The family class is a relatively new phenomenon. It is aimed at primary and lower secondary school pupils whom the schools have difficulties in accommodating, and it is described as an invitation to the parents to take responsibility for their child as a schoolchild. The family class has its own pedagogical agenda, which is concerned with relations, self-reflection, resources and different perceptions. This agenda does not correspond to the way in which the school principal describe and make use of the family class as she mainly uses it as a decision-making technology in relation to the possible expulsion of the pupil. By means of the concept *social steering technology* I will demonstrate that the family class is different technologies at the same time, and by means of the concept *boundary object* I will explain how the built-in ambiguities are part of the explanation of the wide dissemination and rapid success of the family class.

Keywords: family class · governmentality · self technology · social steering technology · boundary object · double bind communication

Hanne Knudsen, Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus, Copenhagen, Denmark. E-mail: hakn@dpu.dk

The betwixt and between family class

HANNE KNUDSEN

The family is increasingly seen as a decisive factor in relation to the activities of the schooling system. It is no longer enough that the families send their children off to school with lunch packs, help them with their homework and inform the school when the child is sick, and then trust the school's professional staff to take care of the rest. Today there is a general consensus that the families need to assume a responsibility for the development of their children's social and personal skills, so that the children are ready to receive education.[1] As a reflection of these conceptions, we are currently witnessing the introduction of various new methods whose purpose is to ensure that the family sees itself as a precondition for the educating activities undertaken by the schools. One of these new methods is the family class. In Denmark the first family class was established in 2003 in Helsingør. Since then the phenomenon has become widespread in the Danish Folkeskole,[2] and today there are many local authorities across the country that have set up family schools, family classes or similar schemes.[3]

This article analyses the family class through three different theoretical perspectives. First as an empowerment technology using Michel Foucault's concept of self technologies and governmentality. In addition to this, I will draw on ideas from Niklas Luhmann's systems theory widening the concept of self technology to a concept of social steering technologies in general. Moreover I intend to apply the concept of «boundary objects», which derives from the actor-network theories of Susan Leigh

149

Star and James R. Griemer (1989). But before I elaborate further on my theoretical framework, I will give a general presentation of the family class as a phenomenon. After that I will present and analyse my findings from a case study of a Danish family class, drawing on empirical observations and interviews. In this connection I will demonstrate the strong differences between the self-description of the family class on the one hand, and the school teachers' and the school principal's descriptions on the other. Finally, I will demonstrate how the score chart, which is a central technique used in the family class, functions as a boundary object, which is to say that it is identical and at the same time representative of quite different things for the various parties involved.

Family classes are an offer given to parents in cases where the school finds that their children need to improve their skills as pupils. The children in question are typically pupils who are disruptive to themselves or others, for instance through threatening or noisy behavior, by hitting, running about, being disorganised etc., to an extent that it becomes difficult for the school to accommodate them. When attending the family class, the pupil will be accompanied to school by his father, mother or another family member, and the aim is to help the parents change negative types of relations within the family. The relations within the family are considered vital in connection with the child's behavior in school.

It varies how many days in the week (though typically 1–3 mornings) and for how many weeks (typically 12–24 weeks) the parents/family members accompany the child to school, just as it varies who is in charge of the family class. In some cases it is the school's own teachers, and in others the classes are being conducted by professionals from special schools. Common to all family classes, however, is that they take their point

of departure in systemic family therapy. In many cases the Marlborough Family Service in London is cited directly as a model of inspiration (Asen, Dawson & McHugh, 2004).

The Marlborough Family Service takes a systemic approach, and their basic philosophy is that problem families have the resources to solve their own problems. «Systemic» in this context means that behavioral and communication problems are seen as the product of interpersonal relations. The basic idea is that problems are not rooted in the individual but in the relational context, such as the family, the local community, the school, work relations etc. This is in opposition to a «biomedical model», where explanations for disturbances are sought within the person's psyche. Instead, the systemic approach relies on:

an interactional framework, which counteracts the risk of becoming too preoccupied with one individual's mistakes and responsibility. To perceive and conceptualize behavior in a relational framework is liberating, as it offers a lot more options with regard to implementing changes if the people involved have become stuck. (Asen et al., 2004; p. 27)

