Better at aspiring than acting?

Seven errors of progressive education and how to address them *Part One*

Joe Hallgarten and Sarah Seleznyov

Abstract: This two-part article presents a critical, reflexive examination of the progressive education movement in England, co-authored by two practitioners with experience in leading progressive initiatives. Despite extensive advocacy for holistic, disposition-rich learning, the contemporary English educational system remains deeply entrenched in a traditionalist paradigm reinforced by the 'Gibb years' (2010–2024). Examining the current policy context – including the 2026 schools white paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' and the Curriculum And Assessment Review – in Part One of this article, we argue that progressive approaches have failed to achieve sustained systemic traction.

Adopting an approach of critical sympathy in Part Two (which will appear in the next issue of *FORUM*) we identify seven core errors committed by the progressive movement across three domains: advocacy, pedagogy and evidence. These include a failure to build a disciplined social movement, a reliance on the vague rhetoric of 'transformation', a lack of operational clarity regarding student behaviour, and an insufficient focus on pedagogical precision and rigorous assessment metrics. Rather than dismissing traditional methods, we call for 'pragmatic progressivism'. We propose a strategic path forward, centred on building upward community demand, developing precise bridging practices, reclaiming evidence-based pedagogies like dialogic teaching, and shifting from the debased language of 'skills' to a robust framework of measurable 'dispositions'.

Keywords: progressive education; traditional education; educational reform; curriculum; pedagogy; schools

Introduction: defining progressive education

This is a confession. We have spent most of our three-decade professional lives arguing, writing, designing and leading programmes and teaching for a more progressive model of education in England. We have led organisations and projects that have aimed to both raise and redefine achievement; produced reports calling for system-wide transformation and disposition-rich curricula; and participated in numerous events that aimed to challenge so-called traditional approaches to education. And yet, in our work in classrooms and schools across the UK, what strikes us is how little has changed at both structural and classroom levels. In many respects the system is less hospitable to progressive approaches

 DOI: 10.3898/FORUM.2026.68.3.07

than when we started. This article is written in the belief that it is time to be honest about why. With what Wraga calls 'critical sympathy', this article examines the achievements of progressive education and its manifest failures.[1] It argues that progressive education is failing to gain sustained systemic traction in England, and that those who advocate for it bear a significant share of responsibility for this predicament.

Historically, authors have described progressive education as encompassing a set of approaches to teaching and learning which are child-centred and socially reconstructive, seeking the emancipation of the learner.[2] This definition has been problematic in its vagueness and often mischaracterised (see below), but also fails to capture the actual classroom practice progressive educators espouse. Therefore, for the purpose of this article, we define progressive education as:

> Attempts to develop a broader set of approaches – to pedagogy, curriculum assessment, and to the development of educators, leaders and institutions – in order to achieve a broader set of outcomes: dispositions that build on, but go beyond, knowledge-rich learning.

This is a deliberately inclusive definition. It encompasses a long and intellectually rich history – from Dewey's insistence on experience as the engine of learning, through the child-centred reforms of the postwar decades, to contemporary interest in character, oracy, project-based learning and democratic schooling. And it insists that progressive education is not the same as indifference to subject knowledge. The best progressive practice is knowledge-rich whilst avoiding knowledge oversaturation. It is the ends to which knowledge is directed – and the means by which it is acquired – that distinguishes such practice from more traditional approaches.

Our definition is in sharp contrast to the definitions of many parody-reliant critics. To take one example, Tom Bennett recently defined progressivism as: 'characterised by child-led education in which children are natural learners, their interests should be the guide to their curriculum, and they should be allowed as much autonomy as possible. Crucially, within this approach strict discipline is not only unnecessary, but considered actively harmful'. [3]

The rich history of progressive approaches has been carefully documented by historians, including Peter Cunningham and Laura Tisdall, whose work challenges the common claim that English schools were, before 2010, in the grip of an ideological progressivism that caused measurable harm.[4] As Tisdall's research shows, many teachers held to broadly traditional practices regardless of any progressive rhetoric from local authorities or initial teacher education. The grip of progressivism was real in some institutional settings but was rarely the classroom reality its critics described.

