment, and qualification becoming part of the focus for those administering the system. Over the next 45 years the exams system was to be established with policies directed at the object of engineering work forces that would be able to support the continual economic growth to compete internationally. In the years up to the New Labour and the Blairite 'Education, Education, Education' slogan, the education battleground on what was to be learnt, by whom and how was joined, by the concern for evidence that aims had been achieved and culminated with a performative approach economising education. Stobart calls out two aspects of such a system naming 'qualification chasing' and 'accountability testing' for which 'These represent the power of assessment to control what goes on in education and training, and how assessment shapes curriculum, teaching and learning' (Stobart, 2008:89). Stobart considers the work of another academic Dore and their work 'The Diploma Disease' which suggested,

That at a time of increased education provision, but of limited employment, schooling becomes a 'positional good' whose value depends on how many people have it. Since job recruitment has come to depend heavily on educational records this leads to qualification inflation (Stobart, 2008:90)

Which according to Dore means that ‘the more examination-orientated school becomes’ is ‘at the expense of genuine education’ (Dore, 1997:72). The system of qualification in England was ‘where one track led towards the GCE examination which opened the door to sixth form and university study, and another towards the CSE exam which led nowhere at all’ (White, 2006:133) which was eventually collapsed with the advent of the General Certificate of Secondary Education.

It was under Thatcher, as then Prime Minister, in the late 1980s that England saw the introduction of standardised testing at KS3 with the National Curriculum which Stobart refers to as a ‘sea change for education in England’ which was ‘accompanied by standardised tests in English, mathematics and science’ (Stobart, 2008,121). Stephen Ball starts with Callaghan and 1976, stating ‘It decisively opened up education policy and practice to new voices and actors’ as it ‘began to articulate a more direct relationship between education and the needs of industry’ (Ball, 2021:1). It was however Thatcher’s government who ‘shifted education from an issue of social welfare to a matter of political economy’ (Ball, 2021:2), whereby ‘Education is now seen as a crucial factor in ensuring economic productivity and competitiveness in the context of ‘the knowledge economy’ (*ibid*). It is here I reflect on my own image that I drew of ‘The Neo-Liberal Stomp’ and the way in which policy began in my view to be pressed onto teachers and students alike, whereby education, as in ‘The resilience test’ is used to crack and distil the population. It was during this time that ‘a reassertion of the twin pillars of individual liberty (the freedom to choose) and market freedom (the disciplines of competition)’ (Ball, 2021:84), with the case made for a ‘social market economy, and outlined an economic and social position that became known as New Right, or more broadly, neoliberalism’ (Ball, 2021:85). This meant that there would be the development of a competitive marketplace for schools with ‘a new emphasis on individual choice and consumption ‘offering parents the right to express preference among state schools’ (Ball, 2021:89). In order to give parents, the information they needed to state a preference accountability came in the shape of the league tables which means that ‘poor results mean both bad publicity and inspections’ which ‘have financial and managerial consequences for schools. The policy intent is clear, in order to avoid them, schools will have to do better’ (Stobart, 2008:121).

At this point I would argue the school leaders are drawn into the economic view of ‘progress’ whereby ‘growth’ in the shape of results became the focus and shaped the next period of education reform under ‘New Labour’

2.8.7 New Labour – ‘Deliverology’ and high standards

Education is the best economic policy there is for a modern country and it is in the marriage of education and technology that the future lies. The arms race may be over; the knowledge race has begun, and we will never compete on the basis of a low wage, sweat shop economy. It cannot be done that way. We have one asset - our people, their intelligence, their potential’ (Tony Blair, Leader’s speech, Brighton, 1995).

This quote from Blair’s speech is seminal in that it really set out the agenda for the New Labour approach to education with educational improvement central to their policy agenda. In this one speech there is the overt statement of competition through education not just nationally but internationally with the population viewed as an ‘asset’ to be exploited.

In 1997 New Labour and Tony Blair came to power in the UK which coincided with the end of my own school education prior to university. Having lived my first eighteen years of life under the Conservatives I remember it as an exciting time as ‘Cool Britannia’ took hold.

For Education in England, it can arguably be seen as the start of a major shift or what Ball calls ‘ruptures’ (Ball, 2017:65) which culminated with the deep changes that have been enacted since 2010 firstly through the coalition and then Conservative administrations. The purpose of this section is to reflect on those policies and their intentions with a consideration of how this relates to the idea of ‘progress’, in particular, economic ‘progress’. Within this consideration the theme of knowledge, global markets, neo liberalism and nationalism will emerge as a political ‘fantasy’ of Britain’s ‘progress’ on a global scale and the role of education in achieving that aim.

Blair’s influence and ideologies led to the term ‘Blairite’ which comes with ‘two definitions. The word is both an adjective and a noun: a politician can support “Blairite” policies, and also be ‘a Blairite’ (New Statesman, [2016](#)) and is a term that became synonymous with New Labour. Whilst in opposition, education had been ‘Blair’s principal policy interest and was also the main area in government associated with him where considerable ‘progress’ was made in the first term 1997-2001’ (Seldon, 2004:243). Blair was keen to move towards a ‘consumer driven’ (Seldon, 2004:243), system that was built around the concept of parental choice. ‘Progress’ here was to be the shift away from a ‘Keynesian national welfare state to competition state’ (Ball, 2013:94). For Blairite education policy competition was the focus rather than the traditional Labour consideration of equality and this can perhaps be illustrated

when considering the speech Blair gave in 1995 ‘Education, education, education’ where he made the statement.

Yet we are 35th in the world league of education standards today – 35th. They say give me the boy at 7 and I’ll show you the man at 70. We’ll give me the education system that is 35th in the world today and I will give you the economy that is 35th in the world tomorrow (Blair, Blackpool, 1996).

Here the success of the system was set against the need to compete on the global scene with ‘progress’ to be measured by the position in which the country could find itself first educationally to ensure that it would be in superior position economically. Two statements from Blair exemplify this where he said, ‘The arms race may be over; the knowledge race has begun’ (Blair, 1995) and ‘The fastest growing cities in America and Europe are those with the highest proportion of knowledge workers’ (Ball, 2013:28). These two statements help reinforce the nationalist attachment to the success of the system where to suggest that this would not be a positive could be construed as unpatriotic. This ‘Blairite’ political agenda coincided with the formation of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which is now fuelling ‘an international obsession’ with ‘high performing education systems’ (Alexander, 2012:4). Harris concedes that ‘One of the reasons for the huge popularity of PISA particularly with policymakers is the key idea that improved educational performance leads to a better skilled workforce and ultimately to better economic prosperity’ (Harris, 2017:216). This supports my assertion in chapter one that the education focus has become fixated on the national security with regards economic power over the freedom and security of the populace. ‘PISA has provided the approval and justification for certain policy measures and approaches but not others’ (Ravitch, 2013). However, the focus on the OECD and PISA is perhaps even more pertinent when reflecting on ‘Goveian’ education policy where the rankings became a justification for a deep and incisive overhaul of the exams system and curriculum.

New Labour under Blair ‘immediately embarked on a whirl of activity’ (Seldon 2001:405) such as opening the funding for faith schools as being ‘valued by very many parents for their faith character, their moral emphasis and the high quality of education they generally provide’ (Adams, 2001) as well as commenting on their ‘superior ethos’ (Oldfield et al, 2013:45) as ‘they have a special ethos which facilitates the development of morality’ (Gillard 2007:1). Such a view of Faith Schools led to policies allowing access to Voluntary aided status for other religions that the Church of England or Catholic Church, as the first Islamic school opened in Brent, followed by the first Sikh school in Hayes. In the initial years ‘Whatever else one could say about New Labour Education policies there was certainly no shortage of them’ with ’47

education related policies, initiatives and funding decisions.....announced since the 1997 election victory' with many aimed at 'remedying perceived neglect and omission of previous Conservative administrations' (Ball, 2017:95).

One aspect of the New Labour approach to government was delivery of their agenda through a concentration on,

The fundamentals: what are you trying to do? How are you trying to do it? How do you know you are succeeding? If you're not succeeding, how will you change things? How can we help you?(Barber, 2007:73).

It was through the 'Delivery unit' such an agenda was to be pursued with the aim to, 'develop techniques or methods that would result in convincing, reliable, evidence-based answers' (*ibid*), which led to the introduction of the term that Nick Macpherson christened 'deliverology' (*ibid*). In essence a burden of proof that meant that all involved with the delivery, had to play their part and pursue strategies, to fulfil their part in the delivery chain. The language of delivery that works in assuring a product and securing the targets, presents an idea of 'progress' as the fulfilment of purpose, and meeting the demands of the policy machine.

Priorities were established with benchmarks and measures set in 'Literacy and numeracy at 11, Maths and English, 5+ A*-C GCSEs, Truancy' (Barber, 2007:50), and all of those involved in the education chain were enlisted to work towards them. Ball explains the delivery chain as,

hierarchies of 'expectation' that connect the 'front line' service delivery to the responsible minister by ensuring 'sharp focus' on performance priorities (rather than purposes) and create what (Loveday 2008, 120) calls 'a tyranny of conformity' or what (Elmore, 2009) calls 'tight coupling' (Ball,2012:514).

It was New Labour's approach to ensure that their priorities and policies came into fruition and that they could directly influence the ground levels, therefore creating a 'a regulatory system' which works by establishing strong links between 'the micro- world of classroom interactions and macro-level objectives of standards and achievements' (*ibid*). I would argue that the influence of this shift is still in effect in the classrooms of the present, with continual policy agendas that look to make the national imperative, the concern of the nation, linking poor attendance to perceived academic failure. In linking the two all stake holders are pulled into line, to deliver on the governmental priority for better school attendance, and higher attainment, to prove success, through the evidence that the government is seeking to identify.

If 'progress' was to be achieved it was to be through the 'Third Way' which associated with the revived fortunes of the British Labour and German Social Democratic parties and their leaders, Tony Blair, and Gerhard Schroeder respectively' (Bastow et al, 2002:269), with an alignment of Left and Right political ideas. Ball refers to a 'post-political form of government, claimed to be based not on ideology but on 'what works' (Ball, 2015:307). Gillard considered one of the areas of Blairite ideology to be the 'creeping privatisation of education' with particular reference to the city academies:

Businesses, churches, and voluntary groups would build and manage them, and they would be outside of local authorities. In return for a £2m donation towards capital costs, sponsors would be allowed to rename the school, control the board of governors, and influence the curriculum(Gillard, 2011:10).

'Progress' would be the commercialisation of the school market in the belief that it would drive up standards. 'Choice and Voice' (Ball, 2017:140), according to Ball are 'slippery notions that are often used loosely by advocates, policy makers and critics' (*ibid*), With regards faith schools the choice sometimes being down to 'gravitating towards faith schools because you haven't got much choice between the bad and the bad' (Butler, 2012:1248). What the Blairite agenda looked to do, and claim was that there was a better and broader choice for parents to decide on where they wanted their children to go to school.

In the white paper 'Excellence in schools' a more altruistic tone was set,

To overcome economic and social disadvantage and to make equality of opportunity a reality, we must strive to eliminate, and never excuse, under-achievement in the most deprived parts of our country (Blunkett, 1997:3).

There appeared to be a concern based on

investing in human capital in the age of knowledge. To compete in the global economy, to live in a civilised society and to develop the talents of each and every one of us, we will have to unlock the potential of every young person (*ibid*).

In the final line Blunkett asks the reader to 'join with us in making the crusade for higher standards a reality in every classroom and every household in the country' (*ibid*). The paper set out targets as to what achievements were to be made by 2002 with fifty-five bullet points each supported with the assertion 'There will be' (Blunkett, 1997:5)

The Third Way political slant as pursued by New Labour is perhaps evident in Blunkett's own attitude towards the education academics in his comment that 'Some researchers are so obsessed with 'critique', so out of touch with reality that they churn out findings that no one with the slightest common sense could take seriously' (Blunkett,1999). Pring explains that 'For Mr Blunkett research which did not measure up to common sense was surely to be rejected' but the concern for those in education was 'whose common sense did he have in mind' (Pring, 2015:100). 'Common Sense' can often be used when closing a subject or simplifying a subject to suggest that at the point of common sense, the resulting decision that should be taken is obvious, it's simple common sense. A point has been reached where there is no real grey area, and the common sense prevails however it could be argued that in education there are moments when common sense does not prevail as there are a multitude of answers to a particular problem. 'It provides the rules of thumb, whereby each person is able to live and make decisions. Probably it works well when the physical and social environments are sufficiently stable for the continued success of unquestioned assumption' (Pring, 2015:103). For education and common sense, the challenge is that schools are not held in stasis, and neither is the community which they house and so 'what is common sense at one time may no longer be so at another; what is known at one time might become part of the unquestioned folklore later' (*ibid*). The schools need to flex and alter their common sense to meet the policy aims which might conflict and indeed the 'common-sense beliefs of the teacher may not be obvious to the parent, so the unquestioned assumptions of the one may be questionable to the other' (*ibid*). An example may be that when considering academic 'progress' in a subject when grades are the context it may be common-sense that in the year 10 mock exam a student is two grades below their target grade but for the parent this is of no sense at all. It is unquestionable to the teacher who is working within the system, who has an awareness of grade systems and the level of the student's work and has experience of the performance of hundreds of students across a broad stretch of time. For the parent this is perhaps the first time they have encountered the system since their own experience and their concern is for the end point and so for them it is questionable that their child is not already attaining a grade. Some of this clash in expectation and in common-sense has been compounded through performativity and 'deliverology' where all are invested in attaining the highest possible results.

The New Labour 'what works' attitude to research led to policy approaches that were set 'on ensuring that the best methods available are used in every classroom in the country' (Blunkett, 1997). Greater instrumentalization is a feature of the paper as the claim was made 'School

performance tables will be more useful, showing the rate of 'progress' pupils have made as well as their absolute levels of achievement' (*ibid*). The publication of performance data is reflected on as being a key determiner in improving school performance when stating,

The publication of performance data benefits parents and acts as a spur to improve performance. We will publish more such data than ever before. We need to provide parents and others with better information by supplementing "raw" results with a measure of the 'progress' which pupils have made. (Blunkett, 1997)

School performance targets were also a feature of the paper and given high standing in the New Labour approach to Education and standards.

School targets should be based on benchmark information on the performance of similar schools, at national and local level information on the rate of 'progress' needed to achieve national targets: and the most recent inspection evidence.(Blunkett, 1997)

There was also the introduction of Education Action Zones to be 'set up in areas with a mix of underperforming schools and the highest levels of disadvantage.' to deal with inequality. There was also the notion of

Specialist schools - focusing on technology, languages, sports, or arts - should be a resource for local people and neighbouring schools to draw on. They will be expected to develop their specialism in partnership with local schools and business and to share their expertise with others. (Blunkett, 1997)

The idea behind them was that they would give the choice to parents as to what area they would want their child to focus on, with schools operating as Art, Science, Humanities or another specialism. In 1998 and the Green Paper *Teachers, meeting the challenge of change* (1998). Blair nationalises the issue stating.

We need excellence to become the norm. And we need a modern professional structure capable of achieving our goals. These are urgent national imperatives. As teachers themselves are often the first to accept they can only be met by radical change (Blair, 1998).

Here perhaps the rationalist can be found with the view of 'radical change' and that 'outmoded customs' or 'traditions' in education get in the way.

Pupils' homes can be networked to schools. Teachers, through interactive technology, will be able to teach their traditional lessons to pupils not just in one location but several. New technologies are giving pupils with special educational needs improved access to learning. None of this is wishful thinking: it is already beginning to happen.' (Blunkett, 1998)

Technology has revolutionised the way we work and is now set to transform education. Children cannot be effective in tomorrow's world if they are trained in yesterday's skills. Nor should teachers be denied the tools that other professionals take for granted. (Blair, 1997)

Perhaps what is stark however, when considering each statement of what education should be and the work of the teacher is the lack of mention of curriculum and how that might look. The language is of technology and skill with claims of revolutionary and transformative capabilities of technology in education yet simultaneously seeming vacuous. In the second of the two statements there is the insertion of the word 'trained' in place of 'educated' perhaps paving the way for the rejection and opposition that was to come from the Conservative party with their focus on what was to be taught and learnt. For Wolf such educational aims of politicians are 'fuelled by a set of cliches about the nature of the 21st Century world: globalised, competitive, experiencing ever faster rates of technical change. In this world it seems education is to be a precondition of economic success' (Wolf, 2002:xi). When considering 'progress' there is the belief that fast rates of change are 'progress' and again the tight link to the notion that economic growth, success is a matter of 'progress'. What government needed to do was to convince people that this is the case and that 'a more qualified workforce = a more productive one' (Stobart, 2008:93). With higher qualifications parents are convinced that their child will go on to have higher earning power and thus 'economic progress'.

One area of New Labour policy that perhaps meets the criteria of 'qualification inflation' and 'credentialism comes in the form of employers not being over concerned about what the degree is in – what counts are the class (grade) of the degree' (Stobart, 2008:93), and with 'the target of fifty per cent of students 'progressing to higher education' (*ibid*). 'progress' for New Labour was a different type of workforce, a professional workforce as

our children will not have to toil in dark factories, descend into pits or suffocate in mills, to hew raw materials and turn them into manufactured products. They will make their livings through their creativity, ingenuity and imagination(Leadbeater, 1999:vii)

However, as acknowledged by Wolf, 'it would be stupid to deny that education is central to any modern economy' or that a country could be 'run by a population that is more than 90 per cent illiterate – the level of eleventh century England' (Wolf, 2002:xii). The link with economic 'progress' in this period and the interest of the policy makers which links back to Blunkett and

his urging of ‘common sense’ evidence as ‘growing enthusiasm for detailed intervention’ (Wolf, 2002:xiii), as they aimed ‘higher level spending ‘properly’ targeted to develop those high skills that the economy needs’ (*ibid*). The strength and desire of New Labour in this period ‘is not unusual in believing they can improve their country’s economic performance through government-led education policies’ what stands out for Wolf is ‘the speed with which our hugely centralised system can launch off one educational broadside after another’ (*ibid*). I would argue that it is the speed of change that has been experienced in the English system over the period from New Labour through to the Coalition and Conservative reforms that have had a significant impact on the notion of ‘progress’. It is also through this that the resilience test of young people in the education system along with the race for qualification that ‘progress’ has become a logic with an intention to buoy a national economy, preserving the ruling classes. This is supported by Wolf who states that ‘we have almost forgotten that education ever had any purpose other than to promote growth’ (*ibid*). Ball explains that through ‘policy imperatives articulated in terms of innovation and adaptation’ schools become ‘more effective and more responsive to global economic necessities’ (Ball, 2021:210).

2.8.8 Establishing Progress 8 and education reform under the coalition

Under the coalition government the SOSE 201-14 launched into what felt like an attack against the previous decade and a half of reform that had occurred under New Labour. Rather than the ‘growth’ the SOSE 2010-14 attacked what he saw as inflation of grades and thus a reduction in worth. In an article he ‘urged politicians to stop lying to children about their life chances and allowing inflated exam grades that he compared to Soviet tractor production propaganda’ (Adams, 2013:1) In his assertion he was successfully reversing the ‘inflation’ boasting that ‘One of the things I have done as education secretary is to reverse that tide of inflating exam statistics’ in the belief that the inflation under New Labour had been a lie stating ‘there’s no crime greater than lying to children – and that’s why we need to tell them the truth’ (*ibid*). In presenting their views on education there is evidence of two narratives occurring ‘utopian visions through narratives of ideal futures (so-called beatific narratives) and away from catastrophic scenarios through narratives of disaster or crisis (so-called horrific narratives) (Quennerstedt et al, 2021:847). Through the setting out of grade inflation and lying to children there is the ‘horrific narrative’ in evidence as a representation of ‘a nation in decay’ (*ibid*). In order to promote a version of a future for education there was a necessity to denigrate the present by establishing ‘an ideal and an obstacle to its realisation’ (Glynos, 2008:287) which

was identified as the exam system, the teaching profession, and academics. An example of the ‘horrific’ and ‘beatific’ is exemplified in this one statement made in the house of commons whereby there is a claim of negligence on the part of the past whilst advocating for a better future. ‘Reforming qualifications alone is not enough to ensure higher standards for every child, and we must also reform how schools are graded to encourage higher expectations for every student’ (HC Deb 7 February 2013). Within this statement there is the ‘horrific’ in that standards are not high enough and that schools are not graded effectively, but the ‘beatific’ in that the reforms will right both those wrongs.

In telling such a truth the inherited system was being diminished and the value of the qualification given the status of a ‘lie’. The route to ‘progress’ was through more stringent testing and better systems to expose the best, which obviously simultaneously chastises what the system itself deems to be the worst. Part of this assessment of the system was that schools were playing the system and seeking out the easiest exam for which he had proposed one exam board an idea the SOSE 2010-14 had to relinquish stating it:

was clear that there were significant risks in trying to both strengthen qualifications and end competition in a large part of the exams market. I have therefore decided not to make the best the enemy of the good, and I will not proceed with plans to have a single exam board offering a new exam in each academic subject (Hansard HC Deb, 7 February 2013)

What they did pursue was the objection to Controlled Assessment arguing that there was ‘a consensus that the exams and qualification system we inherited was broken’ (*ibid*) for which he looked to replace with a system based on terminal examinations only.

In their statement to the House of Commons they stated that:

The qualifications should be linear, with all assessments normally taken at the end of the course. Examinations will test extended writing in subjects such as English and history, have fewer bite-sized and overly structured questions, and in mathematics and science there should be greater emphasis on quantitative problem-solving. (*ibid*)

As well as pulling back on the idea of the one exam board they also conceded on other changes, such as rebranding the GCSE as the English Baccalaureate Certificate (EBC) but fundamentally they had put in place a system that would have a much greater focus on the examinations.

The need of knowledge was hoisted as the primary concern, using the work of E.D. Hirsch as a fundament from which to build education policy. In the post New Labour era there has been ‘policy about maintaining or returning to educational virtues of the past’ (Ball, 2021:210), with

Schools expected to be both innovative and conservative, to deliver both social mobility and social cohesion, to improve both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, to be both collaborative and entrepreneurial. In this sense, education policy as a whole is incoherent and impossible (*ibid*).

Furthermore, in the tampering with the system and the qualifications or pathways there has been a situation created which enables ‘relational choosing and opportunity hoarding for some social groups who are able to navigate the systems using their particular class capital’ (Ball, 2021:212). One might argue that far from social mobility or cohesion there is perhaps greater social injustice with the English secondary school system shackled to performance targets as it is the ‘socially marginalised young people who are most likely to be offered low-level vocational skills and denied access to such subjects as history’ (Wrigley, 2014:20) with some children being ‘fed a pedagogy of poverty consisting of decontextualised exercises, undemanding closed questions and a dearth of ideas’ (*ibid*). With an education system that is used instrumentally to support economic growth and ‘progress’ we find ‘ever more complex forms of educational segregation and inequality’ (Ball, 2021:213) Focus on the PISA rankings as a justification with ‘progress’ in the position in the ranks viewed as a desirable outcome and sign of ‘progress’. The ultimate reform however was of the GCSE and the changing of grades from letters to numbers and the arrival of ‘Progress 8’ with school league tables to report on the ‘progress’ score of schools.

The first action in power for the coalition was to look to making savings.

the ‘development of academic diplomas was scrapped (saving £22.2 million), the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency was abolished (saving £8 million), and the ‘Building Schools for the Future programme was stopped’ (Ball, 2017:104).

These economic savings were part of the new era of ‘austerity’, but the changing approach was perhaps marked by the way in which ‘programmes disappeared from the DfE website – like behaviour for learning and Pupils’ Learning and Thinking Skills’ (*ibid*). Ball refers to the policies initiated by the coalition as ‘a return to previous Conservative preoccupations with knowledge’ (Ball, 2017:105) and interestingly ‘the presentation of its agenda of restoration, which links excellence and traditionalism to opportunity and social mobility. This agenda, of

what might also be called policies of nostalgia' (*ibid*). One might argue here that it was not 'progress' that was being aimed for but a harking back, to what for the Conservative right was a better time, with a greater sense of national pride, of Englishness. Apple refers to this as 'conservative restoration' (Apple, 2005) with Ball suggesting that 'these are forms of restorationism, reform by regression to reassert previous divisions' (Ball, 2021:106). Alternatively, perhaps this was the Conservative view of 'progress' and 'progress' towards a greater sense of national pride and sense of Englishness, in a positive sense from their perspective. When considering the distortions of history that were mentioned earlier through considering the work of Tosh, such a view of education, can perhaps be seen as a distortion of the system, through a horrific narrative.

Policy makers with a nostalgic view of schools and schooling with a 'horrific narrative' look to a future through a 'beatific narrative' (Clarke, 2012:185) whilst at the same time wanting to make an impact and enforce change. It is my position that when considering the manner in which the SOSE 2010-14 approached reform, it was from a position whereby they wanted to demonstrate their skill and capability. In some respect it is hard for some of what they said and did to not feel like a personal attack or insult, as they adopted harsh critical language to put opponents on the back foot. To achieve the level of reform that the Conservative party was looking for they,

Needed to destroy what he disparagingly described as 'the blob' – the local authorities and their advisors, the teachers and their unions, the inspectorate, and the university training departments and their academics, historians, and researchers – in other words, anyone who knew anything about education. (Gillard, 2015:292)

To make the 'progress' as mentioned at the core was perhaps a philosophical underpinning based on the idea that there needed to be 'destruction, pure and simple. For how can the good, the ideal, be achieved unless the corrosive and noxious be exterminated?' (Nisbet, 1980:74). What was perceived as 'corrosive and noxious' was the education establishment who they insisted were blocking 'progress' and what was needed was a set of reforms that would arrest such perceived inadequacies. There is a 'fantasmatic logic' at play that involves:

a beatific narrative, a utopian vision of a state of affairs yet to come but achievable once an implied obstacle is overcome, alongside a 'horrific' vision of disaster that will threaten if the purported obstacle prevails and the desired state of affairs is not achieved (Clarke, 2012:185).

Furthermore ‘Such fantasizing ignores the scapegoating that inevitably accompanies utopian thinking’ (*ibid*), which allowed for some of what was proposed to pass through largely unchallenged. The SOSE 2010-14’s vision of disaster was what they believed to be the left leaning anti-progress, blob, who they scapegoated for what they believed was a lack of ‘progress’. This attitude and belief allowed for the raft of reforms that he set about instigating.

The change to the qualification at GCSE was aimed to return rigour ‘ending modules and resits, insisting there be proper marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar’ (Ball, 2017:109), with the arrival of the flagship English Baccalaureate (EBACC). The EBacc was introduced as a shakeup of the measures aimed at putting the traditional subjects at the centre which need to include ‘English Language and literature, maths, sciences, history or geography and a language’ (Gill, 2022:5). This was part of the agenda to make the English education system more academic and promote those preferred subjects with targets built into the policy around the percentage of students who would complete the EBACC qualification. It was also the way in which despite failing with a complete rebrand of GCSE as the EBC, the government was able to raise the status of what it perceived to be the most important academic subjects. Ball highlights:

The creation of the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc), where the government’s ambition was to see 75 per cent of pupils studying the Ebacc subject combination at GCSE by 2022 and 90 per cent by 2025 (Ball, 2021:103).

In doing so there is ‘official knowledge’ which is ‘determined to a considerable extent by the secretary of state’ (*ibid*), which in turn ‘mean that many schools focus their attention very directly on the requirements embedded in the examination system and exam formats as ‘official knowledge’ (*ibid*). Thus, the coalition promise was that those involved with teaching would have ‘freedom to concentrate on what matters, where what matters’ (Ball, 2021:103). Through this guise of freedom ‘At the same time the teacher’s control over the content, sequencing and pacing of classroom knowledge is weakened’ (Ball, 2021:110) as ‘there is now a very active assertion of ‘real’ subjects, ‘rigorous’ assessment and ‘proper’ pedagogy’ (Ball, 2021). As there is the ‘struggle to prescribe and to ‘free’ teachers’ judgement, both at the same time’ (*ibid*). ‘Progress 8’ one would argue does just this as the curriculum hinges on the performance measure as school leaders need to be aware that their freedom is dependent on their ability to meet the prescription as set out by the policy makers. History and Drama are not on equal terms as subjects or areas of speciality as they do not meet with the centralised view of ‘what matters’ and so the ‘official knowledge’ dictates that one has greater worth than the other. In turn such

a measure has had an impact on the uptake of subjects at GCSE with arts-based subjects showing a decline in popularity perhaps most dramatically Design and Technology from a position where approximately fifty per cent of students took the qualification in 2007 to 2019 where just over twenty five percent were entered (*see figure 16*).

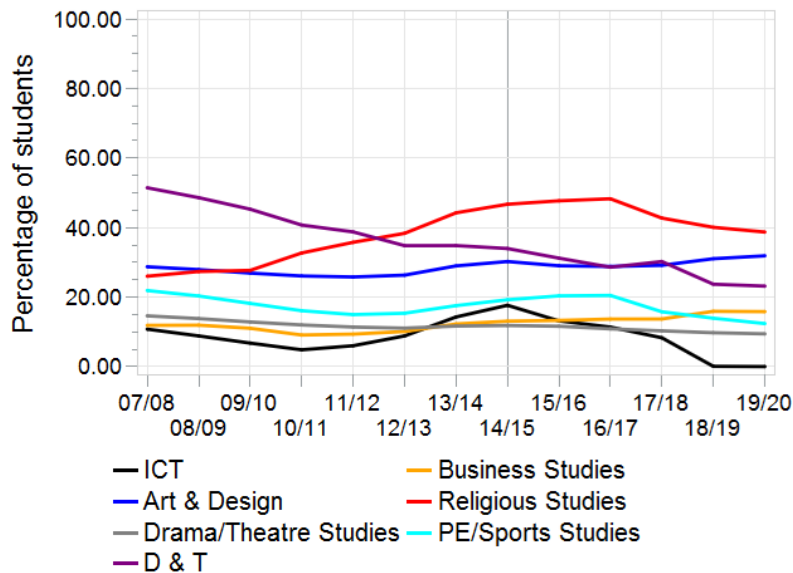


Figure 16, Percentage of students taking non-EBacc GCSEs (2007/08-2019/20) (Gill 2022:17)

Gill notes that ‘The introduction of Progress 8 has impacted on provision as some schools decided to drop some qualifications that are not eligible for the performance measure’ (Gill, 2022:20). One subject where this can be understood is with Drama whereby in 2007 approximately eighty per cent of centres offered the qualification whereas by 2020 just over sixty per cent were still offering. One could argue that the political view of ‘what matters’ as asserted by the school performance measure has generated an accepted ‘official knowledge’ that Drama is of less value than other ‘real subjects. It would then be permissible to surmise that to an extent the coalition reforms achieved their end.

The SOSE 2010-14 introduced the new measure claiming that he was introducing a ‘more balanced and meaningful accountability system’ (HC Deb, 7 February 2013) to replace the previous measure of five A*-C including English and Maths. For the new system there were to be two measures against which schools would be judged with ‘the percentage of pupils in each school reaching an attainment threshold in the vital core subjects of English and Maths; and an average point score showing how much ‘progress’ every student makes between key stage 2 and key stage 4’ (*ibid*) To fulfil his belief in the need to promote the subjects he believed were

most important there was fixing of the average points score to be made up from ‘at least three subjects from the English Baccalaureate – sciences, history, geography, languages – as well as computer science’ (*ibid*). One might argue that although they had not achieved the full rebrand, through the accountability measure they had achieved their aim to overhaul the English exam system.

Subjects have been given a ranking and superiority through the system with a system of weighting which involves what are referred to as ‘pots’ or ‘buckets’ with ‘Only qualifications that count towards the EBacc can be included in the ‘Progress 8’ slots reserved for English, mathematics, and the three ‘EBacc slots’ (DfE, 2014:3). The way in which the ‘Progress 8’ score for a school ‘it is first necessary to calculate the attainment 8 measure for each student in the school. This is based on achievement in their best 8 qualifications’ (Gill, 2022:5).

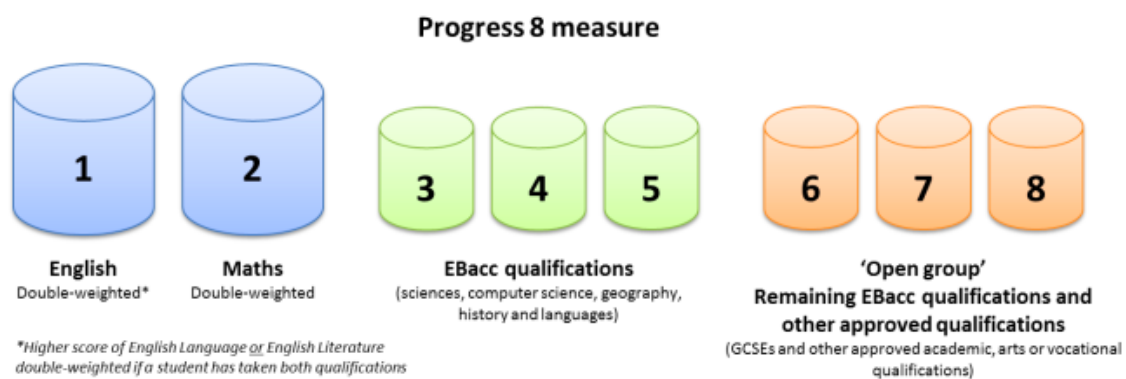


Figure 17, Taken from Factsheet: ‘progress’ 8 Measure(Dfe, 2014:3)

English has a particular place as ‘If a student sits both English Language and English Literature, the higher grade is double-weighted. The lower grade will still count in the ‘open group’ of subjects (not in the EBacc slots)’ (*ibid*). It could be argued that therefore students can be encouraged to study a smaller pool of subjects rather than broader as English can fulfil the requirements in multiple pots of the ‘Progress 8’ measure’ (*see figure 17*). Rather than the aim of ‘The Progress 8 measure is designed to encourage schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum at KS4’ (*ibid*) it has compressed and reduced curriculum breadth and opportunity. Another way in which policy has impacted on the curriculum is that should students fail to meet the standard in English and Maths they are required to repeat the examination. In effect they continue to toil in the face of their failure until they are considered, to be successful, by a system that intends to label them as a failure.

The performance tables in England have also felt the impact as ‘progress’ scores are reported and used to rank and file the outcomes. It is in this climate where my research sits and why I have taken to question ‘progress’ and understand the perceptions of school leaders who are tasked with enacting it. The system that binds, that determines success and failure of all involved has at its heart the word ‘progress’, economising educational endeavour, and treating educational ‘progress’ in the same way in which the ruling classes view economic ‘progress’.

2.8.9 Knowledge to be learnt – using knowledge to resist.

One of the driving forces of the coalition and then Conservative education policies has been the focus on knowledge with ‘attempts to celebrate a mythical past of imperial glories and the virtues and uniqueness of the national state, and to impose a highly traditional curriculum’ (Ball, 2021:210). Such a traditional approach has been supported by the inspection framework in England whereby ‘The end result of a good, well-taught curriculum is that pupils know more and are able to do more’ (Ofsted, 2019:3). The focus on knowledge has been accompanied by an austerity with ‘a teacher centred pedagogy, strict discipline, uniforms’ (Ball, 2021:210), with an ‘emphasis on character education and virtue’ (*ibid*). In this section I want to consider how the focus on knowledge has become ‘official knowledge’ but also the way in which a utilitarian approach which works on a deficit model supporting their own notion of common good and glossing over the negatives as exemplified by Clarke who says:

identifying a neutral notion of common good, a desired or imagined future, that represents public interest, or the public good. Yet notions of the public good are inevitably ‘fantasmatic’, insofar as they simplify and gloss over the contestations and antagonisms that contour society (Clarke, 2018:155).

I would argue that there is also a mismatch between the consideration of knowledge by academics, and that of the policy makers where there is a common-sense approach that more information means more knowledge. To pump the individual full of information does not necessarily mean that they have knowledge and to test that they can regurgitate the information using terms such as ‘retrieval’ is in my own estimation shallow. During the years during which I have been working towards this thesis the turn in education towards ‘knowledge rich’ has had a dramatic influence on the classroom. Schools are working on models of quizzing and repetition of factual content to demonstrate that students have knowledge moulded to the expectation of the Ofsted framework and government policy.

The Cameron coalition came into government with a common good, in that they argued of a 'Broken Britain' and the need for a 'Big Society'. The latter of these two created a notion of public good, of a harmonious Britain, where what was lacking was an understanding of what it meant to be British and a public that needed educating from that nationalist, conservative, lamentation. Wrigley takes direct aim at the SOSE 2010-14 and is critical of this turn in education policy stating that 'Gove has used the Knowledge turn (both in its Social Realist and Hirschian versions) to design a curriculum which is overloaded with factual content and places excessive and age-inappropriate demands on children' (Wrigley, 2017:5). In my own view Wrigley's point is validated in part by the way in which GCSE grades are calculated, using history as my example, when looking at the boundaries. In the government's system of grading, grade 4 is a pass, with grade 5 recognised as a good pass, yet when looking at the boundaries for the grades for GCSE history, as administered by Pearson, grade 5, is achieved with 58% (2024 boundary) and grade 4 is 43%. Bluntly, if the exam is built around knowing, and that students demonstrate what they know, it is possible to pass by knowing less than half of what is required. My view is that this demonstrates the curriculum is overloaded, as I find it hard to celebrate that through all the efforts and hard work of the students, teachers, and families this is an acceptable return.

David Aldridge considers 'the promise of knowledge "insertion," which can be elucidated as follows: knowledge could be inserted by a less time-consuming (and possibly in many senses less expensive) technological process than traditional learning ' (Aldridge, 2019:609). If taken as simply filling a vessel with information this would seem to be a logical step and achieve the desire of the proponents of the knowledge rich approach. Nick Gibb is an important element of continuity in Education policy as between 2010 and 2023, he served as the minister for Schools in the Department for Education with a strong influence over standards and the approaches being taken. In the role he championed the knowledge rich approach, seeing through the initial vision from the SOSE 2010-14. Indeed, if knowing more is the measure of a good education as per Ofsted what would the good education be if we cut out the middleman? What would the point of education be and how would one go about it? Science fiction enjoys working with this sense of the knowing and what knowing means, films such as *The Matrix*, and in novels such as *Machines like me* where the conundrum is presented as between knowing and believing, or, knowing and feeling or even knowing and understanding. In a conversation between the main protagonist of McEwan's novel, Charlie and his AI robot, Adam, they

disagree about whether people really understand quantum physics, Adam replies ‘Charlie, general relativity was once at the outer edge of difficulty. Now it’s routine for first year undergraduates. The same is true of calculus, now fourteen-year-olds can do it’ (McEwan, 2019:144). I include this as I believe there is a real complexity to knowledge and the expectation of what should be known as over time there has been such impact that to determine a canon of knowledge has become ever more difficult. At what point does the level of maths knowledge far outweigh the need of the individual to live their life as a canon of mathematical knowledge is forced into the individual. The importance of maths and the need for such a concentration on maths is questionable as although.

Mathematics is seen as one of the most important school subjects; but how much of what is learned is actively used by adults? How important is it for living a successful and fulfilling life? Has its educational power been overrated?(Bramall and White, 2000:ix).

Some might argue the concentration on mathematics is justified as:

What would become of the national economy in the global marketplace if the high-tech industries on which it increasingly relies could not count on a supply of emetically competent recruits to staff it at different levels?’ (Bramall and White, 2000:x)

But not everyone is going to work within such an industry so ‘What about non-utilitarian justifications – to do with finding mathematical thinking for its own sake?’ (*ibid*)

There is also the notion of ‘believing’ that can be brought into consideration through the ‘knowing’, and it can be argued that the Conservative Party’s education policy with regards to knowledge, is tinged with knowing being important, in the establishment of belief about Britishness. Beliefs and feelings impact on how as human beings we interact with knowledge, as how we question knowledge, to decide for ourselves if that knowledge is of worth, as ‘we cannot separate the state of being a knower from the history whereby that knowing was achieved; we cannot separate the learning from its substrate’ (Aldridge, 2019:610). There may be points in one’s life where knowing has greater importance than at others and the way in which we interact with the knowing is affected. When trying to make decisions about what is necessary knowledge, there is a great challenge to the person charged with doing so, as I again pull on my own experience as a history teacher. When planning a curriculum there is an editing process of history that occurs ,with people and events assigned to the cutting room floor, to

bring a core knowledge together that works on the substantive and disciplinary levels. What this lends to are

‘Curriculum design attempts to codify the atomistic elements of “core knowledge,” or in approaches to curriculum that stress the importance of factual recall in the early stages of learning a discipline, to be followed by critical thinking and analysis later on. The appeal of such a process is its algorithmic predictability and the promise of *perfectibility*: it is possible to learn the “whole” of a representation, and thus to complete one’s knowledge of it‘ (Aldridge 2019:623).

What I am concerned with is ‘a simple justified true belief’ (Tilson, 2019:599) where rather than belief being ‘understood as the result of a failed attempt at knowledge’ (*ibid*), belief is contingent on knowledge that justifies the belief. What is problematic about the way in which the policy makers have approached knowledge, is that the approach is unquestioning and without critique. A curriculum design has been envisaged that is predictable on the part of the policy maker and is transferred to the students in the classroom. Kitson explains this in relation to the work of Michael Young.

Future 1 is a curriculum based on an under-socialised view of knowledge in which there is a fixed canon of knowledge representing, in effect, the knowledge of the powerful. Future 2, by contrast, over-socialises knowledge: no one type of knowledge is deemed better than another and what matters most are generic (often skills-based) outcomes. Future 3 is the realisation of a social realist theory of knowledge in which the knowledge created and verified within specialised communities *does* play a prominent role and provides young people with radically different ways of understanding the world than they could possibly hope to achieve through their everyday knowledge and experiences alone (Kitson, 2021:33).

In my estimation what the policies intended, was for there to be more of ‘Future 3’ but what has happened is that to reach a common-sense agreement over knowledge the English system has found itself to experience ‘Future 1’. Lists of people and events in history and the need to know them all was part of the reform that was attempted and to not know was viewed as to be left behind. Such a common-sense approach has resulted in the algorithmic approach of organisations such as Oak National Academy, with quizzes and tests to affirm the canon has been learnt. Oak National Academy was set up by the government during the Covid-19 Pandemic offering online curriculum resources developed very much in support of government policy. What is perhaps worth considering is that ‘Future 1’ is a rejection of ‘Future 2’ which in some ways resembles the New Labour incantation of curricula with the strong focus on skills. There is the fixing of a generation on what the one in power deems as important and

ensures that the next knows what it wants them to know. The educational act fulfils the ‘banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as reviving, filing, and storing the deposits’ (Friere, 2017:45). With teachers fixed in position ‘progress’ is predetermined by those in control of education, the students passive and on the receiving end.

