

What makes a good teacher? Margaret Mackie asked the question in her fifth published book (*Philosophy and School Administration* (1977). Her own answer was 'one who establishes in the classroom a co-operative spirit of inquiry and creativity' (p. 173). She wrote this near the end of a teaching career that spanned thirty-seven years, for the first ten as a secondary school teacher and for the remainder as a lecturer in education at Armidale Teachers' College.

Her first teaching appointment in 1940 was at Ashfield Intermediate Girls' High School, in Sydney. Here she encountered the first of several encouraging administrators. Miss Marion Ranson, one of the few women heads of school in the NSW teaching service. In those days women were principals only of the very few girls' schools with female staff.

With her brother overseas in the British Army and her parents re-settled in North Sydney, Margaret lived in a boarding house, taught English and History and studied French at night. On her return from Oxford, she had re-acquainted herself with University friends, including Oliver Somerville, who claimed her as his fiancée despite her refusal to marry him:

*I assumed that I would grow up and have children ... but I thought this would all work itself out somehow in the future. There wasn't any sex involved ... I knew ... that Ginger Meggs and Min behaved that way, but this wasn't the sort of thing that nice girls went in for* (MDM, 1996, pers.comm., 24/2).

Margaret, as she had expected, enjoyed teaching. 'When I began to teach, I was very pleased that people were willing to pay me enough to live on in order to do something I so much like doing ...' (MDM, 1996, pers. comm. 24/2). She developed a method of teaching history which crossed traditional subject boundaries to examine, for instance, the effects of geography and economics on historical events, rather than the usual memorization of names and dates.

*I wanted to teach in State schools because I believed ... that people in other kind of schools could pay for the teaching they needed or wanted and I wanted to do something for the people who were not so well off* (MDM, 1996, pers. comm., 24/2).

The evidence throughout her career reflects a lack of conventional ambition; she consistently refused to compete for promotion, a stand that was in line with an argument she was developing against competition as a motivating factor both in education and in society. It was harmful to both winners and losers, ensuring that the majority must experience failure. There was also a temperamental factor in this stance: later as a teachers' college, lecturer, although she had in the course of events applied for successive promotions, on the only occasion there was a challenge to her seniority she found it so

distasteful that she resigned from her promotion position because of her inability to deal with conflict (staff file, UNE).

Her ambitions outside of the classroom lay in a different direction, in having her writing work published. The fulfilment of this ambition was delayed for twenty-six years.

Like all beginning teachers, Margaret experienced some initial difficulties in keeping order in the classroom. In *The Beginning Teacher* (1973) she related an incident at her second school, Grenfell, to illustrate her point that beginning teachers needed to be encouraged to work out their own solutions to some teaching problems. In the story 'Joan Gray' was Margaret Mackie. The headmaster was Robert Hunt.

*After three weeks Joan Gray went to the headmaster.*

*"I know it's my fault somehow. I've tried to get my class interested but they're noisy. You've probably heard them. I'm not controlling them. I think you should know, because this kind of class harms the school tone ..."*

*"Is there something you want me to do, Miss Gray?"*

*"I don't know what the answer is."*

*"I mean I can go in and blow the socks off that class if you like. But it won't do you any good."*

*"And what will do any good?"*

*"You keep on working at it. You must work out the solution that goes with your personality and your style of teaching. The main thing is not to lose interest in teaching, while this situation is working itself out. Have you tried using different methods and testing to see which is the most effective? ..."*

*"Thank you. But this noise question ..."*

*"Just keep trying. Most people have these problems at first."*

*A month later the headmaster spoke to Miss Gray at morning tea: "I think your troubles are over."*

*"Over?"*

*"The discipline problem. I noticed when I walked past this morning. You've got their co-operation."*

*Miss Gray had not even noticed the transition but, when she thought about it, she realised the head was right. (MDM, 1973, pp. 99 - 100).*

The same headmaster once commented to her in the corridor 'Listen to all the teachers teaching themselves'. Margaret's own characteristic learning style was to discern and apply quickly the essence of such helpful remarks. It was her concern to maximise activity that was truly educative, centred on the learner, not the teacher. A student later noted as a feature of her teaching: 'she never used one more word than was necessary to describe anything' (M.S., 1995, pers. comm).

Margaret spent three years teaching at Grenfell. In 1945 she was moved by the education authorities. As she had been happy at Grenfell, she protested, only to be told that move was considered an attempt to offer her 'such rewards as were within our power'. For a single woman in that era, these rewards did not include promotion. It was thought that women could not be placed in a position of authority over men.

At Lismore Margaret developed rapport with two classes of slow learners, the so-called 'no-hopers'. Within one term these children were enthusiastically participating in history quizzes and reading from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. After that one term, because of the return of a soldier from the now finished war in Europe, she was moved again, to Coffs Harbour. Unlike some of her colleagues, she did not consider one row of faces as the same as another row of faces. In a visit to Head Office she protested unsuccessfully against the transfer.