Although many of the tensions in this debate (for instance between knowledge and skills) can be seen as false dichotomies, real choices do exist. With approximately 1000

hours of teaching time available each year, schools face genuine decisions about what to prioritise and how to teach it. The relationship between subject knowledge and the broader dispositions progressive educators value – for example, curiosity, collaboration and critical thinking – is not always harmonious. Maybe in a perfect world (and maybe in the occasional 'perfect school') we could always take a 'yes, and' approach to all these choices. However, our world and our education system are far from perfect, with growing capacity and resource constraints meeting increased demand for schools to do more in terms of child and family support.

Pathologised by critics, used loosely by advocates, and dismissed as passé by many academics, the phrase 'progressive education' risks becoming, as Kaplan has argued, little more than a 'verbal gesture' of superiority over traditionalists – a 'feel-good platitude' deployed in place of rigorous argument.[5] We will argue in this article that those critics have a point, and that now is an ideal moment to rectify our errors.

Section 1: The current situation

The publication of the Labour government's schools white paper, the Curriculum And Assessment Review (CAR) and a new inspection and accountability framework together represented the most significant opportunity for progressive educators in well over a decade. The dominant verdict among those who hoped for more radical change, however, is disappointment. The assertions by the leader of the CAR, Becky Francis, in favour of 'evolution not revolution' rang true for every aspect of Labour's education reform agenda.

The review has made some genuinely important recommendations – for instance a new oracy framework (a strand that Nick Gibb, as schools minister, once reportedly dismissed as encouraging 'idle chatter' in classrooms), reducing exam time by at least 10 per cent, and broadening the curriculum to address the ever-narrowing diet that many schools have offered since 2010.[6] But the structural grip of a knowledge-focused, exam-dominated system has not been fundamentally challenged. Subject knowledge, as Francis herself has asserted, remains the 'best investment' in education: a phrase that signals a settled hierarchy of values that leaves little systemic space for the development of broader dispositions.

The schools white paper, 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving', published in February 2026, illustrates both the opportunity and its limits with unusual clarity. Its three central 'shifts' – from 'narrow to broad', from 'sidelined to included', from 'withdrawn to engaged' – read, on paper, like a progressive educator's wish list.[7] The language of secretary of state Bridget Phillipson was striking: 'The last government's vision for education was too narrow'. This is a significant political concession. And yet. The new enrichment entitlement is funded at just £22.5 million over three years for

400 schools: approximately £56,000 per school, or less than the cost of a single full-time teacher. Progress 8 – the accountability measure that has done more than almost any other instrument to narrow the secondary school curriculum – is to be 'reformed' rather than replaced. GCSEs are largely unchanged until 2029 at the earliest. The chasm between the government's progressive language and the modesty of its ambition is itself an artefact of the problem: a culture of policymaking in education in which progressive values rarely move from rhetoric to reality.

This timidity is partly symptomatic of a wider global predicament. It is genuinely difficult to identify any school system in the world that has sustainably reoriented its institutions towards more progressive goals at scale. The Brookings Centre for Universal Education, the UNESCO International Commission on the Futures of Education – whose 2021 report *Reimagining Our Futures Together* called for a new social contract for education rooted in humanistic values and the flourishing of both individuals and the planet – and the OECD's education 2030 framework with its learning compass articulating student agency and collective well-being as the ultimate goals of education, all make compelling cases for broader educational purposes.[8] Yet the implementation gap between aspiration and practice remains vast. The 'beautiful exceptions' that Valerie Hannon and Amelia Peterson document in their work – individual schools and projects that genuinely embody progressive values – remain exactly that: exceptional.[9] Brookings Institution's own recent work on 'breadth of skills' across various countries further demonstrates the lack of progress in systems committed to a focus on competencies beyond knowledge.[10]

Between 2010 and 2024, what might fairly be called the 'Gibb years', reflecting the exceptional longevity of Nick Gibb's almost-unbroken tenure as schools minister, produced a coherent, sustained and partially effective attempt to reorient English schools towards more traditional goals.[11] What started with rhetoric was followed through with precise, concerted action. Structural (the academy and free school programme), regulatory (Ofsted framework and accountability changes), curricular (the English Baccalaureate, the knowledge-rich national curriculum) and pedagogical (direct instruction, synthetic phonics, knowledge-retrieval) interventions combined to produce a system whose default settings are now possibly more 'traditional' than any serving teacher might have experienced in their own education.

