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teachers, schooling and the future of education in south africa

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Since I started trying to sort out the ideas I have put together in this paper there has been a series of events which have made the South African situation more volatile than it has been for maybe 80 years or so. It is notable that school "pupils" have played a prominent role in these events. It would take either crass stupidity or arrogant blindness to imagine that one could, with any confidence, sketch out an even reasonable estimate of what South Africa might be like a few years hence. The political postures of either liberal gradualism or complacent certainty have both become somewhat fanciful in our current unstable circumstances. We are faced very urgently with the questions of what we can go on taking for granted, and what, in our uncertain world, we should try to retain.

1. INTRODUCTION

The schooling system in South Africa can be seen as riddled with many problems but it would probably be acknowledged that at least one of the most urgent, and maybe central, problems is the shortage of teachers. It's all very well to pour money into building new schools and providing other kinds of material facilities, but without teachers the schooling system will grind to an awful halt.

First responses to what I have just said are likely to be that to talk unqualifiedly of "the shortage of teachers" is too crude; what we need to do is to "analyse" the problem and arrive at much more precise statements about the extent and location of shortages. We need to know much more precisely how many maths teachers we are short of, how many posts in English-medium schools are filled by teachers whose home language is not English, in which areas of the country this type of shortage is most prevalent, and so on. Certainly this demand is legitimate and any approach to a concrete solution to the problem is going, eventually, to require that kind of detail.

But in this paper I am not going to try to marshal detail of that kind, rather I am going to investigate the problem at a different level, at the level of the taken-for-granted framework of assumptions within which the problem arises. Before I proceed with the investigation I wish to mention two emerging forces which seem likely to drive the problem even further from solution in the near future in South Africa.

The first of these is the increasingly vociferous demand that we extend schooling to a wider range of our population. The second is the movement within the teaching profession to improve its own status, to achieve more genuine recognition for the value of the services it provides. It is quite clear how these two forces are likely to aggravate the problem of the shortage of teachers and I need hardly try to spell out in detail what I am talking about. However, I think it is worth mentioning the kind of thing I have in mind. It is by now widely acknowledged, even by officials of the TED, that there is a critical shortage of adequately-qualified teachers in TED schools, which, it is to be noted, are for the at present most affluent sector of the population. If the shortage of teachers strikes even here there seems little likelihood that we have any chance of even beginning to cope with the parallel problem in "Bantu Education", or that we could realistically contemplate the extension of the provision of schooling. Similarly, were teachers to form themselves into some kind of organisation committed to improving the status of the teaching profession it seems likely that they would be reluctant to admit as members many of those who now daily stand before classes of pupils and this reluctance would place under even more serious pressure one source of the "manpower" to run schools.

I shall call the framework of assumptions in the context of which the "shortage of teachers" arises, "Model T". As a lead-in

to a closer investigation of some features of Model T, I shall briefly consider what could be called the "grammar" of the word "shortage".

2. THE "GRAMMAR" OF "SHORTAGE"

Why is it that nowadays we are barraged with the suggestion that there is a shortage of maths and science teachers but we seldom hear the suggestion that there is a shortage of Latin teachers? Is it that the schools are inundated with Latin teachers? Clearly that is not the answer. There is a general shortage of water in South Africa, but there is no general shortage of air, or of strychnine in the water supply; but the reason for our agreement that there is (at present) no shortage of air is of a very different kind from the reason for our agreement that there is no shortage of strychnine in the water supply. The reason for our agreement that there is no shortage of air is that there is an abundance of air, there is sufficient for us all to use as much as we wish.

By contrast the reason for our agreement that there is no shortage of strychnine in the water supply is not that we have an abundance already but that, knowing about the effects of strychnine on human health, we do not think that it would be desirable to have strychnine in the water supply. This points to at least two conditions which need to be satisfied before a claim that there is a shortage of something can be sustained.

First (condition 1) there cannot be said to be a shortage of something unless the thing in question is not available in sufficient quantity. However, it is quite clear that this condition cannot stand alone, there is no way of determining from a mere "inspection" of "the facts", as it were, what is to count as a sufficient quantity of something. Isolated from a particular context, the question "Is 10 litres of petrol sufficient?" is unanswerable. So, second (condition 2), to claim that there is a shortage of something is to imply that the availablity of the thing in sufficient quantity is desirable. It might be thought that in the "air" example above the second condition plays no role. But, on the contrary, we would regard as deranged anyone who doubted the general desirability for human being of the availability of air. We know, as a basic fact about human beings, that a sufficient quantity of breathable air is essential to the maintenance of human life at all; anyone who, knowing that basic fact, doubted the desirability of a sufficient quantity of breathable air would at the same time be doubting the desirability of the maintenance of human life, and there could hardly be a more fundamental doubt than that. In the "air" example we make the taken-for-granted assumption that ,for human beings the availability of breathable air in sufficient quantity is desirable.

