Introduction: the rise and fall of progressive education?

'I sometimes think that all the master problems of life will have to be solved in the nursery and the schoolroom; that if we wait for their solution till the child has grown to manhood and hardened into what we call maturity, we shall have waited too long', wrote Edmond Holmes in 1913.[1] Holmes had been a school inspector in England from 1875 to 1911, rising to chief inspector of schools before becoming convinced that a syllabus which 'relieved [the teacher] . . . of the necessity for thinking' had wrecked the education of children, and resigning his post.[2] Holmes's ideas, expressed in key works such as *The Tragedy of Education* (1913) and *What Is and What Might Be* (1918), alongside the American writer Homer Lane's *Talks to Parents and Teachers* (1928), which described the philosophy of his Dorset-based Little Commonwealth, were profoundly influential for a wider utopian educational project in inter-war England and Wales.[3] Early progressive pioneers tended not to work within the state system, but set up their own schools. For example, Lane's Little Commonwealth opened in 1913, A. S. Neill's Summerhill in 1921, Bertrand Russell's Beacon Hill in 1927 and Kurt Hahn's Gordonstoun in 1934. For these educationalists, the key concern of the school was to free the child from outside interference. They believed that children were distorted by being exposed to adult norms; if they were allowed to obey their own natural laws of growth, a new generation would be produced that was free of damaging neuroses, a generation unlike any other in the history of the world. As Holmes put it: 'the child's outlook on life, before it has been perverted by education, is fundamentally right, while the adult's is fundamentally wrong'.[4]

These utopian educationalists tended to be heterogeneous in their methods and curriculums. As Neill wrote in 1937, he had 'no interest in how children learn', and he stated later in life that 'there is *nothing* in *any* school subject that is *really* important'.[5] What was important, in Neill's eyes, was that children's development was not controlled by adults. Summerhill famously taught along relatively familiar lines but allowed its students to select which classes they attended. Drawing from psychoanalysis, Neill considered that part of his job was to allow students to explore repressed emotions and work out their neuroses via his 'private lessons'. To facilitate this, he demanded that children and adults relate to each other on equal terms. 'When Billy, aged five, told me to get out of his birthday party because I hadn't been invited, I went at once without hesitation', he wrote, and in the self-governing school meeting, each individual's vote counted equally.[6] Other utopian progressives did not always agree with Neill's approach. Bertrand Russell, despite his utopian views, was relatively conservative in his educational suggestions. In *On Education* he sketched out a familiar curriculum, inspired by the American psychologist and philosopher of education John Dewey, that focused on academic subjects such as geography, history, maths and science, but related these to children's interests; he did not suggest that children would be allowed to choose what they studied.[7] Novel educational methods such as the Dalton Plan, Project Method or Play Way, all of which allowed children to self-direct their education within a certain framework, might form part of utopian educational projects, but did not define them. Instead, this psychoanalytical vision for education centred on organisation and management, with School Councils – where pupils met to have a say in how the school was run – and other forms of self-government set up in almost all progressive schools.

As the 'morbid age' of the 1920s and 1930s dawned in Britain, and as a second war with Germany seemed increasingly likely, a revolutionary generation was even more desperately required.[8] As Russell wrote in his profoundly influential *On Education* (1926), young people who were brought up in a climate of 'fearless freedom' might avoid being 'twisted and stunted and terrified in youth, to be killed afterwards in futile wars'.[9] The influence of these utopian progressives therefore intensified in the 1920s and 1930s. Norman MacMunn, who founded his own school at Tiptree Hall, reflected a wider feeling among

educationalists when he stated in a second edition of his book *A Path to Freedom in the School* (1914), renamed *The Child's Path to Freedom*, in 1921, that the experience of the First World War had made it easier to grasp 'new truths' about education.[10] Progressive ideas chimed with wider shifts in attitudes to childhood and youth in inter-war Britain, fuelled not only by the tragic experience of war but by the falling birth rate, the experience of mass unemployment and changing concepts of crime and punishment for juveniles.[11] In their most radical iterations, these concepts of childhood positioned children as the hope for the future, and the British state as corrupted and outdated.

The non-utopian progressive pedagogy that also developed in the inter-war period but became increasingly popular after the Second World War in mainstream schools was diametrically opposed to utopian progressive assertions about childhood, although its exponents saw themselves as part of the wider progressive movement in education. Non-utopian progressive educationalists argued that the child needed to develop healthily, not only physically and mentally but also emotionally and socially, in order to become a fit citizen of the welfare state.[12] Adults played a key role in guiding the child's development, because children's capabilities were so limited in comparison to those of their parents and teachers. A child-centred curriculum, therefore, not self-government, was at the centre of this 'educational revolution'; non-utopian progressive pedagogy advised that if subjects were taught in accordance with children's natural interests, and in line with their capabilities at various stages of development, then pupils would learn most effectively. Finally, it was the developmental psychology of researchers such as Jean Piaget that became central, rather than the psychoanalytical ideas that had shaped early utopian progressive schools. Adult development was seen as a healthy, completed process, rather than as an unhealthy knot of repressed and sublimated desires that must be unpicked. The child was repositioned as a problem that needed to be managed by adult society, rather than as a being that had anything to teach fully mature individuals.

'Underlying all educational questions is the nature of the child himself', stated the influential non-utopian progressive Plowden Report on English primary schools in 1967, summing up the task that its writers believed educationalists had been undertaking since the publication of the Hadow Report on *The Primary School* in 1931. Healthy

development could only be ensured through the use of biological, psychological and social-scientific knowledge about children as a group. Because non-utopian progressive educationalists aimed to 'fit the education to the child, rather than the child to the education', finding out what children were like at different stages of development was central to their mission.[13] In contrast, Neill summed up his lack of interest in child development in 1931 when he wrote that 'I have been dealing with children for many years now . . . but I confess that I know comparatively little about child nature.'[14] Historians of education have tended to conflate these two radically different schools of thought because they both used the terms 'progressive' and 'progressivism'. For example, architectural historian Andrew Saint, writing on post-war school building, suggests that non-utopian progressive education is best defined negatively, as it 'denies that the needs of the state, the church or the economy ought to shape the development of a child's expanding consciousness'.[15] However, the schools that he considers would not have subscribed to this utopian commitment to negative freedom; in post-war Britain, the progressive movement had come to centre on whether education was able to fit the child to fulfil the needs of the state, rather than on whether adults could set the rising generation free.