Coffs Harbour was a port, and a big railhead for hospital trains travelling south from Townsville, carrying Australian wounded from the war in New Guinea. Although the European war had been won, Australian soldiers were still fighting on the Kokoda Trail and the threat of Japanese invasion was imminent. Stock had been evacuated across the Dividing Range to leave no food for the expected invaders and the instructions were clear for the school: teachers and children were to walk into the mountains should the invasion eventuate. There was a trench in the playground for air raid drills. A former student, Marlene Sheppard, one of Margaret's first and most distinguished proteges in the educational field (after rapid promotion for her own outstanding teaching ability, she eventually became the first woman Inspector and a Ministerial adviser), described her experience of schooling at Coffs Harbour.

*I was one of the "school train" children ... The government ran a small train of four carriages from Macksville to Coffs Harbour ... every school day ... it was pulled by a little "Puffing Billy" ... it went to school backwards ... and came home forwards - and I used to think it was like riding a horse away from home; he's a bit reluctant, but as soon as you turn his head, he goes like mad (Sheppard, M., 1995, pers. comm., 22/1).*

Marlene Sheppard attempted to identify the essential qualities of Margaret Mackie's teaching :

*My first impressions of Margaret were that she was the only one of a kind ... She's the only teacher I had whose actual lessons I remember ... did she realise at High School how much my sisters and I hero-worshipped her?... I can remember our favourite thing that she wore - a check blouse with a tiny check, and she wore very sensible, very comfortable shoes that were always clean and shiny... we called her Bantam at High School ... our darling Bantam...*

*[She] came there charged with the same academic fire as if she was still at Oxford, she kindled the mind of the learner ...*

It was the intensity of Margaret Mackie's belief in what she was doing that impressed these young learners, her ability to cut through foggy thinking and get to the point. Her initial discipline problems were a thing of the past: she maintained order by tapping on the desk with a pencil (For those with an awareness of the physical properties

of objects, which Margaret consistently lacked, it was as excruciating to imagine the graphite core of the pencil as it was later to imagine the gearbox of the red Leyland mini she drove around Armidale for over twenty years).

Her methods differed from those of many of her colleagues, who considered that their task was to fill empty vessels with information. Margaret taught French orally, not only from Jones' grammar, making it apparent that it was a living language spoken by real people. She continued with her innovative approach to History which was now officially formalised into the new subject of Social Studies.

Her brief was to make people think: she asked questions and presented social and moral dilemmas; children in her classes were active rather than passive learners and Margaret's role was as a fellow inquirer. She was as careful of persons as she was ruthless with imprecise expression, so that no one attempting to solve a problem felt ridiculed, but supported, encouraged and challenged to make a contribution at their own level.

*How do I differ or disagree with her ideas and methods? ... I approach people on a more obviously warm and personal level rather than having the weight perhaps on greeting people through the ideas... because of this people would think the woman was lacking in emotion and personal feeling... she wasn't at all... one of the warmths people might not see was a great compassion - an unusually highly developed compassion... I know I'm speaking in superlatives, but she was. She wasn't like other people (Sheppard, M., 1995, pers. comm., 22/1).*

As an active member of her profession and an habitual writer, from Coffs Harbour Margaret entered willingly into the current debates in education, writing so frequently to the Teachers' Federation newspaper that her fellow teachers as an affectionate joke presented her with a pen as a gift. Her stance differed from that of contemporary activists like Dymphna Cusack, who in Margaret's estimation was a 'troublemaker' (MDM, 1997, pers.comm., 23/3). In the field of professional ethics, Margaret thought 'much of what is put forward as ethics is defensive industrial policy' (MDM, 1966, p. 143). The ethical measure of educational policy was whether or not it promoted education as distinct from the working conditions of teachers.

The idea she had had as an undergraduate, that no progress was possible under capitalism, had changed.

*If you're living through two world wars and a depression, you're not thinking about doing and having anything; what I thought about was how I could live at all, and contribute (MDM, 1995, pers.comm., 29/6).*

She continued to think and write about issues in secondary education, to correspond with her brother John, now in Egypt, and the friends she had made at

Oxford, engaged in the war effort. On John's safe return in 1946 he took up a position in the Sydney University philosophy department under John Anderson.

The war had irrevocably changed the employment situation for women in the NSW teaching service. Many married women who had been employed as an emergency measure 'for the duration' on the understanding that they would leave when the men came home, were retained to help cope with the post-war baby boom. However, 'women earned only four-fifths of the male salary' (Adelaide, D., in Cusack, D., 1991, p.7) and it was still thought problematic to promote women into positions of authority over men.

Margaret, whose capacity as a teacher was now recognised by peers and by those in the hierarchy who shared her ideas, maintained her irreverent attitude to school inspectors. One said to her 'Miss Mackie, I suppose you're thinking about promotion.' She replied "No, I'm not thinking about promotion - that's your job. I'm thinking about how to teach the children" (MDM, 1997, pers. comm., 23/3).