I have spoken about two conditions which need to be satisfied before a claim that there is a shortage of something can be sustained, there are correspondingly two ways in which a claim that there is a shortage of something can be defeated. One is by showing the ready availability in sufficient quantity of the thing in question, the other is by showing that the presence of the something in question is not desirable. Similarly, there are correspondingly two ways of trying to overcome a "shortage", one way is to increase the supply of the thing in question, the other is to consider whether what we think is desirable really is desirable.

There is a certain crudity in the account I have so far given of the "grammar" of "shortage'. I have characterised the second condition in terms of "desirability" without remarking on what kinds of judgement judgements of desirability are. Someone may ask how it is supposed to be possible to "show that something is desirable", or whether any sense can be made of the phrase "really is desirable". The icy tentacles of Positivism cripple our thinking. In the "petrol" example above I mentioned a particular context isolated from which the question "Is 10 litres of petrol sufficient?" is unanswerable. Well, that word "context" hides a logical snakepit.

I cannot here enter into a systematic general account of the logic of judgements of

desirability, I am not proposing in any thorough way to untangle the strands of the skein of considerations in the context of which judgements of desirability arise, but it may be helpful to make one general point about such judgements, to gesture towards the richness of that skein. This general point is pertinent to explaining how an investigation of some features of Model T can be expected to contribute to a solution to the problem of the shortage of teachers.

Judgements of desirability are not raw "givens" ("data"), they are not something which could be understood on the model of the natural expression of a spasm which originates some where in the gut. Judgements of desirability cannot be isolated from a broad range of other factors, particularly crucially the conceptual frameworks in terms of which we understand ourselves and the world in which we live, or the social practices and institutions which provide the contexts of our lives. We need to appreciate the great variety of the kinds of consideration which fall within this "broad range of other factors". I have already mentioned social practices and institutions and conceptual frameworks (which are intimately linked), but we also need to think of the boundaries set by natural and social facts (if our judgements stray beyond these boundaries we lapse into utopianism) and the degree to which our beliefs about these facts are theory-dependent, and the way in which these boundaries are modified by technology, and our shared religious and quasi-religious hopes about human life and how the range of those hopes is limited by our conceptual frameworks. If one tries to imagine how complex would be anything like a full explanation of why there are no shortages of chariot axles in the modern world one can gain an impression of the wide range of considerations in relation to which judgements about desirability arise.

Most discussions of the shortage of teachers which I know of simply take for granted something comparable to what I have spoken of as condition 2; an alternative way of putting this is to say that most discussions of the issue simply leave out of consideration a whole dimension of debate. The notion of "analyse", operative in the demand that we "analyse the problem" as a first step to trying to solve it, is usually stuck at the level comparable to that of the first condition. Statistics are produced to show the number of inadequately-qualified maths teachers teaching maths in TED matric classes; we try to find explanations for why it is that there is such a low proportion of White English-speaking male teachers in our schools (is it the money, or is it perhaps their reluctance to accept the bureaucratic restraints?); and we propose solutions (encourage surplus teachers from the UK to make a career of teaching in South Africa). But all this kind of fact-garnering and debate takes for granted a whole range of assumptions, it is comparable to manoeuvering at the level of condition 1, it all happens in a single dimension, and is intelligible only within that framework of assumptions which give such activities their sense. Such assumptions are at the level of condition 2.

My modest purpose in this paper is to try to get to a level comparable to the second condition, to try to introduce another dimension into the debate. This is more difficult than may seem at first glance. One difficulty is that many of our assumptions at this level are so deeply engrained in the very texture of our thought, we seldom have call to try to articulate them, as in the "air" example, that it is extremely difficult to express clearly what they are and we are often surprised at what we discover when we succeed. Another difficulty is that we have massive emotional, linguistic, institutional and financial commitments to our assumptions at this level. This has the result that we take as "hard" facts what are merely "soft" facts, and we thus tend to see any doubt about our assumptions as fanciful, maverick and impractical, not worth serious consideration.

In the manner of an anthropologist I shall sketch out Model T. I claim for this sketch only that it points towards a web of assumptions deeply embedded in current ways of thinking about the problem of the

shortage of teachers in South Africa. The test of the accuracy of the sketch will be whether it arouses a feeling of familiarity. Once I begin my sketch it will become clear that I am giving the merest outline of a picture which in fact has a rich texture of detail. The features I do mention are chosen for their pertinence to the problem of the shortage of teachers in South Africa.

