

Progress in Geography

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Prologue

The idea of education is an idea of progress, an investment in the future of our young people and community. In schools we devote considerable time and energy to thinking about progress in the sense of progression and achievement for individuals, groups of pupils and schools, and how we might improve these. We also debate the purposes of education and its links with our collective social, economic and cultural progress.

When I started thinking about this lecture back in 2008, the idea that geography in particular has something to say about progress in its wider sense and should have a contribution to make to human progress, through its methodology and content, seemed self-evident to me. After all, we geographers often claim that learning from past processes to illuminate the present and think about the future is one of our Unique Selling Points, helping to justify our place in the curriculum.

It may even be that we're a little complacent about this, so whilst I plan to consider 'geography for and about progress' as a backdrop, I want to focus in more on 'progress in geography', and how we can raise standards for learners in a rather broader way than just thinking about achieving levels or grades. This may help make those claims rather more credible. In doing so, I'll focus in on geographical knowledge, linking it with a defence of geography, the subject; I want also to think a little about how we select and present knowledge of the world to learners, and also take a slight detour to ask some tricky questions about core knowledge.

Vermeer: *The Geographer*

We're going to start with [The Geographer](#) by Jan Vermeer, painted between 1668 and 1669, held by the Städelsches Kunstinstitut, in Frankfurt am Main. Its subject is caught gazing out of his Delft window to the world beyond as he pores over his maps, dividers in hand. Of course it's an idea of the geographer very characteristic of the time, in the sense of being to do with maps, and places and exploration; today we would read into it the idea of investigating places with a purpose, combining skills and new knowledge to create understanding. It seems to me to be an image of progress, where geographers, using the latest technology and their developing knowledge of the discipline, were valued members of intelligent society.

Vermeer's subject's outward looking gaze suggests a concern with the geographic present, but also imagining the future, now very much part of our subject identity. This was a confident, outward

looking society, on the eve of the European Enlightenment, where the idea of rational enquiry to discover, know and order people and nature changed the way we viewed the world.

A very geographical event provides an example. The Lisbon earthquake and tsunami of 1755 was one of the most destructive ever¹, thought to be similar in magnitude to the 2011 Japanese earthquake. In its aftermath clerics, representing the old order, busied themselves looking for heretics to blame (and hang). Meanwhile the King of Portugal and his ministers began a scientific investigation into the impact and causes of the earthquake which laid the foundations for seismology, and played an important role in the Enlightenment thinking.

This exercise of human reason and the search for knowledge through enquiry which characterised the Enlightenment was underpinned by a belief that these would lead to progress, both for individuals and for society as a whole. It is a way of thinking which has a direct link (via the scientific method) with geographical enquiry – asking questions, finding and presenting information to develop new knowledge and understanding, as well as critical thinking.

Vermeer often included maps or globes in his paintings, and the products of trade. Timothy Brook² shows how these provide a window into the fast-expanding wider world beyond seventeenth century Delft, when the great era of European voyages of exploration and mercantile expansion was really taking off. Brook compares the progress of geographically literate and outward-looking societies like Vermeer's Holland, with more closed societies such as contemporary China. Of course this first wave of globalisation brought great benefits for our own continent, as well as often catastrophic consequences for people and environments in others; rather modern concerns which are central to our current geographical imaginations. The idea of progress may have seemed simpler then; with the benefit of hindsight we tend to be rather more sceptical.

Knowledge and progress

Let's fast-forward nearly nineteenth-century Manchester, booming at the height of the Industrial Revolution and setting out its cultural credentials for all to see. If you stand outside the Manchester Art Gallery and look up you'll see carved into the frieze that the Gallery was 'instituted in MDCCCXXXV (1835) for the Advancement and Diffusion of Knowledge'. This dedication combines a direct line to Enlightenment thinking, with the very Victorian ideas of civic pride and self-improvement through access to culture. A passing citizen sees, set in the stone, a very concrete embodiment of the linkage between knowledge and progress, of society and of individuals. Education and the acquisition of knowledge was, for the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, a clear route to personal and national development; it was taken for granted that a knowledgeable and an educated person were pretty well synonymous.

¹ Chester, D.K. (2008) 'The effects of the 1755 Lisbon Earthquake and tsunami on the Algarve region, southern Portugal', *Geography*, 93:2, pp. 78-90

² Brook, T. (2008) *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World*, London: Profile Books.