*Margaret and her grandfather, John Duncan, c. 1948.*

So far Margaret had been fortunate in that principals in charge of her schools had been democratic and helpful. This had been her experience under Russell Hodge, a democratic principal, who now left Coffs Harbour. A pupil at his farewell said during the time he had been in charge that a student in trouble 'could always find help in the office'. The new principal's first pronouncement to the assembled school was that if a pupil was sent to him, he would 'punish first, and ask questions later'. The morale of the entire

school plummeted. Teachers discussing a point of policy in an informal way after school, sent to his office to invite him to join them, as they had with their previous head. He conveyed a message back that if he wished to speak to the staff, **he** would send for **them**.

Margaret felt she could not remain in a situation she considered to be anti professional. 'It was suggested to me by the English master that a teachers' college job would be a good idea for me' (MDM, 1997, pers.comm., 23/3). There was a prospect, but not immediate, of such a position becoming available. On advice from officials in Head Office she resigned and took a self-funded sabbatical year in England.

*I didn't think of leaving Australia [permanently] to work [in contrast to Jill Ker Conway]... I wasn't thinking of progressing in intellectual life; I thought of getting a job where I could contribute something* (MDM, 1997, pers.comm., 23/3).

Nevertheless, while she was staying in Oxford with her friends the Thompsons, she made some inquiries about the kind of work she could expect to secure if she did stay in England. Learning that the best she could hope for would be to become a teacher at Girton or some other elite girl's school, she reaffirmed her commitment to teach ordinary people in her own country.

It was not in her character to take a holiday without engaging in some kind of intellectual work and she enrolled in a B. Litt degree at Oxford, choosing to research the changes in the English secondary school system resulting from the 1944 Education Act. At the same time she worked as a research assistant to her former tutor, now Dame Lucy Sutherland. Margaret had not yet found her authentic voice as a writer. At the end of the year the thesis was rejected, and rejected again by the Australian Council for Educational Research when she submitted it for publication. The thesis contained the accurate prediction that in England, the competitive examination and the difference in status of each type of school would have the result of replicating a class-based secondary system (MDM, 1951, unpub., B. Litt thesis, p.186).

On her return to Australia she realised that her nephew Sandy, named after Alexander Mackie, was behaving in a similar way to the severely retarded John Thompson in Oxford. John Mackie was making his way as one of John Anderson's most distinguished intellectual heirs. The birth of a child with an intellectual disability in a family that valued intellect to such a degree was a severe blow.

*I'd seen he was backward for some considerable time, but they wouldn't see it. One time... I had a nice picture book to show him, and Sandy who was a very nice polite little boy was all ready to look at the pictures, and John sort of pushed me aside, and said*

***'He doesn't want to look at your pretty pictures: the boy's a mathematician'* (MDM,1997 pers. comm., 23/3).**

Margaret's experience of teaching children with special needs led to her viewing the treatment her nephew received in an academic family with disapproval and this may be one reason for the eventual estrangement between her and her brother.

At the beginning of 1951 Margaret joined the staff of Armidale Teachers' College. The college had been established in 1928 under the Directorship of S. H. Smith, the arch-enemy of Alexander Mackie, and had at least in part been intended to provide a counter to Mackie's monopoly of influence in teacher education in NSW (Turney, 1983, p.111); it was the first teacher training institution outside Sydney. Most of Margaret's teaching colleagues and inspectors had been trained at Sydney and had some contact with her father, except for those who had trained at Armidale under the leadership of the 'lovable old despot' and proponent of Smith's 'commonsense', 'skills' approach to teaching, C.B. Newling. Now, ironically, in the second generation the 'enemy', in the person of Margaret Mackie with similar liberal and progressive views to her father's, was within the gates, and was to influence deeply the views of beginning teachers on education for the next forty years.

Newling's replacement, Dr C.B. Bassett, adopted an approach that was more student- focussed and problem- solving. Margaret was one of the 'new guard' in a staffroom that was still occupied by many of the 'old school' of Newling's day, who brought out their original yellowed lecture notes each year and read them, sometimes the identical lecture to two or three 'sections' of thirty students in a day.

Her task was to lecture on the theory and history of education. She also wrote and corrected courses for the University of New England's external Diploma of Education students. She revelled in the work.

***There was a lot of progressive teaching going on ... sensible people like John Dewey said that you started from your own environment and... worked out from there... [the non-progressive thinkers thought] you had strict discipline and taught them spelling.*** ( MDM, 1997, pers.comm., 23/3).

To teach the history of education, Margaret supplemented the reading she had been engaged in since childhood in her father's house. 'As far as ideas went, everything went back to Plato and Socrates.' She read Tacitus, Seneca, Comenius, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori and A. S. Neill, whose work she had read as an adolescent:

***he' d got a great deal more eccentric- gone too far in the freedom line ... it was becoming quite clear that nobody from his school had distinguished themselves in anything...*** ( MDM, 1997, pers.comm., 23/3).

