

## Bernard Barker 8 May 2015

JM	This is Jane Martin in an interview conversation with Bernard Barker on the 8 <sup>th</sup> May 2015. Well thank you Bernard. I'd like to begin by asking you to share your memory or first meeting Caroline please.
BB	Well I have not had a close personal relationship with Caroline, but she it feels as though she has been, I say has been, was part of my life when I was a school teacher and head teacher. And the personal connection I had with her, she just came to the school I was head of, Stanground College in Peterborough, and I can't even remember when it was. It would have been about '80 something, mid to late 80s. And she came with Clyde Chitty and I can't even remember why they came, but I do remember the conversations and I remember the impression they both made on me actually. And that's the only personal connection I have with her.
JM	Was that in connection perhaps with her book 'Thirty Years on'?
BB	No -
JM	Oh ok.
BB	I used to have a way of bringing distinguished educators or business people to Stanground to talk to staff to make connections and I was always trying to keep the school tuned in. And it was probably, there were various reform groups of education coming from a sort of comprehensive school point of view. What's that one called 'Pressure for Ref-' PRISE.
JM	Oh right.
BB	Yes I remember that, Pressure for Reforming Secondary Education by Sylvia West who was a great friend of mine, ended up as Principal at Impington, who was a great supporter of that. There was lots of overlapping networks and obviously I was aware of Caroline before ever I knew she was bothered about education, because you know she and Tony were kind of celebrated post old Labour couple, but we didn't think of it like that then.
JM	In turns of thinking about Stanground and inviting people to the school, what were you hoping to gain, I mean what was the sort of motive around that?
BB	Well I always pictured the sort of edge of Peterborough, edge of Fenland and the kind of attitude people had towards themselves, never mind towards wider things. So I remember being told that it was a waste of time doing anything about music at the school because it was a flat area and people had flat voices, you know, and I thought well this is web feet country! And the school was in a kind of working class, agricultural mix with suburbia kind of environment. And I saw it as a kind of personal mission, I don't know I'd attempt it now, but I did then, to bring the best people to the school, whether it was teachers, whether it was visitors, whoever they were, to draw in people who had ideas that took us beyond the most basics of education. I was never happy that, you know, we were teaching Maths and English and that seemed very limited. And so getting people to come in and I used to organise conferences and things to get people to come in. I remember we did a very early one. We had something on 1984 that, the Orwell, in 1984 and Bernard Crick who'd recently published his biography which I still think is the best biography of Orwell, he actually came and we had a sort of study day on 1984 and that was sort

	of typical of the kind of initiatives I did to kind of broaden people's minds. And I was aiming as much at the staff as I was the children.
JM	So you spoke about Caroline and having a knowledge of them as a kind of political couple, at a historical moment, were you aware of her role as a school governor at Holland Park school?
BB	I think, it's difficult when you know a lot subsequently not to read it back. I would never claim to knowledge at an age when I didn't have it. So you know the one thing I particularly remember about Tony Benn in the, can I say something more general first? With both Caroline and Tony I think that the existence of the Benn's was immensely important for anybody on the left of politics who was sympathetic to their ideas, because there was so few people who were articulating any kind of clarity about comprehensive education or about politics. The kind of stances Tony took up on workers participation and on challenging some of the sort of corporate interests and so on. It was important that there were people doing that and I certainly - a very early aware of Caroline as a campaigner for comprehensive education. Because of course my own pedigree goes back to 1957 as a comprehensive school person and I was even as a child I was militant about comprehensive education and the little memoir I've just done on my experiences at Eltham Green which I share with quite a few people, they've come back to me with all sorts of reflections. And I'm kind of quite surprised that I was looking at the school critically but with passion at a very young age. So it was always important and I mean the 60s was my formative political period I'm sure. And Tony and people like him and there were others, but I think he was very important. But what I was going to say about 198 - I can't pinpoint the date, but you'll be able to. It was when he was running for deputy leader and you know it ended up with Dennis Healey I think. And that was a point at which I looked at Stanground and the political and social and economic context I was working in and he was talking about tramping the country going in to church halls and in to Labour halls and cooperative halls and getting this tremendous response to left wing ideas. And I pictured the typical parents evening at Stanground and I thought well there's no chance whatever of these left wing ideas working here. So I was probably against that, but even so what I remember is thinking the kind of ideas he believes are popular with ordinary people, in my experience in this mix south Peterborough area, actually I don't think they've got a chance. You've got to sell something much simpler and much less ex, they'll go along with certain things, they won't challenge you if you act with confidence, but if you present them in anything that resembles left wing language or, they'll immediately turn everybody off.
JM	So thinking about you said you were aware of Caroline's pedigree as a campaigner, were you aware in terms of thinking about the vision that you had in relation to Stanground? Were you conscious of the debates around the neighbourhood school?
BB	Oh of course I was. You couldn't, that was the whole part of the comprehensive education problem and always has been and if ever we go back to try to produce it, it will still be the stumbling block. Yes I mean I remember the Benn children being sent to Holland Park, I remember all the sort of sneering about it and the elitists and you know privileged and the fancy slumming it in the comprehensive school. And of course the fact

