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The 'Patron Saint' of Comprehensive Education: an interview with Clyde Chitty. Part Two

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ABSTRACT This is the second and concluding part of the interview which Melissa Benn and Jane Martin conducted with Clyde Chitty in the summer of 2017. The first part appeared in the previous issue of the journal, *FORUM*, 59(3). When Clyde stepped away from regular duties with the *FORUM* board, Michael Armstrong dubbed him 'the patron saint of the movement for comprehensive education'. Clyde talked with Melissa and Jane about his working life as a teacher-researcher who notably campaigned for the universal provision of comprehensive state education. His unshakeable conviction that education has the power to enhance the lives of all is illustrated by plentiful examples from his work-life history. The interview is structured like a narrative. Phrases or sentences in brackets are interpolations for sense and by way of additional context. The section in italics comes not from the interview, but from Clyde's chapter in the book edited with Melissa Benn: *A Tribute to Caroline Benn: education and democracy*. As a coda, we append details of all Clyde's articles for this journal from 1981, beginning characteristically with a piece entitled 'Why Comprehensive Schools?', along with details of his editorials from 1995.

Teaching Life from 1969

(Clyde's first teaching post was at a comprehensive school near Bromley: Malory School, in Downham, where from 1966 until 1969 he taught English and history.)

CC: In 1969, I decided to see what life was like in a secondary modern. And I moved to a secondary modern boys' school in Penge. I was Head of Humanities … I loved it but I was appalled by the way the boys were treated.

MB: In what way?

CC: Because they'd failed the 11-plus, they were treated like dirt and that upset me.

JM: And how would you compare the ethos at the Penge secondary modern with the Malory ethos?

CC: Totally pessimistic.

JM: And what about the teachers at Penge – were they part of that pessimism or were they like you trying to work against it?

CC: No. They were part of the pessimism.

MB: All of them?

CC: Yes, I was the most left wing.

MB: So what difference do you think you were able to make in those classes in that secondary modern as a person who believed in their potential?

CC: I hope I treated them as though they had ability but it would be arrogant to say that that was the thing that made a difference.

JM: And at that point in terms of thinking about how you prepared your classes and things you talked about, [such as] teaching the Plague as a topic at Malory, presumably none of the boys at Penge school were going to sit any kind of public exam were they? Were they going to leave at 15?

CC: Some left at 15 until 1972, but some stayed on and I taught them O level and CSE.

MB: Were you in favour of making the school leaving age older?

CC: Yes. At the time, I thought it should be 16.

JM: And what kind of proportion of … the boys did stay on to 16 at Penge?

CC: About 20 per cent until 1972.

JM: [In] English teaching at that [time] there were many debates around English teaching and [I am] thinking of the research by Peter Medway and John Hardcastle. Were you aware of any of those debates?

CC: Yes. I was.

JM: Ah. So ... for example, there was a debate encouraging children to do local studies and to write autobiographically ... Were you using CSE mode III,* because there was a debate about that? [*The Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) was inaugurated in 1962 and was designed for the next 40 per cent, after the 'top' 20 per cent of the total 16-year-old age group who took the General Certificate of Education Ordinary, or O level. Using CSE mode III, an individual teacher could develop his or her own syllabus through the regional board.]

CC: I used CSE mode III and history mode III.

MB: Could you describe the kind of ways in which that enabled you to be more creative as a teacher?

CC: It meant that I was in charge of the syllabus; twentieth-century history and modern social studies.

JM: And so, you were building and making your own materials, were you?

CC: Yes.

MB: Could you choose what subject to concentrate on, what themes to concentrate on? Did you have quite a lot of freedom in what you taught in a history lesson?

CC: Yes.

MB: Complete freedom?

CC: No because I wanted them to pass O level and CSE.

JM: And at this point Clyde were you involved in any teacher associations at all?

CC: Only the NUT [National Union of Teachers]. I joined in 1966, when I was at Malory.

JM: And was there a strong local branch? Do you have any kind of memories of the issues?