During this period, there were genuine outliers – for example, Big Education and XP multi-academy trusts; SkillsBuilder; Voice 21; and the Whole Education network.[12] But even these faced significant systemic and policy barriers. Other attempts at progressive reform – studio schools, the RSA academies programme, and others[13] – were, in effect, strangled; not always through explicit hostility, but through the stealthy power of an accountability system that made progressive goals invisible or, worse, liabilities, and through the noisy caricaturing of a new, social media-savvy generation of critics. We were involved in some of these projects. That accountability, too, belongs to this article.

Section 2: How the neo-traditionalists won – and what we might learn from them

It would be comforting but complacent to attribute the traditionalist ascendancy to cynicism, ideology or vested interest. Dig into the web of relationships and contracts, follow the money, and it is easy to find examples.[14] However, the neo-traditionalist project was effective for reasons that we in the progressive camp would do well to study honestly rather than simply dismiss.

Whether by accident or design this narrative achieved dominance through three distinct but interlocking elements. The first was the caricature and exaggeration of progressive education's grip on the school system. As Gibb and Peal argue in *Reforming Lessons* , the Gove-Gibb reforms were built on the diagnosis that the 'Rousseauian ideology of progressive education was the fundamental problem in English schools'.[15] The historical record – including Cunningham's curriculum research and Tisdall's work on classroom practice – does not support this.[16] The grip of progressivism was real in some institutional settings. It was not the systemic classroom reality its critics described. A copy of Robert Peal's earlier polemic *Progressively Worse*, which laid much of the intellectual groundwork for the Gibb-Gove critique, was allegedly given to every civil servant in the renamed Department for Education.[17] This playbook is a familiar one, echoing the rhetoric of the Black Papers of the late 1960s and 1970s, as well as the 'discourse of derision' that targeted progressive child-centred methods in the late 1980s.[18] Incidentally, Peal's slipshod book was reviewed in *FORUM* 56 (3).[19]

Yet the power of that caricature should not be underestimated. For those with only a superficial understanding of the term 'progressive', this characterisation provided a clear enemy, a compelling diagnosis and an emotionally resonant narrative of rescue, an example of what Stephen Ball once labelled as 'the mobilising myth of education in crisis'.[20] Progressive educators, by contrast, have rarely managed to construct an equally coherent counter-narrative. The question 'what has progressive education ever done for us?' has some genuinely impressive answers – the abolition of corporal punishment; a paradigm shift in how children with special educational needs are valued and educated; schools' role in supporting children's emotional well-being and mental health; the principles, shape and form of early years provision; the enormous reduction in grammar schools and the two-tiered education system they created. But this story is rarely told with the force and coherence it deserves.

The second tactic was the exaggeration of reform's positive impact. There have been genuine gains in the Gibb years. PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) scores in mathematics and literacy for 15-year-olds have recovered from the lows of 2009. The systematic introduction of synthetic phonics led to rises in phonics scores, with a possible connection to a significant improvement in England's

PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) performance in reading. But the national reference test results at age 16 have remained broadly static, showing that improved reading scores for eight-year-olds have not translated into rising GCSE results. Attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers have, over the long run, scarcely narrowed, and widened again since the COVID pandemic. Some PISA scores, for instance in science, have declined. The causal chain between reforms and improved scores is anyway fiercely contested. As Jerrim and Sims' careful empirical work shows, the relationship between teacher orientation – 'traditional' or 'progressive' – and pupil outcomes is considerably more complex and ambiguous than the reformers have allowed for.[21]

Furthermore, UNICEF data published in 2024-25 ranks the United Kingdom 27th among 36 OECD and EU nations for young people's mental health.[22] A 2024 Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology briefing on children's well-being identified 'curriculum-based alienation' – a mismatch between young people's values and the culture of the classroom – as a plausible contributor to the post-pandemic attendance crisis. A system in England producing some of the world's best readers in PIRLS while ranking in the lower third for adolescent well-being is not, by any reasonable measure, one that is fully succeeding.[23]

The third tactic was the weaponisation of caricature. To take one example, any reference to 'skills' became, during the Gibb years, a marker of ideological suspicion. Watson's analysis of 'New Right 2.0' teacher populism showed how a relatively small but vocal community of traditionalist teachers used social media to construct a divide between 'ordinary teachers' and a 'liberal educational elite', launching sustained and at times visceral attacks on anyone who put progressive ideas above the parapet, from student teachers to academics or senior policymakers.[24] McGill's research on the same terrain suggests that algorithms rewarded the most polarising voices, making measured, pragmatic arguments effectively invisible.[25] The progressive movement had no equivalent. We still do not.