	<p>they did that seemed to me absolutely just what Labour people should be doing and I was a bit, Wilson sent his son and I can't remember Wilson's family very much, but I do remember he had a son who went to university college school and I remember thinking, you know, oh dear, you know, that's not right. And of course Callaghan who lived in Blackheath near us before he became Chancellor, his girls went to Blackheath High school for Girls, you know, so I was well aware of prominent Labour figures using the private sector. So it was so refreshing and so wonderful to have someone who was completely committed to it. And I did at the time, I'm not absolutely sure how explicitly I was aware of it, but I knew Caroline's American background and I knew Susan Crossland had a similar kind of background and they both with prominent Labour figures who Crossland completely different from Benn in terms of being revisionist and all the rest of it. However, Crossland was every bit as much committed to comprehensive education. So you know I did my connections there and valued those particular figures because they did that. Now you ask about Neighbourhood schools. My London comprehensive over 2000 kids, most of them coming in buses from somewhere else, you know, so they came from New Cross, they came from Woolwich, they came from Plumstead, they came from, they came from an enormous distance and produced a kind of mix, whatever, but because the grammar schools still carried on, it was totally creamed. There was hardly anybody in it that passed the eleven plus you know. So anybody who grew up with that and the effects of the - you were part of a comprehensive ideal that had not been realised in any way. Eltham Green was not a comprehensive school except in terms of its aspirations and what it offered...</p>
JM	<p>So in terms of thinking back and you said that attending Eltham Green as a pupil was very formative in all kinds of ways because you were really aware of, so did you carry that through to, through your university degree? Was that what, what brought you in to teaching Bernard?</p>
BB	<p>Well I was about 5 and I went to school and the first day I was very unhappy and the second day I set up a school with my teddies and declared that I wished to become a teacher and really have never stopped being a teacher since then.</p>
JM	<p>So was it always the comp world, later on from that?</p>
BB	<p>No, the desire to be a teacher was formed before ever I, before ever there were any comprehensive schools, except that one in Anglesey. So I think the teaching impulse was stronger than anything, but and I obviously had no idea about comprehensive education until I went to one. And I mean in 1957 that was a very bold and brave thing for me, because I had passed the eleven plus and my dad was the leader in the decision, but my mum certainly didn't oppose it, to send me to this huge tower block comprehensive. But as soon as I went to that school I thought it was the most magnificent, wonderful place and my heart is still there and when you see the painting I've commissioned done by a school contemporary of mine, it so captures where my heart is, you know, and all the problems, because from day one I was also acutely aware of all the problems in the school.</p>
JM	<p>Yes.</p>
BB	<p>So it was scorching to me from that point on, I've never stopped being a</p>