CC: Only that it upset me that they were in favour of the cane. And sadly, so was the NAS [National Association of Schoolmasters]. [CC was secretary of the Society of Teachers opposed to Physical Punishment from 1975 to 1977.]

MB: So, the NUT was not a left-wing organisation?

CC: No. It became more left-wing later but it didn't necessarily believe in the comprehensive school for all children.

Roger Manwood and Earl Shilton

CC: In 1973, I moved back to inner London. To Roger Manwood, a comprehensive in Lewisham.

JM: Did the school have a different ethos?

CC: Yes, but not enough [and then around this time] I met Roger Seckington and I became member of the editorial board of *FORUM*, and that changed my mind about everything … sorry *confirmed* … I was in touch with Brian Simon, we met regularly, and I helped [Brian and Caroline] with *Half-way There*, I wrote the chapter on social organisation.

JM: Right … and did your reflections on your experiences in the different schools help you write about it?

CC: Yes.

JM: And how would you compare the comprehensive ethos at the Lewisham school with Malory?

CC: Slightly different but not different enough. There wasn't the same belief in children that I had [and] the top children were creamed off by Brockley Grammar School. I was the deputy head and the headteacher was of my opinion.

MB: So, in a way it was a de facto secondary modern.

JM: Right ... so what attracted you and made you want to go back to Leicestershire, Clyde, at that point?

CC: Roger [Seckington] was on the editorial board of *FORUM* and he said this job was coming up. He couldn't influence the decision in any way but I decided I wanted to go and work with him. First as vice principal at Earl Shilton.

JM: And what was it about the way in which he worked as an educator?

CC: Well he was not completely in tune with Countesthorpe. He did believe that when you had the whole school in assembly they ought to be attentive.

[Countesthorpe Community College in Leicestershire opened in 1972, with the educationist Tim McMullen as head. He was succeeded by John Watts. Dartington, the private Devon progressive school whose first pupils were taught on the pioneering principle of allowing the children to choose their own lessons and express their own thoughts and ideals, without adult hindrance, influenced the thinking behind Countesthorpe. The central concept was to promote good primary school practice through individualised learning and open the school's resources to the whole community. Children and adults would study in parallel; learning how to learn (see Watts, 1977).]

MB: So, he fitted in with your idea of treating every child as a genius, the root of the comprehensive principle, but [in] an ordered environment?

JM: And these kinds of debates within the comprehensive education movement, were they being discussed amongst yourselves? You are saying Michael Armstrong might have had a particular view and you were aware that Roger was approaching things rather differently in his school setting?

CC: Yes. Michael always called me a Stalinist.

JM: I think that what's really important, and what Clyde you're helping to capture, is that rather than the kind of very dominant, really derogatory, narrative around what happened within the comprehensive [in the early years] … that actually these things were debated among proponents of the change and that people took different positions, that it wasn't all about this kind of wishy-washy [approach] – lax discipline, poor standards – you know the way in which 'progressive' methods were just really lambasted – and that actually there was far more to it than that. So, do you want to say a little bit about how you ran Earl Shilton?

CC: We organised six faculties. And although we agreed with non-streaming we decided not to enforce it on the school and so every faculty made its own decision. English, Humanities, and Design were non-streamed. Maths, Science and Languages were streamed and that was considered by some people to be a cop-out but we didn't believe that an unstreamed class taught by someone who didn't believe in it would be good for the children.

MB: So, each faculty chose their own structure? Did that work?

CC: Yes, it did, and we had very, very strong heads of faculties. So, I can almost say that, Roger probably might disagree with me, but there were few teachers with poor discipline. No. Because we appointed them all.

JM. And it was a neighbourhood school? A comprehensive?

CC: Yes. John Cleveland College took all the children from Hinckley and Earl Shilton but it was getting far too big – two thousand five hundred pupils – and so Earl Shilton was built to take all the pressure off that very large school and we just took all the children from the villages around Barwell and Earl Shilton.

MB: Did you feel it was the most successful of the schools you taught in?

CC: Definitely. Roger was a wonderful head.