Two influential English writers on early childhood education whose ideas Margaret promoted were Susan Isaacs, an advocate of applying psychology to infant teaching, who had visited Australia and whom Margaret had met as an adolescent, and E. R. Boyce. Both were proponents of the 'free play' approach to Infants' teaching, Isaacs in an experimental school at Cambridge and Boyce in the less privileged East End of London. Margaret taught their ideas ten years before they became fashionable.

Australia's version of McCarthyism was in sway. In Armidale, Cold War hysteria took the form of refusal by a guest speaker at the college to appear on the same platform as a red flag (the college banner, which was maroon, was displayed on the stage of the auditorium). A social studies lecturer came under criticism for teaching a course which directly compared the U.S. and Soviet constitutions.

Margaret, for educational reasons, never revealed her religious or political beliefs: 'Nobody here thought of me as being at all left wing.' As her books show, she thought that her ideas about teaching would, if implemented, be more radical than any communist doctrine: 'We educate for change if we educate at all. Education is a subversive activity' (MDM, 1977, p.158). She was well aware of the nexus between education and political power.

What she wanted to subvert in society were those competitive and materialist forces which were undemocratic. Many forces in society, for instance religious, political and commercial forces, relied on indoctrination, unthinking belief and passivity to promote their interests and would not welcome a thinking, aware population.

Her radicalism had been tempered by Lucy Sutherland's extreme political conservatism and Margaret's own pragmatism. She had witnessed thinking individuals like her father and John Anderson taking principled stands on educational issues and being pilloried for it. She had seen two Andersonian colleagues, Frank Fowler and Harry Eddy, demoted for referring to the doctrine of freewill in philosophy classes: 'I never mentioned religion polemically in any sense whatever ... I never discussed the issue ...' (MDM, 1997, pers. comm. 2/7). To remain effective she decided to remain discreet. The most effective way of spreading the values she espoused was to quietly teach people to think for themselves. In this way it is entirely possible that Margaret Mackie became a more effective political force than many who nailed their colours to the mast; perhaps even her own father. It is equally a stereotypically 'feminine' mode of action, to focus on private rather than public action and could be seen as a product of her own acceptance of a limited sphere on the grounds of her gender.

The basis of all her thinking on education and her view of the relationship between politics and education, was the secular ethic, that people are ends in themselves. This she had inherited from her father and developed under John Anderson;



*an education of free men, not "servants", by persons who are prepared to take the fullest political and educational responsibility and, in that capacity, to negotiate with other social groups.* Anderson 1961, p. 61).

She was now able to place Anderson's ideas in perspective with those of the philosophers and educators whose views she was passing on in the history of education: for example, Dewey's view: 'Plato defined a slave as one who accepts from others the purposes which control his conduct (*Democracy and Education*, NY, Macmillan, 1917). Freedom meant finding a way of life suited to the person's capabilities. It was unacceptable because it was anti-educative, for teachers to express a view which might unduly influence their pupils. A teacher's job was rather to encourage her pupils to discuss and think, and to ally herself to forces in society that encouraged freedom of expression.

The space race was impelling Western educators to respond to public demand for less 'socialisation' and more substance in education. Margaret's submission to the NSW Wyndham Committee, constituted in 1953, used her knowledge of the English secondary system to prefigure ideas that later appeared in the report and in *Educative Teaching* (1968): 'The systematic teaching of despair is not unusual' (MDM, 1968, p.37). This referred directly to the problem caused by a secondary education which was based on the entry requirements of universities rather than on the needs of students: that most students would experience failure rather than success.

*What is sometimes overlooked is that this very definition of secondary education [ 'the education of all adolescents'] makes it obligatory for the community to provide suitable education, not only for the "average" adolescent, but also... for the adolescent of talent and for the adolescent who is poorly endowed* (Wyndham et al, 1957, p.36).

Rather than an irrelevant motivation based on academic success: 'The important thing is not to excel, but to contribute' (MDM, 1968, p.37). Margaret favoured a model that would prepare people for citizenship: 'by looking at society and deciding what areas of knowledge are most useful for people who are, irrespective of occupation, to live as citizens of that society' (MDM, 1958, p.271). This point of view is almost purely Platonic but in a modern democracy, unlike the Greek version which rested on a slave system. The purpose of education was to point a way to 'the good life... the life of constructive work, of co-operation, of discovery and thinking, of thought and thoughtfulness' (MDM, 1996, p.49). Margaret was, in a sense, following in her father's footsteps in her interest in secondary education.

In 1955, Margaret settled into the new little workers' cottage built in a working class area of Armidale, that was to become her home for the rest of her life.