	comprehensive school advocate since going there.
JM	And if you were to kind of sum up what you see as the comprehensive ideal for me, how would you do that?
BB	<p>Well it's got to be an order of importance and priority I think. And I think it's that in so far it is possible, given the housing distribution, that people should be educated together and that this selective thing hives people off and gives them a false impression of where their place in the pecking order. You know boys who went to Haberdashers where I deliberately went for my first two years of teaching, you know, they wouldn't have got in if their IQ wasn't 130, but they had 6 streams, you know, but those boys had an image of themselves which was unrelated to the ability range. So to have a realistic understanding of what society is like, to have friendships and connections across social backgrounds, to be educated together. And that was a sort of, I mean I'm with Michael Fielding on this, I think it's deeply philosophical about personal growth, being more important in some ways, because the academic learning seems to happen for most people you know, it has to be pretty poor teaching to scupper it, but the personal growth is really quite hard to achieve. And the personal growth is so much stronger if it's rooted in what everybody else is doing and I think most of the harmful things in our society come from having fantasies about people in other social groups. And that's what our current governments got, it's a fantasy of what the 'lower orders' are like. And of course the whole point of a democratic, co-educational, comprehensive is it challenges those stereotypes. So that's the most important thing. In terms of the nature of the school, I absolutely believe in an entitlement curriculum and I don't think it has to be a national curriculum. I wanted to remedy all the flaws that actually came from my own comprehensive education which was really a three tier system within the one school. I had to choose between, I didn't choose they told me what I was doing. I had to choose Latin and give up Craft, Technology, Art, you know, Cooking. Couldn't do any of those, had to do Latin. And I had to give up History in the 4<sup>th</sup> year because there was only room to do Geography and then I had to do a rush job in History in the 5<sup>th</sup> year, you know, so the choices at every level were constrained in such a way that you were following the Cyril Burt Norwood report. And I do not believe there is one curriculum for the thicko's and one curriculum for the super minds and I think we all need to have an introduction to the most important things. And I agree with Michael Gove when he said everybody is entitled to see and to be aware of the best in human civilisation and knowledge and experience. And that applies to very, people who might really be very good at Maths, actually also being able to make something. I'm really proud that the school I was head of when my daughter attended and my son attended, they both studied technology. My son's technology project was just the most amazing project, but it was based on the problem with a lawn mower box I had, which it tended to tip grass if you didn't empty it in time. And so he devised a machine that the box would actually warn you. And my daughter did a music stand. Well she can do spot welding, she can, you know, and she is fantastic at technology. And that, they didn't do that instead of, Irena became a linguist, she did French and German, it wasn't instead of. The curriculum was calibrated so they got a fair chance and everybody did</p>

	<p>science. And the idea, I used to argue with Harry Ree about this. Languages is for everybody, not just an academic elite and new Labour gave up on that, they made 'French' optional. Well I don't mind French being optional, but the language surely has to be essential. It's just how we teach it and what we do with it where differentiation is going to happen.</p>
JM	<p>So you talked about access to the very best, how do we define the very best?</p>
BB	<p>Well the best is, you know, how do you learn to love classical music if you never get the chance to hear anybody play? Irena picked up the cello after sitting on the knee of, that wouldn't be allowed now, of the peripatetic music squad playing a cello. If you hadn't heard the cello being played and had a chance, would she have developed that? So to have a school where there's no musical instruments or where there's no instrumental tuition or where the orchestra consists of, you know, keyboards or something, that's not the best. And if English for less able children doesn't include some kind of work with Shakespeare or Milton, you know, I'm not being specific, anything will do so long as it's good. I'm not a classical purist, but if you're living in an English country it really is very helpful. My daughter I don't know Jane whether your Sir Frederic's experience puts you in a better position than Irena, but she has got really serious fundamental weaknesses of knowledge about Christian and Biblical stuff, that was drilled in to me at school, but wasn't drilled in to the next generation and, you know, so I think people are entitled to know about the bible as well.</p>
JM	<p>And different faiths though.</p>
BB	<p>The trouble with the, I mean that's what we had at Stanground under my dispensation. So answer is one level yes, but another it becomes a cook's tour of religions. And I think you know at some point how do you do it in such a way there's meaning to it? It's the danger of the NATO to Plato when you try to do too much. My personal view, you know, the most important part of the curriculum is the teachers themselves. And what you need is teachers with passion and enthusiasms that they share and it really doesn't matter whether it's Shakespeare, if they're really keen on Jane Austin, do that instead. And if they really want to do Steinbeck instead, well that's fine as long as they're good and keen and it leads to good learning.</p>
JM	<p>And thinking about what you were saying about having access to all forms of knowledge, how, where, in terms of thinking about the academic vocational divide so called, I mean how would you kind of respond to something...</p>
BB	<p>I've written articles about that, there is no divide. You know almost everything has practical and I don't know what academic means? What does it mean? People talk about, does that mean theoretical? Does that mean conceptual? Does it mean, you know, is writing an English essay academic? You know but so and the idea it's going back to the, all that horrible Burt Norwood sort of conception, that if you're not very clever you're bound to be good with your hands. Well my experience is that the really bright kids are fantastic with their hands as well, you know that the idea that human beings can be pre-invented by the curriculum and they can be put in to slots is criminal. You want to give people the opportunity to</p>