JM: I'm interested in what you said about the common curriculum, Clyde, and I'm thinking about the academic-vocational divide so I'm wondering do you think children and the young people at the school were being equally valued regardless of the kind of subjects they studied? So, you celebrated the achievements of all the leavers?

CC: Yes. I mean we insisted that boys did typing and girls did metalwork and woodwork and that was good. That was new. Oh yes. In the Leicestershire system then, it's changed now, the high school was 11 to 14 and the upper school was 14 to 18, and Earl Shilton was an upper school.

JM: So what percentage stayed on beyond 16?

CC: Do you know I can't tell you exactly but it was very large. I know in my last year four of my A-level history class got into Oxford and they were girls and that was tremendous.

JM: Did you teach at all there? You were under the head but you taught history, did you?

CC: Yes. I taught 15 of the 25 periods.

JM: Oh, I see. So, you must have been making a difference as a good teacher. Did you not feel that?

CC: I was a better teacher than I was a deputy head. Because it's what I love doing. I couldn't sit in my office all day and Roger taught as well. He taught five periods. I always felt it was daft of me giving up being a teacher. I should have stayed being a teacher. No, I shouldn't have become a deputy head.

JM**:** Going back to the script for the *Carry on Comprehensive*⋆ film, [there is a point where] Roger is reflecting on the attempt to introduce more democratic ways of running schools and that that was part of the comprehensive movement. [⋆*Carry on Comprehensive* was a film for Open Door, produced by the BBC's community programme unit, and made by the Campaign for Comprehensive Education to get their message across. It featured early

comprehensive schools and their staff, including Clyde Chitty and Roger Seckington, of Earl Shilton Community College. The narrator was Margaret Miles (1911-1994), pioneering head teacher of Mayfield, a large girls' school in Putney, one of a new type of London school then called 'comprehensive', and president of the Campaign for Comprehensive Education.]

CC: If I'm being honest, I supported him completely but I had reservations simply because I was worried that we might be outvoted on important issues of their choosing and we talked about that. The trouble with Earl Shilton was we had to take members of staff from all the schools that were getting smaller and having to lose their staff. So we had an enormous variety of staff from very liberal to very right wing or whatever and I was always worried that Roger might not be able to convince the staff of what he wanted.

Reflections on Teaching

MB: I'm thinking … that you taught for a considerable amount of time in four schools...

CC: Twenty years.

MB: …in a crucial period of transition in the education system. Is there anything, any overall view as a teacher, that you took from that?

CC: I felt that very few people shared my view of education. They taught in the comprehensive schools but they didn't understand what it meant.

JM: And do you think that links in any way to teacher education and how teachers are prepared to go into teaching?

CC: Yes, I do. Because although the teachers began to realise that Burt was rubbish and you didn't inherit your ability they still felt you were affected by your environment and even at Malory when I said that I thought this boy was very good or this girl was very good they said things like 'He can't be, look at his family, look at the kind of estate he comes from'.

I just think the whole idea of setting aside people, [labelling] children, is wrong because I still believe ... you have to think that every child in front of you has amazing ability.

JM: Thinking back to the policy debates that would have been going on at this time, you've got the Great Debate haven't you, when you first go to Earl Shilton. So, were you involved in those kinds of discussions?

CC: Not really because our big debate was about curriculum and we always felt that the Ruskin Speech was a complete waste of time. It was the subject of my

PhD. The research for my PhD was on the period from Callaghan to '88. *Towards a New Education System: the victory of the New Right.*

Period in Higher Education

JM: Did you enjoy teaching in university and higher education as much as you'd enjoyed in the classroom or more?

CC: As much.

JM: And what was it about curriculum studies at that point?

CC: It was because of my belief in the common curriculum in terms of subjects and in terms of gender.

MB: So that would have been just before Kenneth Baker's National Curriculum, around the time of the 1988 reforms. So how did that political moment have an impact on what you were doing?