3. MODEL T

Model T is one of thes most brilliant inventions of the Industrial Revolution. Central to Model T is the notion of "a school"; using Model T schools, "education" can be provided for the whole population. A school is a place in which the young are prepared to be full members of the society, particularly in regard to occupying a useful niche in the real world of "work". Such preparation is what education is, and while they are "undergoing" education the young are known as "pupils" and, later, "students". Education is a kind of manufacturing process, what is being manufactured is known as a "useful member of society". Each school is located in a building, usually situated in quite extensive "grounds" which include various "recreational" facilities. The buildings consist of "classrooms" and other areas called "halls", "offices", "libraries", "staffrooms", and so on. Such buildings cost anything from R500 000 to R1 000 000 to build and they are used for about 30 hours a week for 40 weeks a year.

Pupils are divided into "classes" and into "standards" (or "grades" or "forms"). A class is a group of about 30 pupils, usually all roughly of the same age, and generally all in the same standard. The class is the fundamental unit for "teaching", in fact some people sometimes say "class-teaching is real teaching". Standards are yearly levels of advancement through the schooling system, there are a dozen before "university". Pupils enter school at about the age of 5 or 6 years of age and, passing through each standard in succession, reach "matric" at about the age of 17 or 18. Sometimes students "fail" a standard or two along the way and sometimes they fail so badly that they leave school ("drop out") at about the 3rd or 10th level. At the end of the 12th level there is a monolithic "public examination" and students who "pass" get a "certificate". This examination is highly regarded in the society and it is used as a selecting device for allocating students to their positions on the starting grid in the status-hierarchy of the occupational structure of the society. Students who are "intelligent" and "diligent" might do well enough in this examination to be admitted to further schooling called university. Universities provide further certificates, called "degrees", for students who successfully complete their obstacle courses. Degrees are highly esteemed in the society generally, and they are again related to the structure of occupations in the society and levels of affluence.

As in factories, time is an obsession in schools. Schools have "timetables" which are organisations of the time which is known as "the school day" into "periods" or "time-table slots". Periods are normally 34-45 minutes long. Periods follow each other in rapid succession through the school day and between groups of about three to five periods there are "breaks" (or "play-times"). It seems to be widely believed that pupils "learn" best in periods. A school day has about seven to nine periods, there are five school-days a week, so in each week there are about 35-43 periods. There are about 200 days in a "school year", that means 1 400 to 1 720 periods in a year. The setting up of the time-table is a major task for each school at the start of each school year, and it requires considerable "mathematical" skill. The problem is that there is a variety of inter-related variables which have somehow to be "orchestrated". Some of these variables are things such as the number of classrooms available, the "subjects" the classes need to be "taught", the "teachers" available to teach those subjects and so on, but the overarching consideration is that time must not be "wasted". During the school day "wasted time" is the time during which pupils are not being taught,

by face-to-face contact with a teacher, some subject which they are to learn.

Teachers are the main operatives in the education of pupils. Teachers are employees in bureaucratic organisations called "Education Departments". Education Departments appoint teachers to schools, and in those schools teachers come under the immediate jurisdiction of "headmasters". Headmasters are fundamentally administrative officers and they need considerable managerial skill. Headmasters are usually recruited from amongst teachers but after becoming headmasters they seldom teach.

Within "their" schools headmasters have higher status than teachers and their salaries are appropriately higher. A teacher is a person who holds a "teaching post" in a school. Teaching posts are of a variety of kinds, which reflect aspects of the schooling system. There are, for instance, "maths teaching posts", "Grade 1 teaching posts", "History/English teaching posts" and so forth. The number of teaching posts to be allocated to each school is worked out by Education Departments on the basis of what is known as the "teacher-pupil ratio". The teacher-pupil ratio is the relationship between a number of teachers and a number of pupils. A teacher-pupil ratio of about 1/25 is normally regarded as desirable. "Unfilled" teaching posts are the most obvious sign of a "shortage" of teachers, but other signs are teaching posts filled by "inappropriately-qualified teachers".

What teachers teach are called "subjects". Subjects are blocks of information to be transmitted to pupils. For each subject there is a "syllabus" which specifies what "content is to be covered" by the pupils in each standard. Sometimes teachers talk about "teaching the syllabus" but this expression is somewhat obscure. The range of subjects offered in a school is called "the curriculum". What subjects there will be on the curriculum, which subjects shall be compulsory and so on is decided by Education Departments. Curriculum subjects are such things a "mathematics", "youth-preparedness", "history", "woodwork", "RI", "Afrikaans", "painting", and so on. The curriculum is an expression of what are taken to be the most important or real things to be learnt by pupils in schools. Such learning is to be deliberately promoted by schools and, by and large, it is curriculum subjects which occupy the centre of attention during the school day. Apart from arranging for the teaching of curriculum subjects schools also organise what are called "extra-curricular" activities. These consist of such things as "sport", like rugby, cricket, athletics and so on, and "cultural activities" such as debating societies, theatrical production, chess clubs and so forth. "Attendance" at "lessons" during which the curriculum subjects are taught is compulsory but usually participation in extra-curricular activities is voluntary.