Of course, many Victorians were pretty cautious about over-educating the working classes beyond their station. Since lack of knowledge blocked their participation in the economy, culture and democracy it is not surprising that this was a key aspiration of working-class movements in this period, one which they sought to overcome through self-help as well as formal education, with the idea that 'Knowledge is Power'³.

I'd like to suggest that we've rather lost faith with the idea of progress, or rather our attention has become focused on the idea of individual, rather than collective progress, and it is something which we could revisit through geography. We've also rather neglected and become suspicious of the value of knowledge, and allowed to become a contested and rather politicised construct; the next section explores that idea.

"What counts as an educated young person in this day and age?"⁴

I want to spend some time thinking about knowledge, the role of subjects, and our professional knowledge. One thing you can be sure of is from time to time the press will come up with some survey showing how little pupils know about science, history or geography. We do tend to shrug it off – not least because many of the same papers seem to have a pretty tenuous relationship with knowledge and the pursuit of truth themselves.

I want to introduce you to a rather famous YouTube clip of an American Game Show: [Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader](#), featuring Kellie Pickler, Country singer and star of American Idol. Now on the one hand we're all sitting here thinking that this is a rather trivial view of knowledge, and "Don't people understand that geography's about far more than this?", and on the other we're also probably thinking "Kellie's not a very well educated person, and that's rather a shame for her". It strikes me that having a basic knowledge and understanding of the world is one of the marks of an educated person – and it's not unreasonable to expect pupils to learn that in geography lessons.

In the early twenty-first century, western culture has developed quite a strong scepticism towards knowledge, not least in education. Knowledge is often characterised by its critics as out of date and part of an old-fashioned curriculum, mainly concerned with delivering great chunks of fixed, irrelevant content. A frequent line of reasoning is that 'old' subjects are accidents of history, and do not prepare young people adequately for an unpredictable future (one of the key aims of any curriculum), particularly in comparison with skills, which are often linked with employability in the 21st century.

In geography I think there are a number of reasons we've lost interest in knowledge; partly we've never lost our professional dread of rote-learning geographical facts and features – the Capes and Bays school of geography - which characterised much of geography education in the nineteenth

³ Bacon, F (1597) *Meditationes Sacrae 'Of Heresies'* (Nam et ipsa scientia potestas est: For also knowledge itself is power)

⁴ Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training for England and Wales, 2008, p.1 (www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk)

century. Another is the strength of geographical enquiry in our consciousness, and our desire for pupils to discover and create their own knowledge. But probably most of all we're interested in geographical themes and issues, including the big themes which will affect us all, especially our pupils, in the twenty-first century, for example energy, food security, hazards, migration and climate change.

One problem of course is in distinguishing between information compared with facts, and knowledge and understanding. They are clearly interrelated, but distinguishing between them is a significant challenge. Considering global warming again, knowledge based on some facts, such as where the equator is or the location and size of the polar ice-caps, is fairly easy to define (although not necessarily constant); but which are the key facts you need to know about atmospheric processes, and at what point does acquiring that knowledge develop into understanding? It seems to me that understanding is most important for learners, but it is dependent on information, facts and knowledge⁵. Particularly in complex and contentious issues like global warming, it is unlikely that learners will have any kind of understanding without a solid knowledge base.

But it's also a reminder that when dealing with complex and controversial issues it's doubly important to have a solid and reliable basis of facts to ensure we remain educators, not proponents of good causes⁶. There are few of us here that believe that just teaching 'the facts' would amount to an appropriate curriculum in the 21st century, when we expect that young people will also have learned a range of skills, and developed capabilities, understanding and values. In particular we expect that pupils will have developed knowledge as a result of good teaching, not simply filled their minds with it. So I think a significant knowledge base is essential to develop real understanding, particularly of difficult issues, and must be part of a quality curriculum.