So what *was* a 'progressive' education, if the term encompassed two such divergent forms of pedagogical practice and social analysis? Emily Robinson's work on the language of progressive politics in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain offers some vital insights. As a 'forward-looking' term, she argues, '[t]o be progressive is to anticipate the future and, in doing so, it is to bring that future into being'.[16] However, unlike terms such as 'modern', this necessarily entails a relationship with the past, as progressivism aims 'to transcend the past, but also to fulfil it'.[17] Robinson's book does not directly consider childhood and schooling, but it is clear why the term 'progressive' proved so useful for educationalists. As children already symbolised the future, envisaged as 'human becomings' who would eventually emerge into profitable adulthood, the language of progressivism was a natural fit for this social group.[18] In its turn, adolescence could be seen as a stage that emerged only in a modern society, which allowed the extension of cultural education beyond biological puberty.[19] Importantly, Robinson notes that before the late 1960s, the term 'progressive' was not necessarily associated with left-wing politics or the 'liberal elite'. Earlier in the twentieth century, it

could be – and was – claimed by those with a wide range of political persuasions.[20] Therefore, any automatic association between, say, 'progressive' and 'permissive' education and parenting must be discarded.

'Progressive', instead, was a term used by those who wanted to associate themselves with 'new schools' and was often employed as a way to emphasise the innovation of 'modern methods', which were contrasted with an old-fashioned 'traditional education'. However, there was little evidence that this 'traditional education' had ever existed as an organised body of thought, or, indeed, that it had eschewed all the strategies that progressive educationalists now claimed as their own. For this reason, despite the fact that these two groups did not use this terminology themselves, I have adopted the terms 'utopian progressive' and 'non-utopian progressive' to distinguish the two major strands of reformist pedagogy that developed in inter-war England and Wales, and to avoid the historiographical confusion that has resulted from the battle between these two visions of the future.

Apart from the word 'progressive' itself, the term most often used by non-utopian progressives to refer to their pedagogical practice was 'child-centred'. To an extent, these terms were used interchangeably; however, insofar as they can be disentangled, I would suggest that 'child-centred' denotes a particular set of pedagogical practices, whereas 'progressive' describes an attitude of mind. Often, the difference between the two did not matter; however, when it did, it illustrated central tensions within the non-utopian movement. To be a progressive meant consistently pursuing innovation; inevitably, then, methods that were deemed child-centred by non-utopian progressives in the 1940s became outdated by the 1970s. This led to claims in the latter decade that progressive change had been more apparent than real – but as schools were being measured against a set of standards that was constantly shifting, it was not surprising that they fell short. Moreover, certain child-centred shibboleths actually stood in sharp contrast to the modernity that the non-utopian progressives believed their movement embodied, because they aimed to preserve childhood as a time of bucolic, timeless innocence.

Both utopian and non-utopian forms of progressivism were important and influential in inter-war England and Wales, although neither was able to do much to put its ideas into practice. But private utopian

flagship schools such as Summerhill and Beacon Hill would ultimately exercise little influence on the development of progressivism in primary and secondary modern schools after 1945. Instead, child-centred pedagogy entered mainstream educational practice as a tool for shaping good citizens. This thread emerged after 1918 with the discussion of the needs of a 'mass democracy' and, as Mathew Thomson has argued, continued into the post-war period, when progressive education was seen as necessary to fit children for the needs of a social democracy and welfare state.[21] Key legislative developments paved the way for non-utopian progressivism to become dominant in primary and secondary modern schools. The 1944 Education Act raised the school leaving age from fourteen to fifteen and established the principle of separate secondary education, urging the abolition of all-age elementary schools. Although this principle was not enshrined in the Act itself, it led to their widespread replacement with a bipartite system of grammar schools and secondary moderns.[22] Because of the limited impact of grammar schools on social mobility and the detrimental impact on those who 'failed' the 11-plus entrance exam and had to attend a secondary modern school, sociologists and historians have rightly tended to focus on the conservative aspects of this legislation.[23] However, it also arose from fundamentally child-centred considerations about the different needs of different groups of children, both in terms of age and ability and the need to provide an education that would suit them.[24]

Even more significantly for the implementation of child-centred practice in mainstream schools, central funding for education substantially increased in the post-war period, rising from a 2.6 per cent share of GDP to 4.5 per cent in the 1950s.[25] The Second World War played a key role in this shift; as James Cronin has argued, the 'expansion of the state' was restricted, rather than inevitable, in twentieth-century Britain, and big increases in spending were only possible in the aftermath of the two world wars.[26] Education spending was uneven, with more channelled into secondary education, especially grammar schools, than primaries.[27] But the building of new schools, the provision of extensions such as school halls and school libraries to some existing schools and the increased money for books, apparatus and classroom furniture allowed child-centred ideas to gain far more ground than before.

Given these political and economic gains, a familiar story is often told about the rise and fall of progressive education. It is seen as the

triumph of 'permissive' teaching methods in Western Europe and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, followed by a vehement backlash in the 1980s that reasserted central control over education, alongside the imposition of increasingly rigid targets measured by standardised testing such as SATs in the UK and the No Child Left Behind programme in the US. Permissivism was accused of allowing children to do what they wanted, regardless of how pointless and destructive it was, of failing to instil discipline and appropriate moral standards and of encouraging low academic achievement. Furthermore, it is remembered as having been driven by radical, left-wing teachers and resisted by the institutions of the central state.[28] Some historians of education have modified this simplistic narrative – considering the deep roots of progressive pedagogy in the nineteenth century and the inter-war period, and noting the beginnings of resistance from the 1960s – but not fundamentally challenged it.[29] However, little in this story stands up to scrutiny.