	<p>become themselves and some kids may be disappointing in that they aren't very keen about becoming themselves and there's not enough encouragement in a 1:30 ratio to help them to become themselves. But the aim must be to encourage them to become, you know, find the thing you really like or find the thing you're really good at and we don't really much mind what it is so long as you're doing it, but don't let's work on the basis you don't need History, because you won't be going to university and you'll probably be a technician. So what you need is to concentrate on circuits or you want to concentrate on plumbing or you want to concentrate on digging. Rural and Environmental Studies was the one when I was a deputy head at Hatfield. We had Rural and Environmental Studies. I mean it was basically if you take kids who might be awkward and get them out in the open air and digging and they'll tire themselves out and wouldn't be a nuisance. That is not curriculum. If it's good, I thought two subjects, Rural and Environmental Studies was one, they're always called 'studies' and the others were Childcare. Childcare shouldn't be in the curriculum unless it's for boys too. And Rural and Environmental Studies shouldn't be in the curriculum unless it's for all the students...</p>
JM	<p>Yeah. So in terms of thinking about the ideal again, one of the things that Caroline was always very careful to present in her argumentation was around this notion that it went beyond secondary schooling. So she did work around 16 to 19. I mean would you add that broad...</p>
BB	<p>I think it applies in primary schools.</p>
JM	<p>Right.</p>
BB	<p>What's being done in primary schools now is near criminal, because in a way it's give them as many tests as possible which humiliates those who are not so good, artificially inflates those who are good and gives a narrow, narrow focus. A comprehensive school is about having everybody in it and everybody try to do everything, you know. Of course you said ideal, I know all the problems about achieving, I've spent a lifetime trying to tackle some of those problems and not always or perhaps not even often successfully. But it must be what we should be trying to achieve and the primary schools now are probably more divisive and selective than the secondary schools are, because they're smaller. So you get a primary school in a 'nice area' and they do a narrow curriculum, I worry about the reading materials that they get. You get bright kids who are on some compulsory reading scheme, the only purpose of which is to get them to pass tests.</p>
JM	<p>Thinking back to the point you were making earlier around sort of networks and particular spaces, if you were to reflect on that would you be able to say a little bit in terms of thinking about career trajectories in relation to...</p>
BB	<p>Whose career trajectories?</p>
JM	<p>Well in the general around sort of in terms of thinking about in relation to, would you apply the word 'movement'? Do you think of it as a comprehensive education movement?</p>
BB	<p>Well yes at the time we thought we were winning didn't we?</p>
JM	<p>Yes.</p>
BB	<p>At Eltham Green I thought I was, you know, I went to Cambridge and nobody from my school had ever been to Cambridge and when I arrived in</p>