CC: Denis Lawton and I wrote a book called *The National Curriculum* where we said we believed in one [i.e. a common curriculum] but not this one. It was just the grammar school curriculum for everybody whereas we wanted a comprehensive curriculum which was pioneered by HMI [Her Majesty's Inspectorate]. It wouldn't have been the same as the 1904 regulations which Kenneth Baker used for his own curriculum. They [my students] were mainly doing an MA, they weren't doing PGCE [Postgraduate Certificate in Education]. I came onto that later… The students were teachers, most of them in their 30s and 40s. London government, the Inner London Education Authority [ILEA], came up with the students. [CC was teaching on the Curriculum Studies MA at the Institute of Education.]

MB: Just thinking about the Institute of Education in this period. I don't know if Peter Mortimore was there then? I'm thinking of people like him and Jane Miller and Harold Rosen. Was there a sense of lots of different people doing radical things at the Institute?

CC: Yes. Jane Miller, Harold Rosen, Peter Mortimore was working on statistics then, but I knew him and his wife Jo. Yes. We wrote a book together called *Secondary School Examinations*, which was a Bedford Way Paper.

JM: And what about Basil Bernstein?

CC: No. I couldn't cope with Basil Bernstein. Basil Bernstein seemed to me to do comprehensive education an enormous amount of harm because he wrote an article in the '70s in which he implied that there was a limit to what schools

could achieve and so I never spoke to him. [Basil Bernstein] rang up Brian after Joan [Simon] wrote an article in *FORUM* saying that Basil Bernstein's work was rubbish, and Joan being Joan took the phone away from Brian and I was there when she told Basil Bernstein what she thought of him.

CC then moved to Birmingham from 1989 to 1997 as Senior Lecturer, then Reader in the Modern History of Education. It was in those years that he did the research with Caroline for 'Thirty Years On', the sequel to *Half-way There*. CC moved to Birmingham for pragmatic reasons.

CC: I was on a one-year contract [at the Institute] and every year it was renewed and I went to Denis Lawton and I said couldn't my contract from now on be, say, three years and he said: 'No, it's our way of managing contraction' and I said: 'Well I can't cope with that'… But I really don't like this idea of members of staff – there were 37 of us at the Institute – who didn't know until the end of the year whether we'd be needed the following year. So, I applied to Birmingham reluctantly, because I love London, because they offered me a three-year contract.

JM: So, was that managing the History PGCE?

CC: I loved it there. I was there from 1989 to 1997. I started off as Senior Lecturer, then Reader, then Professor.

JM: Right, OK, and it was in those years that you were doing the research with Caroline? Thinking of how you balanced these different parts of your working life, Clyde, did you ever get things like study leave?

CC: No.

JM: Right. So, you've always combined being a teacher, whether in universities or in schools, with the research?

CC: Even for 'Thirty Years On'. Teaching was what I enjoyed and I didn't want to just do research, but that was the hardest period of my life working with Caroline doing the book and also having a full timetable.

MB: You mean the hardest life just in terms of the workload?

CC: Yes. I almost – I think I almost overdid it, I was quite unwell. Because 'Thirty Years On' is a very long book.

Inside the Secondary School

JM: Right. So, if we move forward, one of the things that's occurred to me reflecting on part of the interview last week, Clyde, was when you were talking

about discipline, and I have been continuing to read Robin Pedley's book and he's got a little bit in there about Risinghill. And I was just wondering about the impact that the closure of that school had on you and thinking about that in relation to your approach to comprehensive education.

CC: I think I pretended it was very important but secretly I couldn't have worked in a place like Risinghill.

JM: So, in terms of thinking about that, how would you support teachers, student teachers, how do you help them develop that?

CC: Well, when they were having a bad time I had to resist taking over the classes myself so they could see what they were doing wrong. But I was always anxious to tell them afterwards where I thought they'd made a mistake. You know, getting involved with an argument with one member of the class and letting everyone else do what they wanted. I wouldn't have silence in the corridor but there is something in the idea, I think you [MB] said last time I'm the Rhodes Boyson of the Left! I genuinely think a badly behaved class is useless as far as anybody is concerned. But I don't want the cane. I don't want people screaming and shouting at each other. I don't want people walking down a corridor quietly but I want, I want the class to be yes, orderly, and attentive.

