

Mabel McGowan

Moral Responsibility in Education

A small-scale experiment.

It is relatively easy to *talk* about individual responsibility as the essence of morality at a time when the inter-generation tensions of the early stages of 'permissiveness' are beginning to dissolve.

It is less easy to *demonstrate* full-scale operation of the 'choice' factor within the pattern of educational institutions where, on the whole, the majority of students cling to authoritarian security.

It is a very big and frightening step when a student recognises that to opt out may, for her, be the next positive stage of growth.

From here grew the thought that an R.E. professional studies course, selected as a short terms option by teachers in training, might be a suitable place to offer the opportunity of taking individual responsibility.

The following programme is therefore offered for the current Summer Term. The nature of its reception by the students and the development to which it leads for each individual will not be known for several months.

What follows is addressed to the students.

R.E. SUMMER TERM 1975

This is a learning experiment and I should value your comments at the end. Take it SLOWLY, step by step.

1. Define your objectives.

Go away by yourself and **THINK** and **WRITE**. Clarify for yourself why you have elected to follow an R.E. course.

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IF YOUR ANSWER IS IN ORDER TO FILL IN A HALF DAY SPACE IN THE CURRICULUM OPTIONS TIME-TABLE YOU SHOULD **OPT OUT** AT THIS POINT AND USE THE TIME IN ANY WAY WHICH WILL FURTHER YOUR OWN GROWTH AS A PERSON OR AS A TEACHER.
.....

In this way you are taking **RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOURSELF**. This is a very important factor in growth. *I* am not prepared to decide for you whether or not you continue, nor shall I either approve or disapprove of your decision.
.....

2. In making this decision you have performed a **MORAL ACT**.

If you are still a member of the class I am assuming that your mind is revolving around questions concerned with *attitudes or belief* - your own perhaps - or with a *teacher's responsibility* for the *religious* (Christian) or *moral* guidance of children. You may even be having thoughts about a re appraisal of the nature of morality itself.

.....
If I am wrong in my assumption and these are not the areas you want to explore then **GO AWAY AND PLOT YOUR OWN COURSE**. This way you are taking **RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOURSELF**. Whether you go or stay you have my blessing. Do you believe that? Do you trust an explicit statement? Have you ever done any careful thinking about words such as **TRUST** and **FAITH**? And what they may mean in **PRACTICAL LIVING**? (Does it help you to **WRITE** whilst or after thinking?)

If my assumption was *right* (what do the terms *right* and *wrong* mean to you?) then you may be finding your own unaided thinking inadequate to lead you far towards *possible* answers. (Are there ANY answers in these areas which are more than possibilities?)

ARE YOU TAKING IT SLOWLY AND REALLY TRYING TO CONCENTRATE ON SOME OF THE QUESTIONS SUGGESTED?

Would other people's thinking help you with yours? Several other people's, so that you can weigh one against another and attempt to take a *provisional* stance of your own. Does the word provisional give the idea of *dynamic* and *non-permanent attitudes* which I am trying to convey? (Remember that the fact that I say it neither makes it right nor wrong). Right and wrong again! Did you take that one any further?

Other people's thinking: You might -

- (1) **READ A 'starter' reading appendix is attached. Make your reading pattern as wide and varied as you cope with so that you absorb a range of opinion and attitudes. Do not discard anything too quickly which:-**
 - a) You find difficult to understand.
 - b) Conflicts with your existing pattern of attitudes.
 - c) You find initially distasteful.
 - d) Makes you angry or uncomfortable.
- (2) **EXPERIENCE.** If 'belief' is part of your major concern attend your regular place of worship - if you have one - and **THINK WHAT YOU ARE DOING.** You could attend others too of course and so *widen your experience.*
- (3) **ESTABLISH A DIALOGUE.** If the teacher's responsibility for religious or moral guidance is worrying you - **GO AND FIND SOME TEACHERS. SOME - not ONE.** Get them to talk - Be with them in school. Show them this programme if you like. Ask them what they do and why they do it.

It is just possible by now that you are grownin a little **LONELY.**

The Curriculum Options list will tell you which other students embarked upon the course with you. You could make contact with them and find out **WHO IS STILL INVOLVED.** It is no use asking me - I shall not necessarily know. I suggest Thursday, May 15th (The third week of the course).

Where you meet is for *YOU* to establish.

Was there any-one to meet?

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Would you now find advantage in going forward as a pair - or a group if there are more than two of you?
.....

Where are you going? **DECIDE TOGETHER.**
.....

If there was no-one to meet you **WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT? IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY - NOT MINE.**
.....

4. It might help me to help other students to find their own way forward on future occasions if I had some knowledge of what has happened.

IF YOU ARE STILL FOLLOWING THIS COURSE I SHOULD, IF YOU ARE WILLING, BE PLEASED TO MEET YOU ON THE MORNING of Thursday, June 19th, at 10 a.m. in Room 3.

Should we have coffee together and talk? You are welcome to come to this meeting - or *not* - as *you* choose, whether or not you have been following an R.E. programme.

Come with ideas for the morning and possible suggestions of what you propose for the rest of term. Three weeks will remain.

There is of course no form of judgement or assessment. I should, however, be grateful for your co-operation in *evaluating* what we have been doing.

SUGGESTED 'Starter' reading list:

Books:

James Hemming: *Individual Morality.*

Carl Rogers: *On Becoming a Person.*

R. J. Goldman: *Readiness for Religion/Education for Uncertainty.*

Owen Cole: *Religion in a Multi-faith School.*

John Wilson: *Introduction to Moral Education.*

Periodicals:

Learning for Living (Hightown library and R.E. box, Room 3, Resources Unit).

Self and Society (Personality and Growth box, Room 3, Resources Unit).

Pamphlets:

Religious Education in Primary Schools:

Schools Council Working Paper No. 44.