

Support for the Teacher: A Report on an Evaluation

Prof. Harry Daniels

University of Birmingham

School of Education

Edgbaston

UK Birmingham B15 2TT

First I would like to say, that it's a real delight to be here working with you; I hope that what I am going to say will be valuable, but I had also looked forward at this time to learning from you about the way you are developing your own system here in Luxembourg.

Firstly teaching is difficult. It presents people with very complex problems to solve; it presents them within complex problems often very rapidly in complex situations. Lots of people are making demands on usually one adult. The kind of problems that teaching presents to teachers are not easily solved individually. It may be much more powerful to solve problems with other adults. And certainly, in the UK teachers are terribly isolated. If you work as a doctor in the UK and somebody comes in and tells you something about their health and you don't understand it, you are trained to go and ask one of your colleagues straight away about what they think about this situation, how they will think they would act, what ideas they have. If you work as an architect you work in a problem solving team. If you work as an engineer you work in business. In all major professions people solve problems together. The problems teachers face in teaching in the staff-room, those problems enter the micropolitical life of schools, and they impact on the way the many teachers feel they have to present themselves, in their professional life, and that is essentially as someone who can cope on their own with the children, and already is very self sufficient.

So it's in that kind of context that the work I want to talk to you this morning has a reason. A context where many, many, teachers feel quite isolated; they don't feel that they can easily work together and solve problems together. So that's the kind of context. The other part of context which I'll go through very, very briefly is the broadest special needs context in the UK which

is becoming a lot more complicated over the last few years, but in essence the argument that is taking place in the last fifteen years is that search for children who fit nicely into categories of special need is a misguided adventure. That we have to think about how a special need arises in terms of many factors contributing to children's difficulties in schools. That identifying children in terms of scales with administratively convenient cut of points, actually can create more problems than it solves. The will to start thinking about children experiencing difficulty of a quite a broad range: we have a politically convenient twenty percent figure. We've been trying to change attitudes and practice, so we stop the endless search for the ultimate cause of the difficulty, well, don't put so much emphasis on it any way. Except that any child any time in any situation will be performing in a way the reflects of a very complex interaction between who they are and where they are and how people are working with them.

And probably as teachers the one thing that we really we can make a difference to is the Curriculum. So the Curriculum becomes the focus of intervention for children who are experiencing difficulties in school. And that has caused us to do a lot more work in the analysis of teaching as a practice and in management to classrooms and in management of schools themselves as institutions, and we've started to talk in terms which have been devaluated a bit but all children having entitlements in terms of the Curriculum, and of the job of teaching has a lot to do with ensuring the children have access to those Curriculum experiences which they are entitled to. It's a part of the move to think of special education work in human rights terms, and that is been rumbling on in one form or another for a long time. It has involved schools, working-at one time anyway- working together much more closely to think about how the