Gender

CC: It wasn't until the late '70s that I began to see that girls were treated differently in a mixed school and that's why we insisted the common curriculum should include everybody. I look at my writing in the '60s and '70s and it's all 'he' this, 'he' that. I hadn't realised how my writing is very gender specific.

MB: So what feminist educationalists would have influenced you then, in that regard? Writers or thinkers?

CC: I don't really know. The only feminist sociologist who influenced me was Olive Banks, but apart from Caroline, Margaret Miles. But it wasn't until I got to Earl Shilton that I realised there was a problem as we know now, even with the BBC, of the way women are treated in school and outside.

JM: Oh right. Did you know Olive Banks when you were at Leicester?

CC: No, but I knew her work from the sociology of education. But I was gender blind then and I'm ashamed when I look at some of my early stuff to see how I use 'he' all the time when I should be using 'they'.

JM: Did you know you were gay from a young age?

CC: Yes.

JM: Very young?

CC: Yes, by 11, and I never told my father or my mother.

MB: Really, never?

CC: No. My father may have known it. He was once invited to Buckingham Palace and he said would you come? And I said no way. I'm not going to Buckingham Palace! And he said it was probably a good idea as there was only one queen there on this occasion. I didn't make a big thing of it until I left Earl Shilton and moved to London University and so I was a bit of a coward.

MB: Do you think people knew?

CC: Oh yes. Roger tells me that he suspected all the time.

JM: What changed in the mid-80s? Was it the campaigns around Section 28?

CC: It was partly that. It was partly leaving Earl Shilton and moving to London University, where it was a more liberal atmosphere. [At Earl Shilton there was a teacher who] came into the staffroom and said he'd seen a film that last night that was a Sunday, called *Sunday Bloody Sunday* with Glenda Jackson, Murray Head and Peter Finch [where the character played by Murray Head has a relationship with both Glenda Jackson and Peter Finch] – and he said 'I told my wife to turn that filth off.'

MB: What did you say when he said that?

CC: I went berserk. I said people like you shouldn't be in charge of classes. But that was back in the early 1980s and it wasn't the acceptable thing to be gay in those days.

Final Reflections

MB: Clyde, if you look back over the whole landscape of education that you've lived through and you could go back in a Tardis and change one thing – I don't mean in your personal life or professional life, but politically – what would you choose, what moment would you choose to alter in terms of how things developed? Or what was a crucial moment where things went the wrong way?

CC: I think I would use the word 'require' rather than the word 'request' in Circular 10/65. I think that the use of the word 'request' was a huge mistake. I think we never really ever recovered from that.

JM: I was thinking also, Clyde, you know you were talking last week about the common curriculum. And I'm thinking maybe around Tomlinson. Would you have wished that New Labour had adopted the recommendations of the Tomlinson Report?

CC: Yes. I would. But the documents that influenced me were the HMI documents that came out in 1977, 1979 and 1983 and they all advocated a very broad, common curriculum and I think they were tremendous. One of my articles in *FORUM* was called 'Why the GCSE Should Be Abolished'. And I didn't think there was a case for any exam before 18. We [also] overestimated the move to progressive thinking in whole areas and I, I believed the comprehensive school was here and would be absolutely overall successful.

I think we underestimated the extent to which media coverage of indiscipline in comprehensives had a massive effect. I mean, there was an extraordinary film made by *Panorama* of Faraday School in Ealing in 1977, and it concentrated on one particular teacher who had absolutely no idea what he was doing. It was in response to that that a few years later we made this film *Carry on Comprehensive* because this was a very harmonious, well-run school, and the lessons were all very exciting and very interesting, and well organised. So I think she [Caroline] was determined to ... um ... to rebut that image. But she said to me when we were writing 'Thirty Years On' one of the things we never got right, and I do understand what she meant, we never quite understood or worked out what the catchment area of a comprehensive school should be.