*I drew the sketch plans and Claire Linday, the Maths teacher at the High School, drew them properly. I was planning for north light, and of course I was planning to make it as economical as possible ... At that stage, I also thought that my father wasn't going to live forever and my mother might like to come up here ... It was a very nice house at that stage, the rooms were all painted different colours; one room was yellow and another room was pink and another one was green, and Dr Bassett said it was a dear little house ... the cypress ... I got ... from Dr Linsell. She had a house over there with a great hedge of them ... when my mother came to stay with me she brought a little oak plant [about 3"]; it's the one that did survive. Everybody deplored this untidiness with trees out front. It's become rather more fashionable since then ... working class districts don't have trees ...*

*That was just about the time ... My father died, in October 1955. He was in his 80th year and it was known that he wasn't getting any better. The day before it happened was the day they opened Newling [a men's residence] (MDM, 1995, pers.comm 21/7).*



*Alexander Mackie, 1876 - 1955.*

Alexander Mackie had been the person on whom Margaret had modelled herself as a teacher: his liberalism, knowledge of the Greek philosophers and advocacy for education as the foundation of 'the good life' formed the ground on which she built her own belief system; his enjoyment of young children, gifts as a communicator and facilitator of others' intellectual development were passed to her along with Scottish habits of personal frugality and hard work. His work with Peter Board in establishing universal secondary education found a sequel in Margaret's study of the English system and her submission to the Wyndham Committee (1955, mentioned in UNE staff file, 7/9/60).

Margaret, as the dutiful daughter of the family, assumed the major responsibility for her mother's well being from this time on, travelling to Sydney each holiday, while her brother John, now in New Zealand, remained a regular correspondent, writing to his mother weekly.

From the University of New England Margaret's lecture notes outlining her views on ethics in education were sent out to students in the post-graduate Diploma of Education course. Using examples of ethical statements from Buddhism and Hinduism, she identified three qualities of mind which must exist in the classroom if it is to be educative. These were co-operation, constructiveness and enquiry.

*What is needed is not that teachers should try to impose their own standards on children...but that they should help the pupils to see where the errors lie in the false standards set before them...The choice for the teacher is between methods which promote in the pupils obedience and submissiveness and those which encourage the development of co-operativeness, a spirit of enquiry and a confidence in making, doing and thinking on their own initiative... The whole purpose of teaching is to develop the child's powers so that obedience is no longer necessary (MDM, UNE lecture notes on Education and Ethics, 1958).*

She also wrote units on the potentially controversial topic of the influence of schooling on social mobility and the economic and political repercussions of literacy (MDM, 1958, UNE lecture notes from Theory of Education Unit IV, Schooling and Society).

Ten years into her career as lecturer at the college, in 1961 Margaret introduced as a major study, a course in Philosophy. A fictionalised account of this first class was published by a former student and disciple, Alma Denton (nee Pidcock):

*Through my love of philosophy, I gradually warmed to our teacher, Miss Maclean, and found in her a soul mate. I was surprised at her intelligence, her skill in handling small groups, her unusual humour, and her creative insight in understanding what we were trying to say, as we groped our way into new ideas and plumbed new depths. When things got a bit muddled, she'd say "What I think Yvonne is saying is ...". and she would repeat in her own words, the gist of the speaker's argument.*

*She had a real gift easing us and caring, and certainly not teaching for "results".*

*"How can we know something is true?" might be the simple question with which she would open our session. Or "Is there anything you know, with absolute certainty?" My frustration with her was that I never knew what she believed herself. She tended to keep one part of herself removed from the discussion, not in an arrogant way but more in service to the process in the group. Sometimes we would ask her a direct question, and she would usually answer with a story, or an image or something taking our process further... She allowed for the fact that some things in life are inexplicable, but never thought it her responsibility to explain the hidden mysteries.*

*I thrived under her tutelage. We gathered for meals at her house, and I spent many hours by her fire discussing my life, her life, her travels and studies abroad. My soul was nourished in the deepest way and my individuality encouraged... In Miss Maclean, I met a stream of learning and culture that had been completely absent from my own upbringing (Denton, Alma, 1995, *The Kookaburra in the Jacaranda Tree*, Minerva, London, P. 129; pp. 132 - 133).*

From then on the philosophy class made a deep impression on the small number of students who chose it as a major study, many of them considering Miss Mackie a mentor throughout their teaching careers.

1962 was a bad year for Margaret. Dr Bassett had promoted her in 1961 to take on some administrative responsibilities in the college Education Department. Her position as department head was appealed to the point of legal challenge by a new arrival, Dr Pearson. Margaret, who was the popular staff choice, characteristically refused to compete and withdrew her candidacy.