2.9 Some theory of ‘progress’ from Van Doren

It was in the period of the 18th and 19th Century that the Enlightenment with ideals of laissez faire and free trade were followed by the industrialisation and empire along with greater political franchise. Emerging philosophies grew with and according to Nisbet a ‘secularization of the idea of ‘progress’ – detaching it from its long-held relationship with God, making it a historical process activated and maintained by purely natural causes’ (Nisbet, 1980:172). By the end of the period in question Marxism and Darwinism had not only emerged but had begun to have an impact on economics, politics, education, and other such areas of life. In the interim period there was a revolution in France and in America, with challenges to the old order of society and determination of the idea of ‘progress’. In Britain the period saw rapid urbanisation with a mobile population that tested the ability of the old laws, such as the Poor Law, forcing consideration of alternative views of what society might become and how best to achieve it.

Charles Van Doren’s book ‘*The idea of Progress*’ (Van Doren, 1967) proved useful in helping to shape my own understanding of ‘progress’, before looking at ‘progress’ from a chronological angle. Van Doren’s personal story is of interest if not relevance, to this thesis as he was involved in a scandal in America in the 1950s even having a film made about his life. ‘Before his downfall Van Doren was a ratings sensation. He made 14 electrifying appearances on Twenty-One in late 1956 and early 1957 vanquishing 13 competitors and winning a then record \$129,000’ (Michallon, [2019](#)). Van Doren had been given the answers to the questions by the makers leading to him losing his job at Columbia and NBC. Van Doren was from a family of intellectuals ‘His father, Mark Van Doren, was a critic, biographer and poet who won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1950’ (*ibid*). Sklair is not a supporter when it comes to the way in which Van Doren approaches the process arguing that it ‘is almost entirely analytical and ahistorical, and though it does present many recent views on progress its organisation and methodology make it an unhelpful if not thoroughly confusing contribution to the field’ (Sklair, 2005:89). I found the presentation by Van Doren interesting and found some of the reasoning

useful in building my own sense of progress, and so although in places I would concur that Van Doren can be confusing, some of what he wrote was of great help to me. Sklair offers his own definition arguing that ‘progress’ is ‘the end point, temporary or permanent of any social action that leads from a less to a more satisfactory solution of the problems of man in society’ (Sklair, 2005:xi). Sklair also divides progress as ‘innovational and non-innovational’ whereby:

innovational progress by means of the production of new things, ideas, and processes with maximum impact on society. Non-innovational progress is progress by means of the maintenance and diffusion of familiar things, ideas, and processes with minimal impact on society(*ibid*)

In separating progress in this way, I would perhaps argue that initially ‘progress’ in education was innovational but in the present, we are experiencing something that is perhaps ‘non-innovational’ as processes look to maintain the status quo.

Van Doren considers ‘Anthropogenic ‘progress’’ which he separates into ‘Man’s collective memory’ and ‘Man’s use of reason’ against ‘Cosmogenic progress’, which he claims is separated into ‘Divine principles’ and ‘Natural principles. Whilst defining ‘progress’ he also separates ‘authors’ under the different variations as well, to help explain how they present the idea of ‘progress’. For ‘Man’s collective memory’ Van Doren states that it

‘Includes theories, whose authors see ‘progress’ as resulting from the fact that man has a collective or social memory. ‘progress’ occurs, according to this view because later generations of men remember, or otherwise retain, the knowledge and skill of earlier generations’ (Van Doren, 1967:27).

Ultimately, he states that ‘authors who hold this position often distinguish between man, who is progressive because he has language and animals which are not progressive because they do not’ (*ibid*). Within this bracket he includes ‘a representative sample of authors who hold a basic source of ‘progress’ is man’s collective memory’ (*ibid*), some of who he includes are, Turgot, Condorcet, Saint-Simon, Piaget and E.H. Carr.

The next selection of authors is grouped under the notion of ‘Man’s use of reason’ which he claims has ‘the emphasis on the future. If man uses reason in a certain way, they are saying then and only then, will he progress’ (*ibid*). The competing view in this category is that ‘Man’s use of reason in the past as a source of the past ‘progress’ and that ‘man must continue to be reasonable in order to achieve future progress’ (Van Doren, 1967:28). On the one hand there

is a group that pertains to the argument ‘progress’ occurs because man uses or can use, his reason to control external nature’ whereas ‘Man, they say, must also control himself’ (*ibid*). Key names that Van Doren includes this time are thinkers such as Descartes, Tolstoy, Darwin and Dewey.

When considering ‘Cosmogenic progress’ the first categorisation is ‘Divine principles’, for which he defines as being ‘theories of authors which see God or Providence as the source of ‘progress’ in history’ and that ‘Man enjoys meliorative change because God intends it. Progress is God’s plan for the world’ (Van Doren, 1967:29). Within this there is the claim that a division exists between authors whereby ‘on the one hand, some authors conceive ‘progress’ as occurring because of God’s general design for man and for the world’ whereas ‘a few authors emphasize the agency of God’s church in the occurrence of progress’ (*ibid*). The final category is those who ‘see ‘progress’ as the result of a cosmic principle’ but ‘do not hold that God brings it about’ (Van Doren, 1967:30). For these authors ‘the principle of ‘progress’ is natural; ‘progress’ occurs in the human sphere either because there is a general or universal ‘progress’ of which human ‘progress’ is a special case or because this is a cosmic process’ (*ibid*).

There is a further differentiation that Van Doren makes which sets ‘theories that conceive of ‘progress’ as conflict or opposition and theories that conceive its source as universal variation’ (*ibid*). In the group of opposition, he places Hegel, Marx, Adam Smith and Bagehot. Van Doren considers that ‘progress’ ‘is the result of a process of change that affects all things, or all living things – at any rate, a larger group of things than the totality of human beings and human institutions and concerns’ (Van Doren, 1967:89), from which I understand as meaning that ‘progress’ is all encompassing. Van Doren explains that to hold this view ‘authors must agree on the following three points: 1. human ‘progress’ occurs, 2. The universe as a whole (or a part of it that is greater than man but includes man) develops or evolves, 3. The principle of human ‘progress’ is the same as the principle of cosmic evolution’ (Van Doren, 1967:90). The above-named authors are included in this group but also included when Van Doren mentions ‘progress through conflict or opposition’ (*ibid*) and they ‘agree that the natural conflict that obtains the world at large results in ‘progress’ in history’ (Van Doren, 1967:91). Within this Van Doren explains that ‘stages of world history are measured by degrees of freedom. These stages are three: First, as among the Orientals, one man, the despot is free; second, as among the Greeks and Romans some men (those not enslaved) are free; third and finally as among the German

nations, all men are free' (Van Doren, 1967:92) as such and 'in short the history of the world is none other than the 'progress' of the consciousness of freedom' (*ibid*).

Van Doren's view is an attempt to explain the Hegelian perspective of 'progress' and that 'the history of the world is none other than the 'progress' of the consciousness of freedom' (*ibid*). The way in which 'freedom 'progressively manifests itself in the world are the actions and, perhaps more important, the passions of men' (*ibid*) which consequently means that 'progress' is neither simple, nor continuous, since it is the result of conflict' (*ibid*). When there is an absence of conflict there are 'periods of historical stagnation – 'progress' ceases' (*ibid*) of which in this view of 'progress' Van Doren claims that 'Hegel's theory of 'progress' is sui generis' (Van Doren, 1967:93).

When explaining the view of Marx and Engels the depiction is of 'progress as, a result of the conflict -the dialectical opposition- of material forces. Hence, they name their philosophy dialectical materialism' (Van Doren, 1967:94) as they conceive 'progress' as a result of conflict -the dialectical opposition- of material forces' (*ibid*) and as such 'is bought about through conflict among social classes' (*ibid*). In my consideration of 'progress' in education I would concur that there is a conflict between the wants and needs of those who are experiencing the system and the aims of the policy makers. Whether that is still relating to social classes is something I am unsure of but perhaps there is a conflict developing in response to the political class. What Van Doren does explain is that 'progress' for Marx and Engels is an advancement as 'progress is the manifestation in man's history of the line of development along which the world, or at least all living nature, has gradually advance and will continue to advance' (Van Doren, 1967:94)

My own view of 'progress' in education is that conflict of ideas is one of the driving forces of the policy agenda as the political ideas can sometimes be developed around conflict with those of the perceived other. My reference point here is the SOSE 2010-14 and,

What he disparagingly described as 'the blob' – the local authorities and their advisors, the teacher and their unions, the inspectorate and the university training departments and their academics, historian and researchers – in other words anyone who knew anything about education (Gillard, 2015:292).

Through the conflict a form of 'progress' has been bought about, but that 'progress' is towards a right wing set of political philosophies and fantasies by the othering of anyone who sought

to question or oppose the reforms that were being proposed. ‘His strategy of changing everything at once was a calculated one, designed to destabilise the entire edifice’ (*ibid*), was to enforce the behaviourist ‘fantasy’ through the political activity under the guise of generating compliance through predetermined standards and benchmarks.

2.10 Concluding points based on the literature.

This review of literature seeks an understanding of the notion of ‘progress’ historically, philosophically, socially, politically, and educationally to evidence why this research is relevant now. The review has challenged me personally in my own knowledge and understanding of core beliefs about education and how they are and have been impacted on. In my own education I have had little contact with classics or philosophy and so to try to work within this field has been important in having a greater understanding of where ideas have come from. Intrinsically I was aware of some of the key themes I established but, in this review, I have been able to spend time to understand more about the influence of individuals on ideas and how they have shaped the system within which I work.

There has also been the challenge to my own taken for granted and common sense understanding of education with regards to testing and intelligence where my own lack of awareness of the links to eugenics came into focus. What I wish to state is that what this has shown is that there is a justifiable need for my research to take place to challenge the current position of ‘progress’ as an educational term that has been directly influenced by the political and philosophical stance of policy makers.

At this juncture it is also worth to consider the working definition and how this review of literature has informed the development of the definition.

‘Progress’ can be an illusion or ‘fantasy’ that attempts to create a focal point for policy makers and educators in England that embeds a sense of order and purpose, working towards a position that is accepted as being superior to an agreed starting point on a national and personal level. To accept this logic of ‘progress’ the policy makers and educators therefore must believe that the system will overcome a perceived state of inferiority to reach a pre-determined destination. A destination that has been established by those in power who establish the points of measurement through setting numeric national standards and targets as benchmarks of success and failure based on criteria and formula. Thus, the system of performance from the position of the ‘fantasy’ of policy makers has normalised ‘progress’ as the determining factor, maintaining order over the education system in England.

In the literature review there is evidence of the way in which the use of the term 'progress' has been used to create the logic of 'progress' with a metric by which the performance of the English Education system is judged. The reference to those in power is the link to the political efforts which have been involved in building the performative structures which were completed with the establishment of 'Progress 8'. Additionally, through the consideration of 'fantasy' there is evidence in the literature of how the 'logic' of 'fantasy' has been used to create the focal point for which is agreed as the point of 'progress'. When compared to the first iteration of the definition it is evident here how the literature has contributed to this more detailed definition.

3 Methodology and Method

3.1 Introduction

As a part of the course of study there were key moments when we were asked to review different paradigms of education research and to reflect on where we felt we sat within them. For my own development this was extremely challenging and left me being concerned about being ‘boxed in’ as a researcher. The language surrounding research and the traditions had me confused and it took me a long time to be comfortable with laying claim to a particular philosophical stance. This is a sensation that Stephen Ball alludes to when he stated that ‘for a significant time of my academic career I was searching for a sense of identity and security’ (Ball, 2013:2). With regards to my own journey as a doctoral researcher this has led me to lots of soul searching in the attempt to find my identity as a person, teacher, leader and still even at this stage I have a sense of insecurity in what I am doing. In the taught phase of this doctorate when we were asked to read *Methodological Paradigms in Educational Research*, Hammersley (2012), I became very concerned as I felt the meaning of my own research could get lost as my focus would become centred on proving a paradigm rather than presenting an argument. Whereas the intention behind the decision to put such a reading before the group was to help, it had the effect of making me feel unsure and confused. I believe I overcame this insecurity when focusing on what was motivating me to want to study for a doctoral qualification. As stated previously in this thesis I am concerned with social justice and inequities of the current education system in England therefore this research has been designed and carried out with this as a motivating factor. Therefore, the paradigm of ‘critical research’ is perhaps where I identified most when I carried out this thesis ‘as “critical” research explicitly extends this process of assessment to social practices and institutional arrangements, and the evaluation of these is usually in terms of some notion of equity or social justice’ (Hammersley, 2012:24). In taking this position I am aware of the concern expressed by Biesta that ‘such position taking often takes the form of a kind of confession’ (Biesta, 2015:133), but in laying out my concern with ‘progress’ I have already stressed the way in which the central policy of government has entrenched such inequity and a system of education, and this research looks to provide an opposition challenge through the voices of those tasked with enacting it. This approach supports my research as ‘critical research sees social science as playing a key oppositional roles’ and challenging ‘common sense views which are regarded as frequently distorted by ideology’ (*ibid*). Furthermore, the tradition of ‘Critical Theory’ appeals to me as ‘critical theorists and those scholars that use these theories do not like oppression and they want their

work to change it' (Winkle-Wagner et al, 2019:18). I also believe that for there to be a change or disruption I am aware that a critical lens is needed as with the way in which 'Critical pedagogy has helped us to see that there is no individual emancipation without societal emancipation' (Biesta, 2005:55) as I concur with 'the idea that the ultimate aim of education is rational autonomy' (*ibid*).

Through this chapter I aim to present an account of how I built my research and demonstrate my reflexivity as the researcher and the way influences helped me to navigate the direction of the research. Throughout my career as a teacher, I have had to have great self-awareness and found this to be extremely powerful in helping me to understand myself in how I feel about the environment I am in and the practices I am carrying out. With much of this thesis being carried out during the peak years of the Covid-19 pandemic there was the need to reflect on my own feelings and actions as the support networks that existed in person became virtual. There is an element of 'Narrative research' taking place as the thesis can be seen as progressing from the start point where I laid out my position and developed the story as to why this research is needed to where I eventually conclude my argument. In reading the thesis there are signs as 'to constitute a narrative there needs to be movement between signs' (Squire et al, 2014:20). It is also a way of expressing myself in written form that I feel comfortable with due to my understanding of historical writing as a teacher of history and postgraduate researcher. By taking a story telling approach it enabled me to clarify elements of the process and communicate clearly in a style that allowed me to hear my voice rather than trying to emulate the academic voice of another.

In developing my research, I have been influenced by the work of Stephen Ball and the way in which he is able so shine a light on the power structures at play through performativity and government policy. Through his work I also encountered Foucault and although I am aware of the tension between his work and critical theory, his views on power and political structures have influenced me along the way. One such way is with regards to writing as an emancipatory exercise to understand how I feel, Ball states that Foucault 'attributed great importance to the act of writing as a practice of freedom and what he called "self-writing"' (Ball, 2015:7). Later when discussing ethics, I will return to this notion in that I am aware how in searching for my own freedom in academic writing and understanding there is the freedom of my participants and any reader to consider. However, I do believe as Foucault did too that 'When I write I do it above all to change myself and not to think the same thing as before' (Foucault, 1991:27),

and that in partaking in a Doctorate in Education this is an integral part of the process. In the final findings I elaborate on how this process had changed me and what I learnt when I read myself back again, what turning points I took and how they shaped me.

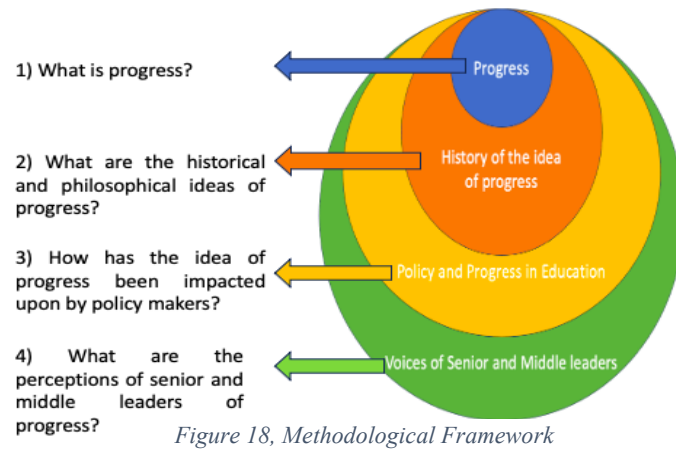
3.2 Research Questions

The main research question has been developed as ‘What is ‘progress’ in the English Secondary School system? Perceptions of Secondary School leaders’. Focussing on the system in the question meant that there needed to be a focus on policy and the way in which ‘progress’ has been adopted as an integral part of the measurement of student outcomes and used to rank schools one against the other. Under the coalition government and policy design of Michael Gove, ‘progress’ was very much part of policy, with the ‘Progress 8’ measure. For the last part of the question, I decided to have an empirical element to the research, to investigate the perception of middle and senior leaders who were ultimately trying to work with the policy decision that had been taken. After the Coalition government came into power school leaders were tasked with curriculum reviews resulting in a new National Curriculum and removal of assessment levels, reforms of A-Level courses followed by a deep and incisive reform of the GCSE qualification. On top of these reforms there was also a fundamental shift in the focus of the inspection regime with much more concentration on the school curriculum and judgements on the quality of education. Such policy changes meant that school leaders were needing to respond to support their own students to still achieve the best results possible as well as support their staff to understand the change in requirements of them. This overarching research question therefore was designed to encapsulate the three parts to the question of ‘fantasy’ of ‘progress’, education policy and the perceptions of middle and senior leaders. ‘Fantasy’ had been part of my literature review initially linked to common sense. ‘Progress’ as a common-sense notion, with the taken for granted belief that students should improve in an upward trajectory appeared connected to fantasies of educational outcomes and policy edicts. Such a ‘fantasy’ or logic of ‘fantasy’ appeared to me, to be in line with the ‘behaviourist ‘fantasy’ that Wilson referred to. As mentioned in the literature review, common sense answers, and common-sense ideas were the preference for David Blunkett when he was education secretary, but I argue that this continued for the ensuing political leaders and their approach to education.

To find answers to the research question the opening question asked at interview was ‘What is progress?’ which was deliberately open to interpretation by the participant but was also central

to my methodological framework . Intended as a phenomenological opener the design was for the participants to be able to work their way around the notion of ‘progress’ and begin to unpack what it meant for them. From the literature on the history of the idea of ‘progress’ I had planned to ask further questions in response but wanted to try to keep each interview as open as possible to allow for themes to occur that were not predetermined by me. Therefore, I did not prepare questions and worked on the premise of a conversation taking place where I would probe and prompt the participants based on what they said. Through the literature review I worked through the historical and philosophical ideas of ‘progress’ questioning the meaning. This question of course involved smaller questions as to the understanding the historical and philosophical ideas of periods of history and how and why ideas changed. When I first became interested in ideas around ‘progress’ it quickly became apparent that this was an issue that had deep historical roots and was an idea that had challenged philosophers. In the historical sense I have already explained how the lens of ‘progress’ has changed over time and the impact that contemporary social, political, and economic factors impacted upon the idea of ‘progress’. In being able to explore how the idea of ‘progress’ had become so tightly linked to education from the outset it became an important part of the research to be able to explore and explain how this had come to be so. In working with this question there was familiarity for me with the historical but very much a challenge in learning about the philosophical side to ‘progress’. The challenge was making sure that in pursuing this line I still maintained a tight link and focus to education, and this is where the policy aspect of the main thesis title helped to keep my research anchored. To sustain the education focus another of my research questions was ‘how has the idea of ‘progress’ been impacted upon by policy makers?’. This question not only focussed on the reforms leading to ‘progress’ 8 but also considered other policies where ‘progress’ and the idea of ‘progress’ as being a part of desired educational outcomes were present. Through chronicling education policies, I was able to concentrate on the way in which policy had led to the point whereby a central focus was on ‘progress’ and the instrumentalization of the idea. Through having asked this question and worked through the policy changes I was then in the position where I could pursue the last part of the thesis title to explore the perspectives of senior and middle leaders. In working with senior and middle leaders to answer this last question I was able to understand whether my own perspectives, that had come about through the literature review and initial work through the images I drew, were present in findings. When the three questions were pulled together, they allowed for my findings and conclusions

answering the overarching title for this thesis as shown in my methodological framework (see figure 18).



The questions helped to frame the research, as I started at the centre point with ‘progress’ and asked the question ‘What is ‘progress’?’ as this was the problem that I had encountered and wanted to research. Through my own practice and work within the English education system the word ‘progress’ had become increasingly problematic as from my own perspective it carries vague and at times subjective notions. I wanted to investigate who determines ‘progress’ and how has that been affected over time by varying factors in education to allow for the current use of the idea of ‘progress’ as with the establishment of ‘Progress 8’. Through the problematisation of the term and my reflections I worked through the history of the idea of ‘progress’ to understand the genealogy with regards to power and control over what has determined ‘progress’. This was an important consideration in the research as the idea of ‘progress’ changes with time and priorities of the society at the time but the extent to which that is deemed ‘progress’ is often determined by the society that comes next. Moving out I then reviewed the literature around ‘progress’ and policy for the English Education system up covering over a hundred years to explore the way in which ‘progress’ has been determined as an aim, method of delivery and measure of performance. As a curricular aim ‘progress’ can have social as well as academic objectives with decisions made about valued skills, knowledge, characteristics, future employment. Other considerations such as economic security on a personal and national scale also came into the literature whereby a reductionist focus for ‘progress’ based on measurement of academic success and performativity has been the dominant force. My research then centred on the perceptions of Senior and Middle leaders of the idea of ‘progress’ to understand the impact of policy and the extent to which they were able

to define ‘progress’ for themselves. A big part in this approach came through the way in which I had come to my position through the visual representations that I had made. These contributed to the framework as it was through reflecting on how they had come about and, in the order, they had occurred, that the questions I had, were generated.

3.3 Ethics

Through the process of BREO (Brunel Research Ethics Online) I followed the process for ethics as set out by the university completing the form firstly summarising the area of study as an investigation into the perceptions of secondary school teachers of ‘progress’. From this I outlined the approach I was going to have with the interviews and my method for recruitment through emailing people I already knew and had contact details for or who I could direct message as contacts through social media. In the form I also noted that I would be carrying out my research via face-to-face interviews or Skype/other online interview, however, with the national lockdowns the first of these two options became obsolete. In my consideration of a criteria, I had to include age and as I intended to involve people still working in education, I included an age range of 22 to 68. On reflection the lower end of this range was unnecessary as once the focus became more connected to the work of middle and senior leaders it excluded new entrant teachers as potential participants. Other key aspects to the approval process were that the data from the interviews would be stored through the encrypted cloud-based methods and that they would be deleted once the degree was awarded. This is in line with the BERA guidelines whereby they advocate ‘the use of password and/or data encryption for electronic data’ (BERA, 2024:24). This aspect of ethics was very much the technical aspect connected to the processes of the university and regulations. There are obviously many other concerns with regards to ethics which are not captured on the form. In other sections in this method chapter, I believe that I consider some of those other wider ethical implications.

3.4 Visual representations – the pathway to my position.

One way in which I have been able to galvanise my thoughts and an important part of my method is through illustrations of my own which represent what I imagine from the literature I am reading but also from my own personal feelings about education. The images are important to the method of my thesis as they have provided an anchor in helping me to return to the original thoughts that have been central to this thesis. In supervision meetings they have

provided talking points from which the supervisory team were able to help me to find direction and for me to explain myself more clearly. Most importantly they tell the narrative of my journey as a researcher and help to explain the need for the research I have carried out as well as how I shaped my research questions. In this section I have shared the images and explained how they contributed to my thinking and how they became my method for developing this thesis.

3.4.1 Concept drawings

In carrying out my research I came across the term ‘Concept Drawings’ and was made aware that there was a body of research work around the use of drawings in education research. These appear to have largely been used by researchers as a way to elicit responses from participants, whereas in my research they were a method for me to engage with the subject I have been researching. I have found that personally to do such small drawings or doodles are good starting points something that is recognised as providing me with a launch pad for looking deeper into concepts. For professionals trying to understand their work ‘concept maps are an alternative way of assessing a perceived environment. Because they do not necessarily require written words to explain them, they may be regarded as an intuitive or instinctive personal assessment of a given situation’ (Garner, 1997:281). In my own research method, I would attest to this as the drawings I have included are my response to the education environment and the way in which I perceive it. This in turn gives insight to my positionality in relation to the matter with which I am concerned, in this case ‘progress’ and the way in which policy has impacted upon the perception of it. My method is further supported when considering that, ‘Visual inquiry approaches, such as collage making and concept mapping, are a means for formulating ideas and articulating relationships among these to help understand phenomena in their formative stages, work through emergent concepts, or to help represent them to others.’ (Butler-Kisber,2010:2).

Additionally, ‘drawing involves and stimulates a sensory engagement with the phenomena under study and the data. Drawings, furthermore, play an important role in arranging and re-arranging concepts when formulating conclusions’ (Jellema et al, 2022:1398). Both of these statements promote the use of drawings in order to conceptualise issues and as a method for organising the data once it has been collected. In my thesis the use of concept drawings has been integral to my work and when it came to the analysis they served as a reminder of where

the investigation had started and why it needed to take place. The drawings were personal and the decision to share them openly in the research was one that could have left me vulnerable to ridicule or dismissal. Jellema et al suggest that ‘A researcher’s drawings may be considered an expression of their relationship to their data: their closeness to or immersion in them (Jellema et al, 2022:1399). It is my assertion that the drawings show how over time I had immersed myself in the project that I had started and through reflection supported by them, have produced an original piece of work.

Drawing as part of research can be considered as ‘a practical and low threshold approach to visual expression’ which ‘does not necessitate complex technical skills or a wide array of tools and materials’ (Martikainen and Hakokangas, 2023:982). In the case of my research this is evident as all the materials that were needed involved a biro and some paper, and as the drawings were for myself initially are ultimately personal. Lyon quotes Berger as stating, ‘Drawing is as fundamental to the energy which makes us human as singing and dancing’ (Berger, 2007:109) which she then equates to a ‘universality and democracy of drawing as an activity that propels researchers to turn to it for insights into human experience, perceptions and behaviour’ (Lyon,2020:297). It was from my drawings that I became more interested in the impact of policy decisions on the perceptions of Secondary school leaders and was key to my research method, design and analysis. The drawings were not only my expression but represent my dialogue with the topics I was investigating as once the drawings were done, I then needed to make sense of them for myself. Berger states that ‘to draw is not only to measure and put down but it is also to receive’ (Berger, 2007:77) which then leads to a dialogue to comprehend what has appeared on the page. Through this approach there is a freedom of expression that occurred which I was then able to use in order to hold a dialogue with myself about the object of my research.

In my own research the visual element helped to clarify my positionality and were supportive in my supervision sessions as well as at key progress points to share my thinking and to develop the research. At the final juncture they have been useful in mapping my thoughts and linking the research so that I am able to explain how I have reached the position that I am in. Most importantly through the illustrations which when connected help to map this research journey and help me to establish my voice. Wilson et al state ‘Concept maps illustrate a form of multimodal communication that allows participants to find and share their voice in new ways’ (Wilson et al, 2016:1152) and therefore to make sense of their environment. The difference

with this research is that through my images there is the theorised subjectivity of myself which has enabled me to share my voice in new ways not those of my participants. In preparation for the viva voce examination, I prepared the drawings in a timeline to help me to organise my thoughts and as an aide memoire. When considering concept mapping the same document is important and included in the appendix (appendix 8) as it shows the order in which the drawings were made. In the next section of this chapter, I explore each drawing in the order that they came about and how the concepts in each led me in research and helped with the organisation. It is this method that adds to the originality of my work but within what is recognised as a legitimate approach when positioned alongside the literature that I have cited in this section.

3.4.2 The Neo-Liberal Stomp

The first of these drawings (*see figure 19*) was of my view of neo liberalism on the education in England and showed a foot stepping on a class of children and a teacher entitled '*The Neo Liberal Stomp*'.



Figure 19, '*The Neo Liberal Stomp*' J,Perkins

I came to this drawing through my reading of Stephen Ball's book '*The Education Debate*' (Ball: 2013), whereby my understanding of how government decisions were leading to a rupture within the system. From the book I felt very much that what Ball was suggesting over the course of the text was that control was moving away from the education professionals.

Through greater focus on performativity through school league tables and the measurement of results teachers and students are being compressed. This downward force through the ‘delivery chain’ has enclosed education, by making the success of educational endeavour tied to government policy and targets within the global marketplace. It was through this reading where I became aware of the ‘knowledge economy’ (Ball, 2013), with the focus on deliberately building a competitive workforce to prop up the national economy. Market forces and competition as drivers rather than social change at the centre of the decisions being made despite a claim of concern for social mobility. I found Ball’s writing inspiring and made me more curious about how government policy impacted upon schools and the way the marketisation had altered the face of the system in England. Although I had been aware of league tables and performativity through the writing of Ball, I found myself considering how some of the system I was now a part of had insidious undertones which were removed from what I believed. It was also around this time through reading Gewirtz book *The Managerial school* that I also reflected on the schools which I had been a part of and how some of the behaviours and approaches I had been a part of, now left me feeling awkward and with a need to investigate and understand more. In my own career I had made choices about where to work and to become a part of those institutions but in doing so I also recognised the need to accept aspects of those institutions that maybe did not concur with my own perception. What I was now realising was that this sense was much more profound, and I needed to consider the wider state of the English system, through the aims, expected outcomes and politicisation of the classroom.

There had been a view that there needed to be ‘conditions for a more competitive and cohesive Europe on the global stage’ which was ‘primarily the result of the scale and persistence of Europe’s unemployment problems and the consequences of the changes taking place in the world of work’ (Jones, 2005:248). It was from this that at Lisbon the concept of ‘lifelong learning re-emerged strongly for the first time since the early 1970s’ (*ibid*). This moment was particularly eye opening as I myself had promoted the notion of lifelong learning, it had been promoted to me through my teacher training and was certainly a part of school development plans. Biesta led me to question such notions of ‘learning’ and the ‘learner’ two words which again, through my training had become part of my own way communicating. What I had not considered is how using the term ‘learning’ and ‘learner’ had become such central tenets of policy and that in what I believed was a liberating act could conversely be having the opposite effect. Biesta refers to the ‘new language of learning – a language which refers to students’ as

learners, to teachers as facilitators of learning, to schools as places for learning, to vocational education at the learning and skills sector, to grown-ups as adult learners and so on' (Biesta, 2013:541). A constant cycle of learning that never ends and that 'to call someone a learner thus suggests an inequality between those who have learned and now know, can, or are and those who still need to learn in order to know, be able or be' (*ibid*). Learners are therefore 'not yet knowledgeable, not yet skilful, not yet competent, not yet autonomous, and so on' (*ibid*).

When I reflected on the way in which my own training and understanding had been impacted upon by such neo liberal views of education I became aware of how 'learning' had been given meaning. Learning was to be seen in a lesson, one of the tutors on my PGCE would keenly ask 'where is the learning?', where indeed? My experience of Initial teacher education and practice were about delivery and facilitation of learning, separating the students in the room to enable diagnostic tests to determine attainment. My encounters with Ball and Biesta, made me reconsider and my drawing was my realisation that perhaps the policy and practices I had been initiated into, were oppressing the very people I believed I was helping as well as those I worked with and ultimately myself.

3.4.3 Fuelling the furnace – proof of evidence.

It was after reading '*Philosophy of Educational Research*' (Pring,2015), I came to do another drawing I entitled '*Fuelling the furnace*' (*see figure 20*) about how policy makers view research evidence. In my reading it felt to me that the need for more evidence was to feed policy makers, so that they could legitimise their decisions polluting the work of academics, as where 'Governments talk of evidence-based policy, too often evidence is confused with proof and proof is too often seen as leading to certainty' (Pring,2015:195).



Figure 20, 'Fuelling the Furnace' J.Perkins

Earlier in the book Richard Pring offered a warning, 'Beware those who in the interests of research or political control change the language of education' (Pring,2015:35), something I had come to consider through the influence of Gert Biesta. Biesta warns of the role of politicians as knowledge 'provides politicians and policy makers and even educators with avenues of control that ultimately block the very spaces for action and agency that such students or adults were able to create for themselves' (Biesta,2015:141). The SOSE 2010-14 built their own arguments on a need for proof by citing Daniel Willingham as having written 'the definitive guide to weighing evidence, especially the scientific evidence, in the debates around education reform' (Clarke, 2018:158). The evidence provided by people such as Willingham encourages policy makers, who want clear answers that secure outcomes for the education process as part of the 'what works' agenda. By presenting the evidence model, examples of practice are shared, with weight given to those seen as being, more versus less successful, through toolkits and policy announcements. The inspectorate then visits schools looking for signs of the practice in action, to affirm the benefits and support the predetermined evidence and pass judgements.

Teachers are expected to accept the evidence in the way in which 'the hygienists believed Pasteur without question' (Latour, 1988:26), as the evidence is laid bare and encourages acceptance as common sense. Pring concludes that such evidence leads to a 'language of targets – the endless list of competencies, the can dos' (Pring; 2015:37), and that 'what is funded may be made to fit in within the research framework of those who fund research' (Pring, 2015:41). David Blunkett criticised education research 'some researchers as so obsessed with critique, so out of touch with reality, that they churn out findings which one with the slightest common sense could take seriously' (Pring, 2015:95). In his assertion Blunkett wanted straight answers that he could comprehend and present as policy without the need for theory or consideration to meet the aims of his political party. The challenge to education research was that for a government working with a logic of delivery there needed to be measurable outcomes against defined criteria to assess the performance.

More recently the conception of the Education Endowment Foundation, with evidence relayed as objective, yet state sponsored, has become an instrument from which policy has been

promoted. Nick Gibb promoted the work of Ben Goldacre and his report on ‘Building Evidence into education’ and the promotion of randomised control trials. For Goldacre

there is a huge prize waiting to be claimed by teachers. By collecting better evidence about what works best, and establishing a culture where this evidence is used as a matter of routine, we can improve outcomes for children and increase professional independence’ (Goldacre, 2013:4)

Goldacre also promoted RCTs as ‘the best way to find out how well a new intervention works: they ensure that the pupils or schools getting a new intervention is the same as the pupils and schools still getting the old one’ (Goldacre, 2013:7). The challenge for all research though is the communication and Goldacre concurs ‘Some individual randomised trials from the UK have produced informative results, for example, but these results are then poorly communicated’ (Goldacre, 2013:13). It is my assertion that this should be of no surprise as Joseph Lister proved through evidence with his work using carbolic acid that death from infection could be reduced, but Lister was a poor communicator. Other surgeons could not get the same results as when they tried to adopt his practices, and it required other colleagues to act as spokesmen(sic) for Lister. Goldacre suggests that there is a need for ‘teachers to be critical consumers’ (Goldacre, 2013:13), but perhaps what I am trying to say is that the ‘deliverology’ and nature of government means that the communication of this very point is lost. Perhaps one of my own critical assessments of the Goldacre view is through such an intense focus on ‘what works’ then there is the neglect of what is not working and the hidden impacts of such processes. Biesta alludes to this problem as ‘In Britain the call for the transformation of educational research and practice has led to a range of initiatives aimed at narrowing the gap between research and, policy and practice’ (Biesta, 2007:2) and that ‘there is a strong push for experimental research that, according to proponents of evidence-based education, is the only method capable of providing secure evidence about “what works”’ (Biesta, 2007:3). In promoting this approach to education research and the advantage of what on the face appears to be opinion and value free solutions pertaining to be in the interest of the body of students that are then subjected to practices and processes. The counter to this is where perhaps I sit with regards to questioning ‘the positivistic assumptions underlying the idea of evidence-based education’ (Biesta, 2007:4) which in turn encourage a ‘managerial agenda; with a ‘top-down approach to educational improvement’ (*ibid*). Returning to Lyotard it is ‘how legitimisation by power takes shape. Power is not only good performativity, but also effective verification and good verdicts’ (Lyotard, 1984:47). This I would argue is the aim of government, as it seeks to demonstrate its own performance as good through verifications

based on the performance, which thus ‘legitimises this efficiency on the basis of science and law’ (*ibid*) supporting self-legitimation and power which is enhanced through control of information and data as

The performativity of an utterance, be it denotative or prescriptive, increases proportionally to the amount of information about its referent one has at one’s disposal. Thus, the growth of power, and its self-legitimation, are now taking the route of data storage and accessibility, and the operativity of information (*ibid*).

Calling on effect size, relating impact to financial input of strategies versus outcomes of students, rating performance of schools through ‘progress’ measures that are calculated and validated as proof and evidence, a factory of production is in constant action.

In my own experience as a teacher in England I have seen, heard and felt the impact of such an approach and perhaps more recently with the promotion of the work of Doug Lemov and ‘*Teach like a Champion*’. I have been a mentor to teachers who have made their way to QTS via Teach First, which is an Initial Teacher Education provider, whereby candidates work full time in schools. They receive an induction over the summer where they are versed in practice before entering full time roles whereby, they learn on the job with the book, along with the terminology acting as a central tenet to their understanding of classroom practice. Presented as irrefutable evidence, they are tasked with following what is presented not just as tried and tested but as being the way in which to teach. In my estimation such an approach has negative connotations for teacher development as such an approach to ‘evidence-based education seems to limit severely the opportunities for educational practitioners to make such judgements in a way that is sensitive and relevant for their own contextualised setting’ (Biesta, 2007:5). In my initial foray into educational research, I believe that I was more inclined with the former but as I read more and was challenged about my views, I began to find my own position.

Through these readings I considered how if I pursued research, it may well be that the evidence, I find may have the opposite impact to the one that I am aiming for. Would my evidence support emancipation and agency or would my evidence shackle and oppress. A joke we shared as a group in our seminar sessions was that none of us wanted to produce a piece of research that could be reduced to an A4 laminate. What I came to know was that I wanted to try to carry out research that would challenge the status quo and address common sense taken for granted initiatives, and critically examine them.

Being critical was something that I experienced as a teacher of history, with the changes to the curriculum driven by the SOSE 2010-14. Many would argue that there was an attempt with the history curriculum to construct a national historical narrative of the past glorifying Empire and characters who played their part in establishing it. Then Prime Minister, David Cameron, declared at the Conservative Party conference in 2013 ‘a new national curriculum – and it’s got proper, narrative history back at its heart: Kings, Queens, battles, dates – our island’s story in all its glory’ (Cameron, 2013, speech to 2013 National Conservative Convention). Brooks uses this same moment in education reform to link to the ‘worrying tendency for some researchers and policy makers to look for evidence that backs the case they wish to make’ with the claim that ‘Survey after survey has revealed disturbing historical ignorance, with one teenager in five believing Winston Churchill was a fictional character while 58 per cent think Sherlock Holmes was real’ answers for which it transpired came from ‘surveys conducted by Premier Inns’ (Brooks et al, 2015:6). Here there is evidence of how researchers need to be mindful of how their findings may have the opposite effect to their intention and be used to legitimise actions of policy makers or practitioners that are undemocratic.

As a history teacher the representation of history and what was considered as important, as presented by the government of the time, conflicted with my own sense of what history is and how it should be taught. I was not alone however, and through great agency the curriculum for history was challenged and amendments made as a strong critical argument was made to change what was eventually published. ‘First, resistance to the draft was remarkable simply because it was so effective: the draft curriculum was withdrawn in August 2013 and replaced with a curriculum which met with general approval’ (Smith, 2017:308), as the move from a starting point where ‘opposition to the draft railed against the curriculum’s apparent right-wing bias’ to ‘a careful disciplinary critique’ (*ibid*). Through my experience as a subject lead tracking the changes proposed, I learnt that it was possible to challenge central policy and that academics could play a leading role in the decision-making process. The manner that the history community challenged the debate also showed how through the curricular arguments the history community managed to sidestep ‘attempts by the Right to frame curriculum debates in binary political terms’ with ‘the history community able to expose both the fallacy of the New Right’s attacks and the ideology which underpinned them’ (*ibid*).

From a research perspective the survey by Premier Inn was never meant to be used to formulate national policy and unlikely it had been subjected to any ethical scrutiny prior to being unleashed on the young people who answered it. From such a standpoint a national curriculum was presented that included key individuals and characters that were promoted as heroes of British history. Ignorance of these said individuals, Robert Clive, for instance, was presented as shameful and an indictment of the history curriculum to be remedied with a revised content. Clive had been a figure in the East India Company and been victorious at the Battle of Plassey in 1757. He took over the collection of taxes in Bengal and became wealthy, only later to be accused of corruption and despite being found not guilty never recovered. In the curriculum proposed by the SOSE 2010-14, here was a man to be revered whereas the history community felt there was a concern of interpretation and notion of Empire that needed addressing. I believe that my position with regards to the relevance of the then SOSE 2010-14 to this thesis is justified through the experience I had as a subject leader in responding to what was a major attempt at curricular change as part of a wider education policy shift.

The supposed research allowed for misuse of evidence that is exaggerated to fulfil a political argument, legitimise policy and in the discipline of history deliver a nationalistic, conservative narrative of the past. To support such decision making requires acceptance of ‘empty signifiers’ such as ‘education’ which intend to ‘bind together a range of other signifiers within a particular discursive formation, and despite their enigmatic nature, to bind together members of a community’ (Clarke, 2018:154). Within ‘education’ there are other signifiers in terms such as knowledge but what they do is to arrive to a ‘consequence of’ a ‘fantasmic’ rendering of education’ that ‘leads us to confront the educational challenges we face in reductive and wholly inadequate ways’ (*ibid*). In succumbing to such a ‘fantasy’ there is the allowance for evidence as a ‘signifier’ of purpose and ‘progress’ for education and that any questioning of such evidence is detrimental to the greater good. What I really believe I am trying to say with this drawing is that it has influenced me greatly in how I have looked to carry out my research for this thesis.

The considerations I have made from this point is that as a researcher, I am more concerned with the lived experience rather than research involved in effect sizes. Pring I think helps to clarify my position ‘Governments talk of evidence-based policy, too often evidence is confused with proof, and proof is too often seen as leading to certainty’ (Pring, 2015:195). Through my research I am looking to make ‘fuzzy generalisations’ (Bassegy, 1999:52) not a concrete proof

nor is my research necessarily aimed at the classroom teacher to improve practice. Education research is not only about what works and securing outcomes but also about the experience of teachers, students and all involved to critically examine their own positions. Some research should take place that considers the philosophical aspects of the educational process that questions the scientific technocratic approach as there exists ‘tension between scientific and democratic control over educational practice’ (Biesta, 2007:5) as a more technocratic approach is favoured by those with an interest in power. Tension is not always something that should be seen as negative and, in my perspective, adding to the tension creates potential for ethical considerations to take place that gives reason to legitimise actions.