Education by Google

Another line of reasoning is that the acquisition of knowledge has limited value in an information age, when such a wealth of material is available to all with so little effort. The availability of the Internet of course is an important default position for knowledge sceptics; as the General Secretary of the National Union of Headteachers put it:

'It is very important that children have an idea of the chronology of historical events, but we expect them to know the precise dates that they happened. Why? ... If children want the date of the Battle of Hastings, they will Google it'⁷

On a similar theme, the Deputy Head of a secondary school in Merseyside told a reporter in 2007:

⁵ Bennet, T. (2005) 'The Links Between Understanding, Progression and Assessment in the Secondary Geography Curriculum' *Geography*, 90:2, pp.152-170

⁶ Marsden, B. (1997) 'On Taking the Geography out of Geographical Education', *Geography*, 82, 3: pp. 241-52

⁷ Observer *Let pupils take mobile phones into class, says teachers' leader* 11/10/09 p.4

“You no longer need to go to school to get knowledge. You can sit on Google and find out anything you want at the touch of a button ... you need to spend less time teaching the knowledge but more time teaching pupils where they can find it out⁸”

Microsoft evidently saw no irony in selecting the College as one of twelve innovative schools globally that would ‘drive a competitive knowledge economy’.

Of course the Internet is a fantastic resource, particularly in geography where we need to move fast just to keep abreast of change. But we use it successfully partly because we’re already knowledgeable. It’s easy too to ignore its problems, notably its sheer vastness and the difficulty of discriminating between the fabulous riches it contains and the rest, particularly on some of the most important issues of the day. An Internet search for ‘global warming’ will return over 32 million results (March 2011), a considerable proportion of which will be distortion, misinformation or polemic; the skills needed to make the search are interdependent with the knowledge to successfully sift and learn from this information. Paradoxically the Internet, for all its great store of information, has also contributed to a more generalised hostility to the idea of knowledge, anti-intellectualism combined with anti-rationalism: ‘there is no such thing as evidence or fact, just opinion’⁹.

The case for subjects

A real difficulty with the discussion about knowledge is that it often seems to become polarised between those (often outside education) who believe that knowledge – especially ‘the facts’ is all that is important. This allows others to portray all knowledge – and the organisation of knowledge in subjects – as a regressive relic of the past. We need to rescue it from its conservative associations – as well as from the knowledge sceptics.

Those critics who argue that traditional subjects represent a nineteenth-century view of the curriculum forget that geography and most other subject disciplines far older than that (as Vermeer demonstrates). But they are also dynamic, not static; what you study in physics, or in geography, is very different in 2011 compared with 1911 – because of new purposes in learning, new discoveries and new thinking in the discipline. So the subject matter, as well as the pedagogy has moved on; it’s not difficult to think of examples – the theory of plate tectonics and continental drift being an obvious one.

One of the consequences of a loss of faith in subjects, commensurate with an emphasis on skills, has been a redefinition of teachers’ capability away from subject knowledge and towards pedagogy, with a loss of subject focused CPD. But subject disciplines remain a key aspect of teacher’s professional expertise, informing their judgement to decide what learning is worthwhile, to plan meaningful learning goals, guide progression and make valid assessments. Because they are familiar with the key principles and methods of enquiry, subject specialists tend to be better able to promote

⁸ Times Educational Supplement *Dreams and disasters to be timetabled*, 23/11/2007, p.17

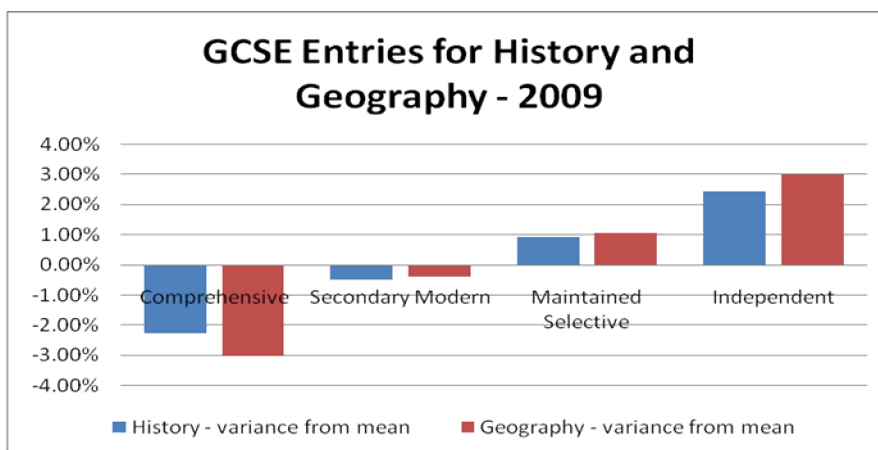
⁹ Susan Jacoby (2009) *The Age of American Unreason*, New York: Vintage

deep understanding and so tend to ask (and answer) better questions, develop better explanations and address misconceptions. Subject specialists are more likely to be part of a community, such as the GA, through which they keep up to date in knowledge and understanding, as well as pedagogy: a hinterland of professional debate and understanding.