*She finds the strain of the impending Crown Employees Appeals action intolerable. She was performing the duties of Head of the Department in a highly creditable manner but claims the thought of having her suitability contested by a member of her own staff is so distasteful that her work is being adversely affected. I have tried, in vain, to dissuade her from this action (Muir, 1962, Letter to the Director of Teacher Training, 8/5).*

She also, possibly not coincidentally, suffered from severe health problems in the same year, contracting pneumonia and taking extended sick leave (staff file, 1963, 27/2; 24/7). A letter from the Principal, George Muir in 1964, gives an account of some of the personalities involved in the dispute and also indicates that after the incident Margaret's health remained poor for a considerable time. Just a year after his 'victory' her rival applied for a transfer.

*Director of Teacher Training  
Dept of Education  
Sydney.*

*Subject : Teachers' College... vacancies...  
I attach...application [s] for promotion].*

*...Dr Pearson is a person of high academic qualifications with a penchant for litigious behaviour, usually in pursuit of causes which he feels reflect a principle rather than his own advantage...On strictly professional grounds I would have to recommend him for a 1A position though I am loth to do this because of his reputation as a lecturer and member of staff... (Muir, G.,1964, letter to the Director of Teacher Training ref.no.01/FH:AH 64/766/61844).*

Mr Muir supported the transfer in the light of the personal difficulties Dr Pearson was experiencing. These difficulties may well have included dealing with colleagues who had been deeply offended by his appeal.

Mr Muir's letter continues with comments on the contenders for promotion. Of Margaret Mackie, the only woman in contention, he wrote:

*Miss Mackie has a brilliant critical mind which deservedly earned promotion to Grade 1B Division 1. She was appointed a lecturer Grade 1A on the recommendation of Dr Bassett and for a time performed the duties of a 1A lecturer satisfactorily. She withdrew from the position because she found the thought of appeal intolerable. At that time I thought highly of Miss Mackie's quality of mind and I still do. However a greater length of acquaintance has brought me to the view that this very quality- the ability to question and argue without ever making a decision- coupled with her shy and withdrawn personality make her unsuitable for promotion at the present.*

*As you know Miss Mackie is recovering from a fairly lengthy period of illness. I would hope that greater emotional stability will be a concomitant of her recovery. At the moment I would not recommend her (Muir, G.,1964, letter to the Director of Teacher Training ref.no.01/FH:AH 64/766/61844).*

Mr Muir's comments on other contenders were equally frank. However, in Miss Mackie's case there is an added implication of emotional instability which may not have been made had she not been a woman 'of a certain age'. 1964 was Margaret's fiftieth year and in the following year she completed the cycle of illness by undergoing major surgery.

a further comment on her staff file shows that either Mr Muir or his deputy, Mr Crane (the report is unsigned) failed to appreciate Margaret's habit in the staffroom of bearding visiting school inspectors and colleagues with penetrating questions on the philosophy of education:

*Miss Mackie's rather waspish approach to the discussion of any problem makes her colleagues unwilling to enter discussion with her and consequently she does not contribute to the work of the College in the proportion which her undoubted ability would suggest (unsigned comment, 1963, UNE staff file 25/2).*

On her recovery Margaret was quietly commissioned through George Muir to draft a syllabus for religious teaching in NSW schools which was to meet the requirement

of the Education Act of 1880 for 'secular teaching' of religion and take into account the shift in public opinion towards recognising the diversity of religious affiliations in the schools. This syllabus met with disapproval from the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney and the Rev. Alan Walker, a leader in the Methodist Church, for its references to other world religions. There was controversy in the Press (which would probably have been greater had the clergy realised it was written by an Andersonian):

*The aim of these apostles of Paganism is clear- to banish Christianity ...from our schools, but one step at a time... This is one time when Christians of all shades of thought should see the common danger and not give away one inch of ground to the enemy* (Bryson, A.M.,1964, letter to *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19/8).

Others supported the syllabus: 'I think the introduction of the new syllabus is a liberal-minded move and should be encouraged' (Irvine, L.R.H,1964, letter to *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19/8). Margaret, as the anonymous author, joined the fray, pointing out that different versions of the Bible offended different religious denominations, thus making it impossible to use the Bible at all: 'I suggest that it is better to teach ethics than to attempt to teach Scripture without the Scriptures' (MDM, 1964, letter to *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17/8). A committee formed as a result of the public outcry adopted a syllabus which resembled Margaret's draft in most respects.

In some way the crisis in Margaret's health and professional life seemed to boost her ambition to live fully. While she was lying in hospital, the question had occurred to her of whether, if she were to remain dependent on other people indefinitely, she would choose to live at all. The answer: 'I decided I wanted to live, no matter what' (MDM, 1996, pers.comm., 19/6).



In 1966 she published her first book, *Education in the Inquiring Society*.

Its theme was education in the context of a society which saw knowledge as a kind of capital, the accumulation of which was to be encouraged in the bulk of the population. It was an optimistic book in the spirit of the time, pointing out that affluence allowed the leisure for learning and that education, in the sense of the development of thinking, could progress in the current social climate. An important element in an 'inquiring society' was allowing criticisms rather than suppressing them: free debate was an indicator of an 'inquiring society.'