But to have spoken of curriculum subjects and extra-curricular activities is as yet to have spoken of only the most explicitly-expressed functions of schools. Schools are multi-function institutions; some of them, those in which pupils live (called "boarding schools") are total institutions. The functions of schools include such things as occupying children so that their parents can get on with their serious activities (such as "bridge", "work", or "tennis"); providing for children alternative daily accommodation to the streets, yards or cafés where they would otherwise spend their time; teaching the impressionable young things which are thought from time to time to be socially important (road-safety, pollution, cadets); protecting children from unscrupulous adults who might otherwise exploit them in low-paid employment; providing other welfare services, such as regular medical surveillance; guiding and counselling children about what they should do with their lives (the operatives who are regarded as specially qualified to perform this function are those with a degree in a "science" called "psychology"); moulding the rising generation as "loyal citizens" (that is, engendering in children a commitment to the political status-quo); training children to read and write; socialising children into the practices of their society; preparing children for their future occupations; and, of course, promoting the "personal development" of

pupils (everyone is sure that personal development is a good thing, no-one seems to know what personal development is). It is quite clear that the functions of schools are both extremely broad and extremely mixed.

Teachers are expected to make a wide contribution to the schools' fulfilling all their various functions, so teachers' functions are correspondingly broad and various. Teachers are expected, for example, to organise and run extra-curricular activities of a variety of kinds, to take a general interest in the personal welfare of pupils, to be concerned with the "moral development" of pupils, to make "schemes of work" for the various classes they teach, to keep "records" of the progress of individual pupils and what has been taught in each lesson, to set "tests" and examinations ("feedback"), to "mark" "essays", "exercises", "books", examinations and tests, and, of course, to teach and "keep discipline". The operatives (teachers) who must perform this broad and various set of functions need, as a "qualification", a matric and either a "teaching diploma" (which normally takes a further three years to "get") or a degree and a teaching diploma (which normally takes five years beyond matric to get).

Teaching is what teachers do with classes in periods. During a single week a teacher might teach 40 periods to six or seven different classes (200 to 300 pupils). The very expression "keeping discipline" points towards a criterial characteristic of Model T. Model T has embodied in it certain very fundamental assumptions about rationality, obediency, authority and responsibility. "Keeping discipline" refers not to what one might expect it to but to some people ("Directors of Education", "Inspectors", headmasters, teachers, "prefects") holding control (as one may control a dangerous machine) over groups of other people, against the ever-present threat of chaos and anarchy. The sphere within which teachers have responsibility is wider than the sphere within which they have the authority to make their own judgements. Similarly with pupils and students, they are thought, even at relatively mature ages, such as 15 to 25, to be incapable of acting autonomously and rationally; on this assumpiton "obedience" is the prime virtue of a 'good" student or pupil. Helplessness and dependence are effects of the operation of Model T, induced by the practices and institutions it spawns, not, as is thought, prior facts against the background of which Model T is invented.

4. DISCUSSION OF MODEL T

It might be said that my description of Model T contains distortions, exaggeration, and inaccuracies, or, more damningly, that it is simply a collection of cliches from the writing of deschoolers. Such a response would be welcome, at least it would indicate that I had successfully identified Model T.

In reply to the objection that my description contains "distortions, exaggerations and inaccuracies" it can be said that any popular myth which lives in the consciousness of a large number of people will always embody differences of detail between individuals and that, as no single description is ever likely to satisfy everyone, it is enough if the description identifies the myth by gesturing towards some of its central features. To say that my description is a "collection of cliches from the writing of deschoolers" is to some extent true, but it is not damning. The deschooling movement in Western industrialised countries is a symptom of a widespread disillusion with the system of mass schooling which has been established over generations in those countries at prodigious cost and effort. Such disillusion, which has its expression in the powerful polemics of such writers as Illich, poses a fundamental challenge to some of our most deeply-held convictions, and deserves serious consideration from those in countries which do not yet have mass compulsory schooling but are rushing in that directions.

But before we allow ourselves to slip into romantic utopianism let us note three facts which mark the boundaries within which any realistic discussion of the shortage of teachers must proceed.

The first of these facts is that Model T provides a major focus for the aspirations of most of the population of developed and developing countries alike. This being the case no radical departure from Model T is likely to be practically possible to implement on a wide scale. Serious doubts about Model T amongst a coterie of academics or groups of radical students in Western industrialised countries are unlikely, at least in the short term, to influence the consciousness of a broad mass of the population. The institutional, financial and emotional commitment to Model T and all its paraphernalia of certification and the like is a massive inertial force unlikely to be shifted even in countries in which disillusion with Model T seems rife. For two reasons this fact is particularly crucial in the South African context. The first is that disillusion with Model T seems to arise only amongst populations which have been subjected to its practices and institutions. Only a minority of the South African population has been so subjected. The second is that for the majority of our population Model T offers the royal road to social and individual advancement. The touching belief in the efficacy of mass schooling in overcoming a wide range of social ills is very much alive in South Africa; and so long as a significant proportion of a society is committed to Model T it is realistic for members of that society to see schooling as the means of individual advancement including increasing personal affluence. The hold of Model T on the thinking of our population is indeed a "soft" fact, but a particularly recalcitrant one.