The result is teachers who really do know what they are talking about; as a result of their passion for learning geography they are well placed to capture pupils' interest, enthusiasm and enjoyment, by connecting them with the real world, to challenge the most able and support the least. TDA research supports this view: 'Pupils across all ages agreed that "having an excellent knowledge of the subject they are teaching" was the most important quality for an effective teacher'¹⁰.

Unequal access

One unfortunate impact of the scepticism about knowledge and the loss of faith in subjects has been to reduce the opportunities to study geography and history, especially in those schools where there is most pressure to improve results; often, those schools in the most challenging circumstances. JNC data on GCSE entries shows that entries for geography and history are below the average for all



subjects in comprehensive and secondary modern schools, and above average in selective and independent schools.

GCSE subject entries by centre type¹¹

Recent research by the University of Birmingham¹² suggests that, within comprehensive schools, geography and history entries tend to be larger in the highest performing schools (mainly suburban and rural) and smaller (even non-existent) in lower-performing schools (mainly inner city). It also points to a geographical and social distribution for GCSE geography entries, with the highest

¹⁰ Lord, P. *What young people want from the curriculum*, <http://www.qcda.gov.uk/libraryAssets/media/NCAsummary.pdf> [accessed 25th September 2009]

¹¹ Joint Council for Qualifications (2009) Data for Centre Types and Regions, GCSE, Applied GCSE and ELC 2009 [online] <http://www.jcq.org.uk/attachments/published/1132/GCSE%20Slides.pdf> (accessed 25th September 2009)

¹² Weeden, P (2009) *Inequalities in curriculum access at age 14-16: A case study of geography* PhD Thesis (work in progress), University of Birmingham

percentage GCSE entries in shire counties, and the lowest in Inner London Boroughs, metropolitan boroughs and towns.

Anyone who has taught in schools serving the most disadvantaged communities knows that significant numbers of pupils there have a limited experience of the world around them. For these pupils, progress would be more not less geographical thinking and knowledge. All pupils, no matter where they go to school, should have both the opportunity to learn about people, society and environment; we don't need to look back to the nineteenth century to know that denying access to knowledge to some young people is profoundly disempowering.

Sampling the world

One of the joys of geography is the world really is our oyster – we could literally teach about the whole of nature and human experience. The price we pay is that, in creating a geography curriculum, we need to be very selective in what we choose to study. Moreover the pace of change in the world means a particular obligation to keep our thinking and our subject knowledge up to date, or risk teaching about fairly recent history rather than current reality. Of course the way we sample the world also says something about the way we think about it, and will inform the geographical imaginations of our pupils. I'm going to look at a couple of examples where I think we could improve the way we sample, at the same time considering what it says about our subject knowledge.

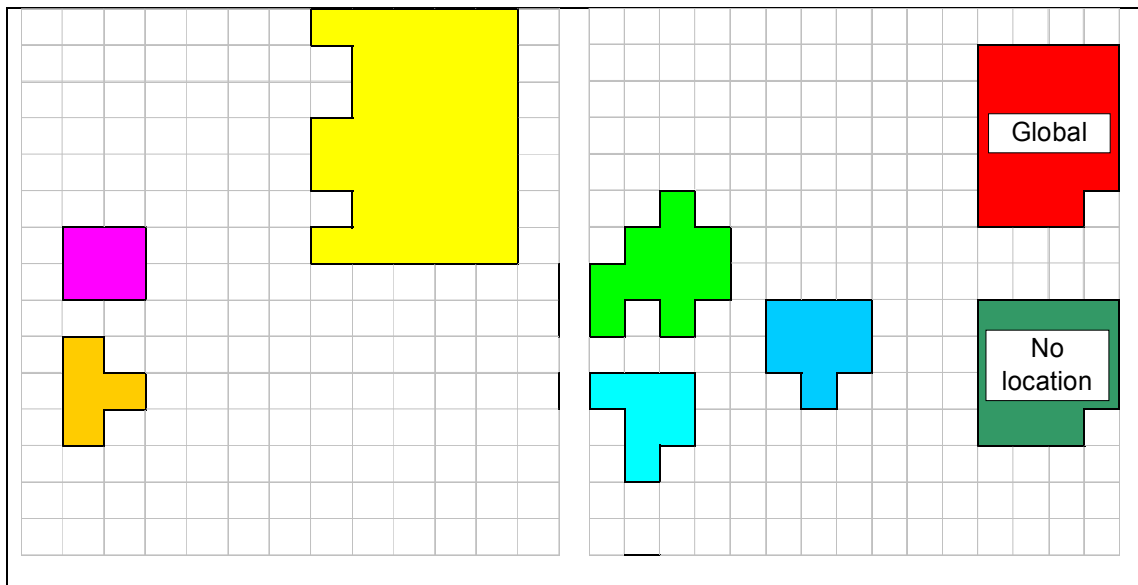
In primary schools where geography is well-taught and managed there's often a mixed economy of work on real places, especially local, and emphasising enquiry, with a few thematic studies. I've always thought the model of looking at distant places in their own right, often starting from the people and children who live there, has a lot to offer: a real, authentic and enjoyable world.