	Cambridge there weren't any other comprehensive school people in my college. So you thought pace setter. I saw myself as a Jessica Ennis of comprehensive schools, you know, I was the poster boy you know?
JM	Yes.
BB	The schools, of course we can compete on equal terms. But and in a way that's how it went for a good part of my career.
JM	Yes.
BB	Until basically 1988.
JM	So you mention people like Harry Ree and having discussions and you mentioned then the awareness of what was going on.
BB	Are you asking about my networks?
JM	Yes and well I suppose how conscious you were in thinking about you and your movement and part of this is about reflecting back, but you talked about Leicester and awareness at a certain point of the significant of that and the individuals there. And I was just wondering how far you'd extend that to other places?
BB	Well Simon was very important and I knew about him I think probably, I don't know as a 6 <sup>th</sup> former.
JM	Oh right.
BB	At a young age I read his stuff and the other one Robin Pedley, not the Chislehurst and Sidcup one, the Leicester one. And his book on comprehensive schools was important to me. Burgess was another one, you know, so I was well aware of people who were campaigning for education. I knew there was a Leicestershire group. I think I grasped that well before I started teaching.
JM	Right.
BB	My sort of what's the word? Pedigree is a bit peculiar in that I never trained as a teacher, but was always passionately interested in education. So I had read and mastered a load of stuff that you'd have got if you'd have done a PGCE I guess.
JM	Right.
BB	You know philosophy of education was not a surprise to me although I never formally studied it.
JM	Yes.
BB	So but in terms of my personal networks, the most important influences were my own school in London.
JM	Right.
BB	A period in Cambridge where it was just like a bizarre world that oh what had it got to do with me in many ways. Then going as a post grad, not as a post graduate education student, as a post graduate doctoral student to York where my wife had graduated and she began teaching. And I studied at York and got involved at the education department there and worked in the general studies project, led by Robin Irvin Smith. And so I knew a lot, and Harry Ree was the Professor of Education there and my wife was his one of his keen pupils. She did Biology and Education. So Anne gave me an entrée in to all the York educators. And there were I think on the staff at York three lecturers who'd all taught at Haberdashers and when Haberdashers came up they said you've got to go there, because it is such a progressive school and they've got such advanced ideas about teaching

	History and so on. But of course when I got there I realised that that had gone and so had the progressive ideas and I had to reintroduce them. But so that was one set of influences. In terms of designing my career Haberdashers was good because having come from a comprehensive school it was good to learn about how you educate selected people to see what the best students can do... So that sort of gave me an awareness of standards and quality that was really good and I did enjoy teaching there, but it was never intended as a career direction. But then Hertfordshire to me was a legendary place.
JM	Oh right so tell me why?
BB	Well I just knew the developments. I knew about John Newsom, I knew that, you know, you got the Leicestershire, I forget who was the one before Fairbank called? Who was the Director of Education?
JM	Stewart Mason.
BB	Stewart Mason and the Leicestershire Plan, I knew all of about that. But I knew that Hertfordshire and of course Anne had been, she was in Hemel Hempstead and so I knew about her grammar school that went comprehensive and you know, and I knew that Hertfordshire schools were built with almost like comprehensive coming along. Mid Herts reorganised was it in 1968? And my teaching career began in 1971. So the chronology is very important when you caught things. And I must say that the two years at Haberdashers and the five years at Fred Osborn were the best part of my career. I look back on them with much greater pleasure and enthusiasm and happiness, a sense of having been thoroughly happy. I suppose one always is when very young, but you know nevertheless they were great people, great kids, great schools and Sir Fred's was I still think one of the best schools I've personally known about, I think that's a terrific school for some of the reasons we've mentioned already. So that was how I got positioned in that way. When it came to looking for headships I really just looked at where there were comprehensive co-educational authorities and Cambridgeshire happened to have a headship at Netherhall and I went there, didn't get it and they invited me to apply for the job I eventually did get and so I ended up in Cambridgeshire. Which then had a, you see if I'd been - hard to tell this story quickly. Cambridgeshire incredibly conservative, but it had a managerialism about it. The local management of schools was more or less invented in Cambridgeshire. The hard right as we would now think of them on the county council wanted head teachers to be business managers. And we were all steered in this fantastically managerialist way, although there was community education there which I one of the reasons why lots of us were there. I met Henry Morris at Digswell House, I say met him he was dead, but I met him at Digswell House. I lived in Digswell Park Road, you know, so I know all about that. And then you know you come in to Hertfordshire and then in to Cambridgeshire and you felt you were getting closer, but actually the community education was terribly diluted by this emphasis on money and managerialism. Which didn't exist in Hertfordshire really not when I left it. When eventually I got to know Leicester and Leicestershire, I realised how little managerialism there'd been, you know, that it was still trapped in a really old fashioned culture of the early period of the comprehensives and the kind of the shire Tories and so on. They had not got managerial, many