The cause of the problem is not the individual person, but rather the relational context which the person is part of.[4] Thus it is also possible to change the individual person's behavior by changing the person's relational context. It is a question of being resource-oriented and creating positive expectations. Helping the involved parties to begin solving their own problems is a process in two stages: Initially the family members must become aware of the ways in which they form relations that may have a negative behavioral effect, but which can be changed. In connection with the Danish family classes the problems are often defined in terms of a failure on the part of the parents to assume the necessary authority in relation to their children. The next stage is that the families adopt a therapeutic perspec-

tive of the world (in the sense that they develop an understanding of how the communication controls the participants' behavior), which in turn makes the therapists redundant. This may be described as a process of double empowerment. The first level of empowerment is that the family becomes able to solve its own problems, and the second level involves the ability to recognize interactional problems, including in other families, and thus the ability to function as therapist in relation to one's own as well as others' problems.

The parents are encouraged to assume their parental authority, as they are continually asked to assess their child's behavior. In addition to this the family class teachers habitually probe into the parents' reactions to their child, thereby seeking to help the parents to reflect on their relations and take a responsibility.[5]

Theoretical framework and analytical questions

I draw mainly on three theoretical concepts: Self technology, social steering technology and boundary object. Foucault writes:

Technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality. (Foucault, 1997, p. 225)

The most interesting part of this is in my opinion the transformation of the self. The technologies of the self install the individual as one who is to be transformed. Also Luhmann works with an idea of transformation in his article on technology and steering. He takes the question of transformation and turns it into a general question of steering –

and not only steering the self but any matter. Niklas Luhmann writes that steering means:

to reduce the difference between a real and a preferred state of specific variables (for example, the rate of unemployment) (…) But *reducing differences* always requires *producing differences*. (Luhmann, 1990, p. 228; italics in original)

A social steering technology establishes and seeks to reduce the differences between an actual and a desired condition. It may be the difference between the actual and desired level of pollution, the actual and desired percentage of women in politics, the actual and desired level of young people taking an education – and it may be differences in relation to the individual and that individual's self-relationship, the variance constituted by a present physical or psychological state or similar. Both Foucault and Luhmann underlines that every technology bears in it selections and suppositions regarding causes and effects, and they both point to the fact that a technology consists of techniques, activities, operations. Drawing Foucault and Luhmann together, and with inspiration from (Andersen & Thygesen, 2004, p. 14) I will define a social steering technology as:

a routine and thereby repeatable organization of social relations with an inherent purpose and a delimited range of suppositions concerning causal relations.

A social steering technology has an inherent range of suppositions concerning causal relations, such as the possible explanations for unemployment and accompanying assumptions of which meaningful actions may be taken to overcome it, the possible relations between self, self-understanding and wisdom etc. Furthermore, a social steering technology involves certain routines and is thus marked by repeatability. For instance, school-home con-

sultations, team meetings and employee-development meetings all make use of preparation forms, follow a set schedule, involve a certain distribution of roles, etc.

Based on this definition of social steering technologies, it is possible to investigate the family class by answering the following types of questions: What routines and techniques does the family class involve, e.g. with regard to interviewing techniques, participants, schedules? What assumptions regarding causal relations are embedded in the technology? – including: What constitutes the possible problems and solutions in the family class? What variance(s) is/are defined and sought overcome with the family class?

My second theoretical concept is the concept *boundary object*. It is taken from Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griemer (1989) who do an analysis on Berkeleys Museum of Vertebrate Zoology in which both heterogeneity and cooperation are central issues. Star and Griemer (1989) show how there were potentially conflicting sets of concerns between several groups of actors: amateurs, professionals, animals, bureaucrats, 'mercenaries' – who succeeded in crafting a coherent problem-solving enterprise, surviving multiple translations. And they use the concept of «boundary object» to understand how these different sets of concerns could meet:

But the protocols are not simply the imposition of one world's vision on the rest; if they are, they are sure to fail. Rather, boundary objects act as anchors or bridges, however temporary. (Star & Griemer 1989, p. 414)

The boundary object is an object that is capable of serving different purposes depending on the point of view, while retaining its identity despite the different understandings of its function.