The first time I came to be more concerned with ‘progress’ and the impact on children was in reading Pring and how the language of psychology, business and power were influencing education. Through a reflection on the common sense that policy makers were seeking I could sense a ‘Churchillian’ spin with a never surrender attitude being valued over perhaps a more compassionate one. Through my own experience as an insider, I felt concerned at the way the word ‘resilience’ was being pushed as a characteristic leading me to my next visual support with a drawing with a test centre where children are tested with a resilience hammer. If broken they are swept onto a scrap heap as their failure to survive the test, being their weakness, rather than a failure of the test. Ball considers that ‘it was intelligence testing and its measurement that provided a concept and a set of tools which would professionalise the practice of the teacher and provide a rationale for practice’ and as such a set of tools that could also be used to determine ‘belonging’ as ‘groups of students who were transmuted from individuals differences(sequences) to distinct types (sets)’ (Ball, 2013:72). Currently there is the division of students into such types in English schools with HAPS, MAPS and LAPS used as abbreviations to segregate Higher, Middle, and Lower attainers (although the use of the word ability for the middle letter is more common), in mark books, seating plans and classrooms. These modern terms are seen more acceptable than their predecessors which had used terms such as ‘abnormal and unteachable, the genius at one end, and the backward or retarded’ (*ibid*) but the sifting and distribution may be perceived to be the same. A test that is designed and given the position of being a measure simultaneously creates new groupings and terminology, ‘the capacity of assessment to create rather than just to measure’ (Stobart, 2008:30).

For schools today they allow for the creation of groupings, internal policy in response to government policy with young people in England tested through examinations. The promotion

of examinations has been a key tenet of the Conservative education agenda, with the SOSE 2010-14 lamenting what he saw as a drop in standards in order ‘to address the grade inflation, dumbing down and loss of rigour in those examinations’ (Gove, 2013). As part of the reforms was also a belief that a system which would bring about a ‘more balanced and meaningful accountability system’ (*ibid*), which would be based on ‘an average point score showing how much ‘progress’ every student makes between key stage 2 and key stage 4’ (*ibid*). They motioned ‘that new GCSE’s will remain universal qualifications – accessible with good teaching, to the same proportion of pupils as now’ (Gove, 2013). From this comment it could be construed to mean that inability to access the qualifications is not due to the qualification itself but to do with teaching and the quality of the teacher. It is my assertion that this must be contested particularly when the system is structured around a bell curve that ensures fifty per cent are always in the bottom half of grades. The system is structured so that those below grade four are seen as sub-standard and not ‘good passes’ which is approximately a third of the population taking the examinations. Students are tested by a predetermined set of criteria where they, their teachers, or school are marked as being the reason rather than the acknowledgement of a system that is deliberately sorting and organising the young people that are working their way through it into groupings. Claims of fairness in exams were reiterated during the Covid-19 pandemic with the then secretary of state Gavin Williamson ‘We know that exams are the fairest way of measuring a student’s abilities and accomplishments, including the most disadvantaged’ (Williamson, UIN HCWS501, 2020). Testing and examinations to conclude secondary education have been a feature of the past thirteen years of Coalition and then Conservative government in the belief that it would lead to a ‘system that can compete with the best in the world – a system that sets, and achieves, high expectations’ (Gove, 2013).

3.4.4 The machinery of ‘progress’ grinding out a future.

From here I also considered how through performativity students and teachers are repeatedly tested but once achieving the goal or meeting the measure the goal posts are moved. In my image the ‘*Treadmill of progress*’ (see figure 21) I have placed a character on a treadmill where they are expected to go beyond their target which they do. Once achieved however they are informed the measure has changed and they must continue, and when finally, they ask to stop it is their resilience that is once again the point of failure. Considering the current attrition rate of teachers in England, with the NEU claiming DfE statistics show ‘that 41% leave within 10 years’ (NEU, 2023). the impact of performativity may well be in evidence.

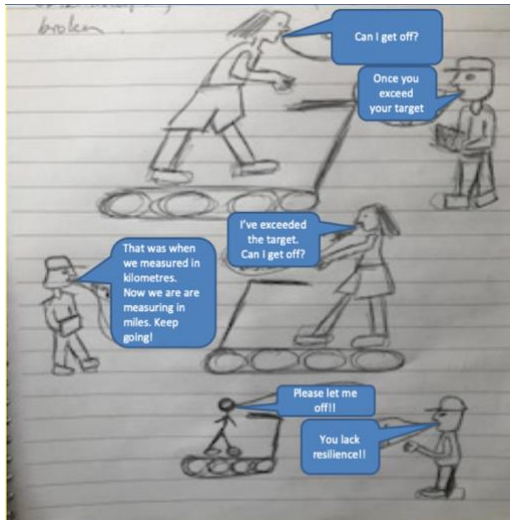


Figure 21, 'The Treadmill of 'progress'' J.Perkins

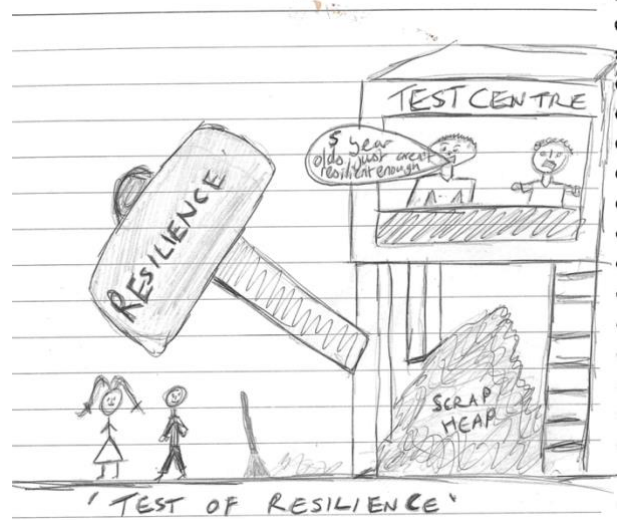


Figure 22, 'The Test of Resilience' J.Perkins

For some the word resilience and the term is used almost as a panacea as 'The vast majority of the popular and scholarly literature on resilience represents the phenomenon as though it embodied scientifically proven principles that can be applied to positive effect in the lives of those living in adversity' (Boyden and Copper, 2007:5). I present this through my drawing 'The test of resilience' (see figure 22) where I show the constant hammering of the students through testing regimes leading to some being cast aside as lacking resilience. In my own perspective there is a requirement on the individual subject to obey the notion of resilience and to accept unwaveringly that it is their own individual weakness or lack of resilience that is the reason for any perceived failure. Obedience is questionable as an educational outcome whereby the 'ideal of moral autonomy clashes head on with prevailing industry' (White, 1982:105), something that is helped by Biesta and his article on the 'Eichmann Parks paradox' (Biesta, 2020:1012). In the article Biesta considers that in Eichmann there is an example of educational success as 'there was after all, a perfect match between what was expected from him and his own actions' whereas Parks is a failure 'from the perspective of effective instruction and successful learning' (Biesta, 2020:1013). Moral autonomy challenges prevailing orthodoxies and practices as 'the morally autonomous man (sic) cannot obediently knuckle under' (White, 1982:106). Economic aims of government are represented in education policy and teachers and students are subjected to them, what I argue is that over time, more so now than ever we see students and teachers 'knuckle under'. Priorities on national scales are put above those of the personal with government talking about 'being in this together' when outlaying the challenges

posed by Brexit, Covid-19 or any other perceived threat to the nation. In education the PISA rankings and the competition to stay ahead has been a part of the drivers in education policy with fantasies of Britain falling behind, where claims such as ‘we have sunk in international league tables and the national curriculum is sub-standard. Meanwhile the pace of economic and technological change is accelerating, and our children are being left behind’ (Gove, 2011) were made. A ‘fantasy’ of a nation in trouble and young people suffering due to neglect generated a sense of urgency and allowed for changes to the examination systems to be carried out with a deep incision.

It was through my experience as head of history and through the reading that I began to become more focussed on ‘progress’ as I witnessed the experiences of the first ‘Progress 8’ cohorts and the way in which despite results being good as a pass their ‘progress’ was seen as being a failure. What I found very difficult here in my own experience was that this meant a student who had a target of grade 9 yet achieved a grade 8 was seen as a failure. What I learnt was that with the ‘Progress 8’ score and ‘Attainment 8’ score what returned was a negative and so for the ‘progress’ machine were a failure on the part of the student, the teacher, and the school. Being on the receiving end of the results made me consider how students can be perceived as a commodity for the work force and the ‘National efficiency’. Docile bodies that need to be shaped to fit the demands of the economy and policy makers, thus my next illustration ‘Grinding a future’ (see figure 23) was my own adaptation of a Cruickshank image (see figure 24) of workers being put through a mincing machine to make money for the factory owner. I replace the factory owner with the government and the mincing machine referred to as the ‘progress’ machine with the young people coming out the other sides as the product to fill the work force and thus benefit the economy.

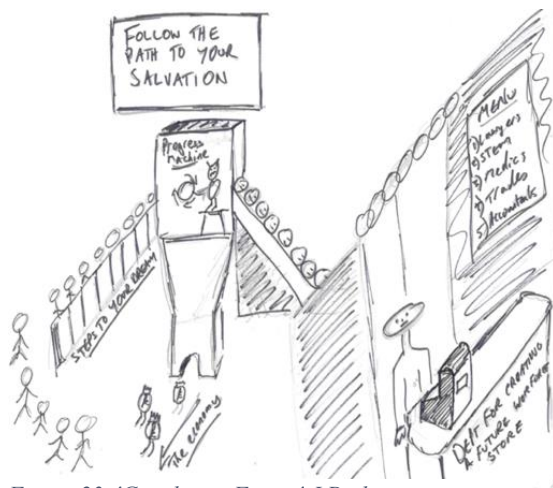
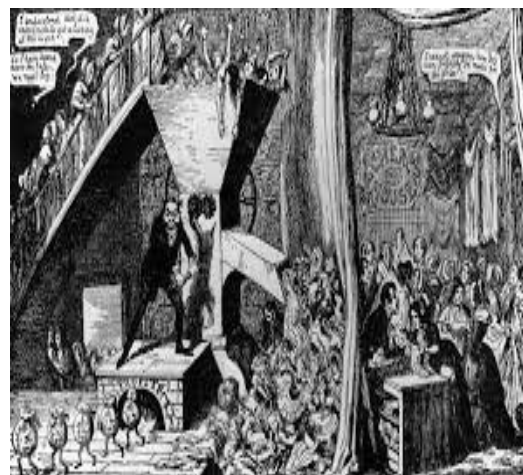


Figure 23, 'Grinding a Future' J.Perkins



Individual liberty is lost and of no concern to the system as figures and targets are fulfilled through the 'progress machine' to have a production line of bodies ready to fulfil roles that are perceived to be necessary for the economy. Education as an instrument to meet and secure outcomes and targets with a 'systematic process for driving 'progress' and delivering results in education' (Pring, 2015:35). Results at a predetermined government level 'When the product is the measurable target on which performance is audited' (Pring, 2015:37). X number of doctors, nurses, teachers, Y number of computer specialists, Z number of Physicists, becomes the focus with the education system judged by the success of the output. In my judgment the system is failing, as gaps in the workforce are identified, and lamented by the right when they are filled by migrants, yet simultaneously undervaluing the achievements of the children of migrants who become teachers, doctors, nurses, politicians. Each time with these I came back to the idea of 'progress' in education and what is it that is being sought as 'progress' and how that has changed, dependent on who controls the focal point. Who decides what 'progress' means and how the output is measured, and why in that way, concerns me greatly, as it feels to me that what is being supported is a life of servitude to a national economy. It is inconsequential to those in power if the bodies that pass through the 'progress' machine have what they need for a quality of life so long as they fulfil their role in the national interest.

There is an obedience from the bodies on the steps as they walk up them following what has been set out before them, as they pass through an almost clinical processing. The degree of obedience is another concern that I have as with each step the physical progression is a forward motion with no chance to step back or down. The objects are obedient to the march of 'progress' but 'Obedience is, in any case, not a moral virtue' (White, 1982:104) as through economic and political educational aims 'What they really want is employees who do what they are told' (*ibid*). The system is promoting a complicit body of subjects who 'toe the line for purely prudential reasons, to avoid dismissal, for instance, or in the hope of promotion' (*ibid*). I would argue that in the 21st century we are now in a position where it can also be understood that such a level of obedience is about sustaining a way of life promoted through home ownership, holidays abroad, fashion, eating out in support of the national economic need for growth. The need for consumers to keep buying and technology to keep pace is wrapped up in the fantasies of 'progress' that abound with greater flexibility in working practices, more

time to spend on yourself yet all the time working harder and longer. Failure to sustain the pace brings me back to resilience whereby,

‘Caution is needed when speaking of resilience. The discourse of resilience can be, (has been?) co-opted by proponents of a neoconservative agenda that argue if one person can survive and thrive, then shouldn't the responsibility for success be on all individuals within populations at risk to do likewise?’ (Ungar, 2005: xvi).

The challenge facing those interested in resilience has been to ‘establish models of practice that emphasise client’s strengths rather than their problems or deficits’ (Boyden, 2007:3). Ungar compares the ecological paradigm with the constructivist view of resilience by stating that,

within an ecological paradigm, resilience has been defined as health despite adversity (see Masten,2001). In contrast, a constructionist approach to resilience reflects a postmodern interpretation of the construct and defines resilience as the outcome from negotiations between individuals and their environments for the resource define themselves as healthy amidst condition collectively viewed as adverse’ (Ungar, 2004:342).

Such definitions are problematic for educators from my perspective with a presentation of schooling as a situation of adversity that needs the individual to self-medicate. Perhaps this is further compounded due to the manner of research on resilience where there is ‘the hope of revealing ways to inoculate children against personal, familial, and environmental acute and chronic stressors’ (*ibid*). If schools promote resilience and expect it of their students, then perhaps future generations will be ‘more resilient’ and better in adversity is the assumption. Educators look for ways to measure resilience and prove that there is greater resilience than there was before, yet no one is overly sure of who or what they need to be resilient to or for.

3.4.5 The ‘Vortex’ – Pulling, pushing, and swallowing.

A phrase that I have heard a lot in my career has been the idea of education as a journey, with ‘progress’ and progression playing a part and so I started with a road working towards a narrow point as if to arrive to a horizon. At the end of that road, I added a ‘vortex’ as a powerful image that pulls the individual along the road of ‘progress’ and once at the centre being sucked through to another dimension. My reasoning for the word, ‘pull’, and the imagery of being ‘pulled’ is from the visual of the ‘vortex’ spinning and dragging the student bodies towards it. Whether the pull is equitable or not one could argue that it is, due to the way in which the system concludes at the point of the GCSE examinations. What is not equitable is the journey

taken to the ‘vortex’ and the position upon the road as secured by class, gender, wealth, and other such social factors. Arriving to the ‘vortex’ better prepared for what may lie the other side is the challenge facing the schools in the English system as they engineer exam performance to meet the goals and targets as set through the technocratic approach. I was considering the work of Biesta and his explanation of how ‘language of education has largely been replaced by a language of learning’ (Biesta, 2005:54) and the way in which the pathway is established, and students, teachers, parents, and policy makers move to a point after which there is no surety about what will come next. The image came to me when I thought about the film ‘Stargate’ which was a science fiction film from the mid 1990s, whereby a portal discovered in Egypt opens up and gives access to a planet where humans worship the Egyptian god Ra. The characters make their way up steps before being transported to an alternate realm.

I was also minded of the film ‘Metropolis’ from 1920s Germany whereby during a scene the machine being operated in the factory turns in to a ‘*Moloch*’ (see figure 25).

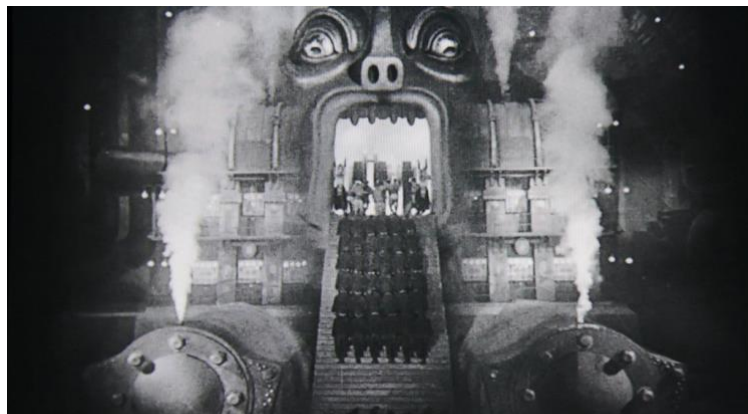


Figure 25, Still of the 'Moloch' from Fritz Lang's film 'Metropolis' (1927)

The term has an origin from the Old Testament and ‘Greek witnesses, followed by the Akhmimic version, read τουμολοχ “Moloch,” evidently from Hebrew mōlek (Dewerell, 2019:738). Where the connection is justified with my own views on education is that ‘there is good reason to understand biblical mōlek as referring to a type of sacrifice, often involving children’ (Dewerell, 2019:739). As the machine breaks down and transforms the workers begin to march up the steps into the jaws with a representation that ‘presents the Metropolis workers as mere cogs in the wheels of industry - men who have been turned into anonymous slaves whose rote actions mirror the movements of machine’ (Wosk, 2010:404). In the film the workers disappear into the mouth of the Moloch, and I imagined students making their way

through arid conditions before making their way up the steps to pass through the portal, a sacrifice of children to the altar of national efficiency, economic power, and ‘progress’.

My view of students as docile bodies making their way to the steps, sacrificed to the policy whims of a national government, is connected to the way in which I feel that to an extent the emancipatory aspiration of education has been degraded and concur with Biesta who says that ‘We now also live in an era in which we are beginning to see that cognition, knowledge, is only one way to relate to the natural and social world, and not necessarily the most fruitful, important or liberating one’ (Biesta, 2005:55). I do disagree with Biesta in some respects where he claims that focus ‘has shifted the attention away from the activities of the teacher to the activities of the student’ (*ibid*) as in the current education climate the focus on knowledge and knowledge accrual has perhaps swung back very much to the activity of the teacher and the way in which knowledge is imparted. In Biesta’s view

‘Learning facilitates an economic understanding of the process of education, one in which the learner is supposed to know what he or she wants, and where a provider (a teacher, an educational institution) is simply there to meet the needs of the learner’ (Biesta, 2005:60).

Although I appreciate this view, I believe that under the most recent set of policies and direction of education in England there has been much less concern about liberation and freedom and that the policy agenda was politically motivated with a ‘conservative curricular appeal to middle class voters who, perhaps unconsciously see a traditional conception of knowledge as a way of safeguarding their privilege’ (Smith, 2017:310). Knowledge as held by the teacher to be imparted with the students ‘sitting in rows learning the kings and queens of England’ (Gove, 2010), and the position of the teacher restored after the perceived damage of progressives whereby ‘the role – and authority – of the teacher and traditional subject knowledge was undermined’ (Gove, 2013). The strength of the position taken with a pursuit of a policy was marked by a ‘Manichean worldview, anyone opposing his proposed core knowledge curriculum must be a pedagogical ‘progressive’ and thus ‘linked with leftist ideology’ (Smith, 2017:311). For education professionals the challenge to present opposition or criticism of such views meant it was hard to ‘avoid any accusations that they were politically motivated’ (*ibid*). Parents, students, and teachers have been pulled into a climate of fear and terror about falling behind internationally and economically, as by not making the grade a sentence of a futureless, future was presented. To this end students and families are being asked to take a leap of faith

that what has been provided will allow them to land softly on the other side with teachers trying to evidence their hand in the outcome.

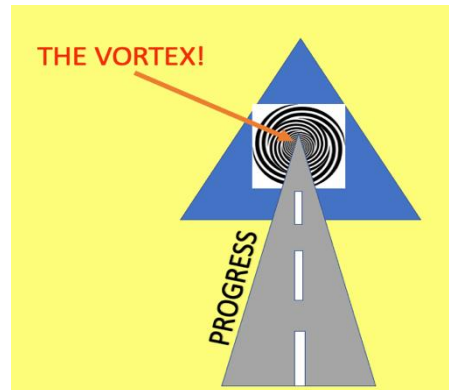


Figure 26, 'The Vortex', J.Perkins

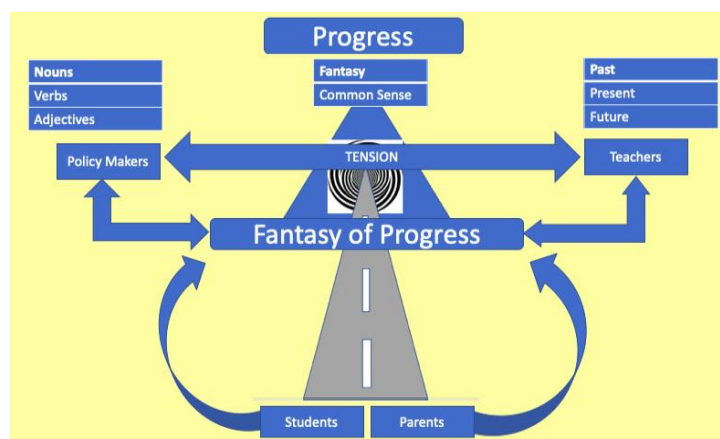


Figure 27, 'Following the Path' J.Perkins

In capturing my view through 'The Vortex' (see figure 26) image, the activity of education is being presented as a journey, with the 'vortex' as the focal point of 'progress', but without really knowing what is on the other side. There can be no delineation as the system is set that by the age of sixteen the young person has to sit the examinations to show the 'progress' has been made and moves to the next stage. 'Progress' to the point is predetermined which is what I believe the current English system is built around to guarantee outcomes before the educational endeavour has occurred. Through the 'Following the path' (see figure 27) I have imagined how the current situation looks to me with regards the purpose of the system and the current situation being experienced in England. Connected to this path of 'progress' are

pressures that hold the subjects to the centre line as they work their way to the portal as depicted in this next image.

With Figure 18, I overlaid the tension that I perceive exists between policy makers and teachers over 'progress' and the meaning. I put parents on the path with the students but in retrospect perhaps they too should have been to the side. The aspirations and fantasies of parents, teachers and policy makers all create pressure and tension on the students as they work their way along the line of 'progress'. There is also order to the image with the teachers and policy makers either side of the route, not allowing for deviation so that all are moved to the same destination. Once they arrive to the destination there is the leap of faith that what awaits on the other side meets the expectation, however, I would argue for some there is only faith and no expectation. Due to the pace and one direction of travel, that compulsory education in England follows, there is not time to fully consider what will come next. Tradition and popular opinion impact student choices of courses to follow, whether that be at Further Education or later when deciding on Higher Education. Through the policy of compulsory education students are focussed through the efforts of teachers and parents to stick to the line and concentrate on the point of qualification. Dreams and hopes are present, but the portal determines the extent to which those same dreams and hopes are accessible once travelling to the next, alternate realm.

In 2020 when the Covid outbreak occurred a sinkhole appeared in the road on the journey to the 'vortex', and all were left wondering what would happen next. I had students contacting me distraught, unsure what would happen, which led to my illustrations in *Figure 28* and *Figure 29*.

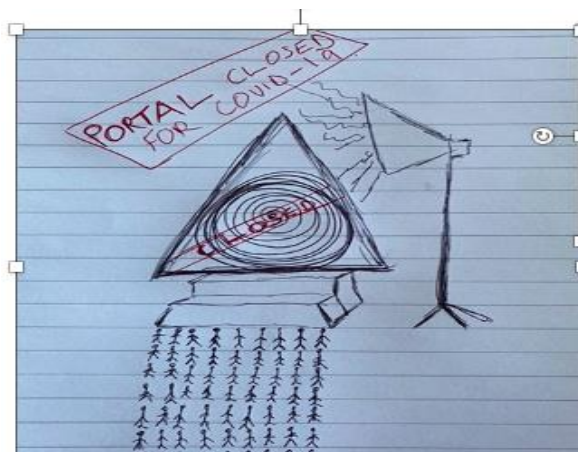


Figure 28, 'Waiting on the Steps' J.Perkins

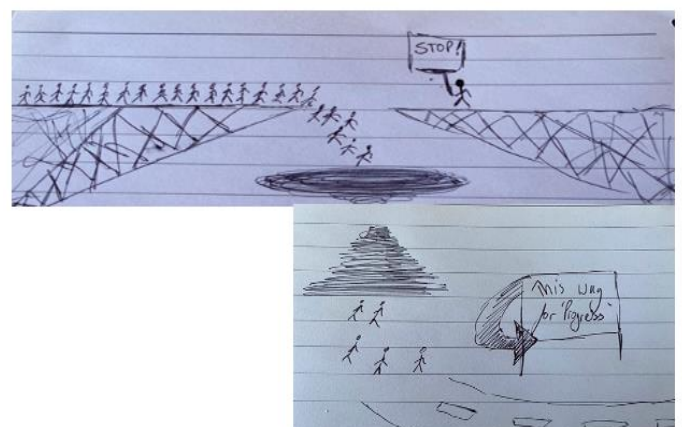


Figure 29, 'Falling through the Vortex', J.Perkins

Through these imaginings I have found that there is an element of Foucauldian thought and in particular the way in which the subjects in my illustrations are represented as 'docile bodies' which 'may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault, 1977:136). In '*Waiting on the Steps*' (see figure 28) and '*Falling through the vortex*' (see figure 29) I deliberately drew the students as stick people without faces or expression to help emphasise the lack of compassion for each, individual. The subjects in this case, students in the English system, are pushed, directed, sifted through 'the delivery chain' (Barber, 2007:85) to the point of 'progress', rather than it being a liberating educational experience, education becomes a source of misery as the constant search for next progression point blinds people from being able to experience the present. Giroux stated in a lecture at Brunel University, London, in 2018 that the purpose of an education is for the students to 'dream of a future that is not their present' but I would say that at present they are not able to have their own dreams as policy makers have developed a system which limits those dreams. From here I find myself looking to Freire and the ability of people to be able to be aware of their own situation and thus liberate themselves. With a system that has an economic aim with a line of 'progress' that is defined, is there room for the individual to realise for themselves or is there a degree of preconstruction? Is the emancipatory aim of education possible or is it the 'Banking education' (Freire, 1970:45) Freire decries. In the background of all of this is the influence of the knowledge-based curriculum that has become the corner stone of the current education system in England and further leans to the notion of banking education.

3.4.6 A core aspect of my method

This section of my thesis is a core aspect of my method as it has shaped my approach and the construction of my methodological framework with the decision making around questions and approach to obtaining empirical data. The visuals also allow the reader to understand where my thinking has come from and why I am approaching this research in this way, which is one the contribution to new knowledge through the originality in approach. These images have been an ever-present part of my research providing the base on which I could return to explore my view and evaluate what I was learning along the way.

3.5 Tension of ‘progress’

The main object of this research is ‘progress’ and the way it has been affected at various points in human history as to what ‘progress’ was, is, and should be. Through time this has created tensions as such understanding has been determined largely by powerful structures as religious and political individuals, groups and alike looked to shape the world of the future through their visions of what should become of civilisation. There have been key moments too where perhaps societal shifts as a reaction to war, plague or famine or revolution through science and industry have challenged the status quo, however in this thesis I argue that for the English Education System the notion of ‘progress’ has been possessed by the political elites. To have such a vision has meant degrading the present or the past to present alternative realities for others to strive towards and an enclosing of the term to quash opposition. When considering the impact on Education this is where pressure for ‘progress’ and the understanding of ‘progress’ impacts on all stake holders which leads to multiple realities in pursuit of a ‘fantasy’. Crotty cites the Marxist perspective ‘The individuals composing the ruling class.... rule as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age. Consequently, their ideas are the ruling ideas of the age’ (Marx, 93:1961). Thus, the idea of ‘progress’ or as I contest the ‘fantasy’ has been enclosed over time and in the English Education System, become a controlling factor. Power over ideas is also affected by power over knowledge and for those in power ‘possession, use and control of knowledge have become their central theme – the theme song of their expertise’ (Saul, 2012:21). It is through their knowledge of production, political power, and infrastructure that they can determine lives of others who fall outside of their ruling classes. Therefore reclaiming ‘progress’ by opening discussion around what ‘progress’ is, can remove control and agitate for a reframing of ‘progress’ in the English Education System, away from one of performativity and control and perhaps something else.

I have argued that Government perceives ‘progress’ as an objective for economic growth and to be competitive in the global marketplace, parent’s, students, teachers share in some of this on a micro level when considering quality of life and employability. From this I argued that there is a tension between stakeholders, as ‘progress’ sits as an idea at the centre but there are competing forces in action as Policy makers try to develop their own sense of ‘progress’, at the same time as teachers. Parents and students meanwhile are navigating their way along the line working towards to the point that is deemed to be ‘progress’ hopeful that there is a reward

awaiting them at the end. From here I also argued that rather than an idea of ‘progress’ there is a ‘fantasy’ at work as ‘futures’ are being imagined by all those involved with the students fantasising about their personal future, the parents with imaginings of what their child’s life will be, teachers promoting values and knowledge along with policy makers using their power to ensure delivery of their agenda. The critical nature of this research is with the way in which those who are enacting the policy of government through the ‘delivery chain’ are succumbing to the central government power. It is through this research and giving voice to professionals that I aimed to challenge that central power and give opportunity to others to define ‘progress’ for the English Education system.

3.6 Participants

To recruit volunteers to participate in the research I reached out using social media and my own professional contacts via email with an initial aim to recruit fifteen or more. In the end I finished with eleven interviews of differing durations but collectively creating around ten hours of material. The participants all held roles in middle or senior leadership and had an experience of leading on policy in a school at departmental or whole school level which had an impact on the age range that I interviewed. Due to the level of experience, it meant I did not capture the voices of leaders below the age of thirty, however I did approach some who would fit into this category, but they did not respond or wish to take part. The age and experience have proven to be important to the study as it has meant that it is possible to understand where there had been change over time and how that impacted on their perspective of ‘progress’. The explanation for being able to reflect in that way is that they have experienced policy shifts and for some changes in government which have impacted on their perception of ‘progress’. Additionally, it also meant that some of the participants were able to reflect on their view by contrasting against their experience as a classroom teacher in contrast to their experiences as a school leader. There is perhaps a peculiarity to the experience as in my own position as a senior teacher I still have a timetable which involves examined groups and therefore have a foot in two camps. In teaching my groups I focus on the data and performance of the students on that micro level and therefore have a degree of compassion for fellow professionals, whilst also being privy to the challenges at the senior level. For my participants this was also the case for most as in most cases they were still working in the classroom as well as holding leadership positions. I was able to get a range of subject specialisms within the sample as well although not from the sciences as the person I had recruited withdrew from the study prior to being interviewed.

Having a range of subjects was important to this study as different subjects have different approaches to developing knowledge and understanding and so impact on perspectives of ‘progress’. Schools are tasked with bringing students into contact with multiple disciplines and so to understand at points what the different disciplines view as their role in ‘progress’ was important to find out. To protect confidentiality, I gave each of the participants pseudonyms rather than coding with initials, this also has the effect of creating a sense of familiarity with the participants for the reader.

3.7 Table 4: Profile of Participants

Name	Age range	Gender	Role	Subject Specialism	School Type
Leon	50-60	Male	Headteacher	Maths	Secondary Foundation Status
Oliver	40-50	Male	Vice Principal	RE	Faith Academy
Ellie	30-40	Female	Head of English	English	Secondary Comprehensive
Lewis	40-50	Male	Headteacher	Economics	Secondary Comprehensive
Helen	50-60	Female	Assistant Head	English/Drama	Secondary Comprehensive
Anna	30-40	Female	Head of English	English	Faith Academy
Kevin	50-60	Male	Assistant Head	History	Independent School
Dean	40-50	Male	Head of Maths	Maths	Secondary Comprehensive
Natalie	40-50	Female	Pastoral Head/Head of Citizenship	Citizenship/English	Secondary Comprehensive
Steve	30-40	Male	Pastoral Head	History	Independent

Heather	30-40	Female	Deputy head	English	Secondary Comprehensive
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The sample had a split of five females to six males, which was important to ensure that there was not a dominant voice from one gender group or the other, likewise with regards the roles held by the participants. Although both headteachers were male, there was a fair representation of leaders at both middle and senior level based on their gender. In presenting my participants in this way I believe I have shared enough of their profile to help the reader understand their background whilst protecting their anonymity as per the BERA guidelines where I have tried to ‘minimise the chances of identification’ (BERA, 2024:23)

One concern I had was over the number of participants and how to understand what the best number of interviews would be to conduct and initially I had planned to hold between 15-20 interviews. I was reassured about this aspect of the research having referred to ‘How many qualitative interviews is enough?’ (Baker, 2012:1) which gives a variety of justifications which helped me to be reassured that I had enough material despite not holding as many interviews as I had originally planned. Baker included in their own paper using a qualitative approach, that they had struggled themselves and suggest that ‘because qualitative research is exploratory by nature, qualitative researchers may not know how much data to gather in advance’ (Baker, 2012:4). Interviewing participants had been part of my MA research where I had done group interviews and then as a paper on the taught section of the Doctoral course, I had conducted an interview with the head teacher on the history of the school. Baker states that ‘both Louisa Passerini and Linda Sandino write about the ways in which one interview is valid within oral history and how single qualitative interviews can produce rich accounts of subjectivity’ (Baker 2012:5) showing how an interview with just one participant can be enough. Mason states that ‘They should regard with utmost suspicion anyone who says that there is a formula for working out the answer (based on ‘population size’ and ‘number of variables’ for example) or that the answer is a straightforward number’ (Baker, 2012:29) and that ‘Sometimes, it is a knee-jerk reaction to simply want to do ‘more interviews’ because that must somehow be ‘better’ (*ibid*). I believe that through the interviews I conducted there was ample material for me to be able to carry out my analysis and so chose not to pursue further interviews with more participants.

3.8 Data collection

To collect the data, I designed the interview so that there would be two parts to it with the first part using an open question ‘What is ‘progress’?’ and for the second part to continue discussing ‘progress’ as part of an unstructured interview responding to the points made by the participants. In asking ‘What is ‘progress’?’ the design was aimed at working as a phenomenological approach so that a light would be shone on their own lived experience. By being such an open question allowed for respondents to talk for as long as they liked on the matter and reach their own view on ‘progress’. It also helped in the analysis to be able to understand the breadth of the view and the impact of policy and performance measures on the shared understanding of the meaning of ‘progress’. It was through the support of my supervisory team that we agreed the second section of the interview should be unstructured but as there were themes and notions that I was looking to pursue this was not phenomenological. In the second phase I looked to understand other aspects of their relationship to the word ‘progress’ and how the participants understood it within their own work setting. There was a degree of risk to this approach as the potential for the first phase to be extremely short became apparent in one of the first interviews that I did but this, I later go on to explain, is perhaps due to the way the English System has presented the notion of ‘progress’. It was my concern that in being distracted with noting or thinking about a next question I would not be able to listen to what was being said and respond in a way that would help to gain insight. The practice of interviewing technique and the support of my peers reassured me that I was able to carry out the interviews in a way that would deliver a meaningful data collection.

It was just prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 that I had begun to plan the interviews and it had been the intention to meet the participants face to face however, with the pandemic it soon became apparent that ‘Zoom’ was going to be the conduit through which the interviews would take place. This was reassuring for me personally when it came to the interview process as well as the recording element meant that some of my concerns over missing points due to needing to take notes were alleviated as I knew I could return to the material more easily. Being online also became a positive part of the experience in that participants were able to choose their location for the interview with some choosing their workplace and others happier to login at home. It also made timing interviews easier as I was able to fit around their schedules much more easily once they had put their children to bed or indeed I my own.

3.9 Online recording – Zoom.

The interviews that I conducted took place during the Covid-19 pandemic and resulted in the use of online interviews through zoom which as mentioned in the previous section bought about the unexpected. My experience of research to that point meant I had been of the view that my interviews would have taken place in person but needing to react to the situation in front of me the decision meant that online was the only option open to me. ‘Online interviews are a viable alternative because researchers can choose from varied communication options and easily talk directly with participants anywhere at any time’ (Salmons, 2022:3). During lockdown where movement and meeting was prohibited, online became the only means available to me and so I had to adapt. What was apparent when I started however was that this method of data collection was still emergent, and one could argue experimental but the purpose for carrying out online was clear as it was the only choice available. Covid-19 is perhaps a turning point in accelerating the use of online video conferencing but there has been consideration of how video or online interviews may provide opportunity long before. Deakin and Wakefield considered the use of Skype stating that ‘video calling provided the research with an opportunity to not just talk to their respondent but see them in real time’ (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014:606), but at the point of their research it was ‘not an attempt to replicate the face-to-face interview, it was more to provide an opportunity to talk to otherwise inaccessible participants’ (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014:607). In my situation the online was a replacement for the face-to-face as the circumstances made ‘face-to-face difficult’ meaning that there was a need for a ‘novel approach’ (*ibid*). Oliffe et al noted one benefit as being that ‘there’s no place like home’ where they ‘sensed a naturalness and spontaneity with participants talking frankly and freely about their experiences and feelings’ (Oliffe et al, 2021:3), and concluded that ‘home environments aided the flow, candour and ultimately the richness of what was said and shared by participants’ (Oliffe et al, 2021:6). Another benefit of Zoom is the cost of travel that disappears, something I had not really considered when I was planning face-to-face interviews. I was able to carry out interviews in multiple places on a given day and across a wider geographical space which without Zoom may not have been as possible. Oliffe et al attest to this as in their research alluding to there being reduced cost as they were ‘operational efficiencies through being able to nimbly reschedule’ (Oliffe et al, 2021:4), something I too had to contend with. Had the interviews been in person and face-to-face such rescheduling had the potential to add costs but maybe even hinder the opportunity to complete the interview itself.

Preparing for the online interview is something I had to learn to do intuitively in many respects but when considering the advice given by Gray et al from whose research '10 recommendations emerged for researchers using zoom' (Gray et al, 2020:1295). Their first recommendation was to 'Test zoom ahead of interview' (Gray et al, 2020:296), which was something I did through experience. Firstly, the sessions at Brunel had moved online and we had used Zoom to meet but my wife's work had switched online and so I was able to trial sending an invite, which meant I met the second and fifth of the recommendations with being able to 'Provide technical information' (*ibid*) and to 'Provide a direct link to meeting' (*ibid*) in advance such as the link and passcode. In doing so it solved the ethical issues of security with regards to who could enter the meeting as ultimately as the host I had control. This did not stop me from being nervous on each occasion however that the link may or may not work and so I joined early each time to ensure I was waiting for the participant and not them waiting for me. At this point in the process, I was also able to take into consideration their tenth recommendation 'Manage the consent processes' (*ibid*) . Prior to the meeting I was able to email them with the consent form for them to return to me in which it explained about the storage of their data and how the interview would be conducted. As well as through the forms I was able to gain consent verbally during the Zoom meeting and could directly explain their right to withdraw at any time and ensure they had fully understood the process. I believe this meant that although I had written consent prior to the interview I was able to 'remain sensitive and open to the possibility that participant may wish, for any reason and at any time withdraw their consent' (Bera,2024:13). I was also able to 'be alert to non-verbal signs that individuals who previously consented to participate may no longer wish to' (*ibid*).

The only challenge I had with one or two of the participants was their technical skills to sign the form electronically and needed to support them. Their fourth recommendation 'Plan for distractions' was something I ensured was negated on my end in multiple ways. One way was using headphones when I was speaking to the participants as they cancelled out any potential noise or distractions making it easier to listen. One of the challenges when interviewing is to be able to sustain focus on what is being said, and to be able to respond when points are made whilst giving full attention to the participant. From my own perspective this was a positive of the experience as by being in a separate room with the headphones there were no distractions. There was also the need to explain to my children what I was doing and to agree times with my wife that would be best to avoid distractions which could have interrupted the flow of the interviews. It may well have been simpler due to the nature of the Covid-19 lockdowns as my

children were accustomed to my wife and I holding work meetings and so my interview slots may have seemed that I was working from their perspective. By explaining to them and agreeing with my wife it meant I could secure recommendation eight ‘Uninterrupted internet connection’ (*ibid*) by agreeing breaks in gaming and streaming of films. Storage of the interviews was also an issue that was relieved through using Zoom via my university login as this meant that the recordings were placed on the university cloud servers and not on my own personal device. Additionally, I was able to offer the participants a copy of the digital file as well as transcripts if they wished so they could check back what they had said. Gray et al also recognise the advantage of ‘secure data generation and storage, personal safety, and cost effectiveness without compromising a meaningful conversation with the participants’ (Gray et al, 2020:1297). Where this article is reassuring is that in much of what they found in their research and in their recommendations is my own experience of carrying out research interviews via Zoom. It was something that I had to learn intuitively and was a key part of the experience that I gained through carrying out research via the zoom platform. An advantage of the circumstances of Covid-19 and lockdown was in some respects that this was the only way for me to conduct the interviews as ‘until recently reluctance to participate in an online interview would have been cited as a disadvantage’ (Gray et al, 2020:1298). My participants were accepting of circumstance and therefore were willing to take part.

Choosing where to conduct the interview and how to dress was something that I had to consider as at the initial point in learning how to use the technology there was the option to blur the background or use a set image. Of note here perhaps, is that now when joining an online meeting many organisations now include a brief of expectations for dress and behaviour which were not included originally. Such innovation perhaps shows how rapidly organisations have had to respond to safeguard all stakeholders when participating in online platforms. For the first interviews I chose a room with a neutral background with my participants in a similar position they were able to choose their own location where they felt most comfortable. Some chose an office whereas one or two chose the comfort of a living room. It was also noticeable from my perspective that there were no interruptions on the end of the participants either which may have been a consequence of interviews taking place during points when people were by and large working from home. Had I been conducting the interviews on school premises or workplaces there may have been interruptions from lesson changeovers, people calling on the phone, whereas no interviews were interrupted. There was also the added advantage of time in that as it was possible to set an exact time to start there was not the problem of myself, being

late to get to an interview but likewise it was also easier to change the start time if needed. The technology also proved easy to use and there were no malfunctions in the recording process either with the sound quality or with participants suffering poor internet connection. Participants were also confident in the use of 'Zoom' as it had quickly become the main way in which they were communicating with teams in their own settings and indeed families.

3.10 Insider Outsider

One of the considerations I needed to consider was my position as an insider of the area of which I was to research as '*Insider research* refers to when researchers conduct research with populations of which they are also members' (Corbin Dwyer, 2009:58) As an insider I was aware that I already had a shared 'identity, language and common experiential base' (Asselin, 2003:100). The concern here is that 'bias and issues unique to insider research can occur that put the trustworthiness or validity of the study at risk' (*ibid*). There is also a potential for 'role confusion when the researcher responds to participants or analyses the data from a perspective other than that of researcher' (Corbin Dwyer, 2009:58). When conducting the interviews, I was aware of how my guise of the researcher and that perception for those who knew me might affect the outcomes. However, Corbin Dwyer explains that there is also a benefit to the familiar in that.