The second fact is that the potential school-going population of this country (that part of the population between the ages of six and 16) is something of the order of nine million. If we accept this estimate as even roughly correct and if we accept the Model T idea that a desirable teacher-pupil ratio is 1/25 then in South Africa now we need roughly 360 000 teachers. This brings us to the third fact and this is that if we count as a qualified teacher any person at present teaching in a school who has at least a matriculation certificate and any further qualification we have in South Africa at persent just a little over 60 000 qualified teachers. Given Model T assumptions we are at present, crudely, short of about 300 000 qualified teachers. The linch pin of my argument is that it is plainly impossible to find 300 000 qualified teachers overnight and it is utopian to think otherwise. One can, of course, fidget nobly but no "crash courses", "encouragement of teachers from the UK", "doubling teachers' salaries" or anything like this is going to provide us with an extra 300 000 qualified teachers in the near future. And the argument remains the same no matter how we wriggle. We could, for instance, reduce our potential school-going population to four million (by, for example, defining the school-going population as that part of the population between six and 11 years old, and ignoring children in distant or scattered rural communities) but, at a teacher-pupil ratio of 1/25, we would still require an extra 100 000 qualified teachers now. The suggestion that we lower our standard of who is to count as a qualified teacher (say to anyone with Standard 5) would enormously increase the pool of persons from whom we could draw teachers, and, given the facts in question ,such a suggestion is a logical outgrowth of Model T. But one may wonder which of the various functions of the schooling system one would then have an even reasonable chance of fulfilling. If we are trapped in Model T then the problem of the shortage of teachers in South Africa will remain insoluble for at least another 40 to 50 years.

It seems, then, that we have no alternative but to modify Model T. The central problem, of course, is to decide in which respect to modify it. In the following section of this paper I make a modest proposal in this regard. My proposal rests on modifying the idea of a teacher embedded in Model T. Here I shall briefly re-emphasise some aspects of that idea.

On Model T the idea of a teacher has two main aspects. The first is that a teacher does his work within parameters set by others. He is employed by an Education Department which demands of him certain

activities which are their idea of which activities it is appropriate for him to engage in; and he is employed in a school under the jurisdiction of a headmaster who has considerable power in regard to such things as the teacher's professional advancement, and correlatively, over how the teacher exercises his professional functions. In such a situation the teacher's sphere of judgement, or the range of matters in regard to which he is entitled to take autonomous decisions, is severely circumscribed. He is an employee, not much different in status and autonomy, from other public servants. The authority he has is second-hand, he holds it with the approval of the Education Department and his headmaster, he is responsible to them for what he does. It is the Education Department and his headmaster whose judgements are critical in regard to whether he is doing his job well or badly, their judgements, thus, have a profound influence on how he comes to conceive of his job.

The second aspect of the Model T idea of a teacher is that such a teacher is a multifunction operative. Many of the functions teachers are expected to fulfil are sheer routine and much of what teachers are required to do in schools could be done, and maybe much better done, by people with different talents, characteristics and qualifications. On Model T the qualities of teachers which tend to get rewarded are very similar to those qualities which are the virtues of good clerks and underlabourers. Model T tends to induce in teachers a kind of bureaucratised mentality which paralyses the exercise of their professional judgement.

Now, again it might be said that I have exaggerated the effects of Model T in making my point, but by and large I think the point is correct, notwithstanding the fact that some teachers working within Model T manage miraculously to retain a sure grasp on their professional integrity.

There are two objections to this idea of a teacher. Both are practical. The first is straightforwardly practical and the second is practical in a more profound sense. The second arises out of moral considerations, particularly those related to the idea of a profession.

The first objection is that the Model T idea of a teacher leads to a wicked waste of a most precious resource, a resource which is, also, incidently, very expensive. The preparation of a teacher is an expensive enterprise, and teachers' salaries account for some 80 per cent of the bill for ordinary schooling systems. On Model T a teacher's talents and qualifications are disgracefully squandered. One way in which this happens is that the teacher has to work within a system which is standardised in various ways, particularly in regard to teaching situations. It seems incredible that it could ever have been seriously thought that the standardised teaching-situation (by persistent face-to-face contact with classes in periods) is the best for teaching anything that one might want to teach. Another way in which teachers' abilities and qualities are squandered is one which I have already laboured. The teachers' functions, on Model T, are extraordinarily varied and it is a plain fact that most teachers spend an enormous amount of their time and energy doing things for which their talents and qualifications do not particularly suit them, engaging in routine tasks, many of which require no special professional expertise, and permanently overburdened, to the detriment of their professional judgement.