For example, if you take the Brian Simon line 'How do you get over the fact that you're going to have schools which reflect the area where they're situated?', I mean, if you take where I teach at Goldsmiths, if you come out of Goldsmiths College you're in New Cross and Deptford. And then you go up the hill and it's as though like in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* – you've entered a new world, and you find yourself in Blackheath.

So, we never got that right. And at the end of 'Thirty Years On' we tried to deal with it; we rather fudged the issue. Er ... we didn't quite know how to answer that. We felt the biggest single criticism of the comprehensive school was that it was too often a reflection of the neighbourhood. In other words, it reflected the fact that England is very – well, other countries as well, Scotland – is a victim of social apartheid.

Brian … simply said the comprehensive school is an educational achievement, it's not a social experiment. And we even managed to restrain Michael Armstrong, who'd written that the main purpose of comprehensive education was to create a social mix and bring an end to inequality. Caroline and I always argued you can't judge schools on whether they make society more equal.

And we had to admit that the criticism of comprehensive schools by Rhodes Boyson in one of the papers where he said that you can't expect schools to end class division, I mean, he was right. What do you do? I mean, if you create the artificial social mix, as Caroline said it's like America's bussing. Black children don't want to be bussed to white areas, and white children certainly don't want to be bussed to black schools. And in fact, in some places there were people at the door with guns preventing them getting in.

So, Caroline and I always felt that that was our biggest single mistake or error, that we hadn't come up with a formulation as to how you decide who should go to a school.

JM: And thinking about the Marxist critique of education, Clyde, what would you, how would characterise that and what would you think of it in relation to the contribution that it makes? What are your views?

CC: I think Brian made an enormous contribution, but the spokesperson for the Communist Party was Max Morris and he was much more concerned with things like wages and conditions of work. He wasn't so in favour of campaigning for comprehensive education.

JM: And in terms of thinking about, if you had to look back and think about different elements of your professional identity, Clyde, you've talked about loving teaching, what do you see yourself as, above all else?

CC: A teacher. Yes. I love teaching. I love to go back to Goldsmiths or the Institute and also, it sounds a bit vain really, I also love lecturing. I quite like the idea of being able to stand there and be challenged, but for the ideas, and that's the, more than the books or the research, that's what's really important to me.

JM: And is there a particular age group?

CC: 14 to 18. Yes. I think my classes at Earl Shilton were my favourite classes. It is when you can influence people. But I also love university students. I mean, I loved working with Ruth Watts preparing people for teaching in schools. Used to love it.

JM: If you were to sum up the differences between the different comprehensive schools that you taught in, all those different schools? Did you have a favourite out of all the schools that you taught in?

CC: The only one that was genuine was the last one. Earl Shilton. It was mixed. We took all the children from a certain area and Roger Seckington was a great head teacher. I think it had the range of achievement but also that it tried to do everything in a comprehensive way. Treating the children as though they were there to improve.

Conclusion: making connections

Half-way There contains the important statement, 'A comprehensive school is *not* a *social* experiment; it is an *educational* reform' (Benn & Simon, 1970, p. 64) – a view Clyde continues to hold. He regrets the grindingly slow progress towards the ideal of the 'common' or comprehensive secondary school for which some educationalists and politicians were already arguing in the 1890s.[1] Harold Wilson's idea of promoting the new schools as the 'grammar school tradition for all' was given wide credence in the 1960s and 1970s but was very far from what Clyde sees as central to the comprehensive ideal. He has strong views about the limitations of the grammar-school model, as he put it in 1969: 'What an appalling future we face if the new comprehensive schools merely aim to provide a grammar-school education for a larger proportion of the school population! Secondary reorganisation should lead us on to a fundamental re-appraisal of the content of education and of the relevance of much that we teach in the classroom' (Chitty, 1969).