One's membership automatically provides a level of trust and openness in your participants that would likely not have been present otherwise. One has a starting point (the commonality) that affords access into groups that might otherwise be closed to "outsiders." Participants might be more willing to share their experiences because there is an assumption of understanding and an assumption of shared distinctiveness; it is as if they feel, "You are one of us and it is us versus them (those on the outside who don't understand)." (*ibid*)

One of the challenges that is perhaps apparent in this thesis is that I have very much made my own position as an insider quite explicit in sharing my own experiences and insights quite so openly. I do not view this a problematic per se, as it was my intention to consider my own perception throughout in shaping the ontology of myself through the process of carrying out a piece of doctoral research. As mentioned in chapter 1, I perceive that an element of what I am doing could be construed as 'theorised subjectivity' (Letherby et al, 2013:79) as I am using my personal biography as well as asking my participants to share theirs. In this respect the insider

is present in much of the work but when it came to the interviews, I wanted to consider myself as an outsider so that they would be able to share their own views and perceptions. The challenge is that of course depending on who I was interviewing their perception of me and my own of myself were not fixed as ‘The binary implied in the insider/outsider debates, however, is less than real because it seeks to freeze personalities in place’ (Mullings, 1999:340). I was aware of my positionality and how that could be impacted upon by who was in front of me and how when they were talking there would be moments where I was very much an insider due to shared experiences. The importance of being able to present myself was not to create a falsehood that I was a lens with no view on what was being said but ‘instead a desire to create a space during interviews that allows interviewees to share information freely’ (*ibid*). In some respects, school leaders are already adept at sharing their positions through reflective activities in their daily work, but it was important to gain their trust and confidence. For the interviews to be a success in delivering evidence from which I could work I needed the participants to talk and share their own views and so positioning myself was vital to achieving that aim. The BERA guidelines also consider the role of the insider noting that ‘An important consideration is the extent to which a researcher’s reflective research into their own practice impinges upon others’ (BERA, 2024:16) and that ‘dual roles may also introduce explicit tensions in areas such as confidentiality’ (*ibid*). I believe that through being conscious of this consideration throughout the process of data gathering and then analysis I have been able to protect the confidentiality of my participants and to work in way that was mutually respectful.

To position myself as a researcher, not a colleague or peer was in my own view, supported by using ‘Zoom’ to conduct the interviews. Although they were in a familiar setting of their own choosing, i.e., their office or home, the virtual platform created a space that could in some ways be considered neutral. Through needing to accept my invite and through my role as the host for the interview I believe it supported the shift needed that may not have been possible had we met in a school setting for instance. I also believe the experience that I had from my MA and throughout the Doctoral programme at Brunel helped me to be able to play the role of researcher and position myself for the interview. During my MA I had interviewed groups of students and already experienced the feeling of the move from being their teacher to a researcher, and then again when interviewing the headteacher as a part a historical paper on the school. I do not claim that I achieved neutrality to the point of being unquestioningly so, as Ten Have suggests that ‘often interviewers are trying to act in a neutral fashion, but this of course is a rather artificial way compared to ordinary conversation’ (Ten Have, 2012:35).

Where I feel that this is not such an issue is that teachers and those involved with school education are regularly being asked to reflect on practices which could be construed as interviews. Ten Have claims that ‘we live in what has been called an ‘interview society’, in the sense that interviews of various kinds are a common occurrence, an accepted format’ (*ibid*) which supports my own feeling about the process. As an insider of the English School system this I believe helped me with the interviews as by being aware means that interviews did have more of a conversational feel. As part of my own role in work after lesson observations the feedback is conducted with a strong focus on reflection and allowing the teacher that has just been observed to talk. In these situations, there is also the need to be able to ask insightful questions as part of the teacher’s personal development and again I believe this experience as an insider of the system of which I was investigating helped in the interview process. Returning to Asselin’s point that already there was a shared language and method of communication about education which meant that I was able to understand what was being said even if the settings of the participants were different. Considerations of assessment methods, curriculum, pedagogy are all terms that I am familiar with myself, meaning that I was able to listen carefully to what was being said. The problem with familiarity, however, is assumed understanding of what the participant is saying resulting in leading questions to direct to a specific point that I am looking to prove. Asselin also problematises stating ‘These “taken for granted” assumptions limit the researcher’s ability to probe for deeper meaning or understanding of the phenomenon under study’ (Asselin, 2003:100) and those researchers ‘become aware of this when reviewing research notes or transcriptions of taped interviews with study participants’ (*ibid*). I will return to this more when I discuss the way I conducted my analysis of the interviews.

Due to my participants coming from my professional network meant that some of them I had worked with in a professional capacity and at varying stages of my own career as a teacher. Of those two were current colleagues although they had no knowledge of my research prior to me inviting them to take part. I was conscious of how they might perceive me and assumptions they might have had of me having known me but as mentioned before, through professional standards, and the nature of teacher reflection, this dissipated once interviews began. Again, the experience I had when interviewing my previous headteacher meant I had already experienced the sensation of interviewing as an insider, as an employee of the school I was researching, whilst finding my place as an outsider. This is not to dismiss the fact that ‘relations between researcher and researched can throw up sometimes unexpected ethical tensions’ (Brooks et al, 2015:2) in particular power relations. My previous experience of interviewing

my own head teacher had made me aware, however, that by him talking about his own school, I had to accept that there may have been deliberate inclusion and exclusion of detail. In this research the participants were talking on their own terms and not as representatives of their schools however there will still have been some decision making on their part as to what they wanted to discuss or share in the interview. In this decision making there was potentially their consideration of how they wanted to be perceived as professionals with roles of responsibility in schools. Additionally, although there is protection of anonymity in the research they may have opted to emit or alter the way in which they communicated their view to maintain that sense of anonymity and independence from their workplace.

When it came to working on the analysis my positionality was also a consideration as I needed to consider the audience for my work and that as an insider, I would have insights which I might take for granted. To be able to present my analysis and findings I had to work on ensuring that I was as explicit as possible with my words and that I was careful not to impose my own assumptions onto the words of the participants. This also involves reflexivity as 'Being reflexive involves thoughtful analysis, or as Wilkinson (1988) define it, 'disciplined self-reflection'. It encompasses continual evaluation of both our subjective responses (personal reflexivity) and our method of research (methodological reflexivity)' (Finlay, 1998:453) Being reflective in my work on a daily basis I believe this is a skill I have and was able to apply to the research as over my time in education and in studying history, I am at home with ignoring the term bias as I attest to the view that the negative connotations that then allow for the disregard of a perception or view is flawed. Instead I embrace 'the alternative view, adopted by phenomenologists, and social constructionists amongst others' that 'if multiple interpretations of the same event are possible (for example different researchers making different interpretations), it follows that we must positively embrace subjectivity rather than habitually dismissing it as 'bias' (Finlay, 1998:455). In holding this view, I am able to adjust my position in response to what I am reading whilst holding onto the motivations that I had for initiating this research and therefor using my 'own thinking, feeling and interpretations' so that they can be 'valued as primary evidence' (*ibid*).

In this chapter I highlight the way in conducting this thesis I have thought about my positionality and reflexivity but am aware this is apparent in other areas of the research too. Through my own personal stories and journey, I have located myself at the heart of the research and so there is a strong sense of how I am inside the research, but in developing the empirical

aspect through interviewing practitioners involved in delivering the policy agenda there is also the position of outsider.

3.11 Emerging themes

When approaching this thesis there were themes that were becoming evident through my concept drawings, the literature review and the analysis of the transcripts from my participants. When working with the transcripts I tried to use colour coding as themes became apparent (see appendix 6) in the responses which enabled me to start to compare and contrast what the participants were saying in response to the research question. There were three themes which came about through an inductive approach to the findings whilst the fourth it might be argued was deductive as I used my own drawing of the Vortex as a starting point.

In making the claim of using an inductive approach I am mindful of how my own preconceptions and views can be argued as impacting on what came out in the analysis. Indeed, some 'novice qualitative researchers often employ the terms 'inductive' and 'deductive' as if one may do inductive analysis devoid of prior knowledge or literature assistance' (Laari,2005:2). In my own case I believe that through recognising my theorised subjectivity from the outset it is clear that there is an awareness of the relational impact on the work. For the 'inductive approach the researcher discovers recurrent phenomena in the stream of field experiences and finds recurrent relations between them' (Miles et al, 2014:237) which is what I tried to do with my analysis. Through the experience and reading I found recurrent relations in what was being said and helped with the emergence of three of the themes. The credibility of my approach I would argue is through the triangulation with the literature and in the case of this research the concept drawings. To try to maintain distance and I did attempt to use NVivo which I explain more about in the next section but found I was better placed to use colour coding and revisit the transcripts. The process was carried out whereby 'codes and categories are not predetermined but are instead identified and named as the researcher reads through the data' (Bingham,2023:2) which is what I tried to do. It was after repeatedly engaging with the research that emerging themes could then be used as propositions which 'are similar concepts to the concept of hypothesis in quantitative work' (ibid) and allowed for the organising of the data. Those propositions came from the three themes that had developed and allowed me to begin to organise the responses as such. One might argue that this is then a shift to a more deductive approach but 'induction and deduction are dialectical rather than mutually exclusive

research procedures' (Miles et al, 2014:211) which helps to support the approach that I took. The fourth theme that I looked at was in relation to the drawing of 'The Vortex' and therefore I was deliberately looking for where the responses met with the proposition I had developed. This was a deductive reading of the data as my findings were 'were based on what' I as a researcher 'deductively assumes may be present in the data. It was my assumption that in my data there was going to be evidence to support the concept drawing and the elements that I had built around it.

The theme of 'Measuring Academic progress' came to the fore as the first consideration that was given in each case was to this aspect and highlighted the influence of performance measures. When the participants responded they had all begun with an explanation of how they measured 'progress' which I was then able to find links to the literature and why I had decided to look at 'progress' from the outset. I would argue that this was still inductive as the question I asked was open and made no reference to performance measure, yet it was the starting point for them. With regards to the second of the themes which was 'Progress as a matter of time and movement', this theme emerged when analysing the way in which the participants were describing organisation of the system and how they saw the 'journey' of the students. In addition, they also began to talk about being at higher points or levels which again linked to movement. This theme I was able to link to my concept drawing of 'The Vortex' and how the system is time oriented with a finishing point with the students journeying towards it along the path. The third theme 'Knowledge, Skills or both' became evident when the participants were trying to explain what they were looking for as evidence of a gain for the students they work with. To organise these themes, I tried to take sections of what they said and placed them into a table (see appendix 7) which allowed me to compare what was being said. However, once I had these themes, I found that what actually helped me was to return to read the sections in context rather than the isolated in the table as sometimes there was something that was said which helped contextualise the response. In this chapter I explain further how it was that I came to organise the responses in this way and what I learnt about how to conduct the research.

Supervision meetings were also instrumental in helping me in this aspect of organisation where I was able to explore the themes and discuss why they were emerging and why they should then be a focus. There were points where I was trying to work towards a minutia of detail that was perhaps unnecessary, which I explain more with reference to an attempt to use NVivo. Through the triangulation of the coding, supervision and re-reading of the interviews I was

reassured that the three themes I outline here were evident in the selection of material and that I was able to then link them to the literature and my concept drawings.

3.12 Analysis

In carrying out the analysis I tried to use NVivo to select the key words and frequencies to try to divide the analysis into themes and from there to turn them into a ‘vortex’ shape from which to work from. My reasoning for trying this was that I was concerned about how I might read too much into what the participants were saying and in many respects was looking for an objective instrument to work with. This was not overly helpful as an approach as it took me away from the spirit of the research that I was trying to develop. As mentioned, when I discussed my annotations earlier evidence and the use of evidence in education, particularly in attempting to be, ‘scientific’, concerns me and I found myself involved in what I am attempting to step aside from. In writing this thesis I have decided to explain this approach and findings here to justify my next steps and how I then carried out the analysis looking at the interview transcript. When I put the words into table format I found it difficult visually to see the importance of the words and themes as they were listed and I was drawn to the numbers rather than the words themselves. When considering how I had begun the research with the image of the ‘vortex’ I opted to arrange the words starting with the most frequent in the centre and then work my way out. This causes me to limit the number of words that I was able to use in order to fit them on the diagram I was building which I felt was problematic once I had completed the task as sometimes it was the less frequent words that were perhaps more interesting and more symbolic of resistance. At the centre the words were very much as expected in that the word ‘progress’ and variations of it such as progression, thought, knowledge dominated and provided the central point. I then started to try to colour code the words in order to help with the visual representation but this was all too time consuming and preventing me from engaging with the interviews and what I considered to be the more substantial part of the research. I have included this example to help exemplify this issue that I am trying to explain in which I wanted to avoid attaching too much significance or importance to singular terms or to create unnecessary word groups. For the interview with Leon ‘school’ resides at the centre with ‘know’ and ‘progress’ coming next working out towards the extremities (*see figure 30*). When I looked at this ‘vortex’ I understood what was central to Leon’s thinking but in a very remote way that lacked the explanation or depth that I felt I could achieve when looking more deeply at the conversation that took place between us in the interview. In colour coding I found myself

for me through out the writing of this thesis has been just that, writing, and what this attempt at analysis did was to kick start my writing and allow for me to express myself along with interpreting the data that I had acrued through the interviews. What it also showed me was the style of writing that would enable me to communicate with greater clarity what I was understanding from the interviews and how it connected to the literature. I had landed on this style having read *Learning to Labor* (1977) by Paul Willis as I had found the book engaging in the tone and style of writing as although clearly academic it was also accessible. As a researcher I would like to believe that this is an area that I can contribute to without having to resort to a reductionist approach. Through self publication in blogs, social media and other such platforms more and more material that has not been edited or peer assessed is available and is having an impact on education. Some of these bloggers garner great following for example Greg Ashman, who on Twitter (now known as X) has over twenty thousand followers and has published books. The challenge I found with writing was the confidence to fully explore the area I had chosen without being concerned with rejection, hence the approach I adopted was to help me in this respect. Establishing a voice as a researcher so that I could hear and understand my self was important to me when reading back and carrying out edits of the work. Through this I believe it helped me when I needed to present my work at conference and when it came to explaining my position in supervision meetings.

In my method I also attempted colour coding the transcripts (see appendix 3 and appendix 4) which I found useful to a degree in supporting my reading of them. It made themes such as movement and measurement stand out on the page, which enabled me to then focus on what was being said. Later on I found that trying to put the quotes from the participants in to table format to organise them against the emerging themes was also helpful (see appendix 5) as I could start to identify similaritites and differences in their responses. However, once I got further into the analysis and the write up phase I found myself using these formats less and less, instead going back to the actual transcripts for insight. I found that by being concerned about where detail fitted in a table, or the colour needed, I was losing the focus on my research and spending time that I could use more fruitfully elsewhere. It was also that the more time I spent putting the pieces together the more I began to work directly with the thesis itself, moving responses around and then adding the sub headings to help add direction. If I was to repeat the process I think it would in some ways be slightly simpler, in the way in which improvements in transcription with built in AI, would maybe be able to select themes more quickly. However,

I think by having to continually read the transcripts to decipher my participants thoughts I became to know and understand them well.

3.13 Themes

The research analysis evolved into four main themes which I then worked through with the interviews, linking back to my initial premise and the notion of ‘progress’, the literature and during supervision meetings. When I reflect on this aspect of the research I believe that conversations around what I was finding and how I had presented them was part of this process. My first work through the data as mentioned in the preceding chapter was key to the way in which I was able to engage with supervision as in sharing my ideas the team were able to challenge my thinking and raise questions which then resulted in reflection. It was through this reflection and by linking back to the drawings that I had done I was able to process the data from the interviews and make decisions about which theme I felt they were representing. One of the challenges to working this way was that I had created a document of close to thirty thousand words that I then needed to work through again to select and move the information around. The benefit of this was that I had developed a deeper understanding of each participant and was able to recognise where I felt their views were strongest and therefore most relevant to the overall research. As previously mentioned I came to the three main themes through an inductive approach and the fourth through a deductive approach using colour coding and the use of tables when reviewing the responses of the participants.

3.13.1 Measuring academic ‘progress’

Measuring academic ‘progress’ was the a theme that became apparent especially given the strong focus on performance and accountability in the English system the lived experience would be affected. What, how and why was the understanding and the way in which that measurement legitimised their actions was also apparent in the interviews. Knowing the impact of their work and being able to justify themselves was key as leaders to help them to do their best by their students. The theme also raised interesting views around the concepts of ‘intelligence’, ‘ability’ and ‘attainment’ as it was sometimes unclear which was being referred to. What this also raised was the notion of predestination which ‘some are predestined to salvation, the others to damnation’ (White, 2006:36) as a system that looks to divide and organise the people who are participating. When rephrasing White’s quote it could be said that in education predestination is that ‘some are predestined to succeed and others to fail’. In this

respect it can be applied to the students themselves, teachers, the school or even to government as the system itself is set up in this way. The history and tradition of testing along with considerations of intelligence have been discussed earlier in this thesis along with the literature. For those who were behind the building of the system these considerations were central to their philosophical stance and legitimisation of their actions. For Burt being able to separate out undesirables, influenced by the eugenicists in a quest for what they perceived to be a better future. Through their work today there is still that residue of intelligence testing and language colouring measurement and performativity which those leading in education are asked to negotiate.

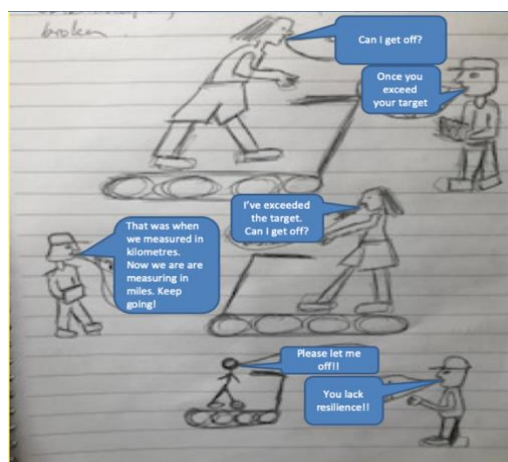


Figure 32, 'Treadmill of 'progress', J.Perkins

I returned to my drawing of the treadmill (*see figure 32*) in consideration of the measurement and the testing infrastructure and the way in which performance indicators had become central to understanding of what constituted success. A system of performance of the type that exists in the English system delivers a system of shaming which 'is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed' (Brown, 2015:46). For young people who do not achieve the baseline measures or those who do not reach the highest grades the system highlights, solidifies and certifies their flaws. If I reflect on my own certifications, I carry the ignominy of getting a grade D for maths at GCSE and needing to repeat the examination to prove that I was not flawed. In my practice I am party to measures such as setting and selection into Sixth Form and am aware of how students I have taught feel when they have not met the criteria. If students in a school, feel shame with regards to the set in which they find themselves in then it can have a damaging impact on their school experience and opportunities. 'Shame is highly correlated with addiction, violence, aggression, depression, eating disorders and bullying' (*ibid*) which one might argue is perhaps the feeling that those who find themselves

labelled as failing feel as part of the education system and thus finding themselves in life situations that perpetuate that sense of shame. Through league tables and performance measures teachers and head teachers are drawn into this feeling as well with the treadmill running continuously to assess the system. Where this theme became important was in understanding how the professionals navigated such feelings and sought to find celebration in measurement and the opportunities that it provides through qualification. One could argue that any sense of empowerment is a 'fantasy' in that 'empowerment of teachers is contingent upon teachers taking greater responsibility and accepting their subordination to the market and the preferences of parents as consumers. So, whilst teachers feel empowered through a loosening of legal and regulatory controls of the state, this is a distraction for the deepening control of education by the logic of responsabilisation' (Wright, 2012:290). Furthermore the 'logic of self-esteem allows the teacher to feel as though they are in control of their work' and 'yet self-esteem is simply another logic which helps to extenuate a 'fantasy' of empowerment. In order to feel empowered teachers must submit themselves to a gruelling regime of self-assessment' which means a 'regime is set by the terms of the neoliberal policy discourse, articulated by government and policed by the market mechanisms that the discourse emphasises and empowers' (Wright, 2012:291). So this section was built from the experiences and perceptions that were shared and how they as professionals believed that they and their students were affected by the system and regime of measurement.

3.13.2 'Progress' as a matter of time and movement

'Progress' as a matter of time and movement' was a theme that came out in the analysis of the interviews as all the participants showed consideration of 'progress' in this way. Time was rooted in the way in which the organisation of the education system in England is arranged and the number of years students have before they sit their qualifications. Space and movement very much came through the idea of the educational journey which in my own starting point and the way in which there is a sense of travel to the experience of the students. The view of the journey which has a shared sense of travel through education and in recent years seen the visual representation of curriculum's as journeys through a subject. Where the journey is of interest to me is that it is almost exclusively portrayed as in one direction with no mechanism to turn back or make a diversion. The strength and rigidity of the English system means there is only a forward movement that has been constructed with more in common to the Roman roads. I return here to 'The Vortex' with the long road leading to the end point (*see figure 33*).

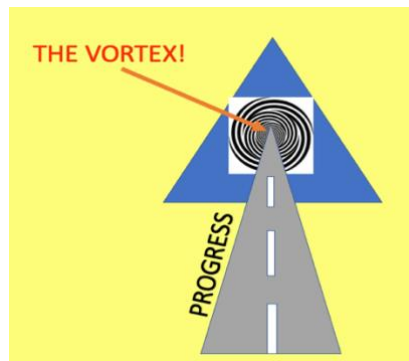


Figure 33, 'The Vortex' J.Perkins

As in my image the road journey's to a point where by it finishes with perhaps a new horizon in the distance with another long road laying out in front or for those who the system has failed perhaps a shelf and the end of the earth. An alternative way to visualise the educational journey could well be as that of a stream or river with the students swept along it towards their destination. Streaming in education, references to 'mainstream', gives a flowing sense to what is taking place with the evolution of the students overtime completed with them finding their legs and being able to find their way to shore. Stobart references Tawney's 'Tadpole philosophy' and that 'one day the more fortunate of the species will one day shed their tails, distend their mouths and stomachs, hop nimbly onto dry land and croak addresses to their former friends on the virtues by means of which tadpoles of character and capacity can rise to be frogs' (Stobart, 2008:13). The examination system in England replicates this aforementioned natural phenomenon as in finding their 'croak' it could be construed those that have made it to the shore are in control yet those who have not continue to be swept down stream. This theme is also rooted in the policy makers role as well in that the points of destination are determined by the central government and thus are restricted to time. Through supervision there was often discussion around the notion of time and how 'progress' was wrapped up in such an understanding. This meant that through the literature, the interviews and my supervision there was a consensus that there is a policy or procedure that determines what happens next which is linked to time and so this theme was one that needed to be addressed.

3.13.3 'Is 'progress' measured as Knowledge, skills or both?'

'Knowledge, skills or both' was the next theme that I separated out of the interviews. In the most recent Ofsted framework it states that 'The end result of a good, well-taught curriculum is that pupils know more and are able to do more' (Ofsted, 2019:3) which has led to an increase

in focus on aspects such as retrieval. Being able to demonstrate knowledge and increased knowledge has been a key focus of government policy particularly with regards to the influence of ED Hirsch. What is also notable however, is what White points to with the influence of Puritanism and religious belief connected to knowledge and as mentioned in this thesis with the 'History of the idea of 'progress'. For Nick Gibb, and his contemporaries Hirsch has replaced Ramus as the provider of the 'logical maps' of 'what to teach and how to teach it' (White, 2006:115) with the Puritans using 'Ramist logic not to promote free thought but to show the one true path' (*ibid*). The expectation of the Knowledge rich curriculum restrains teachers and students, who although share in the aspiration to know and do more, find there is little room for the questioning and wondering that might lead to free thought. In other words there is such a canon of knowledge that when forks in the road appear and the opportunity to deviate appears they need to be ignored to ensure the singular journey is completed. I present a view that is pessimistic but this is the view I hold and have shared in this thesis as the path to 'progress' as designed by English education system is built on this logic. A religious feel to education in England can be argued due to the historical links as laid out in the literature review where I referenced White when considering 'The ideological roots of testing' (White,2006) Michael Gove a committed christian, who whilst Justice Minister stated 'his Christian faith informs his prison policies' (Farley, 2016) was the key architect at the start of the Conservative reforms in education. One might begin to consider this more deeply and tie such attitudes and beliefs about knowledge and education to his upbringing in the Church of Scotland and more latterly with the Church of England. Linking this to the explanation that White gave to the history of education and knowledge with the Puritan and Presbyterian influences of the 17th and 18th Centuries one could argue that religion had and still has a 'feel' in education.

The challenge over knowledge, skills or both is present as most of the participants, if not all, had taught whilst New Labour was in power and the version of education that had been presented at that stage was concentrated on both knowledge and skills. As mentioned previously where I discussed Neo Liberal reforms and the rise of New Labour in the reforms to compete in the knowledge economy, there was a drive for schools to be working on knoweldge and skills. A move away from the perceived traditional academic system towards one that was multi faceted and would develop a workforce steeped in the knoweldge and skills to maintain a competitive position in the world markets. In the responses there was the sense of how the participants had needed to straddle from one set of principles and ideas to the next and how this too had coloured their view of 'progress' in education.

3.13.4 'Through the vortex'

The fourth and final theme was to look at 'progress' 'Through the vortex'. A part of this thesis was to consider the way in which 'fantasy' impacts on the decisions made by those involved in education and how an element of 'progress' was to be able to do that. Returning to the notion of the educational journey suggestions of tickets and real world comparing the state of being educated to a limbo or reflection came through the analogies and considerations of the participants. This theme came from a deductive approach as it was from my drawing of 'The Vortex' that I had begun and so when it came to my analysis, I had this theme in mind. Education can be an exercise in the abstract with meaning sought and shared in the classroom between the teacher and students, involving fantasies as to how such learning may be used or have relevance. Fantasies about where students will go when they complete their education, work they will do, lifestyles they will lead are all part of the opportunity that comes from working with potential. What the participants show is how the work they are carrying out affects those fantasies and helps them to create them.

I return to 'Following the path' (see figure 34) at this juncture as the recent Conservative education policies are cited by Clarke as being involved in creating educational fantasies and in particular when considering the white paper 'Educational, Excellence, Everywhere' which 'conjures up the sense of reaching the rainbow's end – of achieving a harmonious and 'full' state of affairs in which failure, scarcity and disadvantage have become a thing of the past' (Clarke, 2030:156) .

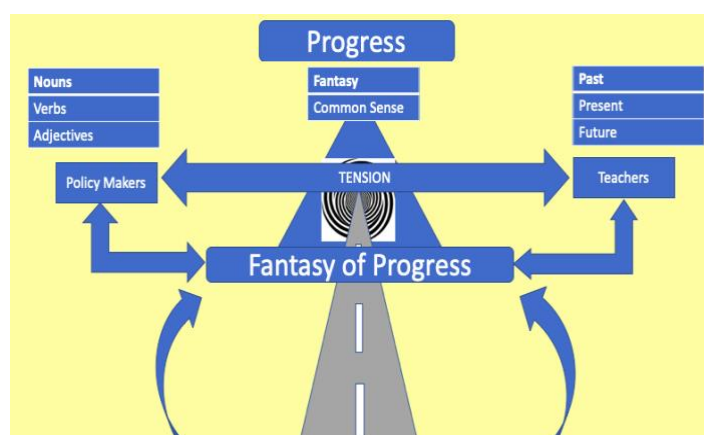


Figure 34, Following the Path' J.Perkins

Underpinning such 'fantasy' there is the involvement of all in other fantasies for example of inclusion where 'the White paper claims to serve the interests of 'all children' impartially'

(Clark, 2020:159) yet ‘practice of encouraging aspiration on the one hand, alongside a commitment to a ruthless form of competition that takes no account of structural inequalities’ (Clarke, 2020:160). All need to travel the same road, all are driven to the same point, sold on the ‘fantasy’, yet perhaps all aware that on arrival at the destination not all will match that ‘fantasy’. This theme came about through the literature review as well as the findings and supervision meetings were noting that a ‘fantasy’ of what was to come and how the process of working towards ‘progress’ might be perceived.

3.14 Conclusion Method

Throughout this section I have shown how I approached the research and the methods that I employed. At the centre of the method was my use of the drawings that I had made as they were very much how I developed my thinking and made sense of what I was learning from the literature. In making strong use of my supervision sessions, I was able to develop the approach to the analysis of the data and support the research questions that I was asking.

4 Analysis and findings

In this chapter there is a presentation of my findings where I have broken down the analysis into four areas of ‘Measuring Academic ‘progress’, ‘progress’ as a matter of time and movement’, ‘Is ‘progress’ measured through knowledge, skills or both?’ and lastly ‘progress’ through the ‘vortex’. Each of these themes was decided in response to what came through the interviews with the participants but also through the supervision process and literature review. As explained in the methodology chapter the themes that I focus on emerged through engagement with the participants interviews and the transcripts. In the initial phase once I identified that there were responses relating to measurement and performance data, I began to colour code the transcripts and added some of the key comment to a table in order to group them (see appendix 6 and appendix 7). It was once I had grouped and arranged some of these responses that I was able to reflect back on the literature that I had reviewed along with the concept drawings. This supported me in the writing phase as I was able place the responses within the broader context of this thesis and the focus on ‘progress’. The fourth theme that I have included in the findings was predetermined through my drawing of ‘The Vortex’ as this was a starting point for my own interest in ‘progress’. Throughout this thesis there is a concern for ‘what happens next?’ once the journey has been completed and the focal point reached. Through the research I have attempted to identify what the perception of ‘progress’ is that the school leaders hold and what they think the ‘next’ is. The drawings that I have done help to map the concepts as well showing the links between the responses and the wider research that I have attempted to carry out. Throughout this section I have used the drawings to highlight and exemplify how what the participants are saying fits within the identified themes.

In the analysis I respond to what the participants were saying and explore my own reactions in noting how they resonate with me and my own experiences within the education system. Whilst working through bring my drawings into the conversation to continue the links to what I set out to establish from the start of this thesis. In doing so I have also sustained the links to the idea of ‘fantasy’ and the ways in which policies are present in the answers even though they may be implicitly mentioned by the participants. What I believe that helps the reader to comprehend is how moments in policy have impacted on the perceptions and practices of the school leaders who took part in this study.

4.1 Measuring Academic ‘progress’.

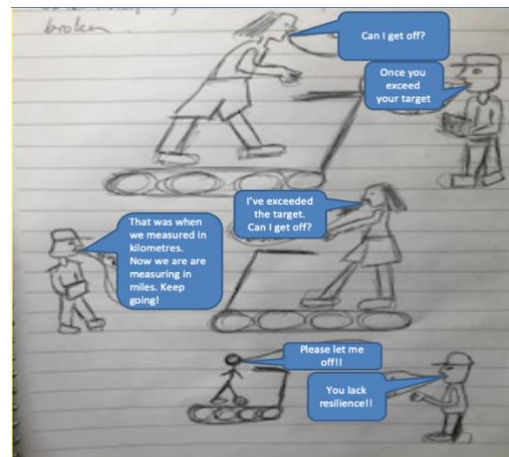


Figure 35, 'Treadmill of 'progress' J.Perkins

Returning to my initial drawing of the ‘Treadmill of ‘progress’ (see figure 34) this section was marked by how the metrics provided by instruments and systems were important to how the participants explained their view of ‘progress’. Each talked about the metrics they used and how they thought they applied to the students’ performance. There were also moments where some participant’s tried to resist such a performative view and challenge the way in which the measures play such a role in their perception of ‘progress’. This theme emerged from the participant’s responses as each in turn began by expressing ‘progress’ as a performative measure which was established via a baseline. When analysing the responses, it was a concern for ‘progress’ as a measure of performance and who was responsible for setting that focal point for which the students, the school and the teachers were to work towards. Later on, I was able to triangulate this through the literature with particular reference to the culture of performativity that permeates through the English Education System.

To determine how to measure ‘progress’ when considering academic ‘progress’ there were varying views about what constituted the baseline and what indeed presented as ‘progress’. The need to create a focal point for the students in their studies, the institution in its work, for league tables to present to parents to support their preferences for places and for government to be able to present ‘progress’ and impact of its policies were all bound up in this discussion. Through the established performance measures the performance of teachers in the classrooms has been under scrutiny and the lived experience of the participants in my research spans across this period. Each of them has been subjected to performance reviews which has taken into consideration the results of their students but, in their leadership, positions put them in the

space where they have needed to play the part of subjecting others to the same. Such an understanding may be attributed to a ‘very public technology of performance – made up of league tables, national averages, comparative and ‘progress’ indicators, Ofsted (office for standards in education) assessments and benchmarks’ which ‘are intended to instil into schools what is called a performance culture’ (Ball et al, 2011:514). In this thesis my concern is that ‘progress’ has become wrapped up in the performance culture and given a metrical measure as an instrument to fulfil policy fantasies such as parental empowerment and school choice. In this section of my analysis the participants reflected on ways to measure academic ‘progress’ often starting with how they ‘baseline’ the students in their care through to what they consider to be marks of success. In this chapter there is a reflection, of the conversations I had with the participant’s and attempt to summarise their perceptions of their lived experience.

4.1.1 Leon and metrics

Leon at the time of the interview was a head teacher in West London and had overseen the school as the head for 18 years and had led the school through various curricular changes in response to government policy. Leon also worked as a school improvement consultant working with other schools on how to improve performance and leadership at all levels. In his opening response Leon explained how baseline data was established in his setting linking to Key Stage 2 data. Leon suggested that this was not enough and so also uses the Middle Years Information System (Midyis), with his perception that his school can get a clearer view of the start point. The Centre for Evaluating and Monitoring (CEM), University of Durham who developed the Midyis claim that ‘accurately measuring a child’s potential is an invaluable tool in understanding and responding to their individual educational needs’ (CEM, 2022), through the use of ‘diagnostic assessments that help inform teachers where interventions may be helpful to improve pupil outcomes’ (*ibid*). Leon promotes this method of establishing the baseline as they compare the primary school experience,

But also, we use Midyis, from the CEM (Centre for Evaluating and Monitoring of the University of Durham.) And what that helps us is give a, an assessment of the child's baseline, regardless of prior education. If John and Leon went to two primary schools, Leon was at a really, really high-flying primary school, John was in a failing primary school. And they both came out to the National Curriculum score of, I don't know 105 in Maths and English and the various bits is that students the same baseline and my argument has always been that probably not because, you know, the circumstances of being in school,

obviously, the family background will come into it a little bit as well. So that's why we use the Midyis which is a more cognitive based assessment as well.

Here the justification is that the Midyis helps to establish a truer image of potential. At a simple level the focus here could be construed as the technocratic approach to education with the assumption that the impact of family background and culture can be smoothed out with the correct mode of testing. As a headteacher Leon is making a policy decision on baseline data with which he is looking to use the data to sterilise the wider context of the child and create an environment where his teachers look at the potential based on the results of the cognitive tests. Leon came into headship in 2003 and had been a senior leader shortly after New Labour came into power and his take on the importance of data would have been influenced by this period of policy development. A cornerstone of New Labour was 'Deliverology which:

According to Barber the key elements of 'deliverology' are the use of good data. Setting targets and trajectories, consistent, regular, and frequent stock-taking(reporting), figuring out the 'Delivery Chain' and tracking 'progress' on a regular basis (Ball et al, 2015:515).

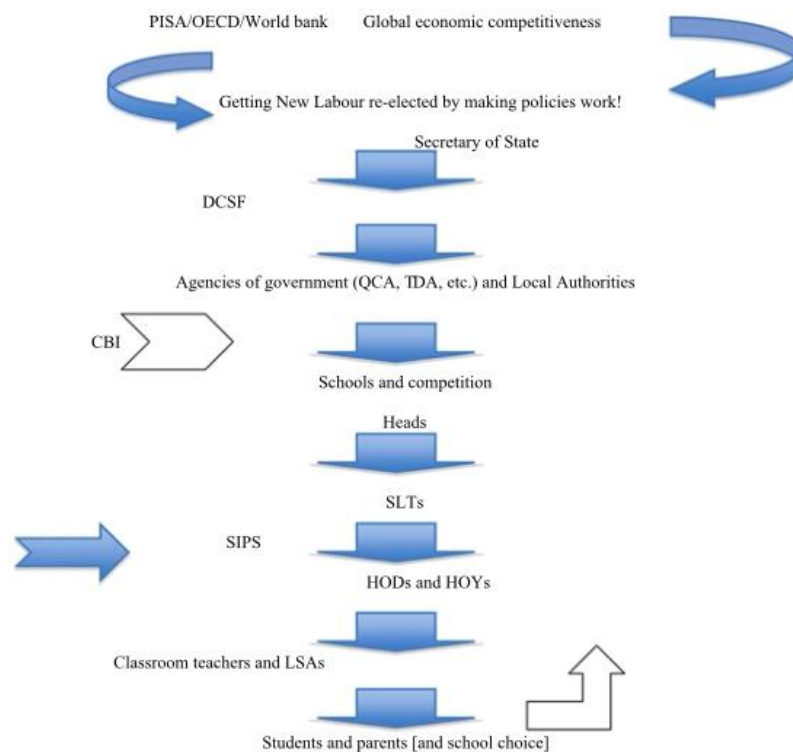


Figure 36, The 'delivery chain'; passing on the pressures to perform (Ball et al, 2011:515)

Ball created a flow chart (see figure 36) to demonstrate how the system was 'passing on the pressures to perform' (Ball et al, 2011:515), with each phase of the chain sharing the

responsibility down to the bottom before resting ultimately with the students and parents. In my own sense of the historical there seems little to differentiate from the way the feudal system of the Middle Ages functioned, with each stratum of society connected through a chain of responsibility. I would argue that school leaders need to act as the Knights and Barons of the past by gaining tribute from the work force and students to fulfil the aims and ambitions of the ruling classes through the policy makers. Some might argue that to fulfil the demands of the system there can be the feeling that it is uncaring. Within Ball's own article one teacher commented that '[E]very child doesn't matter, what matters is getting A to C grades above a certain percentage (Neil, Wesley, English) (Ball et al, 2012:513). The 'Every Child Matters' agenda to which the participant in Ball's research is referring to, was a flag ship Labour policy and there is a sense of irony in this statement as clearly Ball's participant does not recognise the purported aim of the policy. Ball suggests that through having a focus on standards 'Students are objectified as talented, borderline, under-achieving, irredeemable etc' (Ball et al, 2012:518). In suggesting 'Every Child Matters', there seems to be 'the relativist 'fantasy' which is 'marked by terms as progressive, child centred, egalitarian, left wing and others' (Wilson, 1979:31). Through the delivery chain however, and the approach to school league tables, 'success will be something easily quantified or measured, perhaps something to be reduced to a set of skills or performances' (*ibid*) which is the Behaviourist 'fantasy'. In the presentation of education in this way it could be suggested that both the Relativist and behaviourist fantasies of Wilson are presented simultaneously.

In America there was the policy of 'No Child Left Behind' a plan which 'promised a new era of high standards, testing and accountability in which not a single child would be overlooked' (Ravitch, 2010:93). Such promises make strong political visions that at face value cannot be argued with as who would support a policy entitled 'one third left behind', but the means to fulfil such promise can lead to centralised policy based on performative targets. For the 'NCLB' there were threats to school funding through sanctions as in Texas 'any school that did not make adequate progress for every subgroup towards the goal of 100 percent proficiency would be labelled a school in need' (Ravitch, 2010:97). I would argue that in this example is the behaviourist fantasy being bought into reality through measurement and punishment via education policy decisions, a feature of neo-liberalism.

In the response from Leon, it is evident how the professionals need to work between the lines as they are pulled between the two with the suggestion that by using technology there can be

the establishment of equity through a metrical outlook with other social factors overlooked. Leon as a head teacher is trying to establish the ‘good data’ and to support the work of his institution as from this data students’ ‘progress’ can be mapped and planned for. Whether this is educationally helpful as an idea or indeed even possible is not the consideration here when looking at ‘progress’ but more of a recognition of the way in which schools are expected to be able to measure the varying groups within and to show comparison. An example would be with regards to economic income and students in receipt of Pupil Premium compared to those who are not. Pupil Premium ‘provides funding to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in state-funded schools in England’ (DfE, [2025](#)) with a funding criteria stating that;

Pupil premium funding is allocated to eligible schools based on the number of: pupils who are recorded as eligible for free school meals, or have been recorded as eligible in the past 6 years (referred to as Ever 6 FSM) children previously looked after by a local authority or other state care, including children adopted from state care or equivalent from outside England and Wales (DfE, [2025](#))

For example, a student who had been in receipt of free school meals but ceased to be in year 5 would count under the measure of pupil premium up to and including Y10 as part of the that commitment to school budgets.

Schools are inspected and results of different groups can be highlighted as a cause for concern and so in Leon’s estimation the process of the Midyis helps to set an expectation which he believes ignores the social difference. More complex is that for ‘John’ as identified by Leon, to have succeeded in the failing primary school with the baseline score to match that of the ‘high-flying school’ suggest John’s potential is even greater than Leon’s. Therefore, the Midyis test gives the opportunity to compare the potential of the two in a new context and may provide an alternative picture. Through the Midyis and by establishing an alternate data set which he believes eliminates potential bias is Leon’s way of dealing with this conundrum and establishing a baseline from which to measure ‘progress’. There is an acceptance of the system however, as although appearing to recognise the success of ‘John’, Leon chooses the word ‘failing’ to label another school setting. The language around schools as succeeding or failing is wrapped up in the language of performativity as ‘neoliberalism requires and enacts a ‘new type of individual’, that is a ‘new type of teacher and headteacher’ formed within the logic of competition’ (Ball and Olmedo, 2013:88). The term ‘failing’ is also integrally linked to New

Labour as ‘a recurrent subject of policy and popular media’ (Ball, 2017:131) and given the period of which Leon’s own career, as a senior school leader including his headship covers, to communicate his perception in this way there is evidence of the impact of policy. Clarke sees such a perception as what.

We might also consider the cruelly optimistic promotion of a culture of success, under-pinned by a belief that all can succeed, and everyone can be a winner, in a context where university places and well-paid jobs are limited by the structures of the economy and in which one school’s or one student’s success must inevitably be accompanied by another’s failure (Clarke, 2020:160).

Leon is not only aware of the data and performance of his own school but also that of the schools from which he draws his students and through the metrics as determined by the system of delivery. Ball defined performativity stating ‘Performativity is a technology, a culture, a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (Ball, 2010:216). Being recognised as failing results in sanctions against schools and school leaders are aware of what such sanctions might mean for their own careers and so are bound up in the system and therefore incentivised to use such systems and metrics with students. Thus, ‘progress’ of schools and the need to have a clear baseline from which to work is tied to performance and ‘the rationality of performativity is presented as the new common sense’ (Ball and Olmedo, 2013:89), further supporting my own assertion that the behaviourist ‘fantasy’ is evident.

4.1.2 Steve using CATs.

Steve’s school uses CATs. data to support with target setting something he questions with regards to the baseline it creates from which to measure ‘progress’.

You know, you can get students who do brilliantly well in their CAT scores. And that sets them incredibly high target grades for all subjects, whether it's Art, or PE or something which they, they find significantly more difficult. And there is a bit of an issue with that, I think in terms of monitoring ‘progress’, because some people's ‘progress’ is set unrealistically high, based on those initial scores. And equally, some people's ‘progress’ I think is set lower than it should be, you know, they might come in at a low, they might come in at quite a low level. And it can be quite hard.

Steve questions the use of the metrics and the impact they have on the students and the targets they are set, in effect perverting the focal point of ‘progress’ for them and for the teachers who

are, as he puts it, '*answerable for those*'. In stating this I mean that the student as an individual is in some way lost in the translation of the data and although CATS are based on a wealth of evidence and have been used for a long period of time for Steve there is perhaps an ethical question around what using such data does. Through this there are competing pressures, firstly on the student as they are set academic targets that they are then expected to achieve and then secondly on the teacher who may well have their performance judged on the extent to which those students meet those targets. The planned trajectory of the students is what Steve is questioning and the extent to which using a test such as CATS is helpful to him and to his students in them understanding what the focal point of 'progress' should be.