The second objection to the Model T idea of a teacher is that it is in flat contradiction in many respects to the idea of a profession. This is one reason why there have been such problems about setting up a Teachers' Council. A profession can be distinguished from other occupations centrally in terms of the criterion that members of a profession have direct responsibility for the life-chances of other people, in situations in which some uncommon knowledge or expertise is required. Other features of a profession arise out of this central criterion. We place ourselves in the hands of a member of a profession when we are faced with situations which are complex and problematic, situations in which common knowledge or expertise is not a sure guide to what to do. It is pre-

cisely in relation to such situations that standardised and routine solutions are rare and in which professional judgement is thus required. The moral dimension of the idea of a profession needs emphasis. With his knowledge and expertise a surgeon can as readily repair internal lesions as cause fatal ones, a competent attorney can as fluently get his client hanged as released, and an expert teacher can as well indoctrinate as educate his pupils. When we put ourselves in the hands of a member of a profession we have to trust that he will act in our best interest. The necessary moral dimension of the idea of a profession has hindered and rendered trivial much of the work done by sociologists, with Positivist misunderstandings of morality and an Empiricist theory of meaning, on the idea of a profession. The central features of a profession require that the members of a profession need to work within institutional forms in which they have the autonomy and authority to exercise their rational professional judgement free of pressures and influences which might distort it. Model T does not provide institutional forms within which teachers can act as members of a profession, and, more crippingly, Model T distorts and corrodes the idea of a teacher as a member of a profession.

5. A MODEST PROPOSAL

The problem that faces us is this: while preserving enough of Model T to satisfy the popular demand for it we have to create institutional forms which will encourage and enable teachers to make more fruitful use of their special expertise, talents and qualifications. We need an institutional form based on an overall ratio of members of the teaching profession to pupils of about 1/50. Let us take a few initial and tentative steps in envisaging how this might be done.

We need to achieve a much sharper focus on the functions of teachers, then give teachers the appropriate autonomy, authority and resources to carry out those functions with due professional responsibility, and then to consider in which respects Model T would have been modified.

The central function of teachers is to teach. But the teaching of some things requires no particular expertise, and it should not be a function of a member of the teaching profession to teach such things. Amongst those things the teaching of which requires special expertise there are marked differences arising out of the nature of what is being taught. There is only a **formal** similarity between the activity which could be called "teaching literacy" and the activity of "teaching the discipline of mathematics"; and it is quite clear that somewhat different training is required to "teach natural science" from that required to "teach Afrikaans". At ground level, or in the practical procedures which need to be employed, there are quite clear differences between "teaching the discipline of history" and "teaching Zulu as a second language". And of those things the teaching of which requires special expertise not all are appropriate or important for the whole of a population to learn. For example, the teaching of history requires special expertise but so does the teaching of abdominal surgery; but history seems prima facie more appropriate or important for the whole of a population to learn than than does abdominal surgery.

Now, at this giddy level of theorising and faced by the spectre of mere arbitrary assertion, let's propose that there will be, say, 10 distinguishible kinds of things which require special expertise to teach and which are appropriate and important for the whole of a population to learn. And let us call each of these distinguishable kinds of thing an "aspect of the general curriculum", or, an "aspect" for short. It might be misleading to call these things "subjects" or "disciplines" as what I have in mind might include "Basic communicative competence" (in our present world this might be literacy and numeracy, or, more plainly, reading, writing and elementary arithmetic) as well as "mathematics" (which seems to be an autonomous intellectual discipline), and words like "subject" or "discipline", as they are currently used, might carry distracting connotations.

Now, the function of a member of the teaching profession would be to contribute to the teaching of one of the 10 aspects of the general curriculum. And this gives a much sharper focus to the function of teachers. Let us now consider how we can provide members of the teaching profession, with their function clarified, with the appropriate autonomy and authority to fulfil their professional responsibility in the light of their professional judgement.