For both right- and left-wing cultural and political commentators, the central feature of this story lies in the association of utopian progressivism with non-utopian progressive or child-centred education, and of both with 'the permissive society'. Sympathisers defend child-centred education by arguing that children need freedom and autonomy to learn; detractors claim that child-centred education led to the decline of educational standards and the rise of disciplinary problems in the classroom. In other words, this story suggests that there was a direct line of inheritance from schools such as Neill's experimental Summerhill in the 1920s and 1930s to the post-war child-centred primary schools praised in the Plowden Report (1967) to 1970s scandals such as the closure of the William Tyndale Junior School by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) in 1976. But this is not the case. To understand the differences between utopian progressivism on the one hand and non-utopian child-centred progressivism on the other, we should start by recognising that they rested on different concepts of childhood.

The divisions within the movement that has been called 'progressivism' have been obscured or elided because historians of childhood have not tended to consider the classroom, whereas historians of education have often forgotten about the child.[30] When considering late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century childhood in Western Europe, historians

can scarcely avoid paying some attention to the growth of compulsory elementary education, a major factor in what Viviana Zelizer has termed the evolution of 'the priceless' but economically useless child.[31] However, mid- and late-twentieth-century British historians have, on the whole, been more concerned with childhood in the clinic, the court and the family than in the school.[32] Their works share a nebulous chronology which suggests that childhood generally got better from the late nineteenth century onwards as child labour was more tightly regulated, material conditions improved and the child's needs came to the forefront in education and parenting, before a sharp downturn in the 1970s and 1980s as the permissive shift was curtailed.[33]

At the same time, the history of education has been peculiarly and unfairly neglected by historians who do not specialise in it. Peter Mandler has put forward a compelling case for its integration into the wider narrative of modern British history: '[Education] is one of the places where the state enters most regularly and directly into the lives of its citizens. It helps to make us whom we are.'[34] However, historians of education, while also positioning the 1970s as a turning-point, have shown little interest in childhood or youth as a category, focusing on institutional and structural issues in education such as social mobility, gender-differentiated academic achievement and the relationship between the educational system and the central state. Furthermore, as David Cannadine, Nicola Sheldon and Jenny Keating note in their recent monograph on the history of history teaching in twentieth-century Britain, the history of 'taught subjects' – defined as the relationship between the curriculum and actual practice in schools – has been neglected, reflecting earlier arguments about the lack of knowledge of a 'lived curriculum' or the 'social history of the classroom' made by Peter Cunningham and Harold Silver.[35] This suggests, crucially, that child-centred education has still not been analysed in practice, despite recent methodological work that has promised to open up 'the black box of schooling' by considering the range of sources that can be handled by historians of the classroom.[36] Without considering how teachers actually understood, implemented and developed child-centred pedagogy, we cannot assess how it affected classroom practice, or how it reshaped teachers' concepts of childhood.

The top-down nature of the historiography of education partly explains why there has never been a satisfactory history of this kind of

pedagogical practice. Child-centred ideas were rewritten by the teachers who employed them and the contexts within which they were actually used. *A Progressive Education?* will suggest that child-centred education was only ever half-implemented in English and Welsh primary and secondary modern schools. Far from being promoted by 'trendy' teachers, these new ideas met significant resistance from within the teaching profession. Even enthusiastic proponents of child-centred practice were restricted by inadequate school buildings, a lack of materials, uncooperative colleagues and large class sizes. Most importantly, as we shall see, the child-centred education that did become mainstream in primary and secondary modern schools after the Second World War was *not* progressive in the utopian sense. However, non-utopian progressive education not only enabled a deliberate rethinking of childhood but was moulded by the context within which it operated. These post-war ideas about childhood were new.

Positioning this shift after the Second World War expands upon current historical work that views the 1950s as a social, cultural and emotional turning-point in British history. Historians such as Claire Langhamer, Thomas Dixon, Carolyn Steedman, Martin Francis, Michal Shapira and Frank Mort, alongside Thomson, have argued that there were fundamental changes in how selfhood was presented and understood after 1945.[37] These new approaches both challenge the chronology of a 'permissive shift', traditionally dated to the 1960s, and question the utility of the concept.[38] As Nick Thomas suggests, quoting Abigail Wills, the 'exact nature of what has been termed the "permissive shift" remains strangely elusive'.[39] These arguments reflect Alan Petigny's assertion that the 'permissive turn' in the United States should be dated to the 1940s, not the 1960s, due to the increasing popularisation of modern psychology.[40]

However, despite Petigny's argument that 'permissive' parenting, primarily inspired by the work of Dr Spock, played a key part in this 'transformation of moral values', the relationship between child-centred practice at home and school and 'a permissive society' – whatever that might mean – is not straightforward.[41] Child-centred education was not inherently permissive, and it did not value the power and agency of young people. A child-centred school could, and usually did, preserve the teacher's traditional authority; altering the curriculum did not change the fact that it was still imposed from above. Conservative

critics who decided that child-centred methods had caused a decline in behavioural and academic standards told a story that began with the utopian educationalists of inter-war Britain and ended with the 'exploding school' movement of the 1970s, which aimed to break down barriers between the school and the community; as I have already suggested, this is not a story to which non-utopian progressive education, or, indeed, mainstream educational practice, truly belongs. Child-centred methods did lead to a significant shift in concepts of childhood, but they tended to reduce, rather than to promote, the freedom of the child.