What is striking, given all this, is the gap between the apparent political confidence of the traditional turn and what survey evidence suggests the public actually wants. Farquharson and colleagues in a mixed-methods study of over 2200 UK adults, found high levels of public support for progressive education reform, suggesting that the claim that parents are broadly opposed to a more expansive model of schooling is far less secure than the current political settlement implies.[26]

Well before the 2024 general election, the neo-traditionalists were mobilising and organising opposition to any proposals for changes to the status quo, from the dismissing of various key reports (including *The Times* Education Commission and the Blunkett report on education) to the exaggeration of the potential impact on 'academy freedom' of the Child and Wellbeing Bill, to the successful battering of the Curriculum

And Assessment Review into very narrow tramlines, they successfully closed down political spaces for more radical reform.[27] We offered almost nothing in return.

It would be easy, and wrong, to end this section with contempt. The neo-traditionalist project, whatever its excesses, was largely motivated by a genuine concern for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and by a belief that clear, explicit instruction, tighter approaches to discipline and knowledge-rich curricula might offer children some benefits. In fact, we are not arguing that traditional approaches are without merit. We are arguing that the current settlement is incomplete – and that the partial truths of the traditionalist case have been elevated, in the political and media discourse, into a dominant, apparently unshakeable paradigm.

Section 3: Who are the 'we'? We mean us

We trained to teach through a PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) in the early 1990s, teaching in primary schools in the 1990s whose orthodox practices were being questioned by a number of forces. We taught through the famous 'three wise men' report (Robin Alexander, Jim Rose, Chris Woodhead) which was highly critical of primary pedagogies; the creation of Ofsted at the fulcrum of the world's most punitive school accountability regime; and the introduction of SATs (standard assessment tests) at ages seven and 11.[28] These changes, partly inspired by prime minister Jim Callaghan's Ruskin College speech,[29] had some rationale.

Sarah Seleznyov's story

I began teaching in 1995, in an inspirational inner-London school serving a school community with multiple challenges and disadvantages. I learned to teach alongside some incredible partner teachers, and the school's approach was one I would describe as progressive. I learned to plan mathematics from a colleague who later went on to lead the Basic Skills Agency; I worked alongside a creative writing expert and a number of artists on projects that built on children's interests and imaginations. We were encouraged to experiment and to be critical. When the national curriculum was introduced in my first school, we simply mapped coverage against the creative curriculum context we were already teaching; when mathematics unit plans were introduced, we decided they were spectacularly unhelpful and continued to plan our own lessons. I learned to be creative, within a framework of a carefully designed progression of skills and knowledge, which considered all children's achievement levels. I used the curriculum plans, pedagogies and leadership approaches I learned in those early years for a long time after I left the school, and they provided creative and expansive models for the kinds of learning I wanted children to experience.

Later, I worked both within and beyond schools, as a school leader, in an education

charity, universities, in a teaching school and for a local authority, mainly seeking to positively disrupt teachers' beliefs about the purpose of education and the best way to enable it through professional development projects. Then, in 2021, I had the opportunity to set up my own school within the Big Education Trust. School 360 was designed to be deliberately different and to challenge the status quo.[30] This school gave me the opportunity to enact what I had been advocating for the last 20 years, but it was very difficult to do this within a rigid curriculum, a very tight accountability framework and associated expectations from parents. The school went through a particularly bruising Ofsted inspection with an inspector who simply could not find a way to fit us into her tick sheet. Since that time, I have also worked on a number of projects in the progressive domain: Rethinking School, a network of schools from across the UK innovating collaboratively to enable children and young people to benefit from a more expansive education;[31] projects to design and implement play-based pedagogies into primary schools; leading professional development in mathematics teaching using a programme that engages children in collaborative metacognitive problem-solving tasks, in which the teacher facilitates engagement instead of teaching procedures. Schools engaged in these projects have often had challenging journeys, have had to be brave about not toeing the line and have found allies in each other, and not all of them have managed to retain the progressive principles they hold to be true in the face of external pressures.