The central analytical question raised by Star and Griemer, which I can repeat in my study of the family class, is: «how do heterogeneity and cooperation coexist, and with what consequences for managing information?» (Star & Griemer, 1989, p. 414)

An example from a Danish *Folkeskole*

To give an example of how the family class has been adopted in a Danish context, I will now give a description of the specific family class which I have studied[6]. This family class met in a small classroom at the school, which was equipped with a kitchenette, candles, potted plants, 6 two-person desks with two chairs each, a sofa and a notice board. The two family class teachers came from a nearby special school. One was an educationist and a trained family therapist, and the other was a school teacher who had also taken various courses in family therapy. This family class could accommodate 6 children. During my observation period there were 4 children in the class. Two other pupils had stopped recently. The four pupils attending the class were all boys, between second and sixth grade. The boys were accompanied by an adult family member, typically their mothers, but sometimes also a father, grandmother or uncle. Some of the family members were unemployed, one had a flexible work schedule, while others had to send another member of the family to the class.

The family class met once a week for the morning lessons. During the rest of the week the children would attend their normal classes. The family class programme stretched over a period of six months. During the first two lessons of the family class, the children would work on their own school assignments, such as their homework. Here the parents would help and support their children, with the guidance of the family class teachers. Thus, each child would be seated together with his mother – in one case it was

the grandmother – while working on his math problems or other exercises. Whenever the child experienced problems, the mother or grandmother would then have to help him out. If the mother or grandmother experienced any problems, she could ask the family class teachers for help. The purpose of such procedures is to raise the parents' awareness of how they can assist their child in becoming a better pupil, but also to give them an insight into the actual problems that their child is experiencing.

Each pupil would work with three individually defined goals at a time. The goals had to be measurable, obtainable and concrete. The pupil had to be able to practice on and achieve these goals. The goals were listed on a weekly score chart, where all the pupil's teachers had to give the pupil a score between 1 and 4, for each of the goals and for every lesson. The teachers were also able to add a written comment, for instance to indicate if the class had been on a field trip and that a score could therefore not be given on that occasion. For the family class lessons, it was the parents who had to fill in the score chart. The child had to bring the score chart home every day and assess it with his parents. From the conversations I witnessed, it appears that there were days where the score chart was not assessed in this way, either because the score chart just stayed in the school bag, or because the teachers had forgotten to fill it in.

Family Class
This chart must be taken home every day after class and returned to the school on the following day: Goals and scores will be evaluated in the family class.

Date	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5	Lesson 6	Lesson 7	comments
Thursday	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	
Friday	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	
Monday	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	
Tuesday	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	
Wednesday	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	A___ B___ C___	

A: Peter practices to sit through the math classes without taking any breaks
B: Peter practices using his breaks during class to play with Lego, or to go out for a 'breather'
C: Peter practices taking a 10 minutes' break and then returning to class.

1= The child has not shown clear signs of practicing

2 = The child has shown signs of practicing

3 = The child has been practicing a lot

4 = The child has shown that he/she masters the exercise

Figure 1. The score chart.

During lesson 3 of the family class, the participants would evaluate the goals. The child had to read his goals out loud, after which the family class teachers would ask him if he had any specific observations to make. This could for instance be in relation to days with particularly low or high scores, big variances, problems occurring at specific times in the week or in connection with specific teachers, etc. The family class teachers emphasized the importance of using the scores as an occasion to engage in a conversation that was based on something concrete. The discussion could also be broadened, so that the other children and parents could participate.

Once a month the family class held a parents' round during lesson 4. The parents were seated on chairs forming a circle in the middle of the room, talking with each other and the family class teachers, assessing the progress made in the previous weeks. The parents did not have goals formulated in writing as the pupils did, but were nevertheless encouraged to work with themselves and their relations to their children. Here is an example of an exchange between one of the family class teachers and a mother:

The family class teacher: «How are you getting along with your new way of interacting with your child?» [i.e. setting boundaries and being consistent, HK].

The mother: «It's going better. I'm becoming more and more conscious of it. It has almost become a sport. (Addressing another mother: It was a shame that we didn't pursue it, when they didn't stay in the sofa as we had agreed.) He [the boy] reacts faster. I enjoyed the assignment we were given on boundaries: What boundaries they thought others expected of them. We talked quite a bit about that. For instance that he shouldn't stall, when he was asked to do something. He knows that he could improve in that regard.»