For a start we need to note that professional judgement is not subjective or arbitrary but that it depends on interpersonal agreement amongst those who are competent in the sphere in question. In relation to our present topic these spheres are simply aspects of the general curriculum. Each teacher of an aspect of the general curriculum (i.e. each member of the teaching profession) needs to work in close contact with his colleagues who are also teachers of that aspect. This is desirable for a number of interconnected reasons. Authoritative judgements about what counts as successful teaching of each aspect should rest with the teachers of that aspect; given various practical limits, how best to teach each aspect(including at which ages to teach each aspect), is something which can be properly determined only by competent teachers of that aspect; there is an indefinite number of occasions for the fruitful sharing of materials, ideas and responsibilities amongst teachers of an aspect; and so forth. Institutionally each teacher of an aspect should feel that his fundamental loyalty, as a member of the teaching profession, is not to the Education Department nor to his headmaster or school, but to his colleagues in the association of teachers of that aspect, and his success in his career should depend on their judgement. The power and the authority of the envisaged associations would need to be emphasised and provided with social reality in every possible way. The following are some tentative suggestions about how this might be done. In our kind of society prestige and status normally follow cash so it would seem to be a good idea for the members of professional teaching associations to be given considerably more generous salaries than Model T teachers earn. Secondly each association would control entry to membership of that association. The conditions for membership would probably need to be sensitive to the number of people available with appropriate qualifications and the practical possibilities of teaching the particular aspect of the general curriculum with various teacher-pupil ratios. Thirdly each association would collectively bear the responsibility for teaching their aspect of the general curriculum to all pupils. This would involve each association, working within current practical constraints, developing and employing the best feasible methods for teaching their aspect of the general curriculum, deciding at which ages and for which periods of time their aspects should be taught, and so on. And all assessment and evaluation would be firmly in the hands of each association. How each association decided to assess progress in their aspect of the general curriculum, the form and administration of certificatable evaluation used at various agreed levels, these matters would be under the control of the various associations. It would need to be made possible for all such professional judgements to be given concrete implementation.

At this stage we have our member of the teaching profession with his functions clarified and working in an institutional form which backs his authority, gives him relative freedom from distracting pressures and influences, and provides him with a continuing and fruitful source of support in conceiving of his professional functions lucidly and carrying them out competently. It is already clear that such a teacher would be able to teach many more people than the current Model T teacher, maybe twice or three times the number. The reasons for thinking this are pretty obvious, they include such things as that the teacher would no longer have to spread his energies across a variety of responsibilities which "filling a teaching post in a school" places upon him ;that the teaching arrangements within which he works, having been evolved in the light of what is best for teaching his aspect of the gen-

eral curriculum, will enable him to teach more effectively; that there will be considerable sharing of invented and discovered inspiriations, strategies and materials for the more effective teaching of that aspect of the general curriculum; and so forth. Only one, fairly obvious, detail needs to be added to the emerging institutional design before we turn our attention to consider what could be preserved of Model T.

The associations of professional teachers would each employ sub-professional assistants of a variety of kinds, according to their particular needs. Some such sub- and secretarial assistants, and some as professionals would be employed as technical assistants, some as administrative "tutors" to undertake, under the direct control of a professional teacher, the more routine or standard aspects of teaching. In the same vein it might become the practice for aspirant members of the profession, as part of their professional preparation, to join the team of a professional teacher for some period of time. With a variety of such sub-professional assistants, under the jurisdiction of professional teachers, added to our institutional design it can be seen that it would not be wildly unrealistic to think that a teacher-pupil ratio of six times that current on Model T might be feasible.

The outstanding question is what would be preserved of Model T. In general I think enough of Model T could be preserved to satisfy the public demand for it. For instance, the drive towards ten years of compulsory schooling for the whole population could continue (and is likely to be economically more feasible); pupils could still be called "pupils", and divided into groups, if this were thought convenient, and such groups could still be called "classes"; there could still be such a thing as the "school day", and it could still be divided into "periods", if this were thought a good idea; by and large the functions of schools could remain as they are at present, schools could still fall under the direct control of headmasters, and so forth. The main modifications would be in respect to the Model T ideas of "standards", "certification" and the permanent staff of schools. Let us briefly consider each of these in turn.

Were teaching and examining firmly in the hands of the associations of professional teachers there would no longer be any guarantee that a pupil would be at the same "level" for each aspect of the general curriculum; nor would there be any guarantee that all pupils at a particular level in respect to some aspect of the general curriculum would be at even roughly the same age. This means that "standards" as they are conceived on Model T would no longer exist, or if they were preserved as a convenient grouping of pupils, that a pupil was in, say, "standard six" would give no indication of the level he had reached in any aspect of the general curriculum. And this would have repercussions on Model T certification. There is little likelihood that any proposal which eliminated certification could be implemented. Model T creates and feeds a voracious demand for certification; were one being cynical one could say that the major appeal of certificates is that they relieve people, such as employers, of the effort of making their own judgement about people's competence. On Model T, certificates tend to be given in a wide variety of areas, and the main certificates (JC, matric) are monolithic. Were the teaching profession constituted as proposed, certification would need to be modified in the following ways: in the schooling system, certificates would be given only for competence in the various aspects of the general curriculum, and the certificates provided at the conclusion of formal (or compusory) schooling, would be likely simply to indicate the level reached by the pupil in each of the aspects of the general curriculum, there would be no assurance that any particular pupil would have reached even roughly the equivalent level in all aspects of the general curriculum.

The foregoing ways in which Model T would have been modified are relatively minor, the following is relatively more radical.