In the starter activity, the children had been issued with flight tickets for their journey to Mexico. Carlos (an imaginary character) left them messages under his poncho and sombrero... Visual images on the interactive whiteboard and the storyline involving Carlos had been used very effectively to introduce children to the village in Mexico. Their perceptions about what the village might be like as well as questions about their journey were used well¹³.

Secondary schools tend to sample the world using the main principles in physical and human geography to guide the selections of content, with considerably less emphasis on studying places as a whole.

¹³Ofsted (2011) *Geography: Learning to make a world of difference* p.13

The World of Key Stage 3 Geography textbooks 2001



The map shows the distribution of places, proportionate to all the textbook series written for Key Stage 3 in 2001. It shows that pupils' cumulative experience of the world in Key Stage 3 is a rather Anglo-centric one, and although there is a considerable coverage of global themes, the proportion of material on specific places outside the UK is rather low. USA and China, the 20th and 21st century superpowers, figure little in our imaginations. Of course this map is some years old, and most teachers draw material from a wide range of sources, but anecdotal evidence of observation in geography classrooms suggests is not untypical.

There are significant downsides to this approach. There is a danger that places become largely a backdrop, bite-sized chunks to illustrate the issues and themes which organise our curricula, so there is little opportunity to spend time studying important places, to see how places in the round integrate physical and human patterns and processes or to build up a framework of places we know about. Secondly, places tend to become defined by the issue they illustrate and so can become predictable and typecast; for example Bangladesh is often used to illustrate the causes and impact of large-scale flooding. To a great extent, Bangladesh has become defined by flooding in school geography and pupils may learn little about other aspects of life there, such as its revolutionary micro-credit programme. When the content becomes predictable, it can be easy to leave the people out, and so risk omitting their ability to solve real-world problems and make progress. Finally, the principles may dominate the facts, so we may choose content to illustrate principles which, in reality, can become distorted or out of date.

The general public might find it rather strange too that pupils learn relatively little about the two superpowers, USA or China, by the time they complete their studies; our claims to be the world subject begin to look rather flimsy when built on only a fairly limited framework of world knowledge.

Ofsted suggests we need to raise our game:

All but the best students interviewed were spatially naïve. The mental images they held of the world were often confused and they were not able to locate countries, key mountain ranges or other features with any degree of confidence. For example, they understood

about development issues in Kenya but had little or no idea of where Kenya was in Africa ... Their study of geography was isolated and not set within a context that they could identify with¹⁴.

I think this is a problem of knowledge, and the framework of knowledge we help construct for pupils to help them understand not only the way the world works, the processes and patterns, but also where places are and what they're like. This also suggests the dominant paradigm for school geography, at least for secondary schools, needs re-evaluating:

Recently, the positivist orientation within geography has stressed the commonalities among places, whatever their creations, environments, histories and cultures. Geographers have disengaged themselves from studying the uniqueness of place, and consequently have contributed to a general ignorance of the world as a complex mosaic¹⁵.

The shape of the world

The second example is also about the way we imagine the world, and the models we use to help us understand its complex reality.