This mother accepts the subject position she is offered as mother in the family class. It is a subject position which takes its point of departure in a personal weakness, as the mother has difficulties in assuming authority over her child, but which also implies that the person is able to become empowered. In it's self description the family class is a liberating and empowering method. But empowerment is also power because it offers the subject position: «weak person in need of help to become strong». I can illustrate how this is power by giving an example of one who did not accept the offered subject position. The family class teachers told me about an uncle, whom I unfortunately did not meet. He turned up for the family class, standing in for a mother, dressed in a suit and carrying a briefcase. He did not see himself as a weak person in need of help to become empowered – on the contrary, he began to praise the family class teachers for their professionalism. The family class teachers did not quite know how to handle his comments and direct way of approaching them, just as his unwillingness to see himself as powerless posed a challenge in terms of how they could address him. (See Cruickshank, 1999, for an analysis of empowerment as a form of power that presupposes that the empowered person is initially powerless).

In the family class the goals for each of the six children were posted on the notice board. The goals which had been achieved were still displayed, but were marked with a flag. Next to the notice board there was a whiteboard with pyramid-shaped diagrams. The diagrams consisted of horizontal and vertical lines, so that each pyramid-shape contained 32 cells. Some of these cells had been filled in with a marker. And above some of the pyramids there were headings such as 'present' , 'trip to the shopping centre' etc., denoting the type of rewards that the children would get from their parents once all the cells had been filled in. Each time a child scored a 4, a cell would be completed.
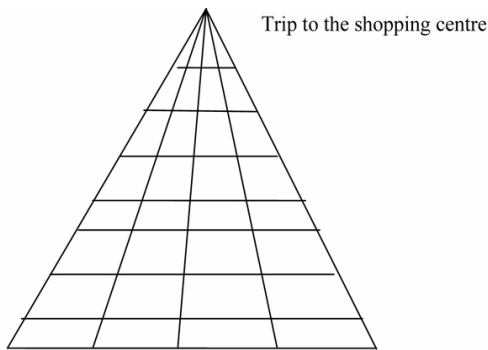
Trip to the shopping centre

Figure 2. Pyramid-shaped diagram from the white-board in the family class.

Once a child had scored 80 percent 3's and 4's in relation to a defined goal, he had fulfilled the criteria for being a good pupil in relation to that goal, at which point new goals would be arranged. The goal would be checked as 'achieved' on the board, and everybody would applaud and celebrate the achievement with cinnamon rolls. After this, a new goal would be set up. The arrangement of such goals takes place through a negotiation involving one of the child's teachers, the child itself and his mother (or another adult family member), and with the family class teacher acting as a mediator.

Both in the interviews and the evaluation of the family class, it was emphasized that the formulated goals must be sufficiently concrete, positive and measurable, so that the child will be able to achieve them within a short period of time (a period of 4–6 weeks is mentioned in one instance), and thereby ending up believing in the possibility of change.

In an interview with the family class teachers: «If you practice on various smaller goals, where the possibility of success is relatively high…then of course that leads to a certain amount of hope and motivation.» Thus the ambition in relation to the child is

that it must regain its belief in the possibility of change. In this respect the family class conforms to the ideas of the Marlborough school: The goals must be positively formulated goals that lead to a belief in the attainability of change. And in addition to this the child's performance in relation to the goals must be measured, so that the child may see a direct connection between his/her own increasingly positive behavior and the increasingly positive reactions of his/her peers and the teachers.

The family class: one thing and at the same time different things

As mentioned earlier, and as appears from the various interviews and written consultation documents, when seen from the perspective of the family class teacher, the family class constitutes a technology for turning destructive relations, particularly within the family but also within the class, into constructive relations by giving the children and parents a better understanding of how their behavior and ways of communicating have implications for the reactions they get. With respect to the relations between parents and child, it is especially important that the parents assume the authority and take their part of the responsibility for the child's behavior in school. From being indifferent about the school, and perhaps even talking about it in negative terms, the parents must be made aware that it is important how they talk about the school at home. From not being conscious of the importance of their own role, they must be taught that the way in which they manage – or fail to manage – to set boundaries for their child will have a direct bearing on how the child is able to cope with adults telling him what to do in school. The family class is also a technology for developing the child's self-image – from one of not understanding the implications of one's own actions and not believing that improve-

155

ments can be made, to one of understanding and believing in improvements and having some knowledge of what it takes to bring about such improvements.