My focus has always been on bottom-up change: educate teachers and leaders in schools to understand the progressive alternative and to see the difference it makes to children, and see how these teachers and leaders progress within the education system until they can make bigger and better changes. But I have seen that that is not an easy thing to do, and I do not blame anyone who gives up or compromises on this vision.

Joe Hallgarten's story

As an inexperienced teacher I was encouraged to try progressive approaches that often didn't seem to work. I remember in particular on a parents' open afternoon in a school in Lambeth their confusion on witnessing an 'integrated day' for nine- and 10-year-olds. 'What are they actually learning?', one parent asked me as children wandered through some kind of cross-curricular, child-led chaos. I remember turning on the national SATS maths cassette to test my year 5 class and being amazed and embarrassed by the overall paucity of the pupils' basic operational skills. I also remember being part of the Major government's literacy and numeracy pilots, which then became New Labour's strategy, and 'hours' for every primary school in England. Having been taught very little about how to teach reading, writing or mathematics in my PGCE, I welcomed the direction and reduction in autonomy this offered.

Since I left full-time teaching, most of my career has been spent on the 'progressive'

side of the fence. In eight years at Creative Partnerships we worked with hundreds of thousands of pupils, teachers, school leaders, artists and others in creative organisations to both 'raise and redefine achievement'.[32] As a £40 million a year government-funded programme provoked by the Ken Robinson report 'All our futures',[33] our particular focus was on developing young people's creative thinking and behaviours, and on reorienting schools to foster more enabling environments for both teacher and pupil creativity to happen. At the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), although I initiated the end of the problematic 'Opening minds' programme, I also led a number of initiatives that sought to model a more expansive approach to teaching and learning.[34] I oversaw the RSA Academies Multi-Academy Trust that was attempting the same at a whole-school level. I wrote two reports – one nationally focused, one with a global outlook – on how school systems should and could take more innovative, expansive approaches.[35] Even when in more conventional roles, for instance in an international development charity, and working for think tanks, I attempted to nudge practices and strategies towards a focus on a broader set of outcomes beyond so-called 'foundational' knowledge and skills. Throughout this time I have been involved in many events, formal organisations or alliances and looser groupings, sometimes participating actively in their development.

Advocating for a more progressive education

Beyond the two of us, Joe and Sarah, there is a network of people involved in advocating for a more progressive education in England. From this point onwards in our article, when we say 'we', this means that same broad and inevitably baggy coalition of groups, which include researchers, practitioners, policy advocates, civil society leaders, or some combination of all four. The bagginess of this coalition is itself part of the problem, as we shall argue. The cast has also changed significantly over the past decade. Several major organisations that previously championed progressive approaches – for example, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA), the RSA and the Edge Foundation – have refocused their missions.[36] The institutional infrastructure that might support progressive approaches to learning appears considerably weaker than it was in 2010. This may in itself be another success indicator or success factor of the Gibb years. As Joe suggested in a 2011 article 'If Gove's got a blacklist, who wants to be on it?', 'given the rhetoric around "trusting teachers", it becomes even more important to wipe out those parts of the education community which might offer schools alternative views about learning, and assist teachers in turning this into a reality'.[37]

Our personal journeys as educators and leaders mirror the broader structural tensions of the English school system over the last 30 years. We have experienced the liberating potential of progressive ideals and battled with embedding them into what others perceive as the comforting clarity of structured, traditionalist frameworks. Our

experiences of successful innovation and of bruising collisions with rigid accountability structures have forced us to look closely at why our collective efforts have failed to achieve sustained systemic traction.

To understand this failure, we must look inward. In the second part of this article we will detail our movement's core mistakes across three broad, interconnected domains: telling and selling (advocacy and communication); teaching and implementing (pedagogy and practice); and evidencing and evaluating (research and proof).[38] Together, they describe a movement that has struggled to be honest about why it is losing – let alone rigorous about what it would take to win. By diagnosing seven critical errors, we lay the groundwork for moving from reflexive critique to action, outlining a pragmatic, disciplined path forward for a modern progressive movement.

These suggested errors, listed below, are currently works in progress, and are being discussed with a range of practitioners. The second part of our article will include a final list, and some recommendations for action.