There is the use of a system that is outside of the control of policy makers by institutions that Leon and Steve are connected to and is in essence given greater weight than the information that has been received from the primary schools on the way the students have 'progressed in the first years of their education. Both systems use testing and data to make predictions about the potential the students have so that the school can in effect create the line of 'progress' for the student to follow. These tests are not repeated and there is no return to the test which may show 'progress' in what has been tested at the point of entry to secondary school. The test uses none of the rubrics, knowledge or skills that make up the component parts of the school curriculum and yet they are given credence when it comes to establishing the baseline. Many schools use the Fischer Family Trust Aspire dashboard to establish the baseline and set targets for academic 'progress' using value added and contextual value-added data. This data is also used to carry out the school self-evaluation, plan for Ofsted as well as a performance measure for the headteacher or principal. In 2013 Brighouse wrote 'The use of data about pupil performance is now the key starting point for school accountability and for school improvement' (Brighouse, 2013:65), attributing FFT data as 'giving 'broad-brush target setting for pupils' (*ibid*). It is from these targets that schools measure 'progress' not only in isolation but against national figures to understand if they are making 'progress' as an institution as well as their pupils as individuals. 'These produce day-to-day 'pressures' for and 'awareness' of and a 'focus' on 'standards', as a new meta-narrative of schooling as performances' (Ball et al, 2015:515), How those standards are applied in different subject areas and for the teachers in those areas to be able to set targets and track their students was the concern for those I interviewed.

Steve questions the validity of the testing on children and the impact it has in neglecting to consider barriers that the children might be facing, *'it might just be in terms of organisation, starting off, which will inform their academics later, can they come in? can they get settled quickly? Can they get their books out?'* It could be surmised that there are other aspects to the children that are important to consider that the data in tries to blend out. As children mature and become accustomed to what is expected of them some of these barriers or obstacles dissipate meaning that the low expectation of them is impactful, as less might be expected of them in the first place. I believe that what Steve is saying is that he needs to look beyond the targets and focus on the individual to bring the best out of them.

What is perhaps absent in Leon and Steve's responses is how this baseline data is relayed to parents which has been a significant aspect of the neo liberal performance agenda as 'parents are also recruited into the programmes of motivation and intervention, as co-workers towards the raising of performance' (Ball et al, 2012:528). With the baseline set each student is subjected to an array of target grades, setting the focal point of 'progress' with the grades made a central part. Parent's evenings involve the discussion of performance against the targets and so within the delivery chain the pressure on 'progress' is coming from below as well as above. From my own picture of 'Following the path' (see figure 37) the teachers and policy makers are placed on the sides to keep the students and parents on the path to 'progress', reminding them of what is important, where to focus, and fully incorporating them into the delivery chain.

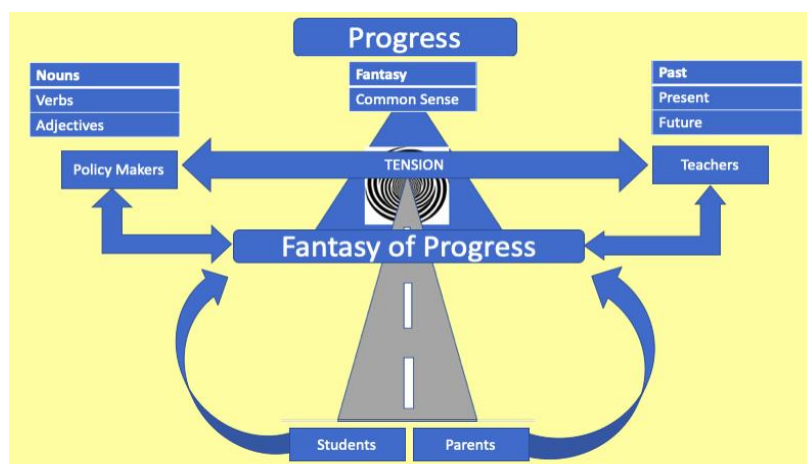


Figure 37, 'Following the Path' J.Perkins

4.1.3 Anna, Helen and Ellie, Using the mark scheme.

For Anna, Helen and Ellie, exam rubrics and mark schemes provided the line for measuring the ‘progress’ of their students. Anna started by saying.

So, for example, you know, you start off with a student who is has got like a low grade, for example, in a particular unit of work, and then things are embedded or implemented. And then you kind of test that student, you know, with assessments or just through questioning whatever, and then they do a final kind of assessment, and then you would hope to see some sort of ‘progress’ based on things you as a teacher has put into place to help them make that ‘progress’.

Anna starts with the grade as being her point at which to set the line from where she wants to see ‘progress’ achieved and then testing being the mechanism to ascertain whether ‘progress’ is achieved effectively reducing ‘progress’ to assessment objectives. Assessment Objectives are part of the exam board mark syllabi and are there to exact a standard across the qualification for students to work towards. These are used as a guide by teachers to measure students’ ‘progress’ across a course as they work towards the terminal examination. Some teachers start to break such objectives down into what could be termed as ‘malicious minutiae’ (Ball et al, 2015:529) with grids and checklists that students and teachers use, with traffic light coding to determine the extent to which they are achieving against the objectives.

In my own experience as a head of department this was expected of me firstly when one school in which I worked looked to introduce ‘Assessing Pupil Performance’ (APP) and then later on at another school where an outside organisation had suggested the school develop ‘Personalised Learning Checklists’ (PLCs). Ellie also considers how there is a ‘*knowledge base comes quite often at the start of a module*’ as they will need to be able to ‘*relate to the exam they are going to be doing*’ and ‘*as the module progresses, we start to look at specific skills, to be able to apply that knowledge*’. This is in many ways the same assessment as that of Anna with the need to support the students for them to be able to apply what they have picked up against the assessment criteria of the exam.

Helen directly linked to the exam system with her measurement of ‘progress’.

So academic ‘progress’ would be, in my view. Again, it's about how ‘progress’ is progressing, your, understanding and your knowledge of a particular topic, content subject area, and you would see a difference

in the responses in terms of 'progress'. And that could be measured through a mark system.

There is the establishment of 'progress' being part of the checking of the learning in a particular area of knowledge that has been presented with a predetermined focal point through the mark scheme being the determinant of 'progress'. She continued considering measurement *'I would say in terms of measuring you might see skills 'progress' and the depth of understanding 'progress'. And that is, that can be academic'* she clarifies.

From an English perspective you might see the 'progress' in their students being able to analyse, might just get into be able to analyse, you know in terms of grammatical awareness and understanding, you might be able to see them using a full stop, for instance and you then you would measure that they have been able to achieve that particular skill.

It is of note here how there is the notion of skill being attached to grammar using words like 'awareness' and 'understanding' when perhaps others might suggest that it is to 'know' when to apply the grammar and thus knowledge the determining factor. This would then mean rather than 'progress' in grammar as a skill the 'progress' would be measured through the gaining of knowledge as to how grammatical structures work and can be applied. There appears to be a mixing of knowledge and skills as Helen progresses with her thoughts when she returns to the need of a starting point to measure 'progress' from. *'So, I think, for me, as a teacher, you need to know where they've come from, what their prior knowledge is, where they are in the classroom with you in front of you, and whereas a teacher, you want them to get to'*. Here as a teacher the concern is clear about where she wants to get them to rather than it being the students determining where they want to get to. The students' own aspirations are not taken into consideration as there 'are tensions between the interests of the school and the interests of the students' (Ball et al, 2015:528). The control over the focal point and the 'fantasy' of the journey of 'progress' is in the hands of the teacher and those that establish the rubrics being used to measure that 'progress'. Ball suggests that 'Pragmatism and necessity trump wider responsibilities for students' (*ibid*), something with which I concur, as curricular choices, exam board decisions, text choice for English all play a role in the 'progress' of the individual student but perhaps without the input of the student in that decision making process. Students are objectified into units from which to gain the greatest productivity against the rubrics to achieve the necessary with regards results.

For Helen there is a necessity to this although she does consider how this narrows the way 'progress' is measured.

that's quite a challenge for teachers because there are so many different elements of the 'progress' you want them to make in a classroom, in their sort of learning journey, that, you know, every single constituent part they might be progressing at a different level, different space. It's quite nuanced, sophisticated approach, or not approach but a sophisticated role you have as a teacher, and I think, you know, we're quite narrow in the way that we measure 'progress'.

Here there is the establishment of the teacher as an expert that is looking for multiple ways in which their students are making 'progress' that may not be visible to the untrained eye as they are areas of 'progress' the system fails to value. Words like nuanced and sophisticated give the position of the teacher as expert as Helen suggests '*most people will say 'progress' is about, you know, getting them their target grades. But for me, yes, that is one part of it.*' She did not really elaborate this but then proceeded to show a concern for the use of target grades and in her perception the way in which they '*can actually limit 'progress' and inhibit 'progress' for students because for staff it might cap kind of expectations of 'progress'.*' I would suggest that through the delivery chain and the behaviourist 'fantasy' that the policies have created, sophistication has been lost. Government, teachers, parents and students are connected through the targets and numeric benchmarks with a shared language and focus on what is perceived as success and therefore 'progress'. As Ball suggests 'it is impossible to over-estimate the significance of this in the life of the school, as a complex of surveillance, monitoring, tracking, coordinating, reporting, recording, targeting, motivating' (Ball et al, 2012:525) on the way in which all three of the participants in this section have reflected on 'progress'. Everyone is involved as the 'progress' and marks that each are talking about are recorded in their mark books, to be checked by senior leaders, shared with parents and students to keep everyone on the path.

4.1.4 Oliver benchmark to outcome

Oliver asked a question and then proceeded to attempt to answer it. '*Why is it we look at it in only two ways, we look at it 'progress', in terms of a benchmark starting point to an exam outcome or an end of key stage outcome?*' For Oliver the Covid-19 pandemic and cancellation of examinations made this more apparent.

Education has got panicked about no exams because that's how they view 'progress'. They don't see the guidance of the evidence of the whole journey of education as 'progress'. they simply see benchmark starting points many people and I think we do have to if lockdowns taught us anything, it's sort of had to be more aware of the how progression isn't simply jumping between points. It is a linear, it is an ergonomic thing that occurs naturally. The sad reality of exams is it simply takes a snapshot of that point, it evidences some of the 'progress', it doesn't evidence that continue line of progression.

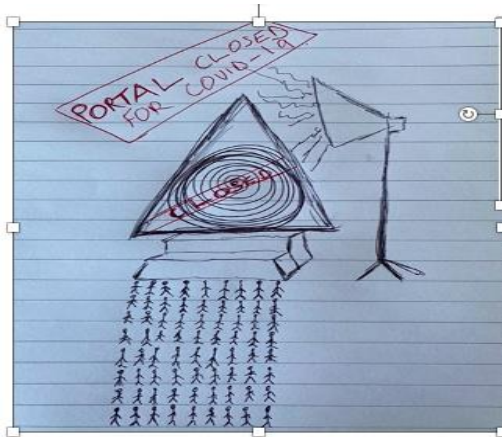


Figure 39. 'Waiting on the Steps' J.Perkins

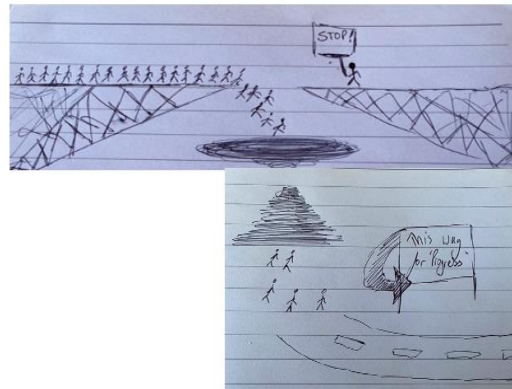


Figure 38, 'Falling through the Vortex'

Oliver is voicing, by bringing the response to the Covid-19 outbreak, what I showed in my own diagram which I drew at the time. There was panic on hearing the news, what will schools do? how will universities be able to allocate places? What if schools cheat? But in my illustrations my concern was as to whether the 'vortex' had closed or in this instance the portal and how would students move on (see figure 38 and figure 39). As Oliver states the method for determining the evidence of the educational journey does not offer a holistic account and is reliant upon the terminal examinations to provide evidence. With the method seemingly swept away there was a need to improvise and change path.

In this statement from Oliver, he is presenting a stopping point or juncture where there is the organisation of the past and what has taken place through the evidence that has been provided through students taking examinations. It is from the evidence that has been acquired numerically that school leaders and policy makers make decisions locally in schools and nationally at the government level. For the coalition government when the process of the evaluation took place, it was determined that the evidence showed grade inflation and a lowering of standards leading to an overhaul of the GCSE in England. As mentioned in the

literature review the SOSE 2010-14 saw that his triumph had been to ‘reverse that tide of inflating exam statistics’ (Adams, 2013). When teachers and school leaders were asked to provide assessed grades during the Covid-19 pandemic there was an inflation with regards to results. An example was ‘between 2019 and 2021, the proportion of GCSEs for example, awarded the top grades 7 to 9, rose nearly 12 percentage points to 28.9% (Richardsdson,2021) . The inflation was met with promises of rolling back the grades and ‘Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi’ claiming he would put ‘fairness at the heart of his plans for exams in 2022 and the year after’ (*ibid*). A ‘fantasy’ of fairness via a system that rewards those who perhaps have the greatest advantages socially and economically in England. Oliver presents a group as ‘*they*’, as meaning the policy makers and outsiders, view of ‘progress’, with the sense that Oliver is trying to separate himself, attempting to hold an alternative view that he can claim as his own. Secondly, is that exams are a snapshot of that point and thus the ‘continued line of ‘progression’ is in some ways broken, which does not consider what the person who has taken that exam at that moment in time is potentially capable of longer term.

I would like to relate this to my own view of the ‘vortex’ and the way in which once arriving to the ‘vortex’ there is not the option to hold back but the student steps through hoping that they have what they need when they appear again the other side (*see figure 40*).

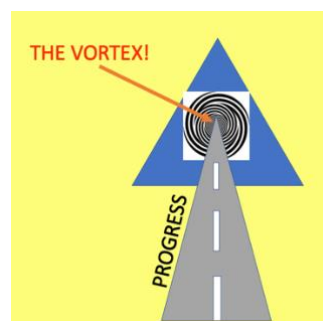


Figure 40, The Vortex

If they were to be given longer or allowed to repeat some steps along the path to the ‘vortex’ perhaps, they would arrive in a better position to succeed on the other side. Leon suggests ‘progress’ is punctuated and to a degree ‘stop start’ rather than a fluid journey. In some respects, the exam point is perhaps like a lap time for a long-distance runner in that it helps them to understand the pace at which they are running and gives an indicator as to the time at which they might complete the distance. This supports my own definition for ‘progress’ as there is the creation of the focal point being based on the performance at a given point to a predetermined set of criteria as the measure of ‘progress’. Returning to athletics as an analogy if the world record for the 100m is 10 seconds then the measure of ‘progress’ for speed would

be to get below that time. In doing so it could be argued that there is ‘progress’ but now the focal point of ‘progress’ changes as it is no longer 10 seconds but 9.97 seconds. But this is a narrow examination of ‘progress’ in the field as what is not considered is how that ‘progress’ was achieved, coaching, diet, sleep and all the other factors needed to support the achievement in the moment. The time at the finish line is the snapshot but the other aspects are not taken into consideration although the athlete may acknowledge them. The difference for that athlete compared to students in the English system is that they can run again another day and they may be slower or through changes become faster. For students the point of examination is that snapshot and the system judges their performance on that day, and they are not afforded a second chance to run that race. They are pushed through the ‘vortex’ in the hope that the training and the work of the education system has equipped them for survival on the other side.

I return to the image of ‘Grinding a future’ (*see figure 41*) as there is an economy of ‘progress’ and the efficiency of the students to fulfil their part in what is presented as ‘a neutral notion of the common good, a desired or imagined future that represents the public interest or the public good’ (Clark, 2020:155).



Figure 41, 'Grinding a future' J.Perkins

The students are processed through the education machine, asked to show faith in the system that when they appear the other side, they will meet their destiny and go on to work productively. In conflict to such hope Clarke suggests that ‘Anxieties about productivity are at the heart of recent education policy. Thus, Educational Excellence Everywhere asserts, ‘the better educated our society, the fairer, more cohesive, productive and innovative it can be’ (Clarke, 2020:160) but what I believe I am questioning and to an extent Oliver is questioning, is at what cost. The common good and concern of productivity is being presented and shared but a performative system is being used to try to meet the ‘fantasy’ and so therefore a

behaviourist approach is preferred. Students are being measured and lap times taken but they are being judged through a system that aspires to excellence for and from those who attain the highest grades whilst consigning the rest to mediocrity. In some ways they are ‘like the fake rabbit in the greyhound races, to sustain endless progress towards an excellence with no real referent or value’ (Taubman, 2012:21). They are sent endlessly round the loop that is the qualification circuit, driving towards ‘progress’, chased by their teachers yet never really being able to appreciate the value before being set off again.

4.1.5 Heather and Assessing Pupil Performance – the minutiae.

Heather reflected on her previous experience when there was the policy push of Assessing Pupil Performance (APP). An initiative by the Labour government for whom this was very much a part of their drive to improve standards and as Ball et al suggest a ‘discourse of ‘standards’ works to articulate a particular version and vision of what schooling is and should be – more, higher, better!’ (Ball et al, 2012:514). APP as ‘deliverology’ and Foucault’s notion of ‘malicious minutiae’ (Foucault, 1979: 226), something with which I concur fully as APP looked to reduce subject disciplines to tick boxes with each student assessed against each strand and those results being used to monitor the work of the student and teacher. It was an onerous task and once the school attempted to input the work into the school management system it was discovered that the headings staff had created were unusable. Heather however reflected on how this was something she had liked to a degree.

you know, you’re a five a or a five, a one, and, you know, red on this number. And Amber on this number green on this number. And I have to be honest, I quite liked it in some ways, because although I’m an English teacher, I’m quite I’m sort of mathematically minded. So, in some ways, it was quite easy to be like, well, this kids on a five B, and they should be on a five A’s. So, we’re going to do X, Y, and Z, and now they’re on a five A and everyone’s happy.

Over time schools have invested large sums of money on systems to support data gathering and presentation to give meaning to the monitoring of the ‘progress’ students make academically in their schools and in order to carry out performance management of their teachers.

The students are very aware, obviously. They mostly talk about C as a pass and D as a fail ... we’d have these little graphs showing where their target was and what they’ve got so far in half-term tests. We’re

trying to share with them as much as possible. So, everyone's aware of all the data. (Sonja, Atwood, Maths) (Ball et al, 2012:527)

Heather though sharing her initial enjoyment of APP does reflect on whether it really had any meaning. *'Discussions about, you know, I don't know 80% of your kids are on target. And this many are below, some ways, it's quite easier. But it also is, it doesn't mean anything does it.'* Steve alluded to this earlier in this chapter when he spoke about CATS and how the targets could have a limiting factor and it could well become a cap rather than a stimulus. It is perhaps why in the example from Ball et al and in many schools this adoption of data awareness is taking place to try to give meaning and make sense. The students are being initiated into Barber's 'deliverology'.

The technology helps to bring a 'technical professionalism' (Ball et al, 2012:523) bringing meaning to the illusion or 'fantasy', as Heather considers how the numeric measure that helps to keep everyone happy is pointless.

You have to think about some ways of having different 'progress' for different students, you know, some students will make more 'progress' in their learning than others on some topics at some times. And that doesn't kind of neatly packaged up, when you then have to report on all these 200 kids that you have in a year.

The 'neat packaging' comes 'in the form of measurement and monitoring software' and 'which are coming ever more refined, ever more specific' (*ibid*). The need to report as part of the 'delivery chain' (Ball et al, 2012:515), is what makes the picture of 'progress' ever more complicated for Heather.

The issue with 'progress' in schools is that we want all things with a dual approach of not wanting all these numbers, but then wanting some kind of numbers to report. I don't really see how we can have sort of a consensus about what 'progress' looks like. That's a hard question.

It is this difficulty in establishing a consensus for what 'progress' looks like that leads policy makers to impose their view and is their need for numeric evidence to support their decisions and present success that creates the focal point for 'progress'. 'Progress' is therefore a 'fantasy', that has been created and shared and then through the delivery chain and made a reality for the students, parents, and teachers. It becomes a common-sense notion that numbers are needed if a 'fantasy' that involves the notion of good and bad education, succeeding and failing schools, excellent students and those who can be seen as failing not through the fault of the system, but their own inadequacy is to be created. For Wilson this represents the

‘Behaviourist ‘fantasy’’ whereby ‘they are ‘concerned with hard facts’ (Wilson, 1979:31) going further to suggest that this line of ‘fantasy’ ‘turns us into ants or robots’ (Wilson, 1979:33). The continual sifting of results past and present to, as mentioned before, envisage the future direction and ‘the point of examining things is nearly always related to these goods or their opposites. We want to know how the patient is progressing, whether the firm’s accounts are properly kept and so on’ (Wilson, 1979:48) if we are to diagnose the next steps to take.

4.1.6 Oliver looking to work outside the metrics.

Over time the systems have become more acutely aware of groupings, but these have been objectified as HAPS (High Achieving Pupils), Pupil Premium, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and gender, represented by colours, bands streams, residuals, to carry out comparison. Foucault referred to this as ‘dividing practices. The subject is either divided in himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him.’ (Foucault, 1989:777). The ‘delivery chain’ is set to meet governmental targets with improved performance of boys versus girls, greater numbers of disadvantaged achieving higher standards and going into higher education. It is these targets that are the focal point which are ‘passing on the pressures to perform’ (Ball et al, 2012:515), with school leaders, teachers, and students powerless to determine their own perception of ‘progress’. For headteachers there is the need for their institution to perform to succeed in the league table and sustain recruitment of students, for Heads of departments and heads of years, there is their contribution to the whole school targets and ensuring they too support the standards being sought after. Classroom teachers are made aware of all the pressures their school is under to succeed by the senior management of their school, who in turn are responding to the pressures of those agencies who oversee them, who are responding to the government policy agenda, against the predetermined targets denoting the ‘progress’ students need to achieve which is of course fed down to the student body itself.



Figure 43, 'Test of Resilience'

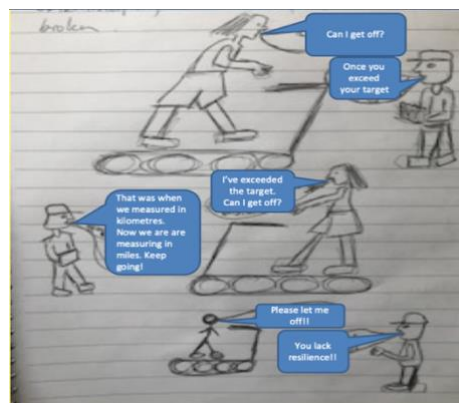


Figure 42, Treadmill of progress

In my drawing of the 'Test of Resilience' (see figure 42) and 'The treadmill of progress' (see figure 43) I represent the way in which the need for students to accept and not question the process has become increasingly part of the activity that takes place. Teachers and school leaders are bearing 'responsibility for their students test scores and the relentless pressure on them to improve results under the threat of elimination' (Clarke, 2020:160), and so therefore are engaged in processes that are perhaps leading to a 'reduction of colleagues and students to disposable human capital' (*ibid*).

Oliver explored his own views on how the way in which the system had impacted on their view of academic 'progress' for the VIth form of the school they worked in.

So, if I take our own school, for example, we've always been quite disappointed with our sixth form results because the directors have always asked why sixth forms, it's a negative value added. So, on paper, it looks to them as if 'progress' has not been achieved. I disagree. I agree. Well, you can't agree or disagree with data. Data is what the data says. From a statistical point of view, 'progress' hasn't matched the previous 'progress' doesn't mean they haven't made 'progress', it means they haven't made the expected 'progress' in accordance with data.

In this one statement that I have selected Oliver attempts to explore why the view of the school's directors is that the Sixth Form results are not a positive picture of 'progress'. Oliver accepts that based on the performance measure and the data 'from a statistical point of view' 'progress' has not been made between the last check point of KS4 to the next at KS5. The journey has been punctuated at the two predetermined points and thus the success of the

students and the teachers is judged to be below the expectation. Oliver discusses ways in which he tried to rationalise and challenge this perception of a failure to make ‘progress’ by promoting the idea with destinations as being the marker of ‘progress’ with ‘100% of our students got onto either higher education, apprenticeships, or a successful pathway into a world of work’ something that was rejected when Oliver encountered OFSTED.

You know, so for me, success should be rated, and we tried to look at that, and that, that's how we discussed it with Ofsted. They didn't agree I'll be honest. When the lady came in from Ofsted, she didn't agree with that appraisal. She said the key should be within the data. And I said to her, but the data that we also have, and we had the evidence for it. I had to have a very deep discussion with as I said, but we had and we did at that point have three years of 100% of our students going on to one of their choice or second choice, university choice apprenticeship or a positive appraisal into a world of work.

Oliver is showing a resistance to accepting the view as presented by Clarke whereby instead of accepting the data and metrics as evidence of ‘progress’ he is trying to present an alternative. Ball asserts that ‘Resisting performativity at a discursive level implies problematising the essence and raw material of own practices. It requires the deconstruction and recreation of the self and a certain capacity to examine ourselves critically’ (Ball and Olmedo, 2013:89). Oliver appears to be doing just that as he is considering his own approach and view to ‘progress’ and how he is tied to a system where he needs to report and explain to the school governing body and the inspectorate. He is refusing to accept that the conclusions being drawn are the only ones available and is trying to use his own insight and practice to hold his own perception.

So, for me it was trying to explain it was more than just numerator steps or figurative steps in terms of jumping through the hoops of expected data and then get into a next stage whether that next be university, it was more in terms of have we guaranteed and physically assured a student is now here. Because even then that's just the next day, folks, there's nothing to say, they're going to complete that, our hope is we've given them the tools to complete that and to move forward accordingly.

Oliver is trying to show that he can work outside of the system and has his own view on what ‘progress’ is and how it should be measured. There is the sense of injustice at the way what he sees as being an achievement was being rejected by the system’s regulatory body in Ofsted which had been sent to the school to regulate the standards. His own judgement and value on ‘progress’ with a clear focal point was being judged by the external force as inadequate and not justification of ‘progress’. It could also be inferred that within the use of the word ‘hope’ there is evidence of a hopelessness, as time means that the students move on but there is no

surety that they have what they need to be able to succeed in the next stage. Against the measure of ‘progress’ there may be success but there is not understanding of the extent to which they really are prepared to be able to function and so Oliver is left with ‘hope’.

4.1.7 Lewis making sense of ‘Progress 8’.

When I asked Lewis his view on ‘Progress 8’ as a measure, he responded by saying.

That's really interesting. I think ‘Progress 8’, despite how incredibly clumsy it is, and it really is, isn't bad. And if you're looking for, if you're looking at all the measures that schools have been measured by in the past, it's a long, long, long way ahead of anything we've had before. In terms of its sophistication, its ability to capture the finer aspects of it.

Lewis accepts there are faults in the system, but he also sees value in the system and how there appears to be in his perception a way to understand to a ‘finer’ degree the outcomes and the level of ‘progress’ achieved by a school. When Lewis considered what he gains from the data management systems that his school employs he was positive about how such systems support the work of his school and what those systems allow the school to understand about student ‘progress’.

Think they're really good. And they're meaningful for staff. So, I think that's good data. I think ours is a very good data ‘progress’ measuring system for sixth form. I like that a lot. The reason I like that is because it's very easy for staff to understand it. And that's always the key thing with data systems and ‘progress’ measures but do any of these things genuinely capture. Yeah, I think probably though.

When considering measurement Lewis seems more comfortable and less concerned when we were unpacking personal ‘progress’. Data is not an objective measure and conclusions, and analysis can be misleading, and assumptions made, that to use Lewis own expression, are nebulous. Having said how P8 was a positive move, he then proceeded to pull it apart by exploring issues with KS2 data and how that impacts on the measurement of ‘progress’ when he explains that ‘we’ve got our current Year 10, 160 kids, only 70 of them have got KS2 data, so you know we have to do our own baseline assessments and devise our own ‘progress’ measures for those kids.’ For Lewis this brings into question the legitimacy of the data being used and ultimately how much it does inform with regards to ‘progress’ as he points out ‘it all depends on how reliable our baseline assessment is as to how useful it is.’ This is surely the problem with all the baseline data that is used by schools as now the scaled scores impact on

the 'Progress 8' methodology and these are now teacher assessed almost exclusively at Primary level. It brings into question the entire process of identifying the point from which the next layer of 'progress' is to be measured and the extent to which that really helps to inform those engaged in attempting to deliver higher rates of 'progress'. What the 'progress' is attributable to is also something Lewis questions.

kids make really, really rapid 'progress' in all of their subjects. But that's, it's very difficult to attribute that to subject teaching, because it's largely because they can write read and write better than they used to be able to, so of course, they're gonna make 'progress'. And there is no, there is really no national measure on standard 'progress' rates for our kids.

In this short extract there is a lot to consider as to what Lewis perceives to be rapid and his own foray into the 'nebulous' with his claim that it is hard to attribute to subject teaching. There is also the interesting notion that there could be a '*national measure on standard 'progress' rates*' which would need a system with a metric much like a height measurement chart to position children against. Whether Lewis thinks this is a real option or if he was just unpacking the problems with the P8 measure is hard to tell but he sees it as '*a massive hole*'. He then pushes the issue to the side suggesting there is not the desire or interest to deal with the issue which he puts down to Brexit. '*But in this kind of Brexit world I don't think there's a political will to do that. I don't think it is anywhere near the top of the agenda.*' Finally, he explains that he no longer pays much heed to the percentages that students get at each grade admitting that '*we have to report it and parents want to know*' and that he sees this as something others may consider as being evidence of 'progress' of his institution saying '*from a marketing point of view, it's probably still the single most important number that we have. Maybe I should pay more attention to it.*'

4.1.8 Anna, being held to account on the basis of KS2.

Anna was also concerned about how KS2 data was being used to mark the point of 'progress' that students were supposed to achieve. '*One thing I've noticed is that obviously, sometimes the target grades that students are often given, aren't technically reflective of what they're, like able to achieve.*' The baseline that is chosen concerns Anna as '*target rates have been created from when they were so young. And the 'progress' that they might make might differ depending on that student.*' In having created a metric based on what someone was like when they were

much younger does not consider other ways, they may change either compressing their ambition or even underestimating their potential.

if there's a target grade of a six, but the student is definitely higher up, higher, a higher grade than a grade six, and potentially could be on a grade eight, then that is academic 'progress' in itself, because obviously, they've gone beyond what's expected of them. But same way, it could be the other way around that a student could have a target grade of a six but is kind of at a three. They may have made some 'progress' since primary school, for example, but then when they get to GCSE, you know, there could be a number of things that, like hinder their 'progress', and so academically, they're underperforming.

The focal point for 'progress' was created at KS2 and so for Anna the 'progress' score lacks the contextual understanding of the individual to comprehend what 'progress' has or has not been made. The standard created through the infrastructure of the delivery chain to arrive to the end point which for 'progress' 8 is Y11 leads all the participants to question the extent to which they really accept this notion of 'progress'. When considering their responses there is an acceptance of the measure and the way in which it is conducted and to a degree, I would argue a helplessness that means they are bound to work within the framework created. What is evident is that they do not necessarily share a belief in the form of 'progress' that the policy makers have created and use alternative measures and means to negotiate their own perceptions of 'progress'.

4.2 'Progress' as a matter of time and movement

4.2.1 A consideration of time and movement from the literature

Perception of time and the way in which human beings organise time has an impact on the way in which 'progress' is perceived, as there is the attempt to account for and attach value to the actions of the moment. Time is central to the understanding of 'progress' in the English Education system as the years, weeks, days and indeed lesson periods are calculated with syllabus and schema planned to conclude at the agreed terminal day of each scholastic year. Meticulous planning allows hundreds of thousands of students to complete their studies at the same point in time across all subjects through a system that is rigid and timed so that the compulsory years of education conclude with exams and results which are then reported on widely. The use of that time tells the story of the individual's experience of the school and the extent to which that is seen as a success or failure given the way all sit the same paper at the same time. Other markers are overlooked that may have played a role in the student's

development, successes forgotten, as the results become the validation of the years of education. Ricouer states that 'time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence' (Ricouer, 1984:52). The narrative for all students and teachers in England is set in motion at the start of each academic year with a concluding point in the summer whereby the experience of the system has a narrative that creates a personal and shared experience all at once. For the perceptions of 'progress', the time bound nature of the academic year and of the duration of attending a school are factors which impact on time and how that is experienced.

As someone who has a degree in history and has spent their professional career teaching history, I believe that there is the work of the historian present in my research. In piecing the research together, I have been trying to organise the past experiences of the participants and understand their perspective of what has been happening, through my own interpretation of their responses. Their testimony has become my source material from which I have provided readers of my research the means to reach an understanding of what has taken place akin to a historical study. As an educator there is the personal reflection I have when considering my own career and the work where I need to look back at what has happened and try to make sense. I ask myself questions about the extent to which practices were successful, lessons learnt, grades achieved or not, and the extent to which some of the curricular aims that I had set out have been met. Sometimes, this leaves me with a sense of disappointment, other times, with satisfaction but the time has passed, and it is the students who are in front of me in the here and now, that become the preoccupation.

Wilson reminds us that in the system there is the point of examination and that; 'some of the terms might be coexistent or partly overlap with 'examine': 'test, 'assess' 'evaluate', 'investigate', 'check-up', 'review' and so on. The root idea is just that of trying to find out something by fairly close scrutiny' (Wilson, 1979:48), as 'We want to know how the patient is progressing, whether the firm's accounts are properly kept and so on' (*ibid*). Scrutinising the achievements of individuals, cohorts, colleagues, and the institutions to examine the academic balance sheet within the standards set as part of the education system. As schools audit their practices using management systems, comparisons of data trying to understand which groups have outperformed others either by gender or ethnic group to make better use of time and gain an edge in performance tables. For some schools rather than an edge the auditing of results is

to be able to live to fight another day with a burden of proof that not all was lost and that there were successes.

To review and audit there needs to be a consideration of the future and how it relates to the present and past when creating the narrative of the events that take place in the school when working towards 'progress'. In doing so there is the 'emplotment' (assembly of events) that enables the educator to understand if they believe the aims, they set out through their curriculum were achieved and for the policy makers who are looking towards performativity for concrete evidence to justify policy decisions on grounds of pre-determined targets.

Returning to the work of John White, some aims are obviously not met through the assessment system, and these are perhaps hardest for schools and educators to be able to evaluate. If the aim is for students 'to lead a life that is personally flourishing' and that they can 'help others to do so too' (Reiss and White, 2013:1), it might be harder for schools to understand if that has been achieved. Students' lives post school would need to be tracked significantly and as time passes it would be harder and harder to ascertain the extent to which the school has made this possible. Likewise for government where a policy decision aimed at reducing unemployment through greater literacy, may appear to be successful but over time it is perhaps the role of economics that has the greater impact.

Sometimes 'progress' does appear in the shape of results and figures which can be compared but in the way an historian will try to create a story of the past the educator is creating their own narrative of their work. Here I would argue is the 'illusionary' and element of 'fantasy' to bring meaning and sense to what are otherwise numbers and letters. The educator must have a view of what the future will look like and what those same numbers and letters should mean to the students who have achieved them. In adhering to the agreed form of 'progress' in academic grades there are competing narratives of a future which is written as a past through prophecy as prewritten narratives linking the results to life chances and earning potentials. Political narratives cast shade on the future of the nation, parental narratives of concern for the future of their children in a competitive market for work, narratives of success and failure on all sides. Managing the narratives and building one's own and perhaps a belief in 'progress' and an assertion that 'progress' has been made helps to satisfy the need to know that there is merit in the work that has taken place and the time spent was worth it.

If taking the understanding of time as expressed by St Augustine ‘there are three times: a time present of things past; a time present of things present; and a time present of things future’ with ‘things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation’ (Augustine, 2008, Bk. 11, Ch. 20, Sec. 26). The example I might use is that of a cohort of A-Level students, whereby through previous results, studies, and agreement those who achieve grade A* or A and go on to attend a Russell Group university have greater earning potential than those who do not. Here an organisation of time has been established with the past memory of student success being used to create an expectation of the future with the notion of success with those attaining the higher grades through a prophecy that has been predetermined by the system of education. ‘Progress’ to the steps of the portal, as in the image I created (*see figure 44*), have been taken on mass, a progression that has been managed and supported in the belief that on the other side the results will act as an enabler for the next steps.

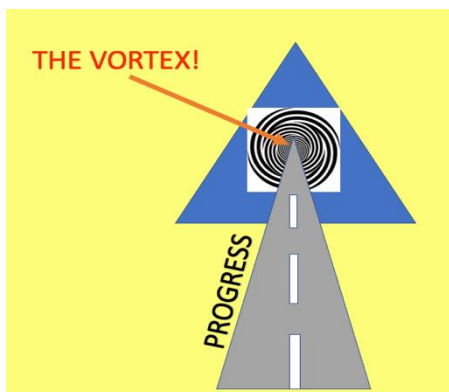


Figure 44, 'The Vortex' J.Perkins



Figure 45, 'Grinding a Future' J.Perkins

Once the students are transported through the portal to the other side their qualifications and the knowledge, they have gained are expected to be of use in helping them to make ‘progress’ in the world at large. From the point of the steps the educator works with the notion of ‘hope’ that ‘progress’ has been made and that the prewritten narratives and prophecies come to fruition so that the meaning that has been given to the activity of education is realised. The view of the policy maker as shown in ‘Grinding the future’ (*see figure 45*) is that once ground through the machine a work force will be produced to fulfil the national economic needs.

Freire considers hope as being 'important for our existence, individual and social, that we must take care not to experience it in a mistaken form, and thereby allow it to slip toward hopelessness and despair' (Freire, 1992:9). If the 'hope' is to show 'progress' has been made there needs to be an understanding of what the form of 'progress' should be and how that form will be recognised. One would assume that any student, teacher, school, university, government, or parent to hope that the form of 'progress' would be a situation where those being educated became less literate or numerate, less aware of the world around them, more ignorant of cultures is unimaginable. Therefore, hope in 'progress' by nature could be argued as ultimately altruistic, linked to advancement propagated by a system in England which is time limited and age dependent, with a measure of increased knowledge, skills and understanding. By using the word 'realised', there comes the complexity of how that realisation may not be shared, as for the policy maker the realisation is of success and justification whereas for the critical opponent of the same policy there is the realisation of oppression.

Now that the students have passed through the gates of the secondary school, through GCSEs on to A-Level, out of Higher education the hope is that these students have the currency that allows them to fulfil the prophecy, the imagined line of 'progress', that was set out. The focus on curriculum since 2019 has taken this stance with the view that 'The end result of a good, well-taught curriculum is that pupils know more and are able to do more' (Ofsted, 2019:3). Essentially this is the hope of all of those involved in the writing and preparing of any curriculum with the sequences and design considered within the limit of the time that is allowed. Time is controlled and finite in the English system with the length of compulsory education enshrined in law and not in the hands of the professionals. Time helps to give a structure for human beings to carry out a measurement of 'progress' through contrasting epochs or stages in existence and education contrasts the epochs of young people's lives as they move between key stages and levels of qualification. The moment of qualification of the students, in qualifying the actions of the teachers, school leaders and policy makers there is an attempt to pause the present to understand the past before alluding to how greater 'progress' will lead to a positive future. Nisbet uses Augustine to support this conception of time by claiming that 'what we think of as "past" and "future", are in reality, constructions in the present' (Nisbet, 1998:62) Nisbet also reflects on Augustine's conception that there is a 'dimension of irreversible time too that has great and strategic importance which in his whole conception of the whole human race advancing to greater perfection' (Nisbet, 1998:63). This reinforces my

own point earlier in this thesis that it is hard to imagine a ‘progress’ that would define the future as worse not better.

In this section I believe that there is evidence of resistance to the performative view of ‘progress’ by the participants as they try to consider ‘progress’ in terms that look to make sense of time and movement. In the previous section the performative nature of ‘progress’ pervaded the discourse. In this section there is evidence showing that at least in the participants for this research there is the attempt to try to consider ‘progress’ in other ways and to rationalise their and their students’ experiences. This theme emerged through the analysis where the participants themselves began to add points to the educational journey and discussed the movement between them. Their responses positioned progress as check points, movement forward, backward, up and down as well as chronologically. It is also important to note that some of that movement had also appeared as reference to physical but also potentially spiritual movement of ‘progress’.

4.2.2 Anna looking up.

Evidence of looking at ‘progress’ with movement and time came out in the interviews with Anna linking ‘progress’ to a sense of movement in an upward trajectory and certainly from the perspective of making a transition that can be perceived as inferior to where the student starts off.

‘Progress’ for me in general is starting in one place, and then different things will happen for you to get to another place. And usually that, other place that you want to get to, is usually somewhere that's higher up than when you where you already are.

Anna does not say what helps her to measure such ‘progress’ at this point using words such as ‘place’ and ‘higher’ to give a sense of location to ‘progress’ rather than stating a measure of knowledge or acquisition of skill. The sense of place that Anna is prepared to consider may be physical in that the position of ‘progress’ is marked by a position of height, perhaps in the sense of scaling a mountain or climbing a hill. It may also be construed that there is the position of enlightenment with the religious achievement of a higher place being found in a spiritual sense although it could also be greater knowledge or sense of being. Ofsted as specified earlier mark the sign of ‘progress’ in the curriculum as being grounded in both knowing and doing offering now positional sense other than using the word ‘end’ creating the terminal point.

4.2.3 Oliver and Helen moving along a line.

Oliver gave an almost identical answer to Anna when he responded by saying.

You've gone from one starting point, and you've made 'progress' on and through to another. The reality of 'progress' is this idea you have gained something, it's as simple as that. There was something that you didn't know before, and you've gained something with it.