This shift can be understood as follows. While childhood and adolescence were established categories by the beginning of the twentieth century, the gap between these two age stages, on the one hand, and adulthood, on the other, widened after the Second World War. The sequential, maturational development of childhood and youth was compared with the completed 'steady state' of healthy adulthood, and children were re-envisioned as incomplete and incapable, rather than as merely inexperienced. Chronological age became much more significant, as it was claimed that children could only acquire certain capacities, such as logical thought, by getting older, rather than, for example, acquiring more life experience. As child-centred educational methods were increasingly introduced into schools, teachers were encouraged to understand childhood in developmental psychological terms. Teachers sought ways to teach classes more easily and effectively, reshaping what they had been told about children in the context of their own practice. At the same time, they blamed child-centred parenting and teaching for what they perceived to be an entitled, selfish and delinquent generation of children and adolescents, even as the developmental psychology it championed reframed both children and adolescents as egotistic, unable to extend genuine empathy to others.

While this book is rooted in a case study of progressive education in England and Wales, its broader findings are strongly relevant to the histories of both childhood and education in the United States and in Western Europe. The progressive education movement was influential in all these countries, and English pioneers exchanged ideas and practices in the inter-war period with key American and European figures such as John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Charlotte Bühler and Arnold Gesell.[42] After the Second World War, teachers were encouraged to

visit schools in other countries and to share child-centred practice.[43] Most notably, the English progressive primary school movement became a key source of inspiration for reformers in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s; in 1974, Ian Lister, head of the department of education at the University of York, called the notably progressive local education authority (LEA) of Leicestershire 'that shrine in England visited by so many US pilgrims.'[44] Vincent Rogers, an American teacher, claimed 'I have not been quite the same' after visiting Brize Norton and two other experimental Oxfordshire primary schools, Tower Hill and Bampton, and he produced an edited collection of essays by English reformers to allow other American teachers to learn from his experience.[45] Similarly, Charles Silberman, who published the well-known American text *Crisis in the Classroom*, in 1970, was hugely impressed by the teaching he saw in London, Leicestershire and the West Riding of Yorkshire: 'Not even the most informal American kindergartens . . . have the incredible richness and variety of materials found in the average informal English infant or junior school classroom.'[46]

American historians of education such as William J. Reese and Diane Ravitch have noted the importance of the English example in shaping progressive educational movements in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.[47] While the LEAs visited by Rogers and Silberman were not representative of educational practice throughout England and Wales – all were known for their radical progressivism – these selective experiences were profoundly influential for what Neville Bennett called the 'droves of Americans' who descended upon English primary schools from the early 1970s onwards.[48] However, the history of non-utopian progressive education and its associated concepts of childhood in England and Wales is important for understanding international experiences not only because English and Welsh pioneers exercised disproportionate influence. While my findings on the implementation of non-utopian progressive education are situated in English and Welsh contexts, they also point to central contradictions within the philosophy and pedagogy of child-centred education as practised throughout Europe, and how it potentially influenced conceptions of childhood outside as well as inside England and Wales.

The argument of this book proceeds across seven chapters. In Chapter 1, I explore how 'utopian progressive' and 'non-utopian progressive', or 'child-centred', educationalists developed two fundamentally

opposed sets of ideas about the capabilities, development and potential of children. Having demonstrated that utopian progressivism had relatively little impact on mainstream educationalists and on the significant series of inter-war reports produced by the Board of Education, I define what practices and ideas were signified by a 'child-centred' education before 1945. I suggest that the simultaneous commitment to providing an 'individual' and a 'natural' education for children introduced an inherent tension into this pedagogical programme. However, this tension was largely dormant during the inter-war period itself, as early child-centred experiments such as the Malting House School dealt with small groups of children, and so were able to provide a genuinely individualised education. Citizenship, a key concern for child-centred educationalists, was also conceived of in more individualistic terms in the 1920s and 1930s than after the advent of a collectivistic welfare state in the 1940s.

Chapter 2 considers how teachers themselves engaged with developmental psychology both before and after the Second World War, demonstrating that they claimed to be mystified by key theorists such as Piaget, while unconsciously absorbing the language he used about childhood. By considering the thought of two dominant educational thinkers in Britain before 1945, the psychoanalyst Susan Isaacs and the educational psychologist Cyril Burt, I will show that ideas about maturational developmental stages were resisted in inter-war Britain, and that this ambivalence was evident in teaching manuals and popular journals as well as in the more theoretical work of Burt and Isaacs. The adoption of developmental stages by child-centred educationalists was magnified by the practical reorganisation of schooling around chronological age from the 1930s onwards, emphasising the importance of 'stages of development', which were presumed to be closely linked to a particular age group. This redefined both childhood and adolescence as fundamentally divided from adulthood, because young people were still progressing through a sequence of stages that would allow them to acquire full cognitive and emotional capacities.

Teachers, as we shall see, rarely grasped the full complexities of the psychological theories that they encountered. However, the ways they used psychology and how it influenced their concepts of childhood were not solely reliant on a misunderstood and confused version of the arguments of key theorists. Rather than being an empty atheoretical

vessel into which psychological knowledge was poured, the teaching profession had its own model of craft knowledge that both resisted and adapted the novel theories with which it was presented.[49] This argument is developed further in Chapter 3, which focuses on teachers' resistance to the child-centred educational methods that emerged from the findings of developmental psychologists. Teachers often felt they had to pay lip service to child-centred methods even if they were not convinced by them, intensifying the influence of simplistic and limiting concepts of childhood and youth. Even when they self-defined as 'progressive', they were liable to believe that this mindset tended to introduce too many changes too quickly, so teachers could not keep up with changing 'trends' in child-centred practice.