1. We have failed to build a disciplined social movement for change.
2. We have made our work sound easy when it is, in reality, much more difficult to achieve than traditional approaches.
3. We have couched our work in the vague and unrealistic language of 'transformation'.
4. We have lacked clarity on pupil behaviour.
5. We have given insufficient attention to pedagogy.
6. We have been too dismissive of subject knowledge, and too imprecise about skills and dispositions.
7. We have been insufficiently rigorous in how we use and build evidence.

Joe Hallgarten took on a new role in June 2026 as the Director of the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park after three decades as a teacher, researcher, programme leader and education consultant. During his time in education he taught in several schools in Manchester and London, led policy and practical research programmes at the Institute for Public Policy Research, the RSA and the Centre for Education and Youth, and supported globally focused education programmes across sub-Saharan Africa with the Education Development Trust. For seven years, he was director of programmes at Creative Partnerships. Joe has written widely on education policy and practice, often with a focus on teacher development, curriculum design, and creativity and the arts.

Joe.hallgarten@gmail.com

Sarah Seleznyov is a former head teacher, an education consultant and a researcher who has worked in the UK education system and internationally for over 30 years. During

this time, she has focused on supporting teachers to design and implement curricula and pedagogies that enable learner agency, and on designing and implementing professional learning processes and programmes that enable teacher agency. Most recently, she was instrumental in setting up School 360, a progressive state primary school in Newham, London, and running Big Education's 'Rethinking School' project, a network of progressive schools from across the UK.

sarah@sarahseleznyov.co.uk

Notes

1. William G. Wraga, 'Condescension and critical sympathy: historians of education on progressive education in the United States and England', *Education Sciences*, 4 (1), 2014, pp128-152.

2. E.g., Gerard Guthrie, 'The failure of progressive paradigm reversal', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 47 (1), 2017, pp 62-76; Eugene Matusov, 'Progressive education is the opium of the educators', *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Science*, 56 (4), 2022, pp829-862; Sam Sims and John Jerrim, 'Traditional and progressive orientations to teaching: new empirical evidence on an old debate', *Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities,* 2022.; Pete Wright, Alba Fejzo and Tiago Carvalho, 'Progressive pedagogies made visible: Implications for equitable mathematics teaching', *The Curriculum Journal*, 33 (1), 2022, pp25-41.

3. Tom Bennett, 'Intellectual discipline: A knowledge-rich behaviour curriculum', in *The value of a knowledge-rich curriculum: An essay collection,* Civitas, 2026.

4. Peter Cunningham, *Curriculum Change in the Primary School Since 1945*, London, Falmer Press, 1988; Laura Tisdall, 'Teachers, teaching practice and conceptions of childhood in England and Wales, 1931–1967', PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2015.

5. Andy Kaplan, 'Reconstructing Progressive Education', *Schools: Studies in Education,* 10 (1), 2013, pp122-131.

6. Becky Francis, 'Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report: Building a world-class curriculum for all', London, Department for Education, November 2025.

7. Department for Education, 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving': Schools White Paper, London, DfE, February 2026; Secretary of State Bridget Phillipson, House of Commons debate, 23 February 2026.

8. UNESCO, *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A new social contract for education*, Paris, UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 'OECD Learning Compass 2030', Paris, OECD, 2019.

9. Valerie Hannon and Amelia Peterson, *Thrive: The purpose of schools in a changing world*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

10. Kate Anderson, Seamus Hegarty, Martin Henry, Helyn Kim and Esther Care, 'Breadth of learning opportunities: A fresh approach to evaluating education systems', 'Brookings Institution', 2018. For current work from the Brooking Institution on similar themes, see: https://www.brookings.edu/articles/purpose-agency-breadth-of-skills-education-cross-country-collaborative-research/.

11. Nick Gibb and Robert Peal, *Reforming Lessons: Why English schools have improved since 2010 and how this was achieved*, London, Routledge, 2025. For a critical review, see Dorothea Guy, 'Story time with Nick and Bob', *FORUM*, 68 (1), 2026, pp156-163.

12. https://bigeducation.org/; https://xptrust.org/; https://www.skillsbuilder.org/; https://www.voice21.org/; https://wholeeducation.org/.

13. James Robson, Ashita Randhawa and Ewart Keep, 'Employability skills in mainstream education: Innovations in schooling and institutional isomorphism', *British Educational Research Journal*, 48 (1), 2022, pp120-136; Colin Hopkins, 'RSA Academies: Vision and distinctiveness', *RSA Journal*, April 2022.