	of the school were well passed their sell by date. There'd been ludicrous experiments in progressive education who'd got a bad name for Countesthorpe was not a name you quoted as like with pride. So that was quite an interesting contrast between the two. And you know in many ways I always missed out on the most progressive experiences and I'm not quite sure why that was. I think it was caution.
JM	Oh right so how would you characterise progressive then Bernard?
BB	Well you know the book by Colin Fletcher, Schools on Trial, it catalogues a set of schools. I was very, very aware of the attacks on schools in London, Chris Searle and the, you know, children shouldn't be allowed to write poetry, very well aware of the black papers. You remember that I was condemned by Rhodes Boyson during my time at Sir Fred Osborn as a Maoist. And I was, my dad said to me at some point don't let them say you're a mad man and I always played on the right-hand side of progressive, because if you lost the confidence of parents and perhaps even some children, then you would not be able to make anything work. If you got that label 'progressive' stuck on you that somehow meant you weren't interested in standards. I'm not talking about the reality, I'm talking about the sense of perception. I had been stigmatised as a Maoist, because I looked at political propaganda and was training children on how to interpret political propaganda. And that meant I was a political propagandist. And created an enormous amount of trouble and in fact when I went for a deputy headship, the head was told by the divisional educational officer not to employ me because I was a red and I was a red because I'd got people to look at posters and decide what political messages were. So you know that was a period of danger, the Black Papers, the damage that they did to comprehensive education, but I think they were aided and abetted by heads who had no, I write about his in my Pendulum Swings book, the danger of the progressive movement, that whilst in many ways I felt about children and child development and so on, in very similar ways to some progressive heads, I would never have allowed myself to be dubbed a progressive, although I might have preached it. And the dangers, you know, just went on and on. When I turned up at Stanground the last thing was needed was an early dose of progressive-ism. I remember how, I'm just trying to think of his name. The guy who Michael, he stopped caning, Rising Hill head of, Michael Duane. The stick that man got and the damage that it did that his stance on corporal punishment. When I started at Stanground it was a school completely out of control, five mobile chip vans, three hundred kids eating their dinners on the road at the front. Upper and lower bands distinguished by different, one lot was dressed like street urchins and the other lot were wearing blazers. Staff totally disaffected. They did not need progressive-ism and I took a stick in one hand and said anybody that goes to that chip van I shall take them in for a flogging straight away. And within three months there were no chip vans and for three months lots of people were caning around the school. The senior mistress came to me and said 'shall I continue to beat the girls?' And I said no. But I did cane the boys. I took it over, I stopped everybody else doing it and for a term I caned about thirty boys. Nobody was ever caned again. So I was a strategist. I wanted to position myself where you had public confidence and could then treat

	people properly.
JM	And in terms of thinking about particular practices that would have been labelled 'progressive' I'm wondering in relation to mixed ability, did you have mixed ability teaching at Stanground?
BB	That's a very strong, what's the word? It's like housing. It is as central to the education debate as housing is and I have always been a passionate advocate of mixed ability teaching. Which is why you cannot afford to only do CSEs or you know oh well we're not going to bother with literacy anymore. If you're going to have a radical position on things, you've got to be jolly careful. Same as my attitude towards Tony Benn, I agree with you but I don't think we can make it work that way here. So when it came to mixed ability all the time the school was heavily banded and setted and I stopped the lot. And I was cheered on my first staff meeting when I said there will be no more sheep and goats in this school and I got rid of a banding system. The banding system basically meant the lower band got practical work all the time. And the upper lot got French. That was all it meant. And I swept it away and what we had instead was sets so that each year group was in half population so there'd be four set or five sets and Maths, English, French and Science would set and it would be mixed ability for everything else. And it took me a, it took me about two years to get that fully implemented. In Maths, Languages you got tremendous pressure from the staff for setting. They believed this was essential. But I've never seen the set, it just begs the question of what your teaching is like and how you're approaching the task. And there are some limited teachers, but they don't teach better with sets. They teach just about adequately with the top sets and very, very badly with the bottom sets. Some of the worst teaching I've seen is Science with bottom sets.
JM	And you mentioned the issues around the Black Paper authors and that kind of moment and some of the narratives that were being played out in relation to discussion of comprehensive education. I wonder also about the, is part of the context that was particularly a kind of barrier in some spaces? I'm thinking of teaching militancy?
BB	Yes I've never been a militant, never political as a teacher, never an active participant in unions or anything of that kind. Partly because my own, I really wasn't that interested in that. I was absolutely for the almost all of my thirty years teaching was what drove me and being with children and teaching children and working with teachers, working with children. They were what I was interested in. I was never really very interested in financial management. I wasn't really, I mean I couldn't have existed in the modern world, not because there's anything particularly dreadful about it, but the heads are now executive heads running federation, I have no interest in running a federation, I'd have been quite happy running a class. So that, I've thought of something quite important to say, but it's slightly at a tangent to that and I need to recover it. Can you take me back in to that last question?
JM	It was in relation to teaching militancy?
BB	Yes look the Black Papers ... the whole thing the Black Papers are about is we're going to teach them grammar, we're going to teach them spelling, we're going to teach them handwriting, and it's no good until they've mastered iambic pentameter for them to invent their own poetry. We do not