Generally speaking, the work in the family class is based on the premise that there are destructive relations, unwanted behavior, negative descriptions and a disclaiming of responsibility – and that all this may be turned into constructive relations, desired behavior, motivating descriptions and a taking of responsibility. Everybody's perception of the mutual relations is relevant, no one has a monopoly of the true experience of things, and no one has a right to put the other participants down. In addition to this, signing their child and family up for the family class is voluntary for the parents. The atmosphere is marked by positive thinking and praise; there are no negative sanctions and no threats. The family class is a refuge, where there is room for the necessary amount of openness about one's own insecurities and room for self-exposure. There is no horizon of exclusion, everybody is 'in' and expulsion is not an option. The fact that some teachers perceive of the family class as a possible step towards exclusion from the school is something which the family class teachers look upon with dislike and mild contempt.

From the perspective of the headmaster, however, things are looking quite different. In the evaluation of the family class the school principal stressed, among other things, that the family class can be used as a decision-making tool, when having to consider what to do with the problematic children:

It was a piece in the puzzle of finding out what might be a good future for him – and it helped us to reach the conclusion that it had to be now. (The school principal, at the evaluation)

According to its self-description, the family class is a refuge with room for everyone, where the possibility of exclusion is not present. But for the school principal the family class seems to have a clear purpose in relation to questions of in- and exclusion. It constitutes a tool for clarification. In other words, to the principal the family class is a technology for finding out whether expulsion of the child can be avoided. Once the pupil has attended the family class, there is a better basis for deciding whether the pupil can be retained in the school, possibly with the aid of other special support measures, or if he or she should be excluded. From the point of view of the school, a pupil who disrupts a teaching situation – through noisy or violent behavior, by disrupting other pupils, disconnecting the computer while others are working on it, etc. – renders himself potentially irrelevant to the teacher's communication (Luhmann, 2002, p. 124). Using the family class as a temporary arrangement becomes the school principal's basis for assessing whether the pupil can stay in the school, possibly in an 'inner outside' (Foucault, 1992), for instance with the aid of a psychologist, by putting him in a special class or giving him special assistance in his own class, etc. In this context it can be rather complicated to uphold the principles that family class participation must be optional for the parents and that the family class must allow for an openness about one's own insecurities.

To see the family class as a decision-making tool in relation to the possible expulsion of the pupil does not in any way correspond to the self-description of the family class. Sanctions, negative descriptions or threats of exclusion are not part of the concept. But when the school principal is involved, for instance in the evaluation of the family class, the whole exercise takes on the appearance of a screening process: Either the family class has contributed to ensuring the

pupil's future as a normal pupil in the class, or it has shown that the pupil should be excluded or be given special support. The decision is in the hands of the principal.

What, then, does the family class represent from the perspective of the school teachers? When interviewing the principal of the school with which the family class I examined was affiliated, I pointed out that she assumed a big responsibility by ruling what was right and wrong and deciding what the next step of action should be in a considerable number of cases. In response to this she noted that she felt that her responsibility was to attend to the school's interests. And in relation to how she prioritized her efforts, she said: «When the teachers break down in front of me, when they tell me that they cry and throw up when they get home from work, then that really gets to me.»

I wonder if the teachers do not see it as their primary responsibility to teach, rather than 'attending to the school's interests'? To ensure that education can take place in the classroom? And in this context some children will experience disturbances. The class represents a unity. If there is one pupil who renders the teaching of the class impossible, or at least causes disturbance, then that pupil must change his or her behavior or be removed from the class. Children are singled out for the family class if they disrupt the class teaching, and therefore need to be removed from the classroom or have their behavior corrected. According to this train of logic, being five minutes late for class is not much better than being fifteen minutes late, as it is still disruptive to the teaching. The family class teachers complain because the teachers tend to only use 1 or 4 in the score chard and not recognize the small improvement by giving 2 or 3. But if the difference that the teachers are using is disrupting/not disrupting it makes sense to only use 1 and 4 recognizing the pupil as either disrupting or not.

From the school teachers' point of view, the most important role of the family class is to help to ensure that the teaching in the class can take place without any disturbances.