14. E.g., Francesca Peruzzo, Stephen J. Ball and Emiliano Grimaldi, 'Peopling the crowded education state: Heterarchical spaces, EdTech markets and new modes of governing during the COVID-19 pandemic', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 114, 2022, 102006.

15. Gibb and Peal, 2025, op. cit.

16. Cunningham, 2015, *op. cit.*; Tisdall, 2015, *op. cit.*

17. Robert Peal, *Progressively Worse: The burden of bad ideas in British schools*, London, Civitas, 2014.

18. Mike Wallace, 'Discourse of derision: the role of the mass media within the education policy process', *Journal of Education Policy*, 8 (4), 1993, pp321-337.

19. *FORUM* 56 (3), 2014, pp575-586.

20. Stephen Ball, 'The tragedy of state education in England: Reluctance, compromise and muddle – a system in disarray', *Journal of the British Academy*, 6, 2018, pp207-238.

21. Sam Sims and John Jerrim, 'Traditional and progressive orientations: new empirical evidence on teaching philosophy and pupil outcomes', *London Review of Education*, 20 (1), 2022, pp1-17.

22. UNICEF, *Report Card 18: Child Wellbeing in an Uncertain World*, Florence, UNICEF Innocenti, 2024.

23. UK Parliament, 'Children's Wellbeing in Schools', London, 6 February 2025: https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pn-0739/

24. Ben Watson, 'New Right 2.0: teacher populism on social media in England', *British Educational Research Journal*, 47 (2), 2021, pp430-450.

25. Ross McGill, 'How has Twitter influenced education politics in England?', *Management in Education*, 34 (4), 2020, pp181-185.

26. Rachel Farquharson, Tom Vickers and Ceri Davies, 'Exploring UK residents'

views on substantive education reform: adversarially co-produced narratives indicate fluidity in support', *Oxford Review of Education*, 2025: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/2474736X.2025.2564696

27. https://www.thetimes.com/education/education-commission; D. Blunkett, J. Firth, P. Nargund, K. Rowan and R. Sandby-Thomas, *Learning and skills for economic recovery, social cohesion and a more equal Britain: The Blunkett Report*, 2022: https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3909.

28. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/4373/1/curriculum_organisation.pdf ; Jane Perryman, Alice Bradbury, Graham Calvert & Katie Kilian, '"A tipping point" in teacher retention and accountability: the case of inspection', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 73 (2), 2005, pp181-200; Chris Whetton, 'A brief history of a testing time: National Curriculum assessment in England 1989–2008', *Educational Research*, 51 (2), 2009, pp137-159.

29. Kevin Jervis, 'Dispelling the myths: An investigation into the claims that Prime Minister James Callaghan's Ruskin College speech was an epoch marking development in secondary education in general and for pre-vocational education in particular', Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2011.

30. Sarah Seleznyov and Andi Silvain, 'School 360: Doing education differently', *The Buckingham Journal of Education*, 4 (1), 2023, pp55-63.

31. https://bigeducation.org/rethinking-school/.

32. Pat Thomson, Rebecca Coles and Madeline Hallewell, 'What did creative partnerships achieve? A review of the creative partnerships (CP) research archive', *Creativity policy, partnerships and practice in education*, 2018, pp13-43.

33. Ken Robinson (Chair), *All our futures: Creativity, culture and education*, National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, Department for Education and Employment, 1999.

34. Sarah Aynsley, Chris Brown and Judy Sebba, *RSA Opening Minds: an evaluative literature review*, The RSA, 2012: https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:15d70ddb-d221-4b2a-aea0-3882ea9b45b9/files/m2335c00d6b66bba9cbc9e4dce5011c2c.

35. Joe Hallgarten, Tom Beresford and Valerie Hannon, 'Creative Public Leadership: How school system leaders can create the conditions for system-wide innovation', WISE and RSA 2015; Joe Hallgarten, Amelia Peterson, Jen Lexmond, Tony Breslin and David Kerr, 'Schools with Soul: A new approach to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education', RSA, 2014.

36. https://www.nesta.org.uk/; https://www.edge.co.uk/.

37. Joe Hallgarten 'If Gove's got a blacklist, who wants to be on it?', *TES*, 17 September 2010: .https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/if-goves-got-blacklist-who-wants-be-it.

38. The second part will appear in *FORUM*, 69 (1), 2027.