One of the defining features of human societies is the significant differences in human welfare from one to another; because these have a spatial dimension, they are of great interest to geographers. On a global scale the dominant model used to explain this in school geography has its origins in the Brandt report's North-South model¹⁶, interpreted through the 1995 National Curriculum as the MEDC-LEDC idea.

I think there are two real problems with this model; the first is that it has only a tenuous relationship to reality. It suggests there are basically two groups of country, rather than a continuum of human welfare and development. In geography we often need to simplify reality to make it more understandable, but there's a real danger the model gradually takes on a life of its own and departs from reality. I think we've reached this point with the LEDC-MEDC idea. For example we commonly teach pupils that in LEDCs most people work in agriculture, people have low life expectancy, poor education etc. So because they have most people employed in agriculture, low life expectancy etc, we select the countries with lowest human development to represent all LEDCs; they become 'an undifferentiated entity'¹⁷. Or, because we ourselves assume all LEDCs are like this, we can even end up ignoring reality to make a country fit the model. For example Brazil, often used as an example

¹⁴ Ofsted (2011) *Geography: Learning to make a world of difference*, p.22

¹⁵ Johnston, R. (1985) Introduction: 'Exploring the Future of Geography', *Future of Geography*, London: Methuin, pp.24-25

¹⁶ Report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues (1983) *North-South: A Programme for Survival*, London: Pan Books

¹⁷ Roberts, M. (2009) 'Investigating Geography' *Geography*, 94:3, pp.181-188

LEDC, has 19% working in agriculture and average life expectancy of 72 years; Mexico 14% and 75 years (2006).

The other problem is that the model becomes locked in time, whereas in reality progress happens. The past four decades have seen really significant improvements in human welfare and development: since 1970 the world as a whole has averaged a 41% average increase in HDI, with striking improvements in education and health¹⁸. There are clearly still huge gaps from one end of the spectrum to another, within as well as between countries (e.g. life expectancy in Afghanistan 44 years, compared with 83 in Japan in 2010). The question for school geographers is – do we focus on the gaps (the current model) or the progress?

I think this is also problem about knowledge, especially how we keep our own subject knowledge sufficiently up to date so that we teach about the real world, not one of thirty or forty years ago. But it's also a problem about our predominant paradigm – starting with the issue (contrasts in human welfare), then looking for a model and working outwards, rather than starting with reality and investigating the model to see how useful it is.

So the LEDC/MEDC model not only represents reality poorly, but it makes a real difference to how we perceive the world (and gets stuck in our textbooks, exam specifications etc); it is an illusion that must surely affect pupils' world view. It makes it easy to forget that development is dynamic, and it's about progress, and development and progress happen across the world. By downgrading the idea of progress, and the possibility that people can change the world, we're also promoting a rather uncritical approach to the way the world works (Harvey 1974). By contrast, a greater focus on progress creates the idea of the possibility and strength of change – the idea of development as progress, and that people and countries can make progress through their own efforts. It is a more optimistic view of the world – one where development doesn't come to mean un-development. Attention to the facts, knowledge and the real world would help mitigate this. It's a theme Hans Rosling will develop in his keynote tomorrow.

Core Knowledge

I want to finish by looking quite briefly at the National Curriculum Review and the idea of Core Knowledge. The Review aims to 'ensure that all children have the opportunity to acquire a core of essential knowledge in the key subject disciplines'¹⁹. However a difficulty in responding to the curriculum review is in predicting the reach of 'Core Knowledge'. Does the idea imply a more comprehensive approach: 'the facts, concepts, principles and fundamental operations'²⁰, but

¹⁸ United Nations: Human Development Report (2010), p.28 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2010/>

¹⁹ *National Curriculum review launched: Press notice* 20 January 2011
<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/nationalcurriculum/a0073149/national-curriculum-review-launched>

²⁰ *Review of the National Curriculum in England* (20 January 2011) Remit, para 14.
<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/b0073043/remit-for-review-of-the-national-curriculum-in-england/>

bringing with it the temptation to specify in considerable detail because of the difficulties of definition and sampling? Or does it imply a minimum entitlement, leaving teachers to decide what further knowledge, understanding and skills to develop: 'the basic factual knowledge, vocabulary and the ability to locate... important places and human and physical features... This knowledge is only a small part of the geography curriculum...'²¹?