The parents may adopt various perspectives on the role of the family class: They can either accept the offer of the family class to develop their own relations to their child. Or they may see the family class as a means to ensure their child's continued inclusion in the school. In relation to the latter perspective, it is not given that the self-description of the family class as an optional offer is shared by the parents. Because what is the alternative to accepting the offer? That your child must be taken out of the school and placed in a special school?

Thus, it is my claim that the family class represents at least three things at the same time: According to the description of the family class teachers, (i) it represents a technology for empowerment and self-development of the parents and the child (as well as of the school teachers). (ii) To the school teachers it constitutes a technology for ensuring that the teaching in the classroom can be carried out, and (iii) to the school principal it offers a basis of decision for determining whether the child must be in- or excluded.

What happens in situations where the principal and the family class teachers seek to engage in a dialogue?

Thus, according to my description the family class represents several things at the same time. This makes it potentially ambiguous what is at play when the family class, the school teachers and the principal are all gathered at the same time. My hypothesis is that it is as a consequence of this ambiguity that the sixth grade boy in the following example

reacts alternately by joining in and opting out of an evaluation of how much he has developed during his stay in the family class.

The participants in the evaluation are: Anthon from sixth grade, his mother, the family class teacher, a teacher from the school and the principal:

The family class teacher: «Okay, we're all here. You might take over (principal's name), since you've just been here.»

Anthon: «I don't know anything.»

The family class teacher: «Anthon, what's the biggest success?»

Anthon: «That I'm doing better in school.»

The family class teacher: «How can you tell?»

Anthon: «I'm not being scolded as much as I used to.»

The mother: «I can see that he is developing. There is more focus on the difficult things. (…) The demands to the parents are more concrete. And because of this I'm also more focused on him …

The family class teacher: (principal's name)?

The principal: «I don't see it as much. But, Anthon, you do have more control over the things you do. I see a different Anthon who is more in control. I'm not involved in any conflicts that revolve around you. That's a really good sign, there was only a minor incident involving a broom the other day. And seeing you down here warms my heart. It's good to have your wonderful, calm mother here.» (mother smiles)

The family class teacher: «How can we improve things beyond this?»

Anthon: «If I pull myself together even more.»

The family class teacher to the mother: «And you?»

The mother: «I need to react faster – to make my point more clearly. That also helps Anthon, so he knows when to stop. ...

The family class teacher: «Anthon?»

Anthon: «I don't know. I'm not qualified to say.»

In my opinion, Anthon's statement «I'm not qualified to say» point to the level of ambiguity that pervades the communication situation, indicating a certain level of confusion as to whether the evaluation should be seen as part of the principal's decision process, or if it is part of an assessment of how things can be improved in relation to Anthon's continued attendance at the school. «I'm not qualified to say» is Anthon's response to the invitation to offer an opinion on how things may be further improved.

Within the framework of the family class, the whole point is that no one is more qualified to interpret and express their opinion than the others. Everyone is considered an expert, but Anthon declines to accept this premise. He makes this statement right after the principal has said: «I see a different Anthon», and maybe it should be seen as a reaction to this? If the principal offers a description of him, maybe there is no reason for him to do the same? Maybe the principal owns the right to describe and make assessments after all?

Later on in the conversation Anthon says: «Is there a score below 0?», as a reply to the question of how worried he thinks the adults have been for him on a scale from 1 to 10. This is another «no thank you» on his part to participate. Anthon is encouraged to look at himself through the eyes of the adults, as someone who has to change from having a 'worrying' behavior to one that is desirable. He declines to confirm the description of himself as someone whose behavior is worrying, and thereby as someone who needs to change his behavior.

Within the framework of the family class, all the involved parties should take part in the setting up of goals, whereas in a conventional school context, the distinctions be-

tween normal and deviating behavior are given, and it is the teachers/principal who have the jurisdiction. Finally, towards the end of this excerpt Anthon exclaims: «Look at that bird!», and points at a wagtail that is perched on a rooftop outside the window. Maybe the significance of this statement is: «You just keep talking anyway, and even though you ask for my opinion, it is the principal who makes the final decision in the end».

If my description of the family class as being several technologies at the same time is correct, what, then, is it that ensures its continued existence? And what is it about the family class that has made it such a success, having been adopted by so many municipalities in Denmark over such a short period of time? As previously mentioned, my conclusion is that its success is partly due to its capacity to be both robust and flexible. Especially the score chart functions as a «boundary object»; an object that is capable of serving different purposes depending on the point of view, while retaining its identity despite the different understandings of its function (Star & Greimer, 1989).