	want creative writing, we want discipline, we want rigour. And I thought that was a very poor way of achieving discipline and rigour to narrow down what children can do... So I've always been a subversive in terms of what I thought worked well in the classroom. I think that we are now suffering and this to me, we're so much in the grip of it almost nobody comments on it, but we're in the grip of what Michael Oakeshott has attacked as scientific rationalism. The idea that there is a form of knowledge, a scientific way of teaching and it's essentially you pull the levers and you get given outputs because you've found the one best way. And that this is a form of theoretical knowledge that teachers can be taught and then apply. When actually Praxis is the hub of it. You can only really learn when you're working with other teachers and with children and you're developing your way contextually to respond to what they're saying and what they're doing. And that is where my radicalism has always been, not in the outward forms, not in the salesmanship, not in terms of militancy or getting involved in unnecessary argument. It has always been about that fundamental thing that you can only really learn by doing, not by precept.
JM	I suppose there's parallels there with the learning without limits approach if we're thinking now?
BB	I don't know about that.
JM	Oh ok. I just also wanted to take us back to thinking about the links with Caroline. So we've got the visit to the school. Did, were there any other moments when you actually personally met Caroline?
BB	No, no.
JM	Oh.
BB	No but I read the books. And they were very important, because they were although done in a serious and more or less academic way, actually they were propaganda because they were telling you we were getting there and we were making progress and that the schools were more or less comprehensive and that we were getting more egalitarian and more, you know, that Thirty Years On I mean terribly important book. I did a review of it when it came out and no.
JM	And were you aware before Thirty Years On looking back to the points that you were making about Anne giving you access to particular bodies of information and through her connections, I'm also wondering because Caroline through the Comprehensive Schools Committee - those surveys are taking place aren't they? So you're aware of that and her...
BB	Absolutely so...
JM	And her research contribution?
BB	Yes absolutely so yes and it was, as I say it is important that you see people doing that and you see that I don't think that we have many public intellectuals in education now, who carry a fraction of the weight that Brian Simon or Caroline or even Clyde or Maurice Galton, you know, to pick just a few, you know, how many people have heard of Stephen Ball who are working in a school? You know. How many head teachers - I mean I've tried it interest people in that Foucault book of Stephen Ball's, a collection of essays around Foucault. And they reject it, they're not interested in it and what's happened is that the whole, people aren't expected to think for themselves. They don't need public intellectuals, they need the script.