For Clyde Chitty, a healthy democracy demands that each child should be developed to the full. Begging the rhetorical question 'how can any nation aspire to be a thoroughgoing democracy if its more privileged citizens educate their children in an exclusive system?', he would legislate to abolish private schools. On the issue of curriculum, he still advocates a fundamental reappraisal of the content of education and of the relevance of much that we teach in the classroom, placing the emphasis on areas of experience, and no exams until 18. Clyde believes firmly in unlimited potential, holding to the view that all children have talents which need to be nurtured and developed. He questions concepts like 'ability', 'intelligence' and 'giftedness' and was ahead of his time in being aware, as a reflexive practitioner, of the issues surrounding 'race', gender and sexuality. The book of which he is most proud is the 2007 publication *Eugenics, Race and Intelligence in Education*, a lucid account of the rise of the eugenics movement in Britain and the pervasiveness of its influence among policy-makers.

Clyde is fond of citing the words of French writer Victor Hugo (1802-1885): 'Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come' – a quote that takes us back to one of the three books that changed him completely in the 1960s, Robin Pedley's *The Comprehensive School*. Pedley quotes Hugo in his last chapter, called 'A Programme for Progress', before ending with a definitive statement on the aims of education:

> It is very important that our comprehensive schools shall not content themselves with merely achieving equal opportunity for the competitive success of individual pupils. In the years ahead, now that the folly of eleven-plus segregation is everywhere being recognized, they will be tempted of the devil. They will be shown and offered all the scholastic kingdoms, including Oxford and Cambridge, York and Canterbury. Tempting though such prizes are, they must not be tempted to divert the new schools from their larger purpose: the

> forging of a communal culture by the pursuit of quality with equality, by the education of their pupils in and for democracy, and by the creation of happy, vigorous, local communities in which the school is the focus of social and educational life. (Pedley, 1970 edn, pp. 205-206)

Clyde looks back on the educational ferment of the 1960s as the best of times, when the struggle to democratise an elitist education system fuelled his crusading zeal. As a young teacher attracted onto the staff of early comprehensive schools, he helped inspire a new climate of high standards for all, order in the classroom, and equality. At the decade's close, he saw Rhodes Boyson and Brian Cox, early Black Paper authors, as scared men – scared of the future, scared of change. 'The principles enunciated in their ghastly essays amount to nothing more nor less than a blueprint to a stagnant, unthinking society perpetuating itself through a rigid hierarchy of educational establishments', he wrote (Chitty & Rein, 1969).

As debate on school selection became increasingly politicised, however, it was the 'grammar school' that would become almost synonymous with 'good school' and the 'comprehensive' with bad in some parts of the media. Clyde's biography offers source materials with which to fight a wilful amnesia that enables some to suggest that the comprehensive school was somehow imposed from above, with little regard for local aspirations (see Chitty, 2011, p. 14). When in fact, early pressure for an end to the 11-plus test and for the introduction of comprehensive schools came from middle-class parents who bitterly resented their children being consigned to what they regarded as second-class secondary moderns. Clyde's work-life history shows the remarkable change of ethos in many secondary schools, and the improving examination performance, that resulted directly from the comprehensive reform programme. So that in 2008, when education ministers launched the National Challenge, it was local authorities with a fully selective education system, such as Kent and Lincolnshire, who had a higher proportion of schools failing to meet the New Labour government's floor target of 30 per cent of students achieving at least five GCSE grades A* to C including English and Maths.[2] Fully comprehensive Leicestershire had none.

In the spirit of 'putting hands around the flame', these interviews show the importance of retelling the narratives of our radical past and the prolonged political battles over comprehensive reform (Fielding, 2005). Clyde candidly discussed early mistakes, notably the absence of a nationwide curriculum debate about the content of secondary education or issues of pedagogy in the early days of reorganisation. These deficiencies were something he later sought to address. Today, the power of the past is evident in the shadow of a hierarchy of types of secondary school, which falls heavily across a more differentiated state school system, particularly in some inner-city areas. Nationwide comprehensive reorganisation was never completed, just as Clyde's first headteacher, Eugene McCarthy, feared. Clyde reflects that he himself may have raised more problems

than he solved. 'Because I still don't know what a comprehensive school should be in the city. Whether you do have a community school or whether you have banding or social mixing or even like Brighton. I think admissions is the one thing we never got right.'