The score chart as boundary object

With its three goals and four possible scores, the score chart represents a central tool in the family class. The child/pupil carries this score chart along to each class he/she attends (and thereby passes it on from one teacher to the other) and brings it home from school, just as it is the score chart which forms the basis of the reflections made in the family class. Assessing and measuring the children's/pupils' performance is a perfectly normal exercise in the context of the school. Thus, to award the child a score from 1 to 4 makes immediate sense, also to the teachers. As one family class teacher noted:

The concept itself of measuring the children's performance is incredibly easy to adopt. But unless you have some experience with family therapy, it can become just another way of putting down the kids. (Interview with family class teachers)

But the score system plays another role in the family class than it does in connection with the teacher-pupil relations. In the family class the score chart provides the basis for reflection and dialogue. It is imperative that the teachers award a score that corresponds directly to the pupil's behavior, so that the basis of the pupil's reflections is as true and fair as possible. The score must be a factual input, so that the pupil can relate to the assessment and possibly take any necessary consequences of it. The teacher must not give the pupil a score based on any underlying pedagogical intensions, such as awarding a high score to motivate the pupil, even though that score does not reflect the pupil's actual behavior.

Similarly, the teacher must not give the pupil an undeservedly low score in one area, because the pupil has not behaved properly in another. According to the family class teachers, there is a tendency among the school teachers to do this when assessing the children, as they seem to have difficulties in focusing exclusively on the individually defined goals, rather than on the pupil's general behavior. «The concept of measuring the children's performance is incredibly easy to adopt», but to ensure that the assessment can be used as a springboard for reflection and discussion, thereby ensuring the pupil's self-development, requires family-therapeutic experience. If you look at the score chart from the perspective of the school principal, the scores become part of the basis for deciding whether the pupil should stay in the school or be given another offer of education. In this way the scores becomes a reflec-

tion of the pupil's potential for development. From this point of view, there are no reasons for interpreting any variations in the scores given on the same day, or from one subject to another – instead, it is the overall picture that is of interest, to help sorting the pupils in the family class.

Conclusion

With Foucault the family class can be regarded as a self technology. It offers the child and the parent the special subject position «weak person in need of help to become strong», and it invites the parents to reflect on themselves as someone in lack of authority and someone who should see themselves as responsible regarding their child's behavior in school. In it's self description the family class is a liberating empowerment technology. But as Foucault (1997) and Cruickshank (1999) show, empowerment also is power, meaning the special form of power where the individual is being positioned as someone powerless and wishing to become empowered – by help from the professionals. So the family class could be analysed from a governmentality perspective.

In my analysis I also regard the family class from a steering technology perspective with inspiration from Luhmann. Hereby it is possible to show that the family class is not only a powerful governmentality technology but several technologies at the same time. To the teachers it is a tool to safe guard the discipline in the classroom. And when it comes to the school principal's office, the family class turns into a decision-making tool in relation to the possible expulsion of the pupil. This does not in any way correspond to the self-description of the family class. Sanctions, negative descriptions or threats of exclusion are not part of the concept. But when the school principal is involved, for instance in the evaluation of the family class,

the whole exercise takes on the appearance of a screening process. This ambiguity means that the communication to families participating is characterized by double bind communication such as «The family class constitutes a safe environment for personal development on the pupil's own terms – until the principal finds that the improvements made by the pupil are inadequate.»

In the last part of my analyses I use the concept «boundary object» to explain how the family class can at the same time be the meeting point for the different points of view of the teachers, the headmaster, the parents and the family class teachers. I show how the score chart, which constitutes a central technique in relation to the family class, is both robust, as it constitutes a concrete and unambiguous tool, and flexible at the same time, as it may have different implications for the various parties involved. It is open whether the score chart is a tool used by the school to assess the pupil's progress, a decision-making tool for determining whether he or she should be excluded or retained, or a tool to help the child engage in reflection and self-development.

The family class is an ambiguous and heterogeneous technology, hold together by boundary objects such as the score chart. The family class is also in movement. There are various ways in which municipalities and schools are working with and developing the concept. It is going to be interesting to follow the development of this ambitious and powerful betwixt and between.