Oliver adds the sense of movement from space to space on a plain rather than considering steps up toward a summit as Anna was expressing, yet there is a similarity between the two as they look to add a sense of movement to the process. Oliver also presents a reductionist view that simplifies the notion of 'progress' by bringing it to the sense that 'progress' is gaining something, which he leaves undefined, preferring the ambiguity. What has been gained Oliver has left open to interpretation, meaning that what is gained could be several options from knowledge, a skill of some kind, or even a sense of self. The ambiguity of Oliver's response is that what is 'gained' from 'progress' means it's unclear whether he sees that there is the potential for gain to be made from loss, for example, loss of innocence which brings with it the gain of experience. Helen said that '*for me it's about coming from a starting point and the moving on from that' with 'a starting point of not knowing to knowing something so 'progress' in knowledge'*'. There is a similarity here to Oliver in the sense of movement from one space to another, but she does not set a terminal point as such. In Helen's response I find that there is the notion of both Freire's banking education but also the Rogerian empty vessel waiting to be filled. 'It is the politics of the "mug and jug" theory in education wherein the faculty (the jug) possess the intellectual and factual knowledge and cause the student to be the passive recipient (the mug) so that the knowledge can be poured in' (Rogers, 1983:187). The object in the student is bereft of knowledge and empty but when taken through the cycle of education they are then filled with knowledge and as there is more than before 'progress' has been achieved. Movement is removed in the sense of from place to place and limited to the pouring of knowledge which in some respects contradicts Helen's starting point if reconsidered this way. Helen's perception that as the knowledge is accrued the student moves forwards to give a positive purpose to the activity and a sense of 'progress'. The Rogerian position is pessimistic in this respect and sees the activity as passive and lacking in movement with a sedentary position taken by the student. In the response there is also an assumption of a blank canvass or as Locke referred to 'Tabula Rasa' (Locke, 1689), blank slate, enabling the teacher to be able to claim that they have added that knowledge to the subject of their work in the classroom and

in Helen's estimation made movement in the form of 'progress'. This is where the notion of 'hope' and 'fantasy' can be deployed as to support the hope that the work is of value there is a 'mistaken form' (Friere, 1992:9) that is presented. The student is transformed in the 'fantasy' from being a person with experience to the mistaken form of an empty vessel that needs to be filled.

4.2.4 Natalie and Helen, a lifelong journey

Natalie similarly presented 'progress' and the time it takes in the form of a journey in a tone that was tinged with the concept of lifelong learning, allowing for 'progress' to be a gradual and longitudinal journey.

'Progress' is what an individual makes in the course of each hour, day, yeah. Lifetime, I suppose. And that's how they move from one thing to another. But we look at it in terms of education, 'progress' is the child learning letter sounds, then progressing to putting those into words, sentences, being able to read word sentences. developing the skills to unpick words, as the 'progress' is gradual, and individual.

Natalie makes assumptions that by being able to construct and build language there will be a natural link to analysis which involves deconstructing language, however, building a sentence is not the same as being able to infer or empathise to take meaning from the work of others. The difference with Natalie was that she began to present what the 'knowing' should be and how that 'knowing' might be beneficial. She does not use the word literacy, but it could be construed that is what she means with the initial 'progress' being able to read the words prior to having the ability to infer and develop meaning. Helen also brokered the view of 'progress' as something that occurs over a lifetime,

If you see 'progress' in a more in a broader sense, and you're just looking at, well, really kind of like just getting from A to B, and then getting from B to C, and C to D, and having that kind of constant journey of learning, which isn't stopped or kept, but is kind of continuum through the rest of their lives. is kind of my probably my kind of philosophy about 'progress'.

Helen's assertion is Biesta's criticism, as he states that there is a 'tendency to replace a language of education with a language that only talks about education in terms of learning' (Biesta, 2010:5), and 'that learning is good or desirable – and therefore as something that should go on throughout one's life' (Biesta, 2012:7). Natalie is taking her understanding of learning and placing it onto 'progress', arguably interchanging the words whilst holding onto a view of

education that is a construction process with blocks put together over a period. Biesta sees the switch to ‘a language of learning’ as having impacted on ‘our understanding of what education is or should be about have become increasingly more difficult to articulate’ (Biesta, 2005:55). For Natalie the language of learning has filled the gap for explaining about ‘progress’ using the learning journey and lifelong learning to simplify something that appears difficult to articulate. Time is elongated and there is a sense that neither Helen nor Natalie wants to add a sense of finality to ‘progress’ allowing for it to take place over a lifetime but in doing so establish the concluding point, in that of the ending of the lifetime. ‘Progress’ is presented as movement between points but not whether these points interlink or have any relation to one another despite Natalie using the word continuum. The movement from space to space is not connected as the positions she creates are boxed rather than being marked on a line or a movement to a higher place. From my perspective there is the image of steppingstones, with the students hopping from one to another, being given time to balance before they try to jump to the next, but rather than landing on the riverbank and being able to stop the assertion is that they will hop from point to point for eternity. Natalie appears to describe multiple journeys which are experienced throughout a lifetime but journeys which are not linked.

4.2.5 Kevin trying to allow for more than time.

Kevin problematises ‘progress’, suggesting that there are multiple areas to ‘progress’, but he did not allude to what these areas might be in this initial point as he was more concerned to explain how he understood the link between ‘progress’ and time.

I don't think it's a necessary linear thing. And that's because it covers what might be termed as 'progress' covers a whole number of areas. I also think some of it that you won't, you will never be able to see at that particular moment in time or even within a year or two.

Kevin wanted to explain that ‘progress’ does not move in one direction and that ‘progress’ may not be observed in the moment, ‘*Because sometimes we talk about 'progress' in schools as being very time limited.*’ When thinking about time in this way maybe there is the consideration of when one should attempt to make sense of ‘progress’ as the direct experience is perhaps not the time when ‘progress’ can be observed or evaluated. If one is to be able to see the differing directions of travel and carry out the ‘emplotment’ of events the timing of the reflection becomes important and thus to bring value to the making of sense. The limitation of time and the way ‘progress’ is linked to a chronological process of schooling could mean that ‘progress’ is ignored or missed. For Kevin there is the perception that ‘progress’ may occur once students

have *'left education and then decided because they have a dim recollection' 'they have gone to revisit the topic and realise they loved it, and they remembered particular things and that would constitute 'progress' in one sense? I think it would'*. Kevin is developing the idea that part of 'progress' is that element of self-reflection and being able to look back, to understand a moment in the present, to determine one's own future. The very nature of schooling in England which has no breaks or reverse gears for those who are not meeting the perceived academic levels does very much put time limits on the activity. 'Progress' is through a system that is time oriented, and the structure of that system means that the judgment of 'progress' by the system is not necessarily the same as what Kevin believes 'progress' to be.

4.2.6 Dean and Lewis resisting performance.

Dean and Lewis attempt to resist the performative nature of 'progress' and to build in their own perceptions based on their experiences of working in English secondary schools. Dean breaks his understanding between his experience of 'progress' between his initial experience through CPD and Ofsted, compared to his more recent experience.

And I think it's a word that teachers throw around very casually. It's, it's like an ever-present buzzword at CPDs, what is 'progress'? And I think over my 15 years, I've heard it sort of like, defined in multiple ways.

Initially Dean's experience of 'progress' was of something that was immediate as he explained.

When I first started school, Ofsted would talk about it as being you know that you'd be able to see 'progress' in, you know, 10- 15 minutes in a half hour observation that they would be able to judge their 'progress'.

There is a sense of the immediate in this view of 'progress' and that something rapid is taking place which can be evaluated in a short period of time by an expert observer. Such a view of 'progress' has changed over time and more recently there has been the expectation of 'progress' over time and Dean explained this switch.

And then, now, it's often talked about as a more long-term aspect. And, obviously, you have the 'progress' 8, where you are supposed to be able to have some metric of an 11-year-old and be able to assess where they're going to be from just English and maths, and that should be able to tell you where they're going to go.

In considering a longer period there is a return to the performative in Dean's response but also the transitional in the final few words with '*where they're going*'. Time to see and understand 'progress' has shifted from short and intense time spans to something much more longitudinal with P8 and the Ofsted framework and the focus on curriculum and quality of education. The shift from something that could be seen and measured in a short period of time now being stretched to something much longer and the addition of a metric links to the ownership of time which is then linked to the 'progress' that is being seen. The future for the child has become an expectation in the realm of their academic 'progress' that can be controlled and shaped through the 'delivery chain' (Barber, 2007:86) of the education system. The students' academic past is given weight over their academic present with their experiences of life washed out in favour of a calculation.

It can be argued that you could see 'progress' in just a single minute of conversation and a realisation that the moment is given weight as 'significant 'progress' but over time little 'progress' is made. Lewis also considered how his perspective of what constitutes 'progress' had altered over time in his career.

The language of 'progress' was throughout the entire school. But it was very much focused on the statistical 'progress' to a really, minute degree. So that kind of idea that you can analyse what people need to start the lesson and they need it, you need to be able to better measure at the end of the lesson, if they could, if you couldn't measure that, then there was no 'progress' being made.

This initial experience of 'progress' matches the experience of Dean with small amounts of time being given gravity and used in the language of the school to present 'progress' as something very specific and measurable. Through such presentation there is the chance for the 'deployment of terms like 'evidence' and 'scientific' (Clarke, 2020:158) which allows for leadership to hold teachers to account for lapses or loss of time in pursuit of 'progress'.

So it was that idea that 'progress' was very kind of was purely academic, but was very, very bite sized, very, very little bits. And if you had all these little bits, and they'd add up together, and then you'd end up with this massive amount of 'progress'.

Lewis presents 'progress' over time as being the amassing of 'bits' creating a way of evaluating the use of time almost as a deficit whereby through a lack of mass time has not been used as well as it might have been. Resistance to seeing 'progress' in such short time snaps was Lewis' way of making sense of the experience he himself had over time.

I think it's much more holistic than that. And I think you can't judge it on the micro level, you can only judge it when you've seen the impact of a series of lessons or a sequence of teaching, or different subjects combining together or whatever it might be.

The responses appear in line with the experience of Dean and how the shift in perspective of 'progress' by OFSTED and through government policy of 'Progress 8' was impacting on the perception of Dean and Lewis with regards the time needed to see 'progress'. Lewis appears to be shunning the short-term episodes for the bigger picture where he believes he needs to make sense of the outcomes of what has happened over time and how the educational activity combines. Lewis' position as a head teacher is perhaps what leads him to take this position as he has an overall responsibility and needs to understand how each part of his institution contributes to the shared view of 'progress'. A shared view that is necessitated by the way Lewis evaluates the work of his teachers and the success of his students, which it could be argued is set through the Government targets that Lewis is judged on.

Another way in which time appeared in conversation was through the stages at which measurement occurs in the English system to suggest movement into the future. I come back to Dean's comment.

Where you are supposed to be able to have some metric of an 11-year-old and be able to assess where they're going to be from just English and maths, and that should be able to tell you where they're going to go.

Through the tone of the response there is perhaps a degree of what Ball refers to as 'discomfort' (Ball et al, 2015:528), as Dean points to the way in which the way 'progress' for English Secondary Schools is very much linked to the way in which performance of students took place at Primary level. Ball might suggest that 'the responsibilities which are generated by the delivery chain mean that many teachers find it difficult to establish a clear ethical position in relation to the techne of performance' (*ibid*). Dean is resigned in some way to the workings of the chain which means he must accept the workings even though he has some reservation highlighted by his use of the word 'supposed'. The junctions where 'progress' is measured is also raised by Leon and Oliver who consider the way in which KS4 is used as a baseline for KS5 and how the timing of the measurement impacts on the picture of 'progress' achieved by the institution. Although Dean does not go on to explain explicitly why the age of eleven matters, the fact that he states it means that he potentially has reservations over the way the

performance of a child at that specific age is really an indicator of the ‘progress’ they will make. Time in the child’s life is a point he is addressing, a time which one might argue has been selected and imposed by the policy makers behind the education system. The punctuation point of the end of primary education before movement into secondary education acts as the lap time before setting off again.

Through the conception of movement and time the interviews revealed a sense of ‘progress’ that is constructed to move students from a position of not knowing to knowing. For some there was the notion of improvement and a trajectory to higher place with all considering time and how perception of time affects this.

4.3 Is ‘progress’ measured through knowledge or skills, or both?

4.3.1 Focussing on knowledge.

From my position as an insider within this research my own experience of working in Secondary schools there has been ongoing discussion around the tension between knowledge and skills with either or being favoured at one time or another. Certainly, I remember being in a training session where the trainer announced that no one needed to remember or retain the date 1066 anymore as if you had the skills to search the internet the knowledge was unnecessary. Through David Cameron there was a rejection of this notion in the absolute with a belief that to rebuild a ‘broken society’ (Cameron, 2011) knowledge of Britain’s past it was ‘vitally important that we bring back proper teaching of British history in our schools. We won’t get very far in promoting Britishness if people don’t have a feel for Britain’s history and heritage.’ Further stating

And the results of [a] recent survey ... highlights only too well what happens when you shift away from learning actual knowledge, such as facts and dates. This failed approach has led us to the great irony that most British-born citizens would struggle to answer the questions on our citizenship tests. ([Cameron,2009](#)).

‘Progress’ for History was tied to a canon of historical events and individuals under which the perception of ‘progress’ can be construed as a greater sense of ‘Britishness’ which Welling’s sees as linked to nationalism but from an English perspective.

The past is a crucial element of this British dimension to the English imagination and the ability to imagine the United Kingdom outside the

EU, even if such an eventuality might strain the UK to breaking point. An understanding of history – or rather an ability to recall instructive episodes of a national past – is a crucial element in the ideology of nationalism. (Wellings, 2016:370)

In the Cameron ‘fantasy’ of Britain, there is an English imagination and thus the focal point of ‘progress’ for the teaching of history is tied to the ‘fantasy’ in pursuit of an ‘English Britain’. The knowledge and facts that the government believed would pull a society together which they perceived as being divided and broken. The approaches pursued prior to reform are accused of failure as they had not met the expectations of the incumbent administration to the extent that they undermined what Cameron and the Conservative right considered as the need to ‘abandon 'state multiculturalism' (Cameron, 2009). New Labour introduced the Department for Education and skills albeit short-lived, along with the introduction in the 2008 National Curriculum of Personalised learning and thinking skills. After the 2010 elections they were removed by SOSE 2010-14 and the coalition, but both do show how for a period the notion of skill was seen as important in education for policy makers. At this point I would argue through policy the focus is almost exclusively on knowledge and working memory and how much of what has been learnt has been retained.

For Clarke a feature of ‘fantasies of education policy in the neoliberal era involves claims of promoting curriculum that combines the best of the past with the cutting edge of the present’ and considers the way ‘Educational excellence everywhere declares its determination ‘to embed a knowledge based curriculum as the cornerstone of an excellent, academically rigorous education, one that is forward looking while (also) equipping children with core knowledge about the best that has been thought and written’ (Clarke, 2020:158). In his article Clarke references an article from *Forum* which is critical of the policy stance and intentions arguing that ‘this language and the proposals they relate to, are disingenuous, deceptive and at times dangerous’ (Forum, 2016:136). In one section where they focus on curriculum and knowledge stating they reflect on the White paper as ‘little more than a traditional reassertion of a conservative, content-filled timetable, dressed up as a commitment to a ‘world class education’ (Forum, 2016:145) whereby what is ‘On offer is an education system in which education itself is conceived, first and foremost as a race’ (Forum, 2016:146). In conclusion they determine that in their view ‘The White paper adopts the authoritarian instincts of an exceptionally strong state’ (Forum, 2016:151). A finish line has been created that all are required to work towards

in a race to accrue and record as much knowledge as possible to differentiate between those that can and those that cannot.

When considering the starting point of the coalition to arrive to the point of Educational Excellence Everywhere is connected to fantasies of identity and nationalism some of which also became apparent during Brexit. The SOSE 2010-14 played a significant role in the leave campaign and had incorporated British values into education policy. During the Brexit campaign he ‘recalled the UKs distinguished global role in the past as an upholder and defender of liberal democratic values’ but claimed its capacities are currently vitiated and undermined by the operation of the EU and its institutions’ (Browning, 2019:235). It is perhaps obvious now as to why such focus was emphasised in education policy with ‘emphasis on nation and nationalism’ whereby the ‘underlying vision of the curriculum is one of reconciling state, society and individual into one harmonious national community’ (Clarke, 2020:158).

The impact of these policies was evident in the interviews as there were times when the interviewees appeared to be negotiating their own position on the extent to which they were looking to enable the young people they work with to gain what they perceived as skill compared to knowledge. Through the analysis of the findings participants were concerned with the separation of ‘skills’ and ‘knowledge’ interchanging the value that they were applying to each. The confirmation of the importance of this theme became more apparent as I related it to the literature and the shift from New Labour approach to education with a greater focus on skills compared to the Coalition’s Knowledge Rich curriculum. In the analysis this theme emerged as in their perceptions they reflected on their experience of the policy change as enacted as a result of the introduction of Progress 8 as a performative measure.

4.3.2 Ellie putting skills at the centre.

Ellie saw ‘skills’ as integral to her perception of ‘progress’.

‘Progress’ is when the students that I work with layer their skills on top of each other and can show that they can do what I’ve taught them or helped coach them to do. So, yeah, it’s like layering skills upon each other. To, to show, to show and in the knowledge, lesson has been taken off, and that’s what I think progresses.

There is a focus on the skills before the knowledge and the belief of a construction through separate layers perhaps like a gateau with each layer the sign of ‘progress’ being fulfilled. Ellie

considered soft skills when speaking about her experiences in alternative provision and how 'progress' was needed in communication for her students so that they could then apply them in the 'real world'.

'I think that the 'progress' of being able to discuss with their peers with their teacher, the themes, the ideas, the context, their history, all of the knowledge that they've gained, and then to be able to apply that to the real world, their world.' She continued to explain this further,

Many of our students speaking and listening wise, don't really have the, the skills to go out and, you know, nearly really good job interview or have discussions or understand different points of view. And all of those discussion parts that we might have on a text, as part of 'progress' allows them to develop those skills of listening of hearing someone's ear that they don't agree with, but being able to unpick that slightly, and all of those, and they're often called soft skills, which is annoying, but they're transferable to real life when they you know, go for their college interview or their job interview. So, it it's a massive part of 'progress' that isn't even assessed.

In her role it is evident that there is the need to look for 'progress' in other avenues than through the grading system as very few if any meet the agreed standard pass mark as set by the government. In Ellie's assertion the 'progress' is made through the young people she works with being able to participate in discussion where they are then able to conduct themselves in formal situations such as work of college interviews. One might argue an element of resistance is evident to the system with which Ellie is working within as none of what she is describing fits with the vision as espoused by 'Educational Excellence Everywhere'. The 'progression' in skills that she is describing and working towards with her pedagogical approach does not fit with the metric evidence based approach.

4.3.3 Steve and confidence through structure

Confidence in themselves is what Steve points to as a barrier to achieving progress and through the teacher helping and creating structure the inhibitions can be challenged with the students then making progress.

You know, a lot of students do arrive with humanities subjects, some of the history subjects, if they're low ability, if they're lower ability or lower predicted, they tend to be quite reticent about doing extended answers, because the idea is, you know, I can't, I can't do it, it's too difficult. It's too

varied. And there's often a formula like, paragraph or CNOP, content, nature origin purpose, and getting them to initially follow a structure,

For Steve there appears to be a construction that takes place with all the component parts laid out as a kit and assembled by the students with the support of the teachers' instructions. By having access to the instruction manual the students should have the confidence to access the work that he is asking them to do. In the knowledge he is advocating is not necessarily knowledge in terms of the subject matter, in his case history, but of how to be able to express oneself within that subject. This is where there is evidence of what the history teaching community distinguishes as 'disciplinary' versus 'substantive' knowledge. 'Substantive knowledge is the content that teachers teach as established fact' (Counsell, 2018), so for History teachers, the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066, is an example of fact. The other side to the teaching of History is 'Disciplinary knowledge' which by contrast, is a curricular term for what pupils learn about how that knowledge was established' (*ibid*) and partake in exercises such as source analysis. What Steve is explaining, is that for students to be able to make 'progress' within the discipline they need knowledge of structures and tools to direct them and enable them to fully partake in the discipline. This concurs with Ellie's perception whereby the need for the students to demonstrate what they can do is heavily reliant on knowing what to do and how to go about it. For Steve, the building job needs to be supported by looking for small amounts of progress as he believes that '*progress can be limited by anxiety and fear of how complete the question can be, and maybe how much they are expected to write*' which he saw in part due to them understanding '*the reasoning behind doing those types of questions*'. The types of questions, Steve, is considering are source questions, something that Christine Counsell recognised as a being a problematic part of the history curriculum. Counsell explained that one of the problems was that 'many activities encourage pupils in the mistaken view that a source can be reliable in itself rather than reliable for something' (Counsell, 2011:204). To be able to deal with the complexity of the disciplinary aspect and to fully comprehend what is being asked, Steve's structure, is presented as the solution to support a view of 'progress'.

4.3.4 Heather's approach to knowledge

When I interviewed Heather, she saw having knowledge as part of the purpose of education saying '*And then there's the purpose about having the knowledge. And I think part of*

progressing as people is about giving people knowledge'. For Heather there is a defined purpose to knowledge in that 'progress' is not just about having the knowledge it is about then being able to share that knowledge with others. It is important to remember that the field of English is broken into Language and Literature as this affected the way in Heather tried to explain herself with regards to English Language.

It's about improving your communication, in kind of very basic terms, but also in terms of improving your ability to persuade people to have a voice in kind of writing and speech and improve that voice.' And stating 'understanding that you might have the best ideas in the world. But if you can't express them, well, people aren't going to listen to you.

In her teaching of English Language Heather saw her role as being to support the progression in creative expression and being able to have a voice. There is the communication skill that is important whilst perhaps developing a knowledge of language techniques to support with communication. This contrasted with Literature where she believed the knowledge gained was the 'progress', she herself had made.

So, literature, I think, is the way that we can experience different worlds and different lives and develop empathy and develop consideration of, you know, when we're young, we're quiet, we kind of think everyone is the same as us. And everyone experiences things in the same way. And literature opens that up for people and talking about literature and understanding literature. You know, that's, that's how I learned about things like slavery, or poverty, because you read about it in text.

The knowledge gained from Literature is given strong gravitas as it brings knowledge of ourselves, us, others, and concepts with the knowledge supporting personal growth and 'progress'. The language skills are there to support as people build their communication skills to be able to have an impact on the world around them. The knowledge from the literature helps to establish the way in which others view the world and to understand how and why the world is the way it is. Heather further clarified this later in the interview when she reflected.

Reading and about understanding your place in society and understanding what society means and challenging your perceptions. And that that, for me is kind of the core of English literature. And I think, you know, I think the idea that teenagers are going to sit and read 19th century novels is a fallacy. So, we have to force them to read them in class, otherwise, they'll never read them.

Reasoning that ‘otherwise they won’t experience part of our culture’ and therefore may miss out on cultural references as they move into higher education and thus fall victim to the ‘Matthew effect’ (Major and Higgins, 2019: XV). For someone reading this who has a deep connection to literature and sees the study as perhaps virtuous this may seem depressing and fails to meet their perception. On the other hand, for the authors of ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’ this was their intention as in children are indoctrinated into a literary canon that fuels a perceived sense of British values. Heather is putting value on the knowledge she perceives as being integral to ‘progress’ not only in school but later life and the way in which that knowledge will be needed for the students, she has educated to be able to participate fully in the world around them.

Educators, policy makers, parents all have a part to play with regards appropriateness but simultaneously the personal ‘progress’ and the potential for that to occur becomes a consideration. In the 21st Century the moral aim of the action of using reading as a sign of ‘progress’ can be called into question as the belief is that the impact of reading will be emancipatory but there is the potential for the opposite to occur. Mollenhauer considers this when writing about Bildung, saying ‘Bildung is at once a process of broadening and enrichment as well as narrowing and impoverishment’ (Mollenhauer, 2014:2). In the attempt to broaden the individual through literacy at the same moment there is the chance it may make their life worse. I would like to contend that the positive ‘progress’ of literacy could well have a negative impact on another area of an individual person’s life. My ‘progress’ as a reader may lead to my depression and isolation from the world as I become influenced and affected by what I read. As a child I may well ‘progress’ to become an excellent reader and in doing so attained a reading age of fifteen plus by the age of ten. In doing so I may well find myself reading literature that introduces experiences and knowledge which is perhaps beyond my comprehension at such an age leading me to become a recluse and depressed or engaged in risky behaviour. Through the attempt at upbringing in literature through the school system it cannot be assumed that the ‘progress’ is only positive.

4.3.5 Dean, Ellie and Lewis calculating knowledge.

Dean also considered skills and knowledge with his own consideration that the,

Problem with all of them have always been that ‘progress’ in school has always been about the measurable. And we always, I mean, when we talk about it, we tend to talk about grades and how are we

measuring it. And that's always been on a, a skill based, knowledge based when there's room a knowledge-based path. And I think 'progress' in a skills way is very difficult to measure.

For Dean this then leads to 'subjects that are easily measurable are given more emphasis' with 'maths, science even in history, geography, where they're sort of like facts that you can pull out. Whereas the arts often not as measurable in those factual ways, and therefore they are put down.'

In Dean's answer there are interesting value judgements being made and criticism of the way in which the knowledge rich curriculum with the focus on learnt content has not only pushed skills into the background but also the arts. Dean levels this as being due to an impatience and a perception that 'progress' can be accelerated.

We, we don't just spend time giving in a way we because we're so desperate to see 'progress', that we actually force knowledge on to students rather than allowing them to develop it. And that takes longer and it's it means that actually, they might take a long time for someone to make 'progress', but actually, in the long term, they will be able to get that information on their own.

In viewing maths in this way Dean suggests that it 'impedes a lot of people's 'progress', because they see it as you can either do it or you can't, you will either make 'progress' or you won't, and that they don't see that.'. For Dean again it appears a long-term approach to the concept of 'progress' is needed as he says, 'However good at maths you are, it's the hard work behind it and the repetition of it, that allows you to make the incremental steps going forward'.

Ellie was considered in her own assessment of knowledge and skills.

I suppose some of it, in applying the skills to unpick the evidence, is that it will relate to the exam they are going to be doing. So, it's important they as the module progresses, we start to look at specific skills, to be able to apply that knowledge.

There was no real crystallisation of what skills or knowledge was being alluded to and even later in the interview there was another case of espousing the need for knowledge and skills with no real clarity. I had asked her 'if you took it away from your subject and you thought about education what the 'progress' we're looking for in Education?' to which she replied, 'to develop well rounded individuals' with 'a good knowledge base and the skills to apply the knowledge and skills that they've gained into their next steps'. From this I would suggest there is the visible impact of both the Labour policies with their emphasis on skills and the more

recent obsession with knowledge. Yandell considers the Conservative's policy whereby 'Gibb offers a Hirschian remedy: knowledge. This is far more than an attempt to distinguish the new version of the curriculum from its New Labour, skills-oriented predecessor.' (Yandell, 2017:249). Nick Gibb was the minister for schools between 2010-2023 and along with his colleague the SOSE 2010-14 had a strong influence over the changes made within the English system. With what appears to be an attack on Hirsch, Yandell says that 'In the Hirschian model, knowledge is inert, fixed, stable – ready to be delivered, more like a sack of potatoes than a box of delights, to the next generation' (Yandell, 2017:250). What I would say is that in Ellie's response she is going no further than offering competing 'potatoes' with empty references to skills and knowledge. There is a political tension at work here that can be emphasised when considering the work of the 'Tony Blair Institute for Global Change' who openly condemn the approach that has been pursued since 2010.

These capabilities cannot be fostered simply by instilling in pupils a narrow pool of traditional knowledge and hoping for the best. The system the government has created leaves little scope for schools to develop in their pupils the personal and non-cognitive skills essential for success in later life. Instead, its obsessive focus on what are assumed to be core competencies crowd out the problem-solving and collaborative skills which build on these, and which employers are crying out for. (Coulter et al, 2022:12)

Skills are perceived as vital to success not what Coulter et al are considering as a 'narrow pool of traditional knowledge' (*ibid*) but as I accepted at the start of this section there cannot be skill without the support of knowledge. Lewis considered the ways in which he felt 'progress' is '*partly made up of knowledge*' and '*the ability to demonstrate key academic skills*' although he did not particularly like this summary.

If I'm honest with you, I just think it's just, it's, it's almost like you're trying to pick different things apart when there's nothing to pick apart. They're all everything's all intertwined. So probably because I've never thought about it directly like this. But yeah.

Lewis decided to explain himself further and why he saw knowledge and skills as intertwined.

Academic 'progress' simply is, I suppose we judge it by, are you getting closer and closer to be genuinely what we would, we would deem to be an A-Level student. So, whether you're actually ever going to get there or not but are you developing those skills that we think are required for further academic study, actually, whether it be A-Level or degree level. So, I think we're constantly looking to see the development of those skills in your sevens, eights and your nines, through exposing them to much higher-level texts through getting them to argue about or discuss. And then trying to open their eyes. And actually, I think that is

'progress', because then you're moving towards where they then, you are developing them as a learner and a critical thinker. I think that's core to it all. And then the knowledge just sits around inside. I'm much happier with that as an answer.

Lewis shows that he is of the opinion that skills are being developed and teachers are aware of how those skills are needed to be able to access further and implicitly higher education. It could be construed that the knowledge is of secondary importance to Lewis and that the real sign of 'progress' is the ability to be a critical thinker as he states *'that's core to it all'* elevating his perception of the role of skills. What is perhaps noteworthy is that as with other participants the knowledge and skills remain generic with little clarity on what exactly those skills are or how to demonstrate 'progress' as a critical thinker. Daniel Willingham who answers his own question 'Why don't students like school? Because the mind is not designed for thinking' (Willingham, 2009:4) claims that 'contrary to popular belief, the brain is not designed for thinking. It's designed to save you from having to think' (*ibid*). Willingham and his research were actively promoted by the SOSE 2010-14 and heavily influenced his views on evidence. The challenge evident here is the cross over and pedagogical approach from before the shift to the knowledge rich curriculum and work that was taking place on critical thinking in schools.

4.3.6 Kevin and getting beyond the frameworks to find oneself.

Kevin considers how frameworks and established assessment regimes constrict the capacity of students, and how what he really aspires to, is for students to get beyond those frameworks and achieve something that is more representative of their self.

That whole idea of becoming, but this is, you know, when you're working within the framework, where things are time limited, and people have certain capacities or limits on their capacities. It's recognising that and saying what can you tap into? And what frameworks do you understand to use to move people into certain positions which will help them but also given them the tools to actually make their own way?

He clarified this further.

So, I can get someone to write something in a particular way. And but when you can become more than that constraint, I think that is, I would say, you know, genuine, what, for me, not genuine 'progress', but it's a way of becoming more than the structure, which is there to support you.

Kevin shows a concern that as the teacher he has a role to play in the student's development, and in helping them to learn to write, but in the presentation of the work and success criteria there are constraints placed upon them. The 'Banking education' here is apparent as in working with the students to follow and apply a structure limiting the 'progress' that can be made unless they break away. Another explanation might be that what Kevin is considering as a cultural script for doing well as 'cultural beliefs or scripts are what assessment is and is for' (Elwood and Murphy, 2015:183) which means that 'dominant cultural ways of being pertinent to assessment and how these ways of being or cultural legacies have emerged in the field and which are rarely acknowledged because... they are taken for granted common sense beliefs or cultural illusions' (Elwood and Murphy, 2015:184). In wanting students to achieve and to reach their potential, there is a pressure placed on the classroom teachers and so methods and approaches to achieve success become part of a culture and shared experience. From my own practice I would include the strategy of the PEEL (Point, evidence, explanation, link) paragraph, which is a well-known method for students to ensure they paragraph successfully. There is a script to follow, to demonstrate an adherence to the mark scheme, defying the notion that 'students responding to test items are isolated from social influences, and are thus separately analysable' (Elwood and Murphy, 2015:185), which potentially acts more as a constraint. Kevin was keen to try to explore a way in which originality could be found in expression.

What makes it great is if you go beyond that structure, and you yourself in your reading your molecules, they're in such a way that you don't see that structure anymore. You see something beautiful, which is unique. And that would be I suppose that's the sense of the current but that's, that's not the finished product. That's just a staging post to get to somewhere else.

In Kevin's reading of 'progress' there is the moment of becoming and arguably the emancipation whereby the taught structures and those of the assessment regimes dissipate. 'Progress' is the reflection of the current moment and the point that has been reached but as a step to somewhere else. The cultural script and structures are perhaps part of the overall and necessary if the goal here is to be achieved of personal 'progress' within the system as it stands. As part of a system of accountability the teachers need to try to give their students the best opportunity to succeed and therefore inducting them into scripts that meet the assessment requirements becomes a necessity. For the teacher to break away fully, ignore the requirements, structures could potentially harm the prospects of their students within the system, from which there is no escape. What Kevin is sharing is that from time to time there are moments when

something unique, or different happens which allows a flourishing which goes beyond such measures.

4.3.7 Bags of potatoes

For the most part when considering ‘progress’ as ‘knowledge, skill or both’ there was much genericism which shows the impact of the policy measures from New Labour through to the current focus from government. In trying to establish a shared focal point for ‘progress’ through the delivery chain knowledge is ultimately presented as ‘potatoes’ (Yandell, 2017:250) that are collected in the bags of the students to be weighed as they make their way to the portal. Those with the heaviest bags are rewarded whilst those with lighter bags are deemed as failures. What is not considered is that when the journey to the portal began some already had potatoes put in the bags for them and so need to collect less along the way to reach the same point.

4.4 ‘Progress’ through the ‘vortex’

4.4.1 ‘Through the vortex to the other side’

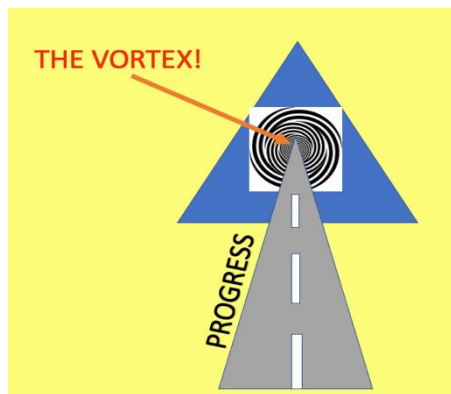


Figure 46, 'The Vortex' J.Perkins

When I made my image of ‘The Vortex’ (see figure 46) and the road of ‘progress’ leading to it there was very clearly in my own reflection on ‘progress’ that a journey is undertaken and at the end of that section of the journey a step is made into another realm. A quote that is often attributed to the American philosopher Emerson is ‘Life is a journey, not a destination’ although to find a reference has proven difficult as there is conjecture as to if he did indeed write it. In recent years with focus on lifelong learning it would be possible to generate a similar quote of ‘Education is a journey, not a destination’. The problem is that there is a terminal point

to both life and education, and so to ignore the destination, and what that holds seems unwise. Reiss and White consider the role of education in this journey as being for ‘every child to lead a personally flourishing life’ (Reiss and White, 2013:5), for which they claim ‘there are many accounts of the flourishing life. Some religious people locate it principally in the afterlife’ (*ibid*). Within this understanding of a flourishing life, it could perhaps be conceived that, the educational afterlife is created and imagined for students in the English with White suggesting that ‘a central aim of the school should be to prepare students for a life of autonomous, wholehearted, and successful engagement in worthwhile relationships’ (White, 2011:129). In this assessment there is potentially the ‘fantasy’ of the educational afterlife what in my own experience some teachers like to refer to as the ‘real world’. In the next section I have selected from the data some of the other interesting points made by some of the participants and how they are considering what happens once the students have moved on from their establishments.

4.4.2 Dean, maths, and the real world

Dean made a point about the way in which policy makers and those with an interest in education try to have an impact on maths and how this affects the understanding of what maths should mean to people once they leave school. ‘They’re always talking about can you please link maths to the real world?’ which leads to ‘*a race to make it useful, rather than seeing it as a subject in its own right.*’ The deficit here could be construed that in the educational journey the ‘progress’ that could be made in maths is being put to one side to learn maths that has the perception of utility or functionality. Dean and his view of the study maths is more than simply gaining a qualification to obtain work but a vital part of allowing people to participate fully in the society in which they live and to be able to question what is happening around them.

I mean, the I think most maths teachers go in and they teach the three averages, and they go, you work out the mean by adding them all together and dividing by the number of numbers you added together. You find the median by doing this and they talk about it mechanically, but there's a reason why there are three averages and that tells us something quite a lot about, and it can, it can, it tells us something about society, it tells us something. Why are there three averages? Why is it that the CEO of a Fortune 500 company wants to use the mean to describe the average wage, whereas actually the unions want to use the median.

Dean wants his students to have a deeper relationship with the mathematics so that students can consider how they impact on society so that.

When they talk about an average in the newspaper, which average are they talking about? And why have they chosen that average? And that's, but that's you have to have a that's a two or three lesson conversation.

Dean is thinking about the other side of the portal and the extent to which they will be able to apply their knowledge to help them to ask the complicated questions and make considerations that allow for agency. Dean wants his students to be able to think critically and be aware of how the way in which numbers are spoken about is affected and the way that then impacts on them. When considering human flourishing again there is an element which is to do with civic engagement as 'fundamental to civic virtues is living together as equal citizens' as 'it matters to us as citizens that every fellow citizen is treated with respect' (Reiss and White, 2013:28). What I believe Dean is suggesting is if students are to be able to hold their space and be able to be involved in the discussion either when it comes to voting or even in their workplace, they need to have a deeper knowledge of the significance of what they are learning. In this respect they are active participants in the world and able to shape their own path rather than having it shaped for them.

4.4.3 Ellie and tickets

The 'real world' was also a consideration for Ellie but that act of gaining in education and to make 'progress' was through the attaining of a ticket, which one could argue is abstract. What was noticeable was that the destination for the ticket was open as she stated.

It's the ticket to the next step wherever that person wants to go. So, some of the young people I work with have it might be a ticket to college, maybe a level three course, if they get certain exam results and make certain 'progress'. Or, you know, in the future it might be to get to university or ticket into an apprenticeship.

A list of destinations is referred to with the ticket left open depending on the individual to use it for what they want with Ellie reducing further to state '*the function of how I see education really, particularly at secondary level, is it's a ticket process*'. Ellie has constructed the school as a travel agent in some respects where through the process, the students make 'progress' to attain a ticket for the next part of their journey which is largely unspecified. She is talking from the perspective of alternative provision however and so perhaps there is the challenge of being more specific. In some sense I can identify the 'vortex' in these statements as there is the portal

and the gateway but no real identification of how what has been learnt will impact or support the person on the other side. Ellie went on to explain more about the grade expectations in the type of setting.

If I'm working in an AP (alternate provision), if someone gets a B, or A grade, I don't think we got a grade eight or nine last year, I think we'd be jumping from the tables up celebrating, you know, someone gets a four, where we're super, super chuffed. It's obviously based on their own ability. But I guess what I'm trying to say the cohort is your ones, twos and threes.

I returned at this point to their notion of the ticket and asked, 'The qualification for them, is it much of a ticket?'. In some ways Ellie misunderstood my question which was more of a concern for those who are always expected to finish short of the line, but Ellie was sure that 'if you can get them to the grade four it's a massive ticket'. I would counter this conclusion that Ellie makes, whereby simply qualifying does not mean there will be success at the finish line. An analogy here would be gaining qualification to an Olympic swimming final but knowing all along you would not finish in the top three. Through a knowledge of your best performance times, all of the training to get to the final you know that you will place in the bottom three. Through the way in which the English system awards qualification there are students out there who will be aware that they are in the bottom third and although they may qualify their outlook is not perhaps as bright as their peers. What I am saying here is that I do not share the same optimism as Ellie, but maybe she needs to have that optimism due to the students she chooses to work with and maintain hope that she is making a difference to their lives.

Ellie considered how role modelling takes place in her provision to support a view of 'progress',

So, I'm repeating myself slightly, but a lot of it is role modelling in the staff that we have of role modelling, what we would expect behaviour to be like, and, you know, and, but also everything that we try and do links to real life, because lots of mainstream education is about the, the ticket out of there. And it is about the, you know, the exam, those there lots of what we talk about this future self.

The ticket appears again as 'progress' seems to be related to escaping from a way of life or being to work towards another that is perceived as better or more agreeable. Such students that Ellie is working with are outside of 'mainstream education' and so there is the need to bring meaning to the qualification not as an end goal or affirmation of a point of achievement but, as a means, to altering their present and suggest a better future. In the discussion with Ellie, I

pulled her back to the issue of how she worked with the students who knew the grade 5 would be out of the question and how she saw those students making ‘progress’.

Leading by a values-based approach can help to model the behaviours that we'd want to see, in regard to, you know, bringing someone back on to education, a lot of what we have to do to engage those pupils to, you know, believe in their own ‘progress’.

It was not clear how this linked to the notion of a ticket as through bringing back to education in this sense is limiting the ‘progress’ to more education. The ticket being applied is not looking beyond in some respects to how the young people will engage societally and yet Ellie goes on to say,

Working on those skills that you talked about, you know, developing that, that moral compass, that idea of community we talk about a lot and, and a values-based approach.’ And ‘I mean, in saying all of that. I mean, this is, again, anecdotal personal experience, not all, of our students do develop that moral compass.

The destination is once again unclear and perhaps this is due to the nature of the work Ellie does and the students she works with where focus is on

Careers, we'll do a lot on the apprenticeships that are out there. And we have a whole coordinator that like really focuses on, on future self. So, I think that helps them reconnect, and maybe try and find a place where they want to be in life.

In working with the individuals that Ellie is describing there is the need to look outside of the conformity and help them to find a place and space in their own futures. ‘Progress’ through the ‘vortex’ is very much the unknown as it does not follow the cultural norm of GCSE to A-Level or Sixth form. For the students she is talking about there is the passing through the gate to an uncertain future in many ways, where despite their vulnerabilities as laid out by Ellie, they will need to negotiate their own path.

4.4.4 Kevin and his existential view

In his reply, Kevin had used the phrase ‘*existential*’, and I wanted to know more about what this meant for him.

It's the, the kind of underlying basis, is that you, you kind of always ask questions, and that you are an unfinished project in a particular way.

Kevin seems to be trying to consider that ‘progress’ through the ‘vortex’ is to continue a project that involves asking questions and being reflective about who you are and how you are approaching life. In reaching the ‘vortex’ and doing what is needed to pass through once on the other side the students will need to use what they have learnt to support them and enable them to work through their life.

So, there are certain proxies that you can say that someone's, you know, done very well, and they're fairly successful. But that depends on what viewpoint that you are looking at it from. And so, I think, in terms of my educational way of looking at things, and seeing, seeing success, or seeing people become different things in different contexts over periods of time, is has kind of scuppered that very linear notion of ‘progress’, which is used in education.

Kevin explains that his own sense of ‘progress’ has been challenged by his experiences over time and that what constitutes success has been altered through these experiences. In some respects when I was discussing Oliver’s response in section 4.1 of this thesis he too had tried to step outside and view ‘progress’ from an alternate angle based on his experiences. The context in which the leaders find themselves is important to that perception of ‘progress’ and what it means to their students as it affects the point at which they consider ‘progress’ has been made and what that ‘progress’ looks like. Through the lens of GCSE results and A-Level results the ‘progress’ of students is immediately thrust into the national context and view of success in the league tables, value added scores and percentages. What both Kevin and Oliver feel they are able to do, due to their experience is reach their own judgements as to the extent that they believe success and therefore ‘progress’ has been made.

And, you know, I suppose that's from a kind of an existential philosophy standpoint, that's, that seems to make more sense to me. Students, we are unfinished projects. And so, we are in a process of becoming, becoming more educated, more human, who knows?’

In this response Kevin is pulling himself away from the ‘progress’ measure linked to grade outcomes and suggesting that he has developed a broader view of ‘progress’ and the way in which people develop. Kevin also suggests that ‘different contexts over periods of time’ have

given him this view and therefore ‘make more sense to him’. In a similar way to other participants the notion of an incompleteness to the endeavour is present but also reference to the students as ‘unfinished projects’ but he used the word ‘we’ and so it could be construed that he is including himself within that.