Clyde Chitty may have regrets. He also has confidence. Asked what his abhorrence of Beethoven says about him as a person, he replied: 'It says I have taste.' Teaching for Clyde involves something akin to 'acting for and with pupils', in the Gramscian sense, rather than acting upon them, as the grammar school model suggests. As a teacher, he believes in the educability of *all* children and sees comprehensive schools as *the* means of realising human potential. As a historian influenced by Joan Simon's view that the state started running education in the sixteenth century, Clyde lucidly analyses the power of the past on our present education system. On one occasion, he uses the case of school discipline to offer an interpretation of old standards that were far from golden. Violence is not a new phenomenon, but what is new, he wrote in 1979, is that middle-class children are no longer segregated into institutions which protect them from the outside world, as they were in the past, and that use is being made of school discipline, or the supposed lack of it, in the political arena. 'For as long as it was confined to the largely unknown secondary moderns in the backstreets and slums of our cities, it was something that stayed out of the headlines. The "blackboard jungle" was not a fact of life of which middle-class parents need ever become aware. After all, it affected only those schools which were good enough for *other people's children*' (Chitty, 1979).

Today, those who cherish a picture of the virtues of 1950s grammar schools help create a powerful national myth in the process of promoting the meritocratic-mobility model of education. Those who put the case for educational separatism rarely criticise the very much higher spending on a privileged minority and forget that the grammar school model allowed many pupils to write themselves off – as was noted at the time by British Conservative MP Edward Boyle (1923-1981), Minister of Education from 1962 to 1964. Clyde resolutely opposes the elitist orthodoxy that monopolises the means of learning, and he portrays the grammar school enthusiasts as 'social engineers' who want the secondary school system to perpetuate the sort of society in which they believe.

Five years ago, Clyde took heart from sociologist Stuart Hall, who reminded us that 'hegemonic projects are not assured of longevity, and this is particularly true of those that lack a firm foundation… . Without a local democratic input, there is no accountable state system, and sooner or later, things will start to go wrong. In the meantime, we have to work hard to convince parents, governors and teachers that the state education system is worth saving' (Chitty, 2011, p. 14). Clyde's refusal to be completely pessimistic about education policy as it exists in England in 2017 gains power through taking the long view. He told us that reading historian E.H. Carr helped him to become a Marxist, and that 'facts' are open to interpretation. While recognising that none of this is easy to define or measure, Clyde articulates the source of his

conviction that a comprehensive education system is what the nation needs. 'I was very lucky as a teacher, in that I never had classroom problems and I set out by believing that everybody in the class was a genius.'

Emily Wilding Davison (1872-1913), one of the most famous of the English suffragettes, particularly believed in deeds, not words. Clyde Chitty uses both. These interviews appear at a timely moment. Once again, the grammar school is being favoured, to the detriment of the whole society. In persisting with our efforts on behalf of the comprehensive ideal, the depth and authority of Clyde's contribution offers motivation and a space in which to make the case against selective secondary education – to advocate a programme for progress that values and gives equal respect to the educational requirement of *all* young people, in the work of building a society which *unites* instead of separates. Let us leave the last word to him.

> Our starting-point must be that we do not accept the concept of intelligence as innately fixed, or that social origins must inevitably determine a child's future development. We believe that schools can make a difference, that, given the right methods and approaches, the so-called 'ceiling' of a child's possible achievement is far beyond anything we can visualize at present. As an absolute priority, we need to ensure that every child is stretched academically and practically. This belief in the fundamental value of education must embrace all pupils, the hostile as well as the motivated: they must all have a right to learn. (Chitty, 1979, p. 162)

Notes

[1] See, for example, Caroline Benn's biography of Keir Hardie (1856-1915) (Benn, 1997) and Jane Martin's biography of Mary Bridges Adams (1855-1939) (Martin, 2013).

[2] Schools with <30% of Pupils Achieving 5+ A*-C GCSE including English and Mathematics (Department for Children, Schools and Families, based on 2007 published GCSE results for 15-year-olds).

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