JM	So you would describe Caroline that way?
BB	Absolutely. Yes it's, she wasn't in the system -
JM	No.
BB	Now for me ... but I have always thought that doing it was what's important. I am proud of the fact that I did not spend my life in a university writing theoretical tracts. And I'm slightly contemptuous of many people who have done that, you know, almost taken shelter... And I think well I'd be more interested after you spent 20 years in a comprehensive school, what you think the teachers problems are and whether you'd be quite so intolerant and narrow and bigoted and faithful to, you know, so I've always thought that doing it, to be in, I mean for me to be in the thick of it, to be energised by it, that's what really motivated me. So for me to have respected someone like Caroline and someone who was not of the system, but was an important leader of thinking and outlook and attitudes and who had passionate vision and was articulating a passionate vision and her collaboration with Brian had given that, I don't know what her, I have not tracked her enough, but I doubt she'd have got to the critique of IQ testing quite so quickly if she hadn't had Brian around, you know, and he was ahead of her I guess. Was he older than Caroline, he must have been?
JM	Yes.
BB	So I think he would have probably have written that IQ testing book, that was such an important book.
JM	Yeah.
BB	And that is a book I did not read until within the last five years. I didn't really perceive Brian as a critic of IQ testing. I was too young to have been aware of it and in my book Rescuing the Comprehensive Experience, I've got a section on IQ testing in which I guess I'm arguing in the same way as Brian without being aware that he'd said it first.
JM	Right. And thinking back to sort of memories of Caroline as a speaker, do you have any, would you be able to - no?
BB	Not really I know that she did and I know that she had an impact, but in some ways you know I'm basing most of my life in Peterborough, it wasn't an accident that I wasn't in London. I took a, very early on although I was born and brought up in London, I did not fancy the teaching environment of London. I thought the Shire counties would be better, because in most urban concentrations with Labour authorities there was a lot of political interference. And I liked all that I'd heard about the freedom head teachers had in Shire counties. And so for me I deliberately based myself in non-metropolitan contexts.
JM	Right.
BB	So I was in this funny position of being an intellectual, a London intellectual who deliberately chose to position himself somewhere else... And I often think comprehensive education on the whole has suffered because of the way London is perceived.
JM	And just sort of to pull the threads together Bernard, I was just thinking if you were to reflect then of around Caroline's contribution and legacy, how would you sum that up for me?
BB	Well I really, the fellow feeling that I think I instinctively felt for Caroline for a variety of reasons not easily explained, were brought into really sharp perspective by your inaugural lecture at Birmingham. Because you focused

on what in some ways is a very narrow part of her career, but I think an important one where she was chair of governors. And almost everything you said made me realise, you know, such a feature of its period. I got, well I didn't get crucified, because I was too clever for them, but I could have been crucified then. And she could have been and she was too clever for them basically, although a governor is in a slightly stronger position than the head teacher, but nevertheless, there was and I think there still is and I think much of our agenda a kind of hatred of democratic education. A contempt for teachers, a disregard for professional capability. And when you think of what teachers are, they're the most highly qualified, highly educated workforce you could possibly imagine aren't they? Most teachers are as good as any of the politicians in terms of their intellectual pedigree aren't they? They are as well educated as the political masters. But people who produce most of the school reform stuff are actually ex-teachers. And yet the whole thing is driven by a contempt for ordinary people, for teachers and so on. So that comes from that period. Now what Caroline was doing as I did in my way and was heartened by her existence I know at the time, but very much more so subsequently, were resisting that. We were denying the premises of the argument. What are you saying the schools results aren't good? Have you looked at the intake? You know don't crucify me on that, don't crucify the head teacher on that. What the Conservative mind-set has done is to undermine and demean schools by holding them to account for something that is impossible for them to achieve. This close the gap nonsense, nowhere in the world has the group that's come in bottom ended up on anything like parity with the top half, never, nowhere. It cannot be done. The entire education system was committed to trying to do it. It is nonsense. So I do see the articulation that Caroline gave, to principles, to values, to the whole concept, I think democratic education is the only way, sounds a bit far-fetched, but you realise how far, democratic education is a phrase I think I wouldn't have scoffed at because I know it expresses something. Democratic community education really did mean something. But it is now if you look at an academy who are run by a carpet manufacturer for example, who's bought his schools from the Conservative party and they're not connected to the locality, they're not connected to any organ of government. They're subject to regulation, but are completely free standing in open space, usually trying to recruit a privileged selection of pupils. You realise democratic education is the most powerful phrase there is and I think Caroline has articulated that. I think its number is up. But any of us who want to have a critical perspective on what exists now need to hang on to her and I think the work that you're doing on Caroline and on the comprehensive movement, is the only way because you see people now have never known anything else. There are teachers who are really working hard to get results up. You know they've internalised so much in the rhetoric and language. So to have that historic look this is also what is possible...

END OF INTERVIEW