In Chapter 4, I consider the implementation of non-utopian progressivism in English and Welsh primary and secondary modern schools since 1918, contending that it was precisely because child-centred practice was only ever half-implemented in primary and secondary modern schools in England and Wales that it transformed teachers' concepts of childhood so profoundly. Psychological ideas about childhood were shaped by the reactions and needs of the teaching profession, one of their major targets and consumers. For example, teachers who had to manage classes of forty or fifty pupils prodded psychological theorists towards generalisations about childhood; they wanted to be told 'how seven-year-olds learn', rather than being informed that they ought to provide an individualised education for each child. In this chapter, I consider how teacher trainers, inspectors, headteachers and teachers shaped both theory and policy at the local level, using four case studies of LEAs: Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Sheffield and Monmouthshire. I suggest that non-utopian progressive education posed a threat to teachers' notions of expertise, shaping a limited concept of the pupil that nevertheless served a practical purpose in the classroom, especially given large class sizes, poor buildings and scant apparatus. Primary and secondary modern schools – and, later, comprehensives – rather than grammar schools or private schools are focused upon for three key reasons. First, they educated the majority of the population during this period.[50] Second, given this, the relative historical neglect, especially of the secondary modern school, is significant.[51] Third, relatively unencumbered by external examinations, they tended to be the sites for pedagogical experimentation.[52]

In Chapters 5 and 6, I consider how class and gender shaped not only teachers' responses to child-centred education after the Second World War but their images of the children they taught. I suggest that progressive education was itself gendered feminine, due to its association with infant and primary schools and the 'mothering' role of the teacher.[53] While both male and female teachers felt their traditional craft expertise and subject knowledge to be under threat, men in secondary modern schools were more likely to resist these innovations than their female counterparts in primary schools. Using a case study of the secondary modern school in the 1950s and 1960s, I extend these arguments about male teachers' status anxieties to explore why media depictions of the 'sec. mod.' or 'modern school' were so fraught with violence and conflict during this period. Class is a key variable; the 1944 Education Act had brought a new influx of working-class children within the ambit of state education at the same time as the teaching profession, especially at secondary level, was attracting more middle-class recruits. However, teachers from working-class backgrounds also had a vested interest in maintaining a 'cultural gap' between themselves and their pupils. Although some teachers criticised the negative media portrayals of the 'blackboard jungle', others embraced them. The anxieties engendered by progressive teaching methods, I suggest, increasingly defined the interests of the child and teacher not as a unity but in opposition to each other. Non-utopian progressive education contributed to this shift by emphasising the gulf between the abilities of children and of adults, reconfiguring childhood and youth as *negatively* defined by what young people were unable to do before they reached adulthood. Both children and adolescents were characterised by their essential egotism, their orientation towards practical and concrete experience that directly related to their own lives and their lack of capacity for abstract reasoning.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I consider the 'backlash' against 'child-centred' education in the 1970s and question whether education in England and Wales was ever truly progressive. This does not mean that child-centred ideas ceased to have any impact upon concepts of childhood and adolescence; instead, the child-centred remodelling of youth was increasingly internalised, divorced from its origins. The emergence of ideas such as Anthony Fyson and Colin Ward's 'exploding school' recalled the earlier utopian ideals of progressives such as Neill and

Russell, but, like the experimental schools that were founded in inter-war Britain, these variants ultimately failed to have much impact on mainstream education, although they were often taken as representative of a system that had failed.[54] The impact of child-centred education upon marginalised groups – girls, ethnic minority or immigrant pupils, working-class pupils and disabled pupils – is further considered, and it is ultimately argued that, while these groups were the most deeply affected, all children and adolescents were defined by non-utopian progressive educationalists as abnormal, seen as incomplete versions of adults despite reformers' assertions to the contrary.

Age remains an inconstant variable throughout this book. With the exception of the case studies of childhood (seven- to eleven-year-olds) in Chapter 5 and of adolescence (eleven- to fifteen-year-olds) in Chapter 6, I mainly consider the seven- to fifteen-year-old age range as a whole in my discussion of the impact of non-utopian progressive education, deliberately omitting the infant school years, which followed a very different historical trajectory.[55] This decision was made for a number of reasons. First, it mirrors the institutional experience of the majority of children and teachers during this period; all-age elementaries were the norm before 1944 and, despite the provision for separate secondary education in the 1944 Education Act, many children remained in these all-age schools into the 1960s, especially in Wales.[56] Second, it reflects the sources I consulted for these sections: teaching manuals and periodicals rarely highlighted the age group under discussion, unless speaking explicitly about the problems of adolescence or of the primary school child. Due to the envisaging of both childhood and adolescence as segmented into a series of developmental stages, post-war educationalists often found that these life-stages had much more in common with each other than with adulthood, and so tended to deal with them together. In contrast, images of the infant and young child, as Shapira has argued, unlike images of the older child and adolescent, were shaped primarily by psychoanalysis after the Second World War, and so were dominated by an alternative set of concerns.[57] Third, even when schools dealt with separate age groups, there was a consistency in the curriculum between the primary and the secondary modern or comprehensive school, reflecting the largely unspoken assumption that progressive methods were especially appropriate for the less academic child – and that such children would never develop into fully mature beings.

In this book, I consider the development of ideas about childhood in different social contexts: from influential academics such as Jean Piaget attending conferences and collaborating with colleagues, to the teacher struggling to teach a class of fifty-four primary-aged children in an isolated and dilapidated rural Oxfordshire school. Tracing concepts of childhood, even in the more recent past, poses a challenge for historians because children, like women, have often been made invisible in the historical record; as Charlotte Hardman has argued, both are 'muted groups'.[58] While it is not this book's main purpose to attempt the significantly more difficult endeavour of uncovering the voice of the child itself, even adult ideas about children are not easily accessible. This is especially true in the context of classroom practice in schools, which has also been 'hidden from history'. For this reason, this book combines both social and cultural approaches to history, drawing on an exceptionally wide range of sources to trace these discourses where they can be found.