In a good deal of the book Margaret engaged in Andersonian fashion in clearing up false distinctions, between emotion and intellect; the learning of 'facts' versus real education; scientific versus humanistic thinking and theory versus practice.

As an Andersonian she had adopted the dictum 'mind is feeling': 'All thinking is feeling, but some feeling is not thinking' (MDM, 1966, p.49). Intense interest, for instance, was an emotion:

*there is a detached way of looking at things which is associated with the highly developed mind...the desire to justice to both sides in a controversial issue, to judge it without regard to one's own advantage, is itself an emotion. A desire to learn the truth, even if that truth is not beneficial to oneself, is a very admirable feeling, and it is one of the feelings which education... cultivates* (MDM, 1966, p. 64).

The belief that thinking rationally would discover an objective 'truth' was a foundation stone of Miss Mackie's theory and practice and she believed that this kind of thinking applied both to science and the humanities.

Regarding 'facts', supplying information was one part of education but was not sufficient without stimulating the reasoning required to make the facts meaningful. In a changing society, any set of facts was becoming less useful than the ability to learn and adapt.

In all of her books, Miss Mackie continued to place the emphasis on the process of thinking rather than its content, although there was in her view a special case for the humanities including philosophy: history and literature enabled the understanding of human behaviour, while philosophy was 'the study of matters of importance to all investigators no matter what their field' (MDM, 1966, p.21), the key to the Andersonian good of inquiry. In studying philosophy people would also address metaphysical and ethical issues in order to develop 'the good life', the aim of all education.

Following the success of this book (she was invited by the University of York to speak to the Faculty of Education), in 1967 Margaret flew to England. In London she visited Alma Pidcock, a former student who was teaching there. In Oxford she saw Lucy

Sutherland, her Somerville tutor, the Thompsons and her brother John, who had been appointed a Fellow at University College. By this time she had five nieces and nephews. Despite her love for children and her desire to be a devoted aunt, this was the last time she was to be invited to stay with the family. It was not until 27 years later that John's third daughter Hilary wrote to Margaret, re-establishing contact.

Margaret's next book, *Educative Teaching (1968)*, was to be the one that established her stature as a writer on education. What *Educative Teaching* did was to provide to teachers a set of self-consistent guiding principles by which to measure competing priorities in the classroom. Whether or not to act in a particular way was to be measured always by whether such actions promoted or prevented education, the development of understanding.

It was not usual at the time for teachers' college academics, as opposed to their university equivalents, to publish at all: Margaret's books were written late at night while she continued with her normal teaching duties at the college and much of their content was adapted from the external teaching units she was writing for the University. In the sixties and seventies, her college work included adapting to a three-year rather than two-year training course for teachers, the introduction of a new course for nurse tutors and the change in status for teachers' colleges to the more generalised Colleges of Advanced Education.

A collaboration with her Andersonian colleague, novelist Gwen Kelly, produced *What Is Right? Case Studies in the Ethics of Education* in 1970. This book began a new direction in the 'exemplification' method which set the pattern for her next three books. Margaret had extended Lucy Sutherland's original directive for examples to illustrate the principles she was advocating, into a strong reliance on anecdotes, labelled 'critical incidents', taken from actual classrooms and written by Gwen Kelly as stories. Margaret's contribution was to extract from the stories a discussion of the ethical issues raised. A feature of these discussions was that Margaret largely refrained from offering advice, in adherence to the principle that there was no one way to solve the problems of education:

*I wasn't teaching people to follow in any particular method; following my father I believed 'there are nine and ninety ways of writing tribal lays, and every single one of them is right.'...the important thing is that the teacher should be interested in what they're doing and have rapport with the children... it doesn't matter much where you do start. (MDM, 1995, pers. comm. 21/7).*

She also commented on how she wanted this kind of book to be read: 'the main object of the work is that the material be examined rather than my conclusions be accepted' (MDM, 1970, p. 1).



In 1974 the college became a C.A.E. under a new Principal, Patrick Leary. This was the second administrator under which Margaret Mackie found it increasingly difficult to continue her work. He seemed not to value or appreciate her ideas and methods.

*Some...thought that what she wrote was a bit trite. Other more perceptive colleagues read it and re-read it, and finally got to what she was on about; not that it was hard to understand, it was just pretty profound ( Ross, R.,1995, pers.comm.).*

She had just published *The Beginning Teacher* (1973), which addressed education from the point of view of primary teachers. Its statements of principle largely reiterated material that had appeared in her first two books. Again she relied on anecdotes to make people think: her particular emphasis was to reiterate that the skills of teaching were not able to be passed on like, for example, the simple set of skills needed to drive a car. Beginning teachers could perhaps learn by simulating the teaching situation through anecdotes and considering how they might respond.