The permanent staff of schools would no longer include members of the teaching profession. The staff of schools would in-

clude a variety of adults with many different characteristics, talents and qualities. For instance, there is much to be said for employing in schools people who are warm and loving, and unsentimentally able to protect children from danger, and whose main talents are a fertile capacity to invent activities which children find absorbing and engaging, and a sensitivity to their shifting interests and passions. If it were thought desirable for schools to be paramilitary organisations, suitable staff, with suitably authoritarian modes of address, could be employed. It would seem to be a good idea to employ, as at present, people who have a passionate interest in sport, or music, or the theatre, etc. It might be possible, where preparing children for some line of occupation were thought a good idea, to employ some people in a part-time capacity to train children appropriately etc. Many people currently employed in schools might have talents and preferences which suit them more as members of the staffs of schools than as members of the teaching profession. Headmasters would have the overall responsibility for organising their schools and making them into educative communities, that is, communities which are protective and stimulating and provide their members with a humane social and physical environment which enables and encourages them to engage wholeheartedly in activities with no obvious "payoff". Members of the teaching profession would, by arrangement with headmasters, teach aspects of the general curriculum in schools, where the pupils for which they were responsible were in schools.

In the final section of this paper I shall make a few remarks about education, but before I do that I want to make a few points, in defence of the style in which I have put forward my proposal, about the design and development of institutions. In modifying an institution to cope with the problems we perceive ourselves as faced with, the probability is that a different set of problems will emerge. On my modest proposal many problems are likely to emerge which we don't at present have, and which, maybe, we can't envisage in advance. The appeal of the proposal rests on the belief that whatever those problems turned out to be they would be less intractable than the problems which face us now. It would be naive to imagine that institutions unlike buildings, are made up of persons whose conceptions of the institution have an impact on the nature of the institution, and this has no parallel in the case of bricks and mortar. Where I have provided detail in my modest proposal, my purpose has been to spell out what I mean; disagreement about detail would be no objection to the essence of the proposal. Its essence is that by professionalising teachers away from Model T we might be able to cope with a problem which, while we are trapped in Model T, has no solution.

6. EDUCATION

Model T is a product of the same kind of thinking that precipitated the Industrial Revolution. It is part and parcel of the Puritanical and Utilitarian ethos which underlies what it pleases the newspapers to call "the consumer society". Model T creates and perpetuates the myth that education is the same as schooling. Schooling is a social utility and on Model T education becomes a poor thing fed into the efficiency machine of means and ends and justified by the calculus of satisfactions. By now it is quite clear that Model T mass schooling does little to promote the education of the generality of those who are subjected to it.

Until we grasp this fact fully and richly, that some schooling might and some might not promote a person's education, that some schooling might even be anti-educative, we are unlikely to be able to escape the insidious pull of Model T, or seriously be able to consider any modification of it.

Maybe when someone says that education is "a kind of manufacturing process, what is manufactured is 'a useful member of society'" our consciences are a little ruffled. In our hearts of hearts we know that that is not what education is, yet we persist in trying to understand education in terms of something else. We say, for ex-

ample, that education is simply the inculcation of doctrines and ideologies, or we contend that it is indistinguishible from socialisation, or when someone says he is studying education we think he means that he is studying teaching, or in scientific tones of voice we act as if education were simply learning tout court, or we utter inane falsehood such as that education is the bringing of the young (by forming and moulding) to adulthood (then we find problematic the notion of adult education) etc. But at the end of all this we still don't understand what education is. A very central part of the difficulty is that we don't understand discursively what understanding is.

Either we think that understanding is to be exorcised in favour of scientifically operationalised "alternatives", or we romantically protest that understanding is locked secretly in the privacy of each person's soul (or gut). Both these views distort the notion of understanding and drive further from our grasp the possibility that we could come to understand what education is. Understanding develops in particular kinds of social environment, particularly those in which there are other persons with understanding. My modest proposal has, I think, a marginally better chance than does unmodified Model T of promoting people's education. On my proposal those teachers who teach discursive forms of rationality, who represent interpersonally-developed disciplines of thinking, have a better chance of conveying those forms of rationality or disciplines of thinking as effectively as they know how; and pupils in schools will be regularly in the company of other adults, untrammelled by syllabuses and examinations, who display other forms of understanding which, maybe, can't be taught but only caught. We tend to slip into a kind of philistine arrogance of thinking that we can deliberately control the process of education. In any case we need to ask whether schools are, or should be, the central agency in the promotion of education or whether, perhaps, other institutions within which we live our lives have an even more profound educative or anti-educative effect on us.

Understanding doesn't grow like a plant, by some kind of quasi-natural (biological?) process; nor is it something which can be the guaranteed product of a deliberate manipulatory process. We can make various arrangements which might promote people's education, but our success depends on factors beyond our control and cannot be measured by machines; but this doesn't mean that when we say that a person is educated we are merely uttering what in logical terms is no different from a burp.