How can we get inside the 'black box' of the classroom and understand how child-centred education worked in practice? English and Welsh education was not tightly controlled from the centre during the period under investigation, although Welsh education was not able to develop independently.[59] As Wooldridge has put it, somewhat negatively, 'English education was a shambles rather than a system', suggesting that the political elite were simply not concerned about mass education as they had no vested interest in its institutions.[60] The nature of the relationship between central government and the schools is summed up in the titles of the handbooks issued infrequently by the Board of Education: they were known as handbooks of *suggestions* to teachers.[61] While the Board produced a steady stream of reports, memorandums, pamphlets and guides, teachers were not bound to obey any of them. It was rare that legislation compelled the local authority to offer any particular service – medical inspections, school meals and the raising of the school leaving age were exceptions – and legislation did not affect the curriculum except in the anomalous case of religious education, which was compulsory in maintained schools.[62] At the local level, schools were likewise loosely accountable to the LEA. The LEA controlled schools' funds, so schools were forced to appeal to the LEA via their boards of governors for repairs, equipment, staff needs and so forth, but the local authority rarely interfered directly in

the curriculum. It was nationally employed inspectors who, indirectly, wielded the most influence over teaching methods. Additionally, teacher training colleges affected the views and methods of teachers entering the profession, but central control was, again, minimal after 1926, when the Board of Education relinquished control of examinations at the same time as it relaxed regulations for the school curriculum.[63]

The decentralised nature of the English and Welsh education system has led to the assumption that local differences are crucial to understanding teaching practice in this period.[64] The four local case studies that I draw from throughout this book actually demonstrated a surprising uniformity of practice, despite the fact that two of the LEAs (Oxfordshire and Sheffield) had a 'child-centred' reputation, whereas the other two (Cambridgeshire and Monmouthshire) did not. Using school logbooks, His/Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools' (HMI) reports, school correspondence, punishment books, teaching journals, oral history archives and other records that span the period from the 1920s to the 1970s, this book demonstrates that we can access what was actually happening in the classroom – and that practice was remarkably geographically consistent. To explain why schools were so similar and why teachers' practice was seemingly so co-ordinated we must turn to the role of the national inspectorate, the systems of promotion utilised by local authorities, and the teacher training colleges. It was progressive HMIs and teacher trainers who became crucial in spreading child-centred practice.

School logbooks, mandated by the Board of Education from 1862 and sometimes checked by the local inspector or HMI, are a useful and relatively underutilised source for the history of twentieth-century schooling, although David Nunn, Hester Barron and Andrew Burchell have made use of them recently to consider the responses of schools to the First World War, the inter-war period and post-war period respectively.[65] One reason for their relative neglect is that their coverage is patchy and uneven. Different counties have widely varying numbers of extant logbooks, and the individual histories of the schools in question often determine whether or not they survive; as Siân Pooley has pointed out, logbooks often did not enter archives until the 1970s or 1980s, and so the survival of a logbook for a particular school may depend on whether or not the school survived into the late twentieth century.[66] Headteachers were required to make entries in these

logbooks, but their use of them varied widely. Entries range from a cursory dozen records for a year to those of the Cambridgeshire headmaster Derek Skeet who took the time in 1964 to write a mini-essay in the closing pages of his volume about the structure and purpose of the logbook, musing that '[t]he log is a unique form of literature created by many hands. From its dry pages, cryptic as manuscript music, with entries as similar as tesserae, emerges an art form, built out of dedicated living . . . It is the life of a school.'[67]

Moving outside my local authority case studies, I use teachers' journals to gain another angle on teachers' responses to progressive education and how this affected their views on childhood. *Teachers World* [*sic*] and *The Schoolmaster and Woman Teacher's Chronicle* (*Schoolmaster*), which became the *Teacher* in 1963, form the two major case studies, as they had the widest readership during this period and the greatest appeal to primary and secondary modern school teachers, as opposed to the grammar and private-school readership catered to by the *Times Educational Supplement* (*TES*).[68] Peter Cunningham estimates that 25 per cent of state primary teachers read *Teachers World* in 1969, comparing favourably to the *TES*, at 23 per cent. The *Teacher,* however, the official journal of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), came out top, at 47 per cent.[69] This perhaps represents the composition of the survey, which included only primary school teachers; as Cunningham indicates, *Teachers World* had less appeal to primary teachers than secondary teachers.[70] Both the *Teacher* and the NUT itself were hence more representative of primary school teachers than secondary school teachers in the post-war period.[71] Unfortunately, there are no figures for secondary school teachers' reading practice, although there are anecdotal reports that some read these periodicals.[72] The *Teacher* boasted in 1972 that 120,000 teachers read the paper, a figure that included primary and secondary teachers; given that the total workforce in UK public-sector schools at the time was around 480,000, this represented 25 per cent of all teachers.[73] There are no readership figures for the earlier part of our period; however, many teachers who taught between the wars recalled these periodicals or found them familiar when prompted with a copy during oral history interviews.[74]

The format and content of these journals changed over time. The *Teacher* shifted from a magazine to tabloid newspaper layout post-war,

and by 1971 it was being distributed free to all schools. *Teachers World* had been popular in earlier decades because of its practical focus; as Cunningham argues, it was 'closer to the reality of the primary school world' because it focused on printing material for use in lessons, such as its colour poster insert.[75] However, its 'teaching tips' were proving less competitive by the early 1960s, and the *Teacher* recalled that it had cut down on this kind of feature under the editorship of Nicholas Bagnall (1961–65) because *Teachers World* was 'slumping badly'.[76] There was a contraction in the education journal market in the late 1970s; the *Teacher* became a much shorter periodical dominated by job listings rather than news or opinion pieces, while *Teachers World* stopped publishing after 1975.[77] Alongside teaching journals, therefore, I read popular teaching advice guides, focusing on key texts that went through numerous reprints and/or frequently appeared on the book lists of training colleges. Both journals and manuals demonstrate significant shifts after the Second World War in both teaching practice and in conceptions of childhood.

Finally, I use both written self-narratives and transcripts of oral history interviews throughout this book. These represent two very different types of autobiographical account. As Alessandro Portelli puts it, unlike the fixed text of a written self-narrative, '[w]hat is spoken in a typical oral history interview has usually never been told *in that form* before', and, even when it has, it has never been told to that listener.[78] Furthermore, a written self-narrative is usually prompted by the subject's decision to write an autobiographical account, whereas an oral history interview is usually prompted by the interviewer. Much has been written on the 'intersubjectivity' created by the interviewer and interviewee in an oral history interview, and it is crucial to reflect upon the ways in which the interviewee's story is mediated and shaped, especially if you have not conducted the interviews yourself. Nevertheless, as April Gallway has argued, archived oral histories are still a valuable resource, as even the original interviewer's understanding of the contexts that shaped the interview will be partial.[79]

I draw from four oral history archives in this book: first, the archive created by David Cannadine, Nicola Sheldon and Jenny Keating for *The Right Kind of History*; both the original questionnaires sent to respondents and the transcripts of selected interviews are available online.[80] Sheldon and Keating undertook the bulk of the interviewing for this project.