The strength of this book, reliance on logical and rational thinking on the part of the reader, was also its weakness. This method failed to take into account that there were as many responses to an anecdote as there were readers and that one simple pithy statement like 'to the pupil leaving school, the power to learn is more valuable than the quantity of learned material' (MDM, 1973, p.33), because of its distillation of principle, could make a stronger impact than any number of stories.

Family matters were to occupy Margaret's mind for a time: relations with John were now remote and she relied on second-hand information from Oxford friends to keep in touch with the doings of her nephews and nieces. The news of the publication of John's first book was transmitted in this way (*The Cement of the Universe*, 1974).

In 1975, Annie B. Mackie died. Margaret had overseen her transition from being cared for at home into a nursing home. John flew out for five days to attend the funeral. He and Margaret spent their last time together, using one day of the visit to look over their childhood home. The issue of Margaret's estrangement was apparently not raised between these two exceptional, and exceptionally inhibited individuals.

She was now 63 years old and this may have been a factor in the push to convince her to retire. Since her reaching the official retiring age for women her employment was subject to an annual review (UNE staff file, 1975, 28/1). Work was becoming more difficult under Patrick Leary's leadership but to Margaret, because of the broken link with her family, work was now, if it were possible, even more integral to her life. She was required by the retirement policy to write a letter each year to the Principal reiterating her desire to continue in employment.

The issues she was facing may have been a factor in turning Margaret's mind to issues of administration. She published *Philosophy and School Administration* in 1977. The book, without supplying a system, supplied principles by which school

administrators could examine the intent of their own administrative systems, so that the purpose of education could be served. Again she employed the 'critical incident' technique and added a separate chapter on current controversies. In a 1998 reading it is these parts of the book that tie it to its era, while the exposition sections, though they take no cognizance of post-modernity, are relatively timeless: in her final answer to the question 'What makes a good teacher?' she reiterated 'at the centre of the educative process is the development of the child's spirit of inquiry' (p.173).

Margaret's collegial relationships tended to be closest with those who were themselves inquirers, and together with Christine Perrott, a second generation Andersonian from the University of New England, she was on the point of producing a Child Growth and Development course based on extracts from literature. It was printed but never used.

*I did some work on the literary extracts about children, chose some to be typed and reproduced ... Think I might work up a short book. (MDM, 1977 journal entry, 12/2).*

Miss Mackie was not specific about her differences with Patrick Leary, but she was not alone in her failure to appreciate his *modus operandi*. A clue may be found in Elphick, E.S.(1989, p. 207): 'The Progressives led by...Leary...saw a ... College... being dragged sometimes kicking and screaming, into the realities of the second half of the Twentieth Century'. Margaret took the extraordinary step of seeking an interview with the head of the College Council to protest against Leary. Her journal details some difficulty in gaining this interview and records no result. The last journal entry for this period reads :

*Sunday 20th February [1977].  
On Friday Mr Leary told me he wanted me to withdraw from Child Growth and Development. I think this settles my plans for retiring at the end of the year. People can't enjoy work on this stop-start basis.*

Margaret's annual request to be reemployed at the end of the year (1977, UNE staff file 1/12), was a response to a letter to her by Leary, which outlined the policy of reemploying staff past retirement age on an annual basis and invited her to continue only till first semester 1978.

Nobody could have predicted, when Margaret Mackie retired in 1978, the many more years of service she would offer the community. She continued as a casual lecturer for the University until 1983. In 1984 she was awarded an Order of Australia medal for her services to education. Retirement was, for her, the beginning of a whole new career teaching children philosophy after school. She started this at the College, where she was allowed to use an office as an 'honorary consultant' till 1989, when the College

amalgamated with the University of New England and the entire education faculty moved to the UNE campus.

A new prospect opened for her when she visited Fiji on the invitation of a former student, Debbie Nitis Mue. One of Margaret's former students from UNE was the Minister for Education; Debbie had initiated Fiji's 'Kindergarten of the Air' and at the time of Margaret's visit was engaged by the YWCA to establish kindergartens throughout the islands. Margaret's visit became an annual one for several years until it became physically impossible for her to travel. During her involvement with Fiji she developed relationships with staff at the University of the South Pacific and with the rehabilitation organisation 'Counterstroke'.

One of her responses to her own loss of family had been, as it were, to 'adopt' the whole world. She privately took on sponsorship and philanthropy benefitting many individuals and organisations, including Fijian orphans and individuals she had met there. One of the most recent examples of her philanthropy was her donation of sufficient funds for the local Armidale Aboriginal preschool to purchase land for its school site. She continued to encourage educational diversity and was awarded life membership of both the Montessori and Waldorf schools for her contributions. She continued teaching philosophy in her own home after leaving the College and in 1991 was awarded a local prize, the Harris Sutherland Award, for her work. To date (1998) she continues teaching. To be a teacher has been as it is now, the meaning of her life.



*M.D. Mackie, O.A.M., in 1997.*

William Mackie

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