Notes

1 For a further discussion of the discursive articulation of the family's responsibilities in relation to the schooling system in Denmark over the last 100 years, see Knudsen (2009). For analyses of the national conceptions of the school-family relationship in Sweden

between 1930–1970 and 1970–1978 see Persson (1996, 1998).

2 The *Folkeskole* is the public school system which covers the entire period of compulsory education in Denmark, that is, primary and lower secondary education. The schools are regulated by the Danish Folkeskole Act and are financed and administered by the municipalities.

3 It is not just in Denmark that the relations between parents and schools are being redefined. In Britain parenting programmes were introduced in 2004, which involve a wide range of different methods:

to help parents address their child's miss-behavior as part of an overall parenting intervention. These include cognitive behavior therapy, mentoring, parenting advice, individual family based therapy, functional family therapy, solution focused therapy, family group conferencing, and group based programmes. Guidance. Para 2.3. (Vincent-Jones, 2006, p. 258)

The above quotation is taken from the guidelines laid down by the Home Office/Department of Constitutional Affairs/Youth Justice Board: «Parenting Contracts and Orders Guidance», February 2004). The extent to which conceptions of partnership, mutual contracts and empowerment of the family in relation to the school may have resulted in the introduction of new methods in the other Nordic countries is beyond the scope of my investigation.

4 In Norway researchers like Thomas Nordahl (e.g. 2008) and Terje Overland (e.g. 2007) work with similar descriptions of problems as being relationally conditioned.

5 There is a growing tendency to hold citizens responsible, especially through contracts or quasi-contractual relations, and not just in connection with the relations between homes and schools but in a wide range of areas. See Andersen (2003) for ana-

lyses of the special kind of power that could be called 'duty to freedom' where the state seeks to govern on the citizens' relationship to themselves.

6 The empirical material comes from observations over two days in the family class, and observations in different kinds of meetings in the school where the family class took place. These observations took place over a period of five months. I have also interviewed the two family class teachers, the headmaster, school teachers, and the man who 'imported' the concept to Denmark. Besides this I have used relevant written material, e.g. the political documents from the municipality of this school, and the book that the family class teachers pointed to as their main source of inspiration.

Literature

Andersen, N. Åkerstrøm (2003): *Borgerens kontraktliggørelse*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Andersen, N. Åkerstrøm & Thygesen, N. Thyge (2004). Selvskabelsesteknologier i den selvudsatte organisation. *GRUS*, 73, 8–29.

Asen, E., Dawson, N. & McHugh, B. (2004). *Flerfamilieterapi*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Cruikshank, B. (1999). *The Will to Empower*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Foucault, M. (1992). *Galskapens historie*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag.

Foucault, M. (1997). Technologies of the self. In *The Essential works of Michel Foucault*, *Vol. 1*. New York: The New York Press.

Knudsen, H. (2009). *Har vi en aftale?* Aarhus: Aarhus universitet, Danmarks pædagogiske universitet. (in press)

Luhmann, N. (1990). Technology, environment and social risk: A system perspective. *Industrial Crisis Quarterly, 4*(3), 223–231.

161

Luhmann, N. (2002). Inklusion og eksklusion. *Distinktion*, 4, 121–139.

Nordahl, T. (ed.) (2008): *Adfærdsproblemer hos børn og unge: teoretiske og praktiske tilgange.* København: Dansk psykologisk Forlag

Overland, T. (2007): *Skolen og de utfordrende elevene: om forebygging og reduksjon av problematfred*. Oslo: Fagbokforlaget.

Persson, S. (1996): *Samhällets reproduktiva ansvar: statliga föreställningar om förhållandet mellan förskola, skola och familj under 1930– 1970.* Malmö: Lärarhögskolan, Institutionen för pedagogik och specialmetodik.

Persson, S. (1998). *Från lågfunktionell till högkompetent: statliga föreställningar om familjen under 1970–1998.* (FOU projekt, Rapport Nr. 3) Malmö: Lärarhögskolan, Institutionen för pedagogik.

Star, S. Leigh & Griesemer, J.R. (1989). Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907–39. *Social Studies of Science* , *19*(3), 387–420.

Vincent-Jones, P. (2006): *The New Public Contracting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.