Second, I examine the transcripts and audio recordings available in the Oxfordshire History Archive. In contrast to the Cannadine archive, these interviews were not undertaken by professional and/or academic interviewers, but took place in a range of situations, from a local radio programme called *My Choice*, where the participant chose a range of songs that meant something to them and informally discussed their life and career, to interviews between colleagues who were already known to each other. This inevitably affected the accounts that emerged from the interviews, in contrast to the more structured approach of Sheldon and Keating. The third archive is the hundred or so transcripts produced by the Wartime Evacuation Project (WEP), led by Phil Gardner and Peter Cunningham from 1998 to 2002, which considered how teachers' experiences of evacuation influenced their teaching practice.[81] Finally, I make use of a set of ten oral history interviews that I conducted in Oxford in 2015. Interviewing teachers who had started teaching in the City of Oxford or Oxfordshire in the 1970s, I adopted a 'life history' approach to consider how teachers' attitudes towards their pupils had changed as they themselves grew older, focusing especially on their initial teacher training, early teaching experiences and their engagement with psychological discourses. I supplemented these interviews with fifteen qualitative questionnaires, including some from respondents who completed an initial questionnaire but were not interviewed.[82]

The shift in ideas about childhood and adolescence in England and Wales after 1945 reflected wider understandings about the role of the post-war state. Moreover, it suggested an emotional change in how adults imagined the future. In the supposedly pessimistic inter-war period, British utopian educationalists saw a distorted world that could be made good by the rising generation. The world was fundamentally flawed, but it could also be fundamentally transformed. This optimism was reflected by children's self-narratives, which tended to imagine exciting and glamorous futures.[83] This was an unusual historical moment, although we may perceive some parallels with the recent positive coverage in Britain and the United States of the coming of age in a time of crisis of Generation Z, born in the late 1990s and early 2000s.[84] As Geoffrey Pearson has argued, concern about the declining moral standards of the young had been the steady state of affairs in Britain for three centuries.[85] In contrast, in the supposedly affluent

and self-confident 1950s, fears and worries about children and adolescents intensified, and children's writing about imagined futures became more practical, less ambitious and more anxious.[86] If Britain had really 'never had it so good', it stood that British citizens also had more to lose. More was required of adults who formed part of a collectivist, social-solidaristic welfare state; it had to be ensured that the generation that followed them had the moral, social and intellectual capacity to preserve the world they had won.

Notes

1 Holmes, *Tragedy of Education*, pp. 99–100.
2 Holmes, 'Confessions and hopes of an ex-inspector', p. 277.
3 Selleck, *English Primary Education and the Progressives*. Lane was accused of the sexual abuse of adolescent girls in his charge in 1918; see Delap, 'Disclosures of child sexual abuse', pp. 83–5.
4 Holmes, *Tragedy of Education*, p. 5.
5 Neill, *Dreadful School*, p. 35; Purdy, *Neill*, p. 9.
6 Neill, *Summerhill*, pp. 9, 40.
7 Russell, On *Education*, pp. 166–73.
8 Overy, *Morbid Age*.
9 Cited in Selleck, *English Primary Education and the Progressives*, p. 97.
10 MacMunn, *The Child's Path to Freedom*, p. 11.
11 Pearson, *Hooligan*, p. 216; Tisdall, 'Life in Bridgeburn', pp. 358–60.
12 Thomson, *Lost Freedom*; King, 'Future citizens'. Similarly, the Progressive Movement in the United States envisaged education as a key part of the development of a modern society; see Marten (ed.), *Children and Youth*.
13 This quotation has been attributed to John Dewey and Johann Pestalozzi, but I have been unable to trace its precise origin, although the phrasing frequently reoccurs.
14 Neill, 'Introduction' in Mannin, *Common Sense*, p. 13.
15 Saint, *Towards a Social Architecture*, p. 39.
16 Robinson, *Language of Progressive Politics*, p. 4.
17 *Ibid*.
18 James and Prout, in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, use the term 'human becomings'.
19 Burchell, 'The Adolescent School Pupil', p. 74.
20 Robinson, *Language of Progressive Politics*, pp. 13–14, 158.
21 Thomson, *Lost Freedom.*
22 Technical schools, the third leg of a 'tripartite' system, were rarely established; see Sanderson, *Missing Stratum*, pp. ix, 147.