I was taken by the phrase ‘*more human*’ and asked Kevin ‘How would we become more human?’ to try to gather what line of ‘progress’ he would draw and how he would perceive that aim being achieved.

I think experiencing lots of different things. Reading lots of different things, broadening your horizons, understanding that we're trying to apprehend that humanity is a very complex phenomenon. Historically, socially, economically, technologically.

As a history and politics teacher this is perhaps what leads Kevin to make such a distinction as his point seems to be that the ‘progress’ to being human is to understand how ‘humanity’ has come to be in the position that it is and perhaps if he was to read this back, he may add ‘scientifically’ to the list. To be more ‘human’ there seems to be the suggestion that it is through this broad understanding that students would then be able to contend with the world in which they live. Kevin reflected from his position as a teacher of Politics.

That is one of the things that I talk about is this kind of growing human rights culture, or this notion of rights and responsibilities. And that these things are, you know, develop over periods of time. And while we can say or point to certain things and say, yes, we have this piece of legislation, or we do this, there are very clear examples where that doesn't apply to everybody. So, is that really ‘progress’? I don't I don't know.’

In stating ‘*I don't know at the end*’ he is answering the question he has posed of ‘*is that really progress?*’ and through this rhetorical question he is perhaps signposting the complexity that he finds with ‘progress’. ‘Progress’ for whom is also a consideration in this response whereby it can be agreed that where there appears to be a group or section of society that is winning there is another that is left out or behind. An example here could be the introduction of universal suffrage which arbitrarily decides that all those under 18 are not to be included on decisions on a national level such as Brexit. In the post Brexit era, it has been notable how generationally there was a considerable difference in the views around the pros and cons of being a member of the EU and how the voting may have been quite different had those under 18 been allowed a say. Likewise, perhaps the notion that universal suffrage would bring the equality so desired

by many women yet in the 21st Century we still have a significant gender pay gap and a largely male dominated government. With regards to this thesis the missing are the students who attain the grades one to three as mentioned previously, whereby a piece of legislation to set a standard and a marker, still fails to provide those at the lower end of the award with anything better than the previous D-G grades.

4.4.5 Leon and the destination of his staff and school

When Leon spoke of destinations and ‘progress’, he involved his own staff in the conversation and considered the ‘progress’ of his institution in enabling that ‘progress’ to occur. He equated the growth of the school he was running to the evolution of the institution. It is possible from this viewpoint to perhaps see the entire school as waiting on the precipice of the steps to enter the ‘vortex’. He begins by addressing the issue of the school’s reputation.

And the local community didn’t have much faith in the school at that time. Because while the buildings were rubbish, and secondly, it was known as a school that had very, very high exclusions and things like that.

I find this comment interesting in the way that the local community is homogenised and the possibility that some of the local community did have faith in the school as they chose to send their children there. Gewirtz explores this in her book and there is something to consider here with regards the way ‘progress’ of an institution is dependent on the community that it serves and the way in which the school leadership looks to alter the community it serves. ‘Within a market culture it is acceptable for there to be winners and losers’ (Gerwitz, 2002:49), therefore ‘there is pressure on individuals (both producers and consumers) to be motivated first and foremost by self-interest’ (Gerwitz, 2002:50). The self-interest of Leon is evident as he sees the chance to rebuild the school as not only improving the buildings but also the standing of the school in the locality. The pressure can lead to schools targeting particular social groups in a locality ‘I’m not saying we’re looking for middle class parentsbut we’re looking for motivated parents’ (Gerwitz, 2002:60). Leon’s school is perhaps like this comment from the head in Gerwitz book as he oversaw a school that grew significantly.

He began by considering the fact that the roll was below what was expected ‘year eight and year nine should have had over 200 students in them and they had 120 and 130’ and that with this came a lot of turbulence for the cohort as by the time ‘it got to year 11 it had nearly 200

students in it, and some had left with from 'that cohort in year seven those who finished in year 11 was not much more than 50%'. He remembered how the school had to flex as

We had to think about integration and students coming from all parts, all corners of the world really at that time. So progresses the school, obviously you know student numbers grew the intake.

The school had moved into new premises and many of those opting to join the school were doing so to avoid 'significant appeals processes and things of the more popular schools.' Leon considered if this was 'progress' and concluded that.

Yes, they are too, mainly because at that time the ability cohorts were very skewed because the middle-class parents were opting out of that system. They were trying to get into other schools and if not getting into the slough grammar school system or into independent schools if they could afford it.

He goes on to take pride in the growth of the school and returns to the roll as a measure of 'progress' 'Not only is the school full at 200 but has grown to a capacity of 288 with further forms of entry'.

Leon also measures the 'progress' of his school against Ofsted but with a twist of irony as if looking purely at Ofsted ratings there is no 'progress', only a stagnant good. 'I am a squeaky clean two' and when he believes that there was the chance of an Outstanding rating, he suffered the ignominy of Ofsted deciding that as he was a consistent good, they did not need to visit. I bought Leon back round to discuss how he saw teachers making 'progress' as people which he saw as being essential to the 'progress' of the institution. 'If you make your people better and create high performing teams, then you know, that is going to be for the greater good of any institution regardless of it being education and arts'. He saw 'progress' linked to the partnerships he has built over time and how that supports the 'progress' of the school.

Subject leaders will be at different levels in their own personal development, some will have been doing it for a long time, doing it very well, for a long time, some will have been doing it very well for quite a while and sort of maybe stagnate.

To support the 'progress', he talks about grouping teachers together and that this had a positive impact on the outcomes of the school. Here the personal 'progress' of the professionals is linked directly to improved outcomes for the students thus the 'progress' goes hand in hand. In my mind there is the image of an entire institution gathered around the 'vortex' looking in, not knowing what the other side is but holding a degree of faith in the process.

4.4.6 Oliver and preparation for challenges in life

Oliver wanted to disassociate himself from the data centred view of ‘progress’.

When I was in my younger past, no, I didn't want to measure data. It wasn't about the data. It was about enabling those students to fulfil their lives. But then I thought over the last few years more particularly, are how are we following up those students once they've left? How are we reviewing how successful they are in a few years' time,

Here Oliver is showing an interest in what takes place once the students have moved on and to understand whether the work of the school and the way in which the educational experience has prepared them to ‘fulfil their lives’. He reflects on the concern with resilience and the need for people to have resilience in their lives but how it is not possible to put a number on such a desired outcome.

Oh, yeah 100% of our students are resilient and they've gained the skill of resilience because we did this. Because even if we could put a number on I, how much is us? How much is the nurture of the parents? How much is their perceptions of wider society?

Oliver problematises the aim of the system and the way in which there is pressure to evidence whilst not knowing which area of life has the greater impact in achieving that aim. The rise in reported mental health concerns is an area that current government policy is looking to understand but for Oliver it is not Covid-19 that has caused this. ‘It's because we haven't prepared generations for how to deal with things’. Through my own interpretation this again plays into the vision of the ‘vortex’ and a portal to a dimension where educators have hope and faith, that once those who have been through the system emerge, they are equipped to cope with the next phase.

4.4.7 Anna and applications

Anna also showed a concern for agency.

So, if they can make ‘progress’ with their reading, then I guess in the wider scale of things, when they go off, and they leave school, and they go into the big wide world, they're kind of better equipped, and maybe more confident with things that they will have to deal with in real life. So, for example, being able to read an application form or being able to read, you know, a piece of research for their university course, or whatever it might be. So, reading

'progress' is important, because it kind of gives them the skills for life, really, because they'll always need it.

In this response there are a lot of areas that are covered quite quickly and lend to the notion of what is needed once passing through the portal. There is the equipping with the school of reading and how that will equate to a sense of self efficacy linked to what Anna refers to as 'real life' in completing applications stretching all the way to the other end of the scale with research at higher education. In this response the next dimension, 'vortex' view of 'progress' as the one element of education, that of being able to read is being stretched. To complete an application is something every person will do, from jobs, to bank accounts, to housing, benefits, and an endless list whereas the higher education need is perhaps fewer. Rather than 'real life' the term human flourishing again offers perhaps an alternate explanation as by taking their literacy with them the students can have praxis.

I asked Anna to consider other ways that students might make 'progress' with reading.

It kind of just helps with things like imagination. So, the reading doesn't have to always be like nonfiction, nonfiction, or anything like that. It could be to engage with a story to then kind of provoke some imagination within themselves.

I found this interesting as there was no real follow up as to what the imagination is needed for or how it would promote a form of 'progress'. It was unclear if this was to give the sense of moral understanding or to be creative with ideas Anna brought it back again to the notion of real world.

I think it also will prepare them for things like being able to like comprehend things in the in the wider world as well. So, you know, are they able to kind of put their comprehension skills not to test but kind of like can they comprehend things that are around them.

With this comment she moves to the practicality of reading in making sense of the world around us but again with little clarity on what that might be but then concluded that,

I think having, being able to read will really empower people. Because at the end of the day, reading, writing, and communicating is all kind of the things that we need. To kind of, I don't want to use the word 'progress', but I guess to move forward and to obviously, succeed, I feel like without the reading, there's this idea that maybe it will hinder people from being able to move forward, maybe.

In my own interpretation of what Anna is trying to say I feel that she is suggesting that without the ability to read then communication will not be as strong thus inhibiting people and disempowering. In most of Anna's responses with regards to reading and literacy there is a sense of functionality and existence and if one was to be critical, lacking in aspiration. Giroux claims that

Literacy becomes completely subsumed within the logic and needs of capital, and it's worth is defined and measured against the demand for those reading and writing skills necessary for that growing sector of the labour process as literacy becomes the new admission ticket for the poor' (Giroux, 1983:206)

It is possible to concur with this assessment from Giroux and the way in which the English system puts value on the literacy of students and through the measure on English through the 'Progress 8' score and reporting of grades. Production is less measured in manufactured goods as of the past but through services and the workforce to power such production needs to be literate. For Anna the literacy is empowering but I would have to disagree to an extent and would suggest that far from empowering the literacy that young people are acquiring is shackling them. Inducted into value judgements about what it means to be literate and the functional uses of the skill of reading one could question whether the students can see beyond.

I had picked up on the word 'comprehend' and opted to ask Anna how their 'progress' in reading and comprehension might help her students to comprehend themselves. Anna contemplated how through literature there was the space to '*empathise with what that character is going through, then I feel like emotional connections are being made between the person and the characters in the book*'. 'Progress' could well be that as people we reach a point where we can edit and censor ourselves. Anna perhaps sums this up when she said:

If they can understand themselves, or they sometimes like when you're reading that you might see echoes of things that resonate with you. So, if you're reading something and you connect with it, then maybe it kind of makes you think about your own life or situation and kind of maybe makes you assess what's going on.

Anna does recognise though, that there is the complexity of someone being academically sound yet unable to express themselves.

But having said that, some people, maybe socially are just uncomfortable. So, they might be academic, they might be able to read lots and understand it. But in a social situation, they might not be able to express how they're feeling because it's just them as a person.

Here the academic ‘progress’ dissipates, if the person is unable to benefit from it and to use what they have learnt from partaking in the educational endeavour, to fulfil themselves in key situations. Anna brings this back to the scenario of an interview.

I don't know, the interviewer asked something that because it could be something that's quite light-hearted. If that person's well-read enough, maybe they could impart some of their wisdom or knowledge of what they've read, to make the situation a little bit less tense, then hopefully making the interview more successful.

‘Progress’ appears to be that the students go beyond the academic criteria and the grade associated ‘progress’ and that they can take what they have worked towards and benefit from it in any given circumstance. Again, the portal or ‘vortex’ can be reconsidered as the preparation the students are receiving, in this case through literacy, is known to be needed but the capacity in which it will play out on the other side is open. To take a critical stance is this any sense of ‘progress’ at all, or more that the students have the means of survival when it comes to challenging situations.

4.4.8 Natalie and being a citizen.

Natalie in her roles as a head of year referred to one student’s ‘progress’ as them being able to appreciate their own family history and how that related to their life and what their parents had hoped for them.

When calling his dad and his dad telling his son in front of us about his experience as a refugee, and why he came to this country, why education is so important. That literally was that lightbulb moment for a child, and he suddenly stopped messing about and made huge ‘progress’ and graduates went on to graduate from university where he was going to medical school. And it was just as simple as having nothing to do with the parent’s life experiences that his dad never shared.

In this vignette there is much to consider as the consideration of what the parent had aimed to gain from moving to the UK was wrapped up in the ‘progress’ that he wanted to see for his child. In making that apparent the child was able to understand more clearly the role of education in their own life which one could accept as a significant sign of ‘progress’ when comparing the life chances of father and son. I find in this explanation a link back to my own biography that I shared at the start of this thesis with the view that perhaps there was ‘progress’ in my life based on the way in which my grandparents and great grandparents had lived. To be more qualified, more educated, more professional simplifies the notion of ‘progress’ to the neo

liberal principal of higher skilled, more knowledgeable, and higher paid workforce. It reiterates Wolf, and her concern that the purpose of education has been lost with such a focus on growth as in this example there is the positivity of the view that the student in question went on to study medicine, however, we don't know more. Once they stepped through the portal and went to medical school what next? Have they sustained a moral purpose and are using their knowledge and understanding to fulfil a purposeful life that enables others to do the same? The 'vortex' opened, and he stepped through with the hope that what has been invested by school, parent and student continues the other side.

Natalie is a teacher of Citizenship and so I asked her what 'progress' she was looking for in the subject.

a lot of that is about taking courage, there's knowledge of this subject to find, establishing your own viewpoints and other people's views. And so, the 'progress' is about every situation from different angles and be able to construct a good argument themselves. And that sort of 'progress' happens in different ways. And so is looking for that understanding that analysis and know where to start they might not be able to do by the end of either a lesson or a series of lessons or a unit of work, or in some cases it takes a year to see that 'progress' being made.

Here Natalie sees 'progress' as something that takes time and is not instantaneous allowing a year or more as a frame within which to see 'progress'. There is the understanding they are learning how to do for themselves when it comes to developing arguments or thinking critically. Natalie is working on the notion that once through the portal and out the other side the 'progress' and learning made will help them to be active citizens.

Because a lot of it is taking real life situations and being able to bring it into the classroom and relate it to what they're learning. The whole system forces back in active citizens, the value of reading, the voice, the voting, testing, writing, standards a lot of times as well as more responsibilities. And I think that's it, it's about making sure that the students that are well rounded in the world.

On the other side is the real world and the school is presented as a simulation or reflection of that world whereby what is being learnt will serve in the future. The suggestion that 'real life' needs to be brought into the classroom is apparent in a similar way to which Dean and Ellie referred. 'Progress' is fractured by Natalie's perception with a separation between the present in the experience of the student in school compared to when they leave and so there is not an expectation of continuity per se. The 'vortex' and the moment of passing is the transition that students make as they depart from the school world and land in the 'real world'. Through my

analysis of all participants the challenge of perception over what is real and what is not impacts on their perceptions of 'progress'. There is the idea of what they need to take with them, to have in their bag, ready so that they can survive on the other side.

4.4.9 Heather and civil participation

I asked Heather how she thought students made 'progress' as people which she saw as being *'the bit that is kind of often forgotten about, isn't it? I suppose it depends on, on the kind of purpose of schooling really'* Heather broke the purpose down into *'about getting those grades, and about achieving those exam results'* then *'the purpose about having the knowledge. And I think part of progressing as people is about giving people knowledge,'* then thirdly.

And then that's the sort of part of the curriculum that we can't do during remote learning a lot of is teaching them how to be polite, and how to say thank you, and how to open doors and how to you, you know, line up for things and those kind of elements of societal 'progress' which would mean that you theoretically, learn to become a better person to become a better character.

Heather sees the person in three portions due to her perception of purpose and the 'progress' that the person makes being separated. It would be interesting perhaps to consider how you could make great amounts of 'progress' with grades and knowledge yet leave schooling as someone who is extremely impolite and rude. This in effect would be failing to make 'progress' against the criteria of character that Heather set out in her statement. I asked her 'So how would you know that you're becoming a bad character?' Her response was to question character education and unpick it,

I don't know. I have a, I have a problem with this idea of character education as a separate education from general education. If you don't, I mean, I don't think you can teach people to be good people. I think you can help people to become better people. But I think part of it is about improving their knowledge of the world, you know, why do we recycle? Is it because someone tells us to recycle? Or is it because we've learned about what happens if we don't recycle? You know, why do we vote, is it because we've learned what happens when we leave voting to crazy people. And the general people don't vote? So, I have a bit of an issue with 'progress' or character education as a separate idea from sort of knowledge, curriculum education.

It appears the moral purpose and aim of education is what Heather sees as more important, and for the school curriculum to be the vehicle that develops that aspect of the student's understanding. In the response the moral aim and purpose of the school curriculum to go further and allow active citizenship is the 'progress' that the participant is alluding to, the ability to

live a fulfilling life, making one's own decisions. From my own perspective however, I am not sure how much educating about the need to vote really is supporting agency. The '*leaving voting to crazy people*' is perhaps how radical change might be achieved, and if voting is about maintaining status quo, then why vote at all? The 'progress' made in universal suffrage may not have been achieved had it not been the actions of those at the time who were deemed as 'crazy' in Pankhurst et al. Apathy may well be drawn from the point that there is no difference of any magnitude, to one's own life, that even by having a grasp of civic duty it is not necessarily in the interest of the individual to follow it through. I would go further and suggest rather than 'progress', what is being sought reflects the values of the present in the young people being educated.

4.5 So what is the other side? I still don't think we know.

In my consideration of this section, I would argue that the reason there is such deference to the measurement and economic view of 'progress', is that establishing 'progress' in other ways is too complicated. The 'fantasy' of another political system, of ways of behaviour, technological advancement means that for those involved in education to have a sense of the concrete or real the measurement becomes a default setting. The views expressed in this section do try to put some distance and to consider 'progress' in other ways as people, characters, morally but the responses are tinged with doubt. Once the students have crossed that line and through the 'vortex', there is hope that they will carry with them what has been learnt without knowing really where the student is going.

5 Conclusions

5.1 What is ‘progress’ in the English Secondary School System? Perceptions of Secondary school leaders

The purpose of this thesis was to ask the question ‘What is progress?’ and investigate how progress is perceived by school leaders but also to understand my own perception and the ways in which policy, history and practice have influenced that perception. Through this original contribution this thesis sets out to disrupt and challenge thinking around ‘progress’ to ask questions of the current system in England and the extent to which ‘progress’ is or is not being made. At the start I set out a working definition which I return to here as part of my contribution to knowledge of ‘progress’ and how it might be perceived at this present time. The definition has been produced through three stages with the first coming through my supervision and wanting to be able to articulate my emerging theory of ‘progress’ and what it means in education.

Progress is an illusion or fantasy that attempts to create a focal point for those engaged in the activity of education to work towards in the belief that on reaching that point the subjects of the educational activity are in superior position to the point they were at in the beginning. In order to succumb to this reductive simplification of progress the educator therefore must believe that their interruption will overcome what is perceived as being a state of inferiority to reach a pre-determined destination.

The second version of the definition below is whereby through the literature I had begun to understand ‘progress’ much more as impacted upon by policy influenced through my reading of Stephen Ball’s work on performance. In the review the influence of policy and agendas that looked to shape education also were found to influence education and the way in which the term ‘progress’ was being used. As a performance measure ‘progress’ had become something that could be determined at a central government level with schools measured against it.

‘Progress’ can be an illusion or ‘fantasy’ that attempts to create a focal point for policy makers and educators in England that embeds a sense of order and purpose, working towards a position that is accepted as being superior to an agreed starting point on a national and personal level. To accept this logic of ‘progress’ the policy makers and educators therefore must believe that the system will overcome a perceived state of inferiority to reach a pre-determined destination. A destination that has been established by those in power who establish the points of measurement through setting numeric national standards and targets as benchmarks of success and failure based

on criteria and formula. Thus, the system of performance from the position of the 'fantasy' of policy makers has normalised 'progress' as the determining factor, maintaining order over the education system in England.

In returning to the definition now and in response to the analysis and findings there is also the chance to refine it further and to include reference to the themes that became apparent as well as to ensure that there is a clearer indication of the political influence that impacts on the understanding of 'progress'.

'Progress' can be an illusion or 'fantasy' that attempts to create a focal point for policy makers and educators in England that embeds a sense of order and purpose, working towards a position that is accepted as being superior to an agreed starting point on a national and personal level. To accept this logic of 'progress' the policy makers and educators therefore must believe that the system will overcome a perceived state of inferiority to reach a pre-determined destination. A destination that has been established by those in power who establish the points of measurement through setting numeric national standards and targets as benchmarks of success and failure based on criteria and formula. 'Progress' is identified as movement, through time, space, within a system that has a set time span based on age and stage demonstrating that knowledge and skills have been accrued. Thus, the system of performance from the position of the 'fantasy' of policy makers has normalised 'progress' as the determining factor, maintaining order over the education system in England. Therefore 'progress' can be construed as a logic that is applied to the English system.

In this final iteration of the definition there is the recognition of the themes that came through the analysis of the data as well as the literature with mention of the 'measurement', 'movement through time' and the accrual of 'knowledge and skills'. Through my engagement with the literature, the perceptions as expressed by the participants as born out in my analysis as well as my own reflections throughout this thesis, there is enough evidence to support this definition and to propose further research and discussion around 'progress' and how it affects education, therefore adding to knowledge. In the definition there is a clear link between the perceptions of the participants and the greater focus on 'progress' as a performative measure that they feel they, their students and their schools are judged by. There is their perception of how 'progress' is affected by considerations of time and movement and finally the way in which they consider 'progress' as being achieved through 'knowledge and skills'. I believe that this definition answers my research question for now but with further research could be refined more or added to, in particular as new policy measures come about. Therefore, this is still very much a working definition and not one that I would claim to be complete as the notion of 'progress' and the focal point will surely change again over time. As shown through this thesis the perception of

‘progress’ and the meaning is shaped and altered by policy and the work of those working in secondary schools. Should I continue to investigate ‘progress’ with further research they may be other themes or notions that become apparent which have not yet done so.

My research questions were linked to my methodological framework (*see figure 47*) where I set out to look at ‘progress’ historically, philosophically, sociologically through policy and finally through the perceptions of school leaders. In pursuing this research, I believe that important considerations have been made about the role and idea of ‘progress’ and the impact it is having on the English Secondary School System.

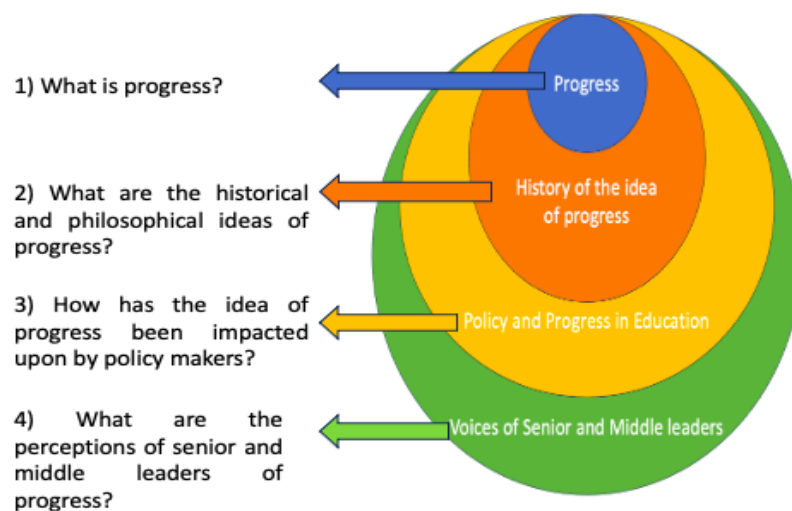


Figure 47, Methodological Framework

Through the literature review I set out a novel attempt at a genealogy of ‘progress’ firstly through establishing the lenses I was to use as a historian but also through what Tosh determined as ‘significant distorting effects’ (Tosh, 2002:13). Through social memory of, ‘traditionalism, nostalgia and progressibid) to which I also add ‘fantasy’, I have endeavoured to explore the way in which the idea of progress has altered over time. In doing so I believe my contribution has been to present the idea of ‘progress’ in an innovative way that allows the reader to understand how ‘progress’ has been perceived in different time periods. Consequently, in the last part of the chapter there is much more focus on centralised, state education which I would argue is a feature of the 20th and 21st Centuries. Through the literature, there is evidence of how greater interest in engineering ‘progress’, has become a focus of the state and the establishment of the reforms that were started by the SOSE 2010-14 and the Coalition government. Within this final section there is the subjectivity of my own lived

experience due the sharing of my personal biography in Chapter 1 whereby the reader can potentially locate me as a person within the narrative of this research.

5.2 Research outcomes – Supporting my definition.

To review the research outcomes and revisit the analysis I have used my own definition as a scaffold and reflected on how the categories and themes that I have written about occurred. In turn I have also returned to the images that were core to my methodology and the way in which I have constructed this thesis so that the golden thread of this thesis is evident in my summing up. By presenting this chapter in this way there is the chance to demonstrate my contribution to knowledge as well as to consider how they link back to the literature. Within this there was the emergence of the key themes of through my use of an inductive approach to the data analysis as well as the deductive when considering ‘The Vortex’. I have clarified and explained this approach fully in section 3.11 of the method and methodology chapter.

5.2.1 Personal illustrations as part of my method

Part of my contribution is the way in which I have built a method around the illustrations which I have used throughout this thesis which have served to firstly, allow me to understand my thoughts but secondly to present to the reader where my thoughts have come from. I believe this to be an original approach to research and an innovative approach. The illustrations helped me to respond to what I was reading but then also supported with direction of enquiry as looked to understand why my illustrations had come about. What was unexpected, from my own perspective was how they became part of the writing up of the thesis to support key points that I have made. When I first considered using them to illustrate points from the literature and why this research needed to be carried out, I had not considered how they could be used repeatedly to support further assertions. In presenting the work in this way there is a contribution to knowledge in respect of methodology and how one might approach the research process.

5.2.2 Superior to what came before.

I think that this is a part of my own definition that has vexed me considerably in trying to understand what I mean and why I see it as a problem. There is the common sense, taken for granted acceptance that what comes at the end of the education cycle is that the students are in

a position that is superior to the one in which they were before. The contribution I am making is that through my thesis there is evidence that the students are not in a better position than before and any such position is illusory, but in the assertion of the policy makers the nation itself has gained and progressed as a result. Thus, for the policy maker ‘progress’ is achieved and will contribute to sustained and continual progression in a global marketplace where each time a superior position is attained. The acceptance of ‘progress’ in this way means that the agreed focal point of ‘progress’ is never reached but moved repeatedly and continually drawing all of society into a quest for the unobtainable. The challenge in all respects is to agree on what the superior should be and mean and therefore there is a common-sense acceptance that ‘progress’ is a movement involving positive outcomes that brings benefits. Acceptance has come through the role of the Politician as what I earlier called the ‘determinator’ to ensure that they can hold all accountable in the pursuit of ‘progress’.

Another contribution of this thesis is to bring attention to ‘progress’ as common-sense as an educational aim and outcome as engineered by policy makers through the English Secondary Education System. It is the assertion of this thesis that ‘progress’ has become an area that is unquestioned and has a demonstrable impact on the practices of those involved in the Secondary sector, the policies of government as well as the parents and students. Government and policy makers identify the impact of their policy and the way in which obedience to the policy of ‘progress’ is played out. For teachers and educators ‘progress’ supports the methods in the classroom highlighting effect size and legitimising their own micro policies that are the lived experience of all stakeholders. To disrupt such common-sense acceptance of ‘progress’ this thesis contributes through the perceptions of School Leaders who try to make their own sense of what ‘progress’ is.

What I believe should be one of the outcomes of this, is that through disseminating my research to other educators will be for them to question the logic of ‘progress’ and the way in which ‘We still seem to be committed to the particular logical alignment of ‘more’ and ‘better’, whether this means earning more, producing more, living more comfortable lives, or living longer, and more healthily’ (Zamojski, 2023:1073). Furthermore, that through this common sense the result is that ‘progress’ in actuality:

concerns an individual whose cognitive development is facilitated, an individual whose potential should be found, extracted and exhausted (as we do with any other potential we find on Earth), it concerns precisely the

institutional logic of progression and promotion from one class or study level to the next (higher)(*ibid*)

‘Progress’ is the identification of the potential of the student body as a resource from which individuals are extracted and forced through a system of testing and measurement to support the agenda of the dominant forces of the day. I return to ‘progress’ as ‘non-innovational’ (Sklair, 2015:Xi) as through the idea of extracting and mining the population there is not a desire for transformational progress, rather the opposite, which instead sustains and maintains the status quo.

5.2.3 Measuring academic progress.

A core part of the responses by all participants was the way in which ‘progress’ is measured in schools and the extent to which they themselves were focussed on measuring ‘progress’. In all responses they located points of progression based on assessment data and baseline targets. From these targets there was the consistent use of the language of measurement that has become common place in the English education system through the model of delivery. The measured comes from an acceptance of the performance measures, exam systems and the way in which the value is assured through the student outcomes. In fixing an agreed point there is the filter of who has and has not succeeded in making adequate ‘progress’ across their time in education as well as a judgement on the work of the professionals engaged within.

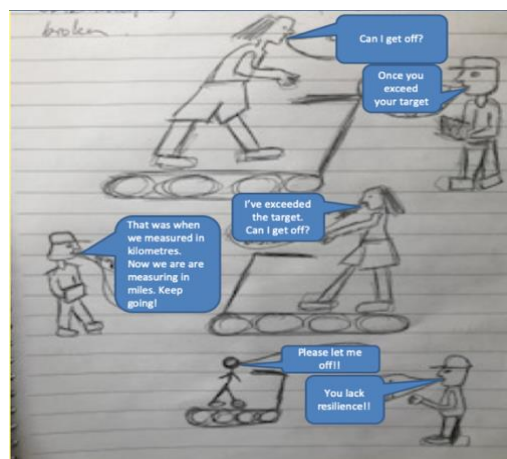


Figure 48, 'Treadmill of 'progress' J.Perkins

From all participants at all levels of leadership type of school there was the acceptance of start points based on data taken from ability testing whether this be CATS or Midyis. It was viewed as being an important part of establishing how students would be judged and although there was some scepticism amongst some of the participants all were compliant in the practice. Once

in the English System and the impact that had on developing the current system and would hope that those reading this thesis may be drawn to question such practices. As the analysis showed the use of data through cognitive testing has been normalised and other researchers, or educators reading this thesis may wish to investigate this practice further.

5.2.4 'Progress' as a matter of time and movement

'Progress' represented as a journey or motioned by time was another theme that came about through the analysis and shines a light on the way in which the school leaders use mixed metaphors to explore that sense of time. 'Progress' and the notion of time are inextricably linked and change depending on the way in which it is being addressed. In the secondary school system time is finite, and predetermined by through the ethic of compulsion, and educators tasked with making the most of that time. 'Progress' as per my definition is set out as a focal point based on the age and stage of the students and the points of measurement are set along the way as markers for the journey. Discussions around whether 'progress' is linear in movement or results in reaching higher plains were part of the discussion and evidence of how educators try to make sense of what they are being asked to do. In doing so there was the evidence that 'progress' was a sense of improving and thus better than what had come before. From a point to another was also a way that this was shared as well as in relation to time and accrual as one moves through time at school. Additionally, there was the idea of the lifelong learning and journey that involve the piecing together of experiences that lead to the achievement of 'progress' Through the literature there is evidence of how this perception has been affected by history, with the cyclical view of progress from the Greeks and Romans, the acquisition of knowledge in the 17th Century to the more economic view of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. In the present 'progress' is movement towards an established numeric goal as set out through performative measures and targets.

5.2.5 Is 'progress' measured through knowledge skills or both?

Knowledge and skills to measure 'progress' was another core theme with some more focussed on one than the other. Sometimes the skills were slightly ambiguous but largely revolved around how the students would eventually be able to demonstrate their worth post school. A lot of the discussion of skills was about communication and expression and the role of the school in supporting that development over time. The focus on the skills as I mentioned during the analysis, demonstrated the influence of the New Labour years on the perceptions of the

school leaders. Knowledge was focussed on how the knowledge would be relevant or useful to the students with the participants aware that they did not just want to fill the students up but that what they gained would benefit them. Being able to use their knowledge in combination with their communication skills, which would allow them to be independent, active citizens was evident. What the research shows in combination with the literature is that ‘progress’ as an accrual of knowledge was very much part of the surge towards a knowledge rich curriculum. The ‘horrific narrative’ of not knowing, leading to a lost sense of Britishness and nation mean that a push from government towards the need for reform. Therefore, these findings support the definition that I have worked towards as part of the focal point that has been established is wrapped in the ‘fantasy’ of Britain, through education policy.

5.2.6 ‘Progress’ through the vortex

The image of the ‘vortex’ has been part of the originality of my process and important to my unpacking of ‘progress’, as a force that drags the student bodies to the centre before sending them to their next dimension. For the participants those next dimensions were denoted by the real world, tickets to destinations unknown, existential plains, better schools as well as their own professional sense of ‘progress’. In the responses the road of ‘progress’ was preparation for something but very much that they would be a part of the world in which they found themselves. From my working definition there was the ‘beatific’ fantasy that they would succeed in the life they choose, and that the system is preparing for that moment. For the students themselves, further research would be to ask them a similar question and to see whether they view their school education as preparation for an unknown realm or world. Schools and educators do much to try to reflect and share the potential future of work, life, study but much of that preparation is done in hope that it will support the individuals. Therefore, as per my definition, the sharp focus on performance from the position of the policy makers means the order and direction is one way, ‘Following the path’ (*see figure 50*) to the ‘vortex’.

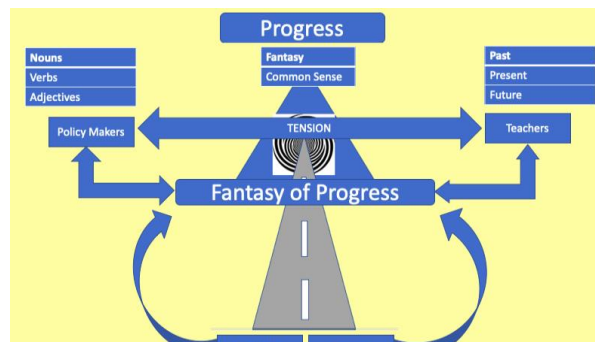


Figure 50, *Following the path.*

5.2.7 The ‘fantasy’ or illusion

‘Fantasy’ or illusion of ‘progress’ is evident through the measures and rationale of those in power who continue to direct and instruct the action of education in England, and in the way in which the participants I interviewed try to make sense of such illusion. In the responses there was the assertion that what was taking place was adding value and that those in education were in a stronger position by the end. The value was considered in different ways through the qualification, by the knowledge and skills gained as well as in the sense of movement.

I argue that such understanding is linked to the starting point of a ‘fantasy’ as there is the imagined sense of where the process of being educated will take the individual. Additionally, as discussed there is also the ‘fantasy’ and illusion of those who set the policy from the outset as discussed with the reforms made by the SOSE 2010-14. In those reforms there was firstly the ‘fantasy’ of a broken Britain which had lost connection with history, of educational professionals as blocks to ‘progress’ in need of destruction and renewal. The curriculum and assessment changes made were pointed with a perceived lack of ‘progress’ blamed on lack of aspiration and policy generated with school leaders expected to enact upon it. In this effort the focus on knowledge and what needs to be accrued has been an important part of the creation of focal points in achieving such ends. It is my judgement that the participants’ views of ‘progress’ have been affected by the changes as carried out under the Coalition and Conservative governments with a strong focus on knowledge and knowing in their responses. There was also the residue of the New Labour strategies evident in the responses with the focus on skills and in the ‘fantasy’ of the future workforce and what skills were needed. In the responses there were explanations that reflected the neo liberal agenda through explanations that were concerned with the Knowledge economy and the need for young people to be able to compete within it. Such fantastical logic represents education as means for subsistence rather than growth or personal emancipation and freedom.

5.2.8 Analysis of my self

In the opening chapter and throughout this thesis I have reflected on myself and the construction of the ontology of myself as I try to make sense of how through the completing of this thesis I have been affected. . Through my motivation to carry out my research, my research method and analysis, I have had cause to consider how to position myself and the extent to which I am present in the writing. I believe that there is a justification in this approach as ‘It has become common place for the researcher to locate her/himself within the research process and produce ‘first person’ accounts’ (Letherby et al, 2012:82) but where my research makes a claim to originality is the way in which I have used the visual representations I have created to support that narrative. I would claim that in many respects the work I have produced is in line with Theorised Subjectivity in that I have tried to use ‘a reflexive approach that acknowledges the significance of both intellectual and personal auto/biography of researchers and respondents (Letherby,et al, 2012:91). My own autobiography has been apparent through my reflections on my own experiences of education as a student, practitioner, and doctoral researcher. In taking a subjective approach does not mean objectivity cannot be found in my work and perhaps that objectivity will be found by the reader.

5.2.9 Reaching my own ‘vortex’.

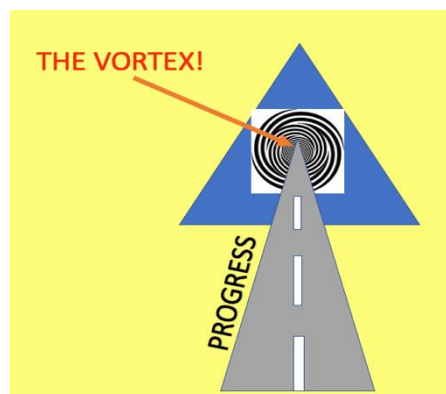


Figure 51, 'The Vortex' J.Perkins

In presenting my conclusions and findings I am minded that I am reaching my own ‘vortex’ (see figure 51) or portal as these are effectively the last steps in my thesis. In setting out on the course I was ambitious and determined to make my voice heard but also to find a way to present a piece of research that would shine a light on the lived experience of others. In doing so I had the opportunity to work with a variety of academics as well as my peers in working towards

this end point in terms of the qualification, but what has it given to me and what am I taking through the portal with me. At the outset of the doctoral course I have followed, one of the curricula aims that was shared with us by Gert Biesta and Paula Zwozdiak-Myers at the outset, was that we would become thoughtful about research. In this reflection I consider the extent to which my thoughtfulness is tinged perhaps with some cynicism. In looking back at my thesis, I can see where I have been, and the path taken to reach the point at which this thesis is at a point where it can be assessed. I have needed to work towards the line and follow the path that is laid out by the expectations on participating in such an academic endeavour. The challenge is to have the strength and confidence to step through to the other side and to understand what is waiting in the same way in which the students I teach do the same at GCSE and A-Level. The qualification itself is abstract until the point of award where by then it can be understood what such a qualification might mean. Certainly, a sense of fear or foreboding is something that can come in a situation such as this given there is the risk of failure. If this is the case is 'progress' more simply put the feeling of confidence that what has been achieved is of worth and bought a value? What I would say on reaching my own 'vortex' is that I am sure there is more research to be done with regards to 'progress', what it means, how it is used and the extent to which it is a 'fantasy' that supports the human understanding of time and civilisation. In producing the research and presentation I have been thoughtful about what I have done and why I have pursued it in this way. My own curiosity and interest are what made me consider the need to investigate 'progress' and what it means to educators in the English secondary system. From my position as an insider, I had been subject to performance measures and discussions around 'progress' in the classroom and as an institution and felt that it was important to investigate the extent to which others had considered 'progress'. In my approach I believe I have shown that I was able to extricate myself and find the position of researcher to collect the data and then present it. Any claims I have made have been tempered to maintain a degree of thoughtfulness about how my research can add new knowledge and be disseminated further. At a time where AI is developing, and industry looks to continue rapid development of ideas and processes a discussion around 'progress' is vital as fantasies of how the world will look, the work people will do and ultimately what young people will need to have as their education are core discussions. Education as a production model for units to fit within the workforce has become the parlance of government and industry leaders to the extent that the young people in our schools are funnelled and minced to meet such ends. Individual liberties and choice may well be considered subordinate to the needs of the nation's economic security in the global markets.

5.2.10 My own 'progress' – Reading myself backwards.

When I read myself back through this research, I can see how my own values and experiences have led to me reaching this point and for pursuing this line of investigation. In being reflective I can take a step back and look for where I believe there are moments in my life and career that have brought me to this point. In 'progress' it could be argued that I am now in a position where I can articulate my view on education and challenge policy from a point of authority. At the start of my career in education I knew intrinsically why I had concerns with education and where I felt the system was not perhaps working in the way I felt was right. Through being able to spend the time on this research and by being part of the research community at Brunel I believe I am now in the position where I can use my research and my authority in this area to engage with others as an agent of change.

I have also found that there are other ways to write about and talk about education by finding areas on the Philosophy of education which is something that I had not considered prior to the doctoral programme. My own sense at the start was that research in education took place in schools and was about making schools better by finding methods and approaches to promote change in the classroom. What I learnt over the years of which I have been engaged with my own research is that education of course is not just about schools but also about all places where education takes place. It also made me reflect on that underpinning the approaches is not just the surface level of the policy makers and government decisions but also the history and traditions that have come before it. In this research there has been the conscious decision to try to express myself historically, philosophically, and sociologically on an issue in education that I believe needs greater consideration. I would like to believe that as I continue to be engaged with education research should someone one day be reading my work, they would be able to track back to this point to understand how I have developed my own perspective and voice. As I continue to research after this thesis, I look forward to being able to continue to think and write about education with freedom.

5.3 Reflecting on the methods and analysis.

5.3.1 Lessons learnt - What would I do the same and what might I change?

In reflecting on the way in which I carried out this research I believe there are some aspects that I would like to pursue and would help to give greater depth to the findings about 'progress'. There is much more to consider about how 'progress' is defined in school settings and the strategies that schools are using to pursue the greatest amount of 'progress' possible. One such aspect would be teaching and learning in the classroom and how the pursuit of 'progress' has impacted on this important aspect of a school. To be able to understand the impact I would need to recreate the interviews with classroom-based teachers, who are without leadership roles. From such interviews I would be able to analyse them against the findings that I have from school leaders and understand if the perceptions that I have gathered are particular to that group. Where I have gathered evidence through the literature and my analysis there would be evidence of how the policy decisions at the national and school leadership levels impact on the classrooms. When I first suggested my project there was the question about the students themselves and whether to interview them directly, which would be interesting, but I think would be a completely different study. I am not convinced that through a phenomenological question such as 'what is progress?' there would be the same level of response to that of the professional. If I was to attempt the same project with students, I would perhaps prefer to use group interviews, these would be less intimidating and encourage the students to talk. From this it may then be possible to understand what they believe they are progressing towards, and why their 'progress' matters.