A really minimal approach, such as suggested by the Core Knowledge® sequence²² and some readings of the White Paper, is probably one we should be cautious about. Such a curriculum could risk the minimum becoming the maximum in some schools, with a stripped down content which might be viewed as all the geography that pupils needed. It might also suggest a view of learning where transmission of information was pre-eminent, rather than the pursuit of knowledge.

The idea of Core Knowledge raises significant further difficulties, for example in deciding which is 'Core', compared with 'non-Core' knowledge: which knowledge is intrinsically important, and which important at particular times; which inconsequential? Which material is best introduced, reinforced or developed at particular ages; how should it be differentiated or pitched for different abilities; what does progression look like, and what are the implications for assessment? How too do you avoid ideological bias in the selection, for example, by specifying 'objective' facts, supposedly intrinsic to the subject, risking cutting out alternative viewpoints and the exploration of more controversial issues? An unchanging canon of facts is a particular problem for a subject that is about a fast-changing world, and puts at risk the intellectually more generous idea of geography as a medium for education²³.

Conclusion

I started by harking back to 2008, a year which encompassed the election of a new President and the promise of progress (for some) in one of the world's largest democracies, as well as a long look into the abyss of deep recession for many in the world. For a brief period, in the UK at least, there was significant public discussion about the assumptions underpinning our current model of living, what we mean by progress, and for whom. We would be right to be at least little sceptical about the idea of progress²⁴.

Nevertheless belief that a better future is possible keeps us going - especially in education, founded in the idea of progress as we launch our young people into the world. I've tried to link the idea of progress in geography with two generous conceptions of knowledge; knowledge as an essential part

²¹ Ofsted (2011) *Geography: Learning to make a world of difference* p.1

²² <http://www.coreknowledge.org/>

²³ Slater, F. (1982) *Learning through Geography*, London, Heinemann Educational Books.

²⁴ Judt, T (2010) *The Memory Chalet*, London: Heinemann, p.179

of finding out about the world, through reasoned enquiry (an Enlightenment ideal), and knowledge as power, with the idea that a knowledgeable and educated person are often the same.

In asking the question 'What counts as an educated young person in the twenty-first century' the ideas of knowledge, and of disciplined enquiry into the world through subjects, have faced some scepticism recently. As a result, although we've probably never been clearer what the potential of geography for young people might be, considerable numbers are missing out on a quality geography education. That may say something about the way we've come to think about progress, and our commitment to it: by constraining knowledge, we're also placing constraints on progress – as least for some.

I hope too I've been able to set out a number of ways that we educators could make progress in the way we set out learning for our young people: I think they involve some rebalancing on a number of fronts. One way we could make progress at the system scale involves a rebalancing of curriculum aims, which have become skewed towards employability and the needs of the economy and away from the idea of developing an educated populace that sustains a healthy democracy; both are important, and complementary. A second would be to recognise the value of knowledge and subject knowledge alongside the current preoccupations, skills and pedagogy. Linked to this would be a rebalancing of our ideas about high standards, to include the quality and breadth of the curriculum as well as attainment. Together, a more balanced set of aims and a more rounded view of the value of subjects would help re-establish geography as a valued part of a broad and balanced curriculum for all.

Finally, I started by suggesting that geography ought to have a lot to say about progress. As geographers we have little difficulty justifying the idea that our subject should include 'the opportunity to think about change in the contemporary world and to imagine alternative futures'²⁵. Few of the big themes of the twenty-first century which we teach about are neutral, many involve difficult choices. All are multi-dimensional, where attention to a secure foundation of knowledge is important in promoting good understanding, as well as helping avoid the trap of promoting particular interests or opinions²⁶. So making progress in geography also involves rebalancing within our subject, especially reviewing how we develop a framework of knowledge on which to base understanding, which is challenging and relevant but also accurate and of the real world, and includes attention to the uniqueness of places as well as thematic and issues-based work.

These big questions - what the future holds, what different futures might be for people and environments - are questions about progress. Whether you're in seventeenth-century Holland or twenty-first century London to be geographically literate, curious and outward-looking is to raise horizons and contribute to progress for individuals and community, giving geography moral purpose. However if we're serious about this, we also need to use all our professional capabilities to make progress in making school geography better.

²⁵ Ofsted (2011) *Geography: Learning to make a world of difference*, p.5

²⁶ Lambert, D. (2008) 'Inconvenient Truths', *Geography*, 93:2 pp.48-50.