23 For example, Thom, 'The 1944 Education Act'. Peter Mandler discusses the 'compromise' nature of the Act and its impact on working-class children in 'Educating the Nation I', pp. 216–35.
24 Tisdall, 'Inside the "blackboard jungle"'; Carter, '"Experimental" secondary modern education'.
25 O'Hara, *Governing Post-war Britain*, p. 7.
26 Cronin, *Politics of State Expansion*, pp. 2–4.
27 DES, *Children and Their Primary Schools*, p. 389.
28 Most recently, every step of this narrative has been rehearsed in Blundell, *Education and Constructions*, pp. 5, 125, 140–56, and in Howlett, *Progressive Education*.
29 For the earlier period, see Lowndes, *Silent Social Revolution*, and Selleck, *English Primary Education and the Progressives*. For the counter-attack on progressive education, see Lowe (ed.), *The Changing Primary School*, Jones, *Beyond* and Lowe, *The Death of Progressive Education*.
30 Blundell, *Education and Constructions* is an exception, but Blundell solely considers educational ideas and institutions, rather than practice in schools.
31 Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*. On nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century education, see Rose, *Intellectual Life*; Heathorn, *For Home, Country and Race*; Hurt, *Elementary Schooling*.
32 Rose, *Governing the Soul*; Cox, *Gender, Justice and Welfare*; Shapira, *The War Inside*.
33 Hendrick, *Child Welfare: Historical Dimensions*; Hendrick, *Child Welfare: England 1872–1989*; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society*; Heywood, *History of Childhood*.
34 Mandler, 'Educating the Nation I', p. 6.
35 Cannadine *et al.*, *The Right Kind of History*, p. 219; Cunningham, *Curriculum Change in the Primary School*, pp. viii, 2; Silver, 'Knowing and not knowing', pp. 104–6.
36 Braster *et al.*, *Black Box*.
37 Langhamer, *The English in Love*; King, *Family Men*; Davis, *Modern Motherhood*; Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*; Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family*; Dixon, *Weeping Britannia*; Steedman, 'State-sponsored autobiography'; Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil*; Francis, 'Tears, tantrums and bared teeth'; Shapira, *The War Inside*; Mort, 'Social and symbolic'; Waters, 'Dark strangers'.
38 Permissivism in the 1960s is discussed in Marwick, *The Sixties*; Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 12.
39 Thomas, 'Will the real 1950s please stand up?', p. 228.
40 Petigny, *Permissive Society*.
41 Petigny, *Permissive Society*, pp. 2, 16, 40–1.
42 Hirsch, 'Apostle of freedom'; Rose, *Governing the Soul*; Giardiello, *Pioneers in Early Childhood Education*; Nawrotski, 'Froëbel is dead'.

43 D. Jordan, 'The quaint, rude, undisciplined British', *Teacher,* 1 July 1966, p. 17.
44 Lister, *Deschooling*, p. 2.
45 Rogers (ed.), *Teaching in the British Primary School*, p. v.
46 Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom*, p. 221.
47 Ravitch, *Left Back*.
48 Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom*, p. 262; Bennett, *Teaching Styles*, p. 8.
49 Middleton and May, *Early Childhood Herstories* makes the similar point that teachers have always used theory.
50 Todd, *The People.*
51 McCulloch and Sobel, 'Towards a history of secondary modern schools', p. 275; Carter, 'Experimental secondary modern education', p. 24.
52 Grosvenor and Lawn, 'Days out of school', p. 382.
53 Indeed, Mathew Thomson suggests that popular psychology was itself 'feminised' in post-war Britain, due to its association with motherhood. Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 292.
54 Fyson and Ward, 'Streetwork'.
55 Giardiello, *Pioneers in Early Childhood Education*; Davis, *Pre-School.*
56 DES, *Primary Education in Wales*, p. 4.
57 Shapira, *The War Inside.*
58 Hardman, 'Can there be an anthropology of children?', p. 85.
59 Jones, 'Perspectives from the brink of extinction'; Jones, 'Which nation's curriculum?', pp. 6–7.
60 Wooldridge, 'The English state', pp. 232–3.
61 Major re-issuings of this *Handbook* from 1900–67 occurred in 1905, 1909, 1918, 1926, 1937 and 1959.
62 Wooldridge, 'The English state', p. 233.
63 Cunningham and Gardner, 'Teacher trainers and educational change', p. 240; Grace, 'Teachers', p. 207.
64 Cunningham, *Curriculum Change in the Primary School.*
65 Barron, 'Little prisoners of city streets'.
66 Pooley, 'Parenthood and child-rearing', p. 36.
67 Cambridgeshire Archives, St Luke's, Cambridge, Boys: Logbook, Uncatalogued, entry at back of logbook, c. 1964.
68 *Teachers World*'s ungrammatical title has been the subject of much confusion among historians of education. The title changed across time: it was *The Teacher's World* from 1918, *The Teachers' World* from 1922 and *Teachers World* from 1930, when it started producing 'Junior School' and 'Senior School' editions, and it retained this title from 1940, when the two editions became one again. I have referred to the journal as *Teachers World* throughout.
69 Cunningham, *Curriculum Change in the Primary School*, p. 109.
70 Cunningham, *Curriculum Change in the Primary School*, p. 110.
71 Tropp estimates that in 1956 the total membership of the NUT was 240,400, including retired and trainee teachers. 79.7% of primary teachers were

members in 1956 compared with 66.7%, or exactly two thirds, of secondary modern teachers. See Tropp, *The School Teachers*, p. 266.

72 For example: WEP A064, 27/11/01, p. 37; A086, 22/1/01, p. 33.

73 M. Wilkinson, 'The voice of the profession', *Teacher,* 14 January 1972, p. 9; History in Education, 'Analysis of teacher numbers' (2010).

74 For example: WEP A039, 17/8/00, p. 28; D016, 10/5/01, p. 41, A016, 3/10/00, p. 25; A071, 24/1/01, p. 18.

75 Cunningham, *Curriculum Change in the Primary School*, p. 110.

76 *Teacher*, 14 January 1972, p. 19.

77 *Teacher*, 8 January 1971, p. 19.

78 Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia,* p. 4.

79 Gallway, 'Rewards of using archived oral histories'.

80 History in Education Project, www.history.ac.uk/history-in-education/index.html.

81 Cunningham and Gardner, 'Oral history and teachers' professional practice'; Hussey, 'The school air-raid shelter'. This archive is currently only available to researchers for comparative purposes, so I have been unable to quote directly from any WEP transcripts, although I am able to cite individual interviews in footnotes when considering broader trends.

82 I have anonymised all respondents' names and the schools at which they taught in accordance with respondents' wishes.

83 Langhamer and Barron, 'Children, class, and the search for security'.

84 For example, 'How Generation Z will change the world', *Time,* 23 April 2018, http://time.com/5250542/generation-z/.

85 Pearson, *Hooligan*.

86 Highmore, 'Playgrounds and bombsites'; Oxford, Bodleian Libraries: Opie 35, Folder 1, Folios 1–220, essays on 'What I want to be when I leave school' written between 1951 and 1952 by children aged seven to thirteen.