In pursuing this research, I found my own approach to the literature review which helped me to access different ways of examining the idea of 'progress' and helped to legitimise the study that I have carried out. If I was to repeat the process, I believe there is conceivably much more to read around ideas of 'progress' that would add to the richness of the work and help to ask even more questions. In the limitation of my own education, this was the first time with which I had engaged with some of the philosophical ideas, particularly with the Greek and Roman elements. It would be enjoyable to take the time to go back to some of these ideas and revisit them now that this work has been completed and look to learn more. The contribution of this research is not to stop and suggest the answers have been conclusively found but to critically ask questions and debate the idea of 'progress'.

A potential limitation to my study could be construed as geographically how representative is the work of school leaders, as many of my participants are based in London and the Southeast. The reason for this was due to who responded to my requests to participate and thus could be seen as limiting in terms of representative. I do believe however this is quite a small issue as through the literature review, I have shown that 'progress' is very much a historical, philosophical, and sociological area of concern. In the literature there is reference to the experience of various nations as well as the teaching profession in England so there is breadth in that respect. To cover the length and breadth of the country would potentially require a team of researchers to pull together the participants and allow for the time needed to complete such a broad piece of research. As this is my own personal, doctoral research to work collaboratively in this way was not something I considered or planned for but if I had the opportunity in the future, it is something I would consider.

My approach to the analysis of my data was very much a complicated learning curve as once I had the interviews, I needed to understand how best to read the findings and make sense of them to then be able to report them back. My initial use of NVivo, as mentioned in chapter 3, was not a great success and I think that what I learnt by the end was that I needed read the transcripts and respond to what they said with my own words. By responding directly to the transcript, they started to make sense which meant in supervision meetings themes started to form. The problem with such an approach is that it is very time consuming and could have perhaps analysed the data much more quickly through using tables or colour coding. In this research I have done I am very much on the inside and so potentially that made the analysis more difficult, however over time one would hope to become more proficient. What I do believe is that in my analysis there is a degree of humility, and throughout the thesis as well, that there are no wild unjustified claims.

The part of my method that I would pursue again, and I think does add to the originality of this work and supports my contribution, is the self-reflective element, through the biographical insights and through my visual representations. I understand that with research and when trying to meet the demands of a qualification there are expectations and conventions, but I set out in my introduction, I wanted to establish the ontology of myself. The purpose of this writing is not only to complete a doctoral thesis but to understand my self and to understand the effect that this has had on me. By contributing to knowledge of education by examining what I perceive to be a current, and important issue in 'progress' I am also asking questions of myself.

There is the identity of a researcher and writer that has been forged with ideas about how my voice will sound to those who read it and how best I can express myself.

Overall, there are boundaries to this research and the stretch it can claim to have which I have discussed above. The national picture of education in the English Secondary system is very much a result of the performative approach of government and their systems over a prolonged period, which means that the findings I have can be linked to that literature. The gap that is being filled is that through the perceptions it is possible to understand how those policies have impacted upon, in this instance, school leaders.

5.3.2 Further research and recommendations

It is my assertion that there is much more research to be carried out in understanding ‘progress’ the way in which the logic of ‘progress’ has become normalised and how this can be challenged and reimagined. The roots from the economic shift in the idea of ‘progress’ are prevalent in daily language along with a preoccupation with pace of ‘progress’ and the need to get the most from the resources in schools. To carry out such research would be to continue talking to teachers in schools to understand their perceptions and how they make sense of ‘progress’ in their work. Further research could also be carried out by interviewing teachers in other countries to understand if the way in which ‘progress’ has been represented in this research is evident or if there are national and cultural differences. Such research would help to explore notions of the global knowledge economy and the impact of the neo liberal agenda.

Supporting the wider research is the work of others who are also questioning the taken for granted acceptance of ‘progress’ as with an article ‘Studying with a teacher: education beyond the logic of ‘progress’ (Zamojski, 2023:1072) where Zamojski suggests that there is a real challenge to the ‘difficulty of the task of imagining education outside of the logic of ‘progress’ (*ibid*). Further research might lead to a reimagining of ‘progress’ if not breaking away from the logic of ‘progress’ with alternative shared visions of ‘progress’ that challenge the dominant ‘fantasy’.

With regards to recommendations, it would be for school leaders to reflect on assessment practices in target setting and the use of ability testing to set the point of ‘progress’ for their students. There is an acceptance of the cognitive ability testing in schools and what concerned

me throughout my research was the way in which although there was some reservation there was no strong objection to the use of such testing. Through the literature review I presented the way in which the history of ability testing and the origins from the Eugenics movement has impacted upon the way in which 'progress' plays out in the English Secondary System. My recommendation would be that rather than starting with 'progress' from this perceived position of grounding in an accepted test that leaders return to the consideration of the aims of education. The narrow focus on the educational outcome of the qualifying grade and 'progress' means that wider aims are neglected but also that generations of young people are being educated to accept 'progress' as presented in this way. It may well be that there is a generation of talent that is more resilient, deeper in knowledge yet completely lacking in compassion for their fellow man. For educators there is the challenge of refocusing and challenging the status quo and taking brave decisions about what they are doing and if 'progress' is what they really mean.

For the policy makers there needs to be a critical assessment of the role of performance measure and targets and the way they are used and how they create a culture of terror and fear. Education involves risk but a system that is so tightly calculated with a canon of knowledge so regimented means that most are risk averse. This research demonstrated the way in which the middle and senior leaders were connected to measurement through academic schema and assessment points. The system is built with a self-fulfilling prophecy of pass and failure that needs regiment and order to meet the account, proving effectiveness of policy decisions and is not working towards freedom and liberty. Policy makers in my estimation need to reconsider the aim of education, to break from notions of efficiency and supply chain, but consider the students and what education means to them. If the policy makers are not minded reconsidering it is perhaps the role of educators themselves to act as agents of change and challenge the prevailing orthodoxy of performance measures and the perception of 'progress'. Through innovative approaches such as 'An Aims based Curriculum' with a focus on the 'Significance of human flourishing' (Reiss and White, 2013:1) there would be the chance for school leaders to concentrate on broader aims of education and redefine what 'progress' might mean for them and their students.

5.4 Key learnings and personal theory

In this section there is a reflection on the key learnings from carrying out this research looking at what the process revealed with to the views of ‘progress’, the impact on my own personal views of ‘progress’ and lastly what I have learnt about the processes and importance of educational research.

With ‘progress’ through this research I have learnt that there is not just a depth to the views of the leaders that interviewed but also a great complexity as they tried to make sense of ‘progress’ in their work. Through the government policy there has been the creation of a metric for ‘progress’ but what I learnt was that the leaders did not want to be tied to that one version of ‘progress’. In their responses the key themes that came through exemplify the way they have to conceptualise progress as measurement of academic ‘progress’, a consideration of ‘progress’ as time and movement as well as knowledge and skills. In addition to this there were their personal thoughts on education with them sharing how they saw progress intertwined with personal development and professionalism and performativity. Within the analysis of the section on measurement I concluded that there was a degree of helplessness as they are bound to work with the framework. What the research showed however was that caught up in this was that they did not necessarily share in the perspective that was created and so were negotiating ‘progress’ on their own terms. Considering learning and how to understand what has been taught was evident when they spoke about movement and time, which again highlighted the complexities of the work of the school leaders. They considered how time given by the academic year; ages of students matter along with the movement through the system whilst also what might be considered the more abstract notions of higher places. In responses they looked to elongate time and discussed the ‘journey’ and check points that they believed were part of the story of ‘progress’. When it came to knowledge and skills there was evidence of how they as leaders had worked through the policy shifts of New Labour with the strong skills focus to the Coalition and Conservative concentration on knowledge. In the responses they brought out the difficulties leaders face when confronted with policy and how they try to put their students interests first but understand there is the performative measure at play as well. With the final theme and the Vortex, there was the distancing from the system and their attempts to discuss ideas such as civic duty, living fulfilling lives, autonomy and that the students would be in control of what comes next for them. However, what was most apparent

was how they were leaning to a degree on hope that these outcomes would be possible given that their success as professionals hinged on the performative measures. In my analysis there is evidence that shows that even if a logic of progress is imposed through a performative system the professionals involved in it can resist and are creating their own sense of 'progress'. I also believe that from what I was learning from the data and the reading was that there was a real commitment from the participants to engage and to want to share their perspective. This became a strong motivating factor to complete the thesis at moments when it was becoming a struggle as I felt that I needed to reciprocate that level of commitment and trust that they had shown in me as a researcher. Going forward as a researcher I believe this understanding will be core to how I work with future projects and participants.

A key learning from the experience of writing this thesis has been my perception of educational research and the importance of being part of the wider research community. Through the experience it has allowed me to discuss aspects of education and to forge opinions of my own as well as understand more greatly the perspectives of others. When I set out on the course with Brunel, I was aware that I had an interest in the perspectives of others and that perhaps the research I was interested in was not necessarily to do with effect size. Where this was helpful at the outset was through the teaching at Brunel where the discussions were about being thoughtful in research. It was also through my participation in the doctoral course that I was able to find a space away from my daily work where I could consider some of the bigger questions I had with regards to education. Over time through my reading of Ball and White I became increasingly interested in how policy and practices impacted on education and that it was possible to do research that was not necessarily aimed at improvement in a classroom. What I learnt was that there is a space in educational research for the type of work I have carried out here which then ties to policy and movements in education with a consideration of their impact. With regards to this reflection, I am reminded of the article that I referenced by Biesta (*Can the prevailing description of educational reality be considered complete? On the Parks-Eichmann paradox, spooky action at a distance and a missing dimension in the theory of education, 2020*) as I consider the way in which policy and practice try to iron and straighten messy and problematic terms to fit with performance. To that end there is an element of working to the instruction or the orders but what I learnt through the research is that there is the chance to challenge the orthodoxy. In the present climate and through the performative systems in place education in the English system is built around rigour and robust systems that are structured to secure outcomes. In having such a focus, the 'care' has been pushed to the side with the school leaders,

teachers, students and parents focussed on end results and performance. Through the minutiae of data driven systems and handbooks based on evidence that claim to guarantee outcomes the care for the individuals themselves is perhaps lost. What I believe education research can do is to create spaces for wider conversations to take place where the systems and policies can be considered and influence educational decisions in the future. In reflecting on the impact of their perspectives it has made me consider my own view of ‘progress’ and the impact on education and in particular how some processes and activities inside of a school might lead to an education that is perhaps less caring than it should be.

Another important learning, I have taken away is the difficulty that school systems and structures create for individuals to be able to break away and form their own personal theories. I count myself as fortunate in that through writing I have created a space where I can break away from the systems and responsibilities of my daily work and consider education. There is often a lack of time or space to hold important discussions when working against the termly timetable or deadlines. What the doctorate allowed me to do over a prolonged period of time was immerse myself in the question of ‘progress’ and the sessions with my supervisors were a rich time when I could hear myself speak. With regards to the participants, I would hope that by taking part they benefitted from having the time to talk about ‘progress’ and consider their own viewpoint. By volunteering to take part and being asked to share their voice it could well have benefitted their own perception and I think that this is an important element of education research as well. The voices of school leaders are needed as government policy is drafted and implemented but the educators in schools are those who experience first-hand the effects. If there is a growing crisis of mental health amongst young people, lack of tolerance for our fellow humans education has a key role to play. If the focus is on ‘progress’, then I would like to think that I have learnt is that research has a role to play in challenging those in education to think more critically about what ‘progress’ means and how policy affects it.

Finally, another key learning was how through carrying out this research I was able to find freedom to explore education and to share my voice with regards to the concerns that I had when I began. When I set out, I was preoccupied with following the rubric and whether my writing would be acceptable academically, but over time I learnt how to share my voice and to present my ideas. Through the theorised subjectivity of myself I was able to show my connection to the study and to position myself centrally which aided my writing. Most of all this thesis gave me a space to explore my own beliefs and how these connect to my work in

education, whereby through regular critical conversations I have developed as a person. As alluded to earlier in this thesis there were moments when encountering terminology and theories, I found myself doubting myself and finding myself boxed in. What the research has taught me is that there is the chance to express myself quite freely and that my research does have a place in the wider debates around education. My personal learning is to encourage others to look to investigate education and to consider their position and subjectivity as a means of emancipation. The language of education is now embroiled in systems, performance and an industrial approach, perhaps more than ever, and for educators research can offer that step away. For my personal theory and expression, the work in completing this thesis and bringing it forward has been integral to that personal development as a professional in my daily work but also as a researcher. It has taught me how important it is to me to continue to research and work within educational research as a means of self-expression and to be able to communicate with the wider research community. In section 3.4.3 of this thesis, I referenced Pring and his comment that ‘Governments talk of evidence-based policy, too often evidence is confused with proof, and proof is too often seen as leading to certainty’ (Pring, 2015:195). With this thesis I have worked towards proof to support the work, but I am understanding that there are some ‘fuzzy generalisations’ (Bassey, 1999:52) not a concrete proof. Over the course of the EdD I have concluded that Educational research is not just about what works and what does not but the wider experience and perceptions of those involved.

This research has a place in time as part of the impact of the Progress 8 measure and the reforms that took place under the Coalition and then Conservative governments, respectively. At the point of submission for this thesis there was a new Labour government elected and with that curriculum and assessment reform back on the agenda. The focus for ‘progress’ will surely shift again, as policy makers revise the focal point and develop their own vision of what ‘progress’ is. School leaders will need to respond as there may be changes to the focus on knowledge and maybe a return to a focus on skill but also inclusion very much at the centre. There will be many challenges to come for school leaders, as the performance of schools and their communities will shift with the policies driven from politicians with agendas that they wish to pursue. Where I find my research reassuring is that the school leaders who participated in my research showed that they are thinking critically and will continue to theorise their own sense of ‘progress’.

5.5 Planned Dissemination

In order to share the findings of this research and to engage with the wider research and practice community there are different aspects that could be focussed upon and presented.

One way I look to disseminate the findings is by continuing to write about ‘progress’ as mentioned in the preceding section on further research. I would look to write a paper focussing on the idea of ‘progress’ as a logic or as I have begun to consider the ‘ethic’ of ‘progress’. Through writing, I will be able to engage with the wider research community and with other researchers who are also interested in ‘progress’ and to have dialogue about how progress is perceived. By researching ‘progress’ I have been able to conclude that there is a need for greater discussion about what ‘progress’ means and the way in which there is pressure around the notion of ‘progress’. ‘Progress’ is widely written about historically, philosophically with an allowance for differing perspectives but in education ‘progress’ has become defined as a desirable goal that must be achieved. By disseminating my own research and continuing to write about ‘progress’ I will look to engage with others to further explore the impact on the educational experience of ‘progress’. An acceptance of failure to make ‘progress’ is presented as unethical by the performative system and through an agreed ‘ethic’ of ‘progress’ education is not able to accept perceived failure or adjust. Therefore, by disseminating my work further I will look to engage with policy makers and other educationalists to consider how reform can take place against a constant drive for ‘progress’ and the ethics this might involve.

A second way I will disseminate my findings is through Brunel university where I would be able to present my research in a forum, such as the summer student conference. It would be the chance to share the findings of the research and to get feedback from peers and staff at Brunel on the work that I have carried out. Other than the findings I will also look to give back to the EdD by sharing the methods and approaches that I have used, in particular my use of the concept drawings. Through the drawings I was able to theorise my subjectivity and explore my positionality with regards to the research that I was conducting. It would be a good opportunity should Brunel agree to disseminate this aspect of my work that had become very personal and would potentially help those embarking on the EdD with their own approach. Through continuing the relationship with my supervisory team there is the potential to collaborate on a seminar session to share the work and to present the findings in the next academic year and perhaps beyond. Through being part of such sessions, it should enable dialogue to occur about

the lived experience of the professionals that took part and to gain a new perspective from others who perhaps do not have the same shared experience. By continuing to have a relationship with the department at Brunel it would open new areas of research and allow me to use what I have learnt through the EdD in a new capacity. It would be exciting to work on writing a paper collaboratively with others and to continue to develop what I have learnt over the course and to continue to be actively engaged with a research community.

An alternative would also be to try to use blog posts to share what I have learnt and to look to engage with the research community policy makers. Blogging is a popular approach to writing and gives the authors the chance to self-publish and gain an audience directly. Through having gained the qualification through the EdD I could potentially disseminate my research which would open up the opportunity of gaining more insight from others. There are many ways in which to publish either directly through posts on professional social media networks such as LinkedIn or Substack. The challenge of this would be ethically to know that I was editing myself sufficiently and is where my preference is to work with Brunel so that what I produce is quality assured. During one of the EdD weekend sessions Gert Biesta spoke to us about the responsibility that comes with qualification the doctorate provides as what you write and say gains a different level of credence. From my learning across the course the importance of ethics and collaborating with others to check what is being written and said has been very apparent and something that would be essential to future work.

Having written a thesis that is considering policy it would be remiss to ignore that I would like to find a way to disseminate the findings to policy makers. The term policy maker can be used quite broadly from the broader political sense but also to those who determine policy in the micro sense of the school. At this point I would have to admit I am unsure as how to go about engaging policy makers but believe through continuing a commitment to research and writing I will learn more about how to make this a possibility. With the growth of Academy trusts, some are now making policy decisions across multiple schools, and it may be that the way to start is to find trusts that are interested in what I might have to say. Additionally, by attending conferences and national events there is the chance to develop a professional network that would allow me to create further opportunities to disseminate my work .

I am also interested to reach out to other researchers who are also interested in ‘progress’ and the way in which the ‘logic’ has been applied in particular Piotr Zamojski as there is some

cross over with his writing and my own. He has concentrated on ‘progress’ in the professional learning of the teacher and it would be interesting to discuss my own findings in relation to his research. This would potentially allow for a wider conversation to take place for which I would be able to contribute and further investigate the notion of ‘progress’ and the impact that it has had on perceptions of education. From this position it might then be possible to take my work out to conferences and continue to engage with the wider research community.

Finally, I aim to disseminate my research in my place of work as an example of professional learning and being an extended professional. In my career as a teacher, I have found that being connected to research and education has given me a sense of purpose that helps me to keep working and striving to be better each day. By disseminating my research at my place of work it would hopefully encourage others to remain engaged with the bigger picture of education. An important part of working in education is professional learning and the manner in which being invested in such learning can help with professional development but also in longevity in the workplace. Through dedicating time and space to disseminating the research it would allow for wider discussions with colleagues about education and how they themselves are navigating their own position. From this there is the potential for further research to take place around ‘Theorised Subjectivity’ through using reflection to understand personal positions on education. It would be interesting to work with a group of teachers on reflective writing based on their own concept drawings of their positionality and to understand how that impacts upon their work.

5.6 There is no ‘progress’, there has been no ‘progress’, there will be no ‘progress’.

Overall, using my working definition to summarise, ‘progress’ can be an allusion or fantasy that is used a focal point to work towards. Through having a focal point order and purpose is given to the work of the school leaders, to strive towards a position that is seen as superior to the agreed starting point. This agreement is cascaded down from central government through national, local and personal targets for which all are held accountable. In accepting this view of ‘progress’ there has to be a belief that the system can achieve the goal of escaping the state of inferiority and the destination reached. To have a shared destination there is the acceptance of an accountability and performance system uses points of measurement through national standards and targets, with success and failure predetermined. Therefore, from the position of

the ‘fantasy’ of the policy makers ‘progress’ has been normalised as the determining factor in maintaining order of over the education system in England.

What is missing is what happens next as the students who have made ‘progress’ pass through the educational ‘vortex’ and find themselves the other side. Given ‘tickets’, ‘passports’, ‘qualifications’ they are pushed out of the education system with the expectation that they will become productive units to prop of the national economy. Their ‘progress’ is to maintain and sustain the system as it is putting the national needs before their own as their security is presented as a threat should there be an economic catastrophe. The fear of a scarcity of work, housing, money, are presented and the need to compete ingrained where rewards are something that will be found later.

In closing it could be argued that there has been no ‘progress’ and there will not be ‘progress’. We have not progressed towards a more harmonious society, there is not a society with a more equal share of wealth, there is not a system of education that supports equity of opportunity. What we have is the continuation of a world dominated by the few with the lived experiences of the many influenced by decisions of powers that look to administer, categorise, and control the population. What we have is a mass that is working, tirelessly to support economic forces whilst being fed a ‘fantasy’ of ‘progress’ where machines and AI can take over the menial allowing greater freedoms. There will not be ‘progress’ until there is a fundamental challenge to that force and rethinking of what ‘progress’ means away from the position of power. Until then students are working in our schools to learn a canon of knowledge to secure a qualification that enables them to fulfil a life of servitude to an uncaring authority. They will continue to step along a line of ‘progress’ and through the ‘vortex’ to a destination unknown. Why might I end on such a note that appears to offer no hope? To lay down a challenge to the readers of this thesis to debate with the ‘idea of ‘progress’, and the extent to which they have considered what ‘progress’ means to them. I finish with the image of the ‘vortex’ (*see figure 52*) empty and swirling at the end of the road of ‘progress’ asking the question of the viewer as to what lay the other side.

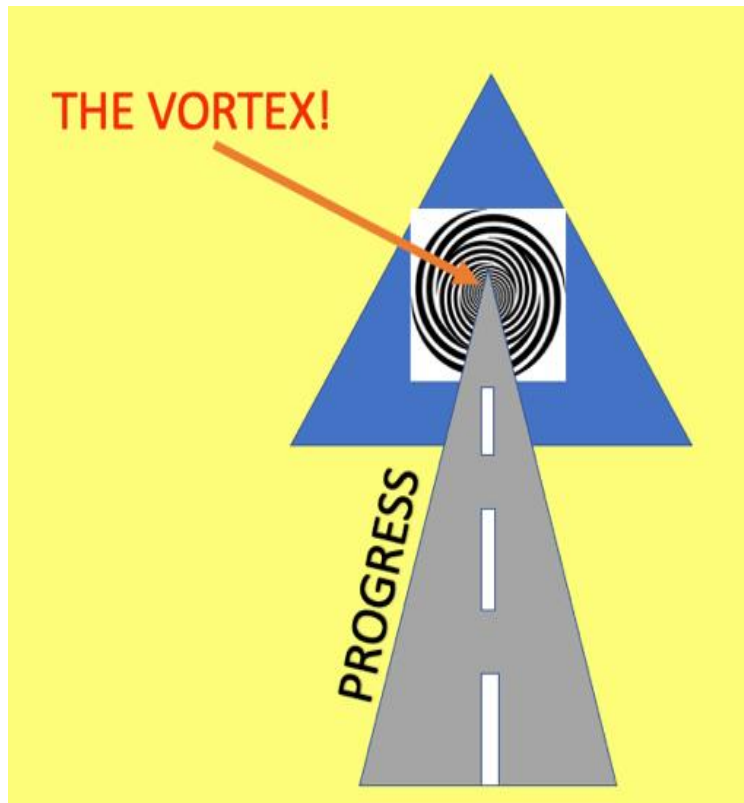


Figure 52, *The Vortex*

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Breo Approval



College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Brunel University London
Kingston Lane
Uxbridge
UB8 3PH
United Kingdom
www.brunel.ac.uk

11 September 2020

LETTER OF APPROVAL

APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR THIS STUDY TO BE CARRIED OUT BETWEEN 11/09/2020 AND 01/02/2021

Applicant (s): Mr John Perkins

Project Title: The perspectives of Secondary Teachers in England on 'Progress' as an educational aim

Reference: 23218-LR-Sep/2020- 27873-2

Dear Mr John Perkins

The Research Ethics Committee has considered the above application recently submitted by you.

The Chair, acting under delegated authority has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. Approval is given on the understanding that the conditions of approval set out below are followed:

- **Approval is given for remote (online/telephone) research activity only. Face-to-face activity and/or travel will require approval by way of an amendment.**
- **The agreed protocol must be followed. Any changes to the protocol will require prior approval from the Committee by way of an application for an amendment.**
- In addition to the above, please ensure that you monitor and adhere to all up-to-date Government health advice for the duration of your project.

Please note that:

- Research Participant Information Sheets and (where relevant) flyers, posters, and consent forms should include a clear statement that research ethics approval has been obtained from the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- The Research Participant Information Sheets should include a clear statement that queries should be directed, in the first instance, to the Supervisor (where relevant), or the researcher. Complaints, on the other hand, should be directed, in the first instance, to the Chair of the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- Approval to proceed with the study is granted subject to receipt by the Committee of satisfactory responses to any conditions that may appear above, in addition to any subsequent changes to the protocol.
- The Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to sample and review documentation, including raw data, relevant to the study.
- You may not undertake any research activity if you are not a registered student of Brunel University or if you cease to become registered, including abeyance or temporary withdrawal. As a deregistered student you would not be insured to undertake research activity. Research activity includes the recruitment of participants, undertaking consent procedures and collection of data. Breach of this requirement constitutes research misconduct and is a disciplinary offence.

Chair of the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Brunel University London

Appendix 2 Breo Approval

Due to Covid-19 disruption, change in supervisor and a short period of abeyance there was a gap in the approval. No interviews or further data gathering took place during this period.



College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Brunel University London
Kingston Lane
Uxbridge
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United Kingdom

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19 March 2024

LETTER OF APPROVAL

APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR THIS STUDY TO BE CARRIED OUT BETWEEN 21/04/2022 AND 30/04/2025

Applicant (s): Mr John Perkins

Project Title: The perspectives of Secondary Teachers in England on 'Progress' as an educational aim

Reference: 23218-A-Mar/2024- 50512-1

Dear Mr John Perkins

The Research Ethics Committee has considered the above application recently submitted by you.

The Chair, acting under delegated authority has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. Approval is given on the understanding that the conditions of approval set out below are followed:

- Please check and amend the dates in your consent form. Please check that your participant information sheet is also up-to-date.
- **The agreed protocol must be followed. Any changes to the protocol will require prior approval from the Committee by way of an application for an amendment.**

Please note that:

- Research Participant Information Sheets and (where relevant) flyers, posters, and consent forms should include a clear statement that research ethics approval has been obtained from the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- The Research Participant Information Sheets should include a clear statement that queries should be directed, in the first instance, to the Supervisor (where relevant), or the researcher. Complaints, on the other hand, should be directed, in the first instance, to the Chair of the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- Approval to proceed with the study is granted subject to any conditions that may appear above.
- The Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to sample and review documentation, including raw data, relevant to the study.
- If your project has been approved to run for a duration longer than 12 months, you will be required to submit an annual progress report to the Research Ethics Committee. You will be contacted about submission of this report before it becomes due.
- You may not undertake any research activity if you are not a registered student of Brunel University or if you cease to become registered, including abeyance or temporary withdrawal. As a deregistered student you would not be insured to undertake research activity. Research activity includes the recruitment of participants, undertaking consent procedures and collection of data. Breach of this requirement constitutes research misconduct and is a disciplinary offence.

Chair of the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Brunel University London

Appendix 3 Participant Information sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study title - Secondary School Teachers perceptions of Progress

Invitation

As part of my doctoral research at Brunel university I am looking into the lived experience of teachers at all levels with regards the focus on 'Progress' as an educational aim and how this has affected perception. Through this letter I am approaching you to take part as a qualified teacher who is working in a secondary setting at this point in time. Due to current conditions with regards Covid-19 the interview will be recorded through Zoom with recording itself will be deleted after January 2022.

What will your participation entail?

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. The research project will run until April 2025. It will involve your participation in one interview that is unstructured where you will be posed one question on the idea of 'Progress'. As the researcher I will then listen to what you have to say and may wish to elicit further comment on responses based on what you say. These interviews will be recorded, and you will be provided with a transcript of the recording that you will be able to make amendments or additions if you wish. If you do decide that you would like to participate you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. Recordings will be kept until January 2022 so that they can be used during the write up phase. and will be deleted after that time. Should you choose to withdraw after the interview has been done then any recording or subsequent transcription will be destroyed.

Guarding your confidentiality

To guard your confidentiality all material will be saved to a device that only I the researcher has access to with password encryption. In addition, when referencing any comments that you make, I will be adopting a system of coding to protect your identity. The final paper will be submitted in April 2025 and at that point I will share the completed work with you and other participants and be available to discuss them with you should you wish to. With your permission, anonymised data will be stored and may be used in future research – you can indicate whether or not you give permission for this by way of the Consent Form.

If you take part, there are no anticipated disadvantages or risks associated with this study nor are there any intended benefits. If something should go wrong during the study and the participant would like to make a complaint, they can do this by contacting the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The study is self-funded as part of my own endeavours as an EdD student at Brunel and any indemnity is covered through the insurance cover by Brunel University London for research that has received ethical approval.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There is no intended benefit to the participant for taking part in this study.

What if something goes wrong?

If something goes wrong during this study and the participant would like to make a complaint, they can do this by the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

What are the indemnity arrangements?

Brunel University London provides appropriate insurance cover for research which has received ethical approval.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed by the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

This research study has been reviewed by the Brunel College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Ethics Committee. Brunel University is committed to compliance with the Universities UK Research Integrity Concordat. You are entitled to expect the highest level of integrity from our researchers during the course of this research.

If at any stage you have any reservations you can contact Researcher: John Perkins john.perkins@brunel.ac.uk

Appendix 4 Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Secondary School Teachers perceptions of Progress

John Perkins

APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR THIS STUDY TO BE CARRIED OUT

The participant (or their legal representative) should complete the whole of this sheet.		
	YES	NO
Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? (via email/phone for electronic surveys)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? (via email/phone for electronic surveys)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you understand that you will not be referred to by name in any report concerning this study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you understand that:		
• You are free to withdraw from this study at any time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• You don't have to give any reason for withdrawing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Choosing not to participate or withdrawing will not affect your rights?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• You can withdraw your data any time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to my interview being audio and video recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the use of non-attributable quotes when the study is written up or published	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The procedures regarding confidentiality have been explained to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that my anonymised data can be stored and shared with other researchers for use in future projects.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in this study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature of research participant:	
Print name:	Date:

Appendix 5 Sample of transcription from interview with Oliver with coding to denote assessment and movement

Me: What is progress?

Oliver: It's not straightforward. You said straightforward in your mind, you and I both that is not a straightforward progress. Let the reality of progress when you look at it from both an education and personal point of view, is that effectively, you've gone from one starting point. And you've made progress on and through to another. The reality of progress is this idea you have gained something, it's as simple as that. There was something that you didn't know before, and you've gained something with it. When you look at it from an educational perspective, which is the crux of your argument here. It is the understanding of why is it we look at it in only two ways we look at it progress in terms of a benchmark starting point to an exam outcome, or an end of Key Stage outcome? To this whole issue of progress is only those indicative points of when you do well, we call it gems or when other schools do assessments. And that's why the whole lockdown, relating it to lockdown last year was the issue, because the majority of schools and the majority of Education has got panicked about no exams, because that's how they view progress. They don't see the guidance of the evidence of the whole journey of education as progress, they simply see benchmark starting points many people and I think we do have to if lockdowns taught us anything, it's sort of had to be more aware of the how progression isn't simply jumping between points. It is a linear, it is an ergonomic thing that occurs naturally. The sad reality of exams is it simply takes a snapshot of that point, it evidences some of the progress, it doesn't evidence that continue line of progression.

Me: Can you just can you just continue on that a little bit more?

Oliver: The the line of progression idea

Me: Yeah, as well.

Oliver: So we'll look at the sad reality when you look at it in different schools. So if I take our own school, for example, we've always been quite disappointed with our sixth form results because the directors have always asked you sixth form, it's a negative value added. So on paper, it looks to them as if progress has not been achieved. I disagree. I agree. Well, you can't agree or disagree with data. Data is what the data says. From a statistical point of view, progress hasn't matched the previous progress doesn't mean they haven't made progress, it means they haven't made the expected progress in accordance with data. The way I've always seen, it was sixth formers have we enabled them to move further forward upwards on to whatever their next steps of aspirations our progress should not be that we are trying to catch up on everybody to not that there is a number one job in the economy, to the number one job in the economy, that's a very capitalist way of thinking that we have to all exert the reality behind a more social capitalism, you could argue is everyone fulfilling their objective to doing something positive, everyone feeling they have gained, and they are doing something, education, if anything should be about us all through our journey, and making sure we're getting to a positive next stage result. And I'm very careful try not to call an end stage result, because that's where problems ensue, they, I think, lifelong learning and all that there is no end stage result we are continually developing and learning. So progress should be we have moved on. Whether it be daily, whether it be from stage points, whether it be for example, points or qualification points, but we've moved on from our sixth form using that example. I've always seen it in terms of we've set ourselves a target. So whether it was just me or whether it was our previous incumbent in

terms of Prashant, the key issue of sixth form was always have 100% of our students got onto either further education, apprenticeships, or a successful pathway into a world of work, where we can say every single one has gone onto something that they've been able to say, You know what, I can do something now I couldn't do before, or I can move into a profession now. I couldn't do before. You know, so for me, success should be rated and we tried to look at that, and that that's how we discussed it with Ofsted. They didn't agree I'll be honest. When the lady came in from Ofsted, she didn't agree with that appraisal. She said the key should be within the data. And I said to her, but the data that we also have and we had the evidence for it. I had to have a very deep discussion with as I said, but we had and we did at that point have three years of 100% of our students going on to one of their choice or second choice, university choice apprenticeship or a positive appraisal into a world of work. So for me it was trying to explain it was more than just numerator steps or figurative steps in terms of jumping through the hoops of expected data and then get into a next stage whether that next Ah be university, it was more in terms of have we guaranteed and physically assured a student is now here. Because even then that's just the next day, folks, there's nothing to say they're going to complete that our hope is we've given them the tools to complete that and to move forward accordingly. And that's why you probably see in my emails, it's a subtle hint, I keep saying, and I didn't realise I must have picked it up subconsciously, I didn't realise it was from Disney. Somebody said it to me the other week, they said, Oh, you keep writing on the bottom your emails, when I do those Google cross promotions, keep moving forward. And it is about progress it is about developing is about getting better. And I didn't realise somebody pointed out that apparently, it's um, it's, it's Walt Disney used to use that term, all the time about adapting and learning from failure and moving forward. So I must have picked it up subconsciously, somewhere.

Movement
Assessment

Appendix 6 Sample of transcript from interview with Natalie with coding to denote assessment and movement

Me: So my question is what is progress?

Natalie: Progress is what an individual makes in the course of each hour? Day? Yeah, lifetime, I suppose. And that's how they move from one thing to another. But we look at it in terms of education, progress is the child learning letter sounds, then progressing to putting those into words, sentences, being able to read word sentences. developing the skills to unpick words, as the progress is gradual, and individual. And there's no specific timeframe that you can necessarily measure a child and each child is different. It's quite tricky. I suppose you're looking for it in terms of education. I suppose progress meet also isn't a linear thing, it doesn't just go in the straight line, that it changes depending on the task, and that people can make progress, one listens, and they show that they've understood something. And then following this and need further clarification, to affirm that progress. And so then to take the next steps and move one of our colleagues, talking about history in particular, that a parent was very concerned with their child, they felt their child's progress should be they should be making progress in every assessment. And both point was assessing, reading and one assessment and assessing writing in another, it isn't going to be a straight line of progress is going to be the zigzag depending on the skills that the child needs in those particular particular tasks. And I progress doesn't always happen very quickly, it can take a very long time. Depending on that person's prior knowledge, skills, confidence, abilities, experiences, that it will. It varies, and that you can't necessarily say this is what progress looks like for a class as a whole individual's not quite sure what else to say.

Me: It's fine. Just what you what you think and feel.

Natalie: I often get frustrated. And we're looking at it from a lesson observation point of view is that you can't necessarily show every child has made progress, every lesson sometimes is going to be over the course of lessons. They might show a wonderful thing in the lesson. But it isn't an act to show that they've actually understood everything that needs further clarity. And that we use the term progress, but it isn't always obvious. And what's really different ways of looking at a child and the progress that they're making in a particular area. And I don't always think you can see progress in books, sometimes you can, sometimes you can't.

Movement
Assessment

Appendix 7 Table of selected data used to inform chapter 4.1 Measuring Academic ‘Progress’

Measuring academic progress	Leon	<p><i>But also, we use Midyis, from the CEM (Centre for Evaluating and Monitoring of the University of Durham.) And what that helps us is give a, an assessment of the child's baseline, regardless of prior education. If John and Leon went to two primary schools, Leon was at a really, really high-flying primary school, John was in a failing primary school. And they both came out to the National Curriculum score of, I don't know 105 in Maths and English and the various bits is that students the same baseline and my argument has always been that probably not because, you know, the circumstances of being in school, obviously, the family background will come into it a little bit as well. So that's why we use the Midyis which is a more cognitive based assessment as well.</i></p>
	Steve	<p><i>You know, you can get students who do brilliantly well in their CAT scores. And that sets them incredibly high target grades for all subjects, whether it's Art, or PE or something which they, they find significantly more difficult. And there is a bit of an issue with that, I think in terms of monitoring ‘progress’, because some people's ‘progress’ is set unrealistically high, based on those initial scores. And equally, some people's ‘progress’ I think is set lower than it should be, you know, they might come in at a low, they might come in at quite a low level. And it can be quite hard.</i></p>
	Anna	<p><i>So, for example, you know, you start off with a student who is has got like a low grade, for example, in a particular unit of work, and then things are embedded or implemented. And then you kind of test that student, you know, with assessments or just through questioning whatever, and then they do a final kind of assessment, and then you would hope to see some sort of ‘progress’ based on things you as a teacher has put into place to help them make that ‘progress’.</i></p> <p><i>if there's a target grade of a six, but the student is definitely higher up, higher, a higher grade than a grade six, and potentially could be on a grade eight, then that is academic ‘progress’ in itself, because obviously, they've gone beyond what's expected of them. But same way, it could be the other way around that a student could have a target grade of a six but is kind of at a three. They may have made some ‘progress’ since primary school, for example, but then when they get to GCSE, you know, there could be a number of things that, like hinder their ‘progress’, and so academically, they're underperforming.</i></p>

Ellie	<p><i>knowledge base comes quite often at the start of a module 'relate to the exam they are going to be doing' and 'as the module progresses, we start to look at specific skills, to be able to apply that knowledge</i></p>
Helen	<p><i>So academic 'progress' would be, in my view. Again, it's about how 'progress' is progressing, your, understanding and your knowledge of a particular topic, content subject area, and you would see a difference in the responses in terms of 'progress'. And that could be measured through a mark system</i></p> <p><i>I would say in terms of measuring you might see skills 'progress' and the depth of understanding 'progress'. And that is, that can be academic, From an English perspective you might see the 'progress' in their students being able to analyse, might just get into be able to analyse, you know in terms of grammatical awareness and understanding, you might be able to see them using a full stop, for instance and you then you would measure that they have been able to achieve that particular skill.</i></p> <p><i>that's quite a challenge for teachers because there are so many different elements of the 'progress' you want them to make in a classroom, in their sort of learning journey, that, you know, every single constituent part they might be progressing at a different level, different space. It's quite nuanced, sophisticated approach, or not approach but a sophisticated role you have as a teacher; and I think, you know, we're quite narrow in the way that we measure 'progress'</i></p> <p><i>most people will say 'progress' is about, you know, getting them their target grades. But for me, yes, that is one part of it.'</i></p>
Oliver	<p><i>Why is it we look at it in only two ways, we look at it 'progress', in terms of a benchmark starting point to an exam outcome or an end of key stage outcome?'</i></p> <p><i>Education has got panicked about no exams because that's how they view 'progress'. They don't see the guidance of the evidence of the whole journey of education as 'progress'. they simply see benchmark starting points many people and I think we do have to if lockdowns taught us anything, it's sort of had to be more aware of the how progression isn't simply jumping between points. It is a linear, it is an ergonomic thing that occurs naturally. The sad reality of exams is it simply takes a snapshot of that point, it evidences some of the 'progress', it doesn't evidence that continue line of progression.</i></p> <p><i>So, if I take our own school, for example, we've always been quite disappointed with our sixth form results because the directors have always asked why sixth forms, it's a negative value added. So, on paper, it looks to them as if 'progress' has not been achieved. I disagree. I agree. Well, you can't agree or disagree with data. Data is what the data says. From a</i></p>

		<p><i>statistical point of view, 'progress' hasn't matched the previous 'progress' doesn't mean they haven't made 'progress', it means they haven't made the expected 'progress' in accordance with data.</i></p> <p><i>You know, so for me, success should be rated, and we tried to look at that, and that, that's how we discussed it with Ofsted. They didn't agree I'll be honest. When the lady came in from Ofsted, she didn't agree with that appraisal. She said the key should be within the data. And I said to her, but the data that we also have, and we had the evidence for it. I had to have a very deep discussion with as I said, but we had and we did at that point have three years of 100% of our students going on to one of their choice or second choice, university choice apprenticeship or a positive appraisal into a world of work.</i></p> <p><i>So, for me it was trying to explain it was more than just numerator steps or figurative steps in terms of jumping through the hoops of expected data and then get into a next stage whether that next be university, it was more in terms of have we guaranteed and physically assured a student is now here. Because even then that's just the next day, folks, there's nothing to say, they're going to complete that, our hope is we've given them the tools to complete that and to move forward accordingly.</i></p>
	Heather	<p><i>you know, you're a five a or a five, a one, and, you know, red on this number. And Amber on this number green on this number. And I have to be honest, I quite liked it in some ways, because although I'm an English teacher, I'm quite I'm sort of mathematically minded. So, in some ways, it was quite easy to be like, well, this kids on a five B, and they should be on a five A's. So, we're going to do X, Y, and Z, and now they're on a five A and everyone's happy.</i></p> <p><i>You have to think about some ways of having different 'progress' for different students, you know, some students will make more 'progress' in their learning than others on some topics at some times. And that doesn't kind of neatly packaged up, when you then have to report on all these have many 200 kids that you have in a year</i></p> <p><i>The issue with 'progress' in schools is that we want all things with a dual approach of not wanting all these numbers, but then wanting some kind of numbers to report. I don't really see how we can have sort of a consensus about what 'progress' looks like. That's a hard question.</i></p>
	Lewis	<p><i>That's really interesting. I think 'Progress 8', despite how incredibly clumsy it is, and it really is, isn't bad. And if you're looking for if you're looking at all the measures that schools have been measured by in the past, it's a long, long, long way</i></p>

	<p><i>ahead of anything we've had before. In terms of its sophistication, its ability to capture the finer aspects of it.</i></p> <p><i>Think they're really good. And they're meaningful for staff. So, I think that's good data. I think ours is a very good data 'progress' measuring system for sixth form. I like that a lot. The reason I like that is because it's very easy for staff to understand it. And that's always the key thing with data systems and 'progress' measures but do any of these things genuinely capture. Yeah, I think probably though.</i></p> <p><i>we've got our current Year 10, 160 kids, only 70 of them have got KS2 data, so you know we have to do our own baseline assessments and devise our own 'progress' measures for those kids.</i></p> <p><i>it all depends on how reliable our baseline assessment is as to how useful it is</i></p> <p><i>kids make really, really rapid 'progress' in all of their subjects. But that's, it's very difficult to attribute that to subject teaching, because it's largely because they can write read and write better than they used to be able to, so of course, they're gonna make 'progress'. And there is no, there is really no national measure on standard 'progress' rates for our kids</i></p> <p><i>But in this kind of Brexit world I don't think there's a political will to do that. I don't think it is anywhere near the top of the agenda.</i></p>
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Appendix 8 Timeline or concept map of drawings created in preparation for viva voce examination

