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**A project on teachers' practice of new governance technologies in primary school and its implications for the pupils.**

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**Abstract**

The theme of this study is governance technologies in the Danish primary school. The study deals with the importance of the introduction of newer technologies in school - technologies which are all aimed at improving students' academic performance and learning outcomes.

My special focus is on how teachers concretely practice these technologies in everyday life, including the considerations that underlie these practices. This focus is linked with a desire to further elucidate the governance technologies' impact on pupils in Danish schools.

Throughout the study, I work at the basis of two approaches: A teacher-oriented approach where I focus on the teachers' perspectives in working with technologies and a pupil-oriented approach focusing on the importance of practice in relation to the students, which the governance is directed against.

The theoretical framework for the study is based upon the educational sociologist Basil Bernstein's theory of classification, framing and pedagogic codes.

This involves an understanding that teachers' practice of governance must be understood as shaped by both the teachers' own perspectives, attitudes, experiences and concerns but also by macro-structural conditions in the form of regulations and laws that exist in relation to the use of technologies.

Thus the practice of governance is considered as a recontextualization process where 'external' power structures are being reshaped within local constructions of meaning. The present study is part of my Ph.D. project in progress.

In this paper I put out a description of the research field around governance technologies in schools, followed by a discussion about the research debate in the field. These sections form the basis for a further explanation of my position and approach to the field. Further, I present the project related to the theme of the summer school Learning Cultures, Cultures of learning followed by my theoretical approach and a description of my reflections on fieldwork and methodology. The paper concludes with some points for discussion at the summer school.

**Field of the research project**  
Governance technologies in public schools is in itself not a new phenomenon. Since time immemorial, schools have taken advantage of various governance tools such as classroom grades and exam. In recent years there has been - if not a bloom - then at least new forms of governance technologies in schools (Moos 2007: 5.9). A number of these newer technologies should be seen as the result of the School Effectiveness Movement, which in recent years has gained more and more influence internationally, and also has a 'hit' the Danish elementary school.

This has resulted in a different way of thinking about school and learning in the Danish primary school. Thus, much more than previously we now focus on how the Danish pupils perform academically compared to students in other countries. This way of thinking in competition has -among other things - resulted in profound international comparisons and reviews of education - first and foremost by the OECD (Moos 2007: 10).

PISA surveys are a familiar example of this, and here it was established that Danish school children read significantly worse than students in many other countries.  
Although governance technologies are not a new phenomenon in the Danish school, we see, both internationally and in Denmark a tendency to make education more efficient and compatible to the global market - and thus also the school - a trend that, as mentioned, has led to the introduction of a number of new governance technologies such as mandatory national testing, student plans, canons and step-and end goals for the pupils of the Danish school. The technologies featured here are all considered as means to raise the Danish pupils' academic achievement.

**The research debate**  
The introduction of modern governance technologies in the Danish primary school has given rise to much debate both in academia and in society more generally. Here I will confine to relate myself to the research debate, which generally can be said to divide into two camps: The School Effectiveness Movement and critics of the very same movement.  
The School Effectiveness paradigm takes its source in the UK, where the neoliberal wave has influenced educational thinking and policy for longer than eg in Denmark (Krogh-Jespersen 2005:53). Research on School Effectiveness occurs also in Britain and spread during the 1990s internationally, as there is today an active and international network among School Effectiveness and School Improvement Researchers (Ibid: 56).

The argument among the members and advocates for the School Effectiveness Movement is largely about the need to 'tighten up' on a number of factors in elementary school if students shall be able to achieve an optimal academic achievement through their schooling. In Britain, research has resulted in a number of key factors that specifically act as indicators of student performance and how effective schools are[[1]](#footnote-1). These factors – among other things - consists in introducing a more targeted teaching, to work from established guidelines for teaching content, to provide high expectations for the pupils, providing positive feedback to the pupils and to monitor pupils' progress through standardized assessment forms (Reynolds 1996).

Not surprisingly, the members of the School Effectiveness Movement concludes that research shows that the above factors affect students' academic achievement in school, thus the factors that count as means are all looking for the same goal: Maximising development in student achievement through their schooling (Krogh-Jespersen 2005: 59).  
The trend is clear. In the School Effectiveness paradigm it is the student achievement, there is absolutely central, and it is largely the teachers’ responsibility, through focused and determined teaching and evaluating student performance, to ensure students' academic progress.

As mentioned, the School Effectiveness paradigm, also in Denmark, won more and more influence and with the publication of the anthology 'The world's best school' in 2005, edited by the then Education Minister Bertel Haarder, the idea of ​​strengthening the professionalism and the culture of evaluation in the Danish primary school became even stronger. Haarder wrote following:  
  
'Denmark must have the world's best school ... All students must have good academic skills. " "The goals are hard to reach. This is because the school for years have placed too little emphasis on professionalism and performance. "We have no strong tradition of assessing students' skills and give feedback to pupils and parents" (Haarder 2005).

Through increased professionalism and evaluation of student achievement the conclusion of the proponents of the School Effectiveness paradigm is that it is possible and also necessary in the national and international competition to strengthen both the 'strong' as the 'weak’ students performance. To strength all students’ achievement are thus central to the paradigm. Thus, in the beginning of the 1970s, the American School Research concluded that schooling does not make any difference but that the students' social and family background ultimately decided the learning outcomes. The School Effectiveness Movement rejected this thinking and introduced a ‘new’ thinking: That school *is* useful and makes a difference. The paradigm is thus a notion of equality as a primary goal (Krogh-Jespersen 2005: 54.62).

As mentioned, the School Effectiveness paradigm gave rise to much criticism - a criticism that both raises concern in relation to the students and partly in relation to teachers and their professionalism.

The profession-oriented part of the research debate thus argues that the School Effectiveness paradigm and the new forms of governance technologies are helping to undermine the theoretical anchoring of the teachers’ work. The increased control, according to critics, reflect a deprofessionalization of teachers - a deprofessionalization arising from the fact that teacher professionalism with the School Effectiveness Movement is uniquely associated with the ability to act according to certain rules and norms. The professional teacher is one who is able to realize a "best practice" such as it is described by a number of key factors (see for example the previously mentioned key factors). Brusling (2003) similar states that the deprofessionalization is manifested by an increased regulation of teachers' work, where teacher competence is defined within a narrow target and controllable framework.

Supporters of the School Effectiveness paradigm and the new governance technologies in reverse advocates that research, education and school development initiatives have strengthened the teachers' professionalism in terms of their increasing mastery of performance factors - in other words, of the tools of governance (Krogh-Jespersen, 2005).

Parallel to the (de)professionalization debate and concern about the effect of the governance technologies on teachers' work-life stands a more student-centered criticism, especially dealing with students' educational process. The criticism primarily highlights the danger of a movement away from the general development perspective, where the’ ‘whole’ development of the child is at the center[[2]](#footnote-2). With requirement of documentation - not only by teachers' activities, but also of students' academic progress (eg, student test results) – the critics see a danger that the school services will be split up into measurable and verifiable individual activities rather than deal with 'the whole child ', or with the child's overall development (Ahrenkiel et al. 2011: 1ff).

With governance technologies such as student plans and national tests that specifically target each child's academic (and social) performance, is also a strong individualization trend in public school promoted, where the core of pedagogy is how the individual student, so to speak, 'improve' his learning and his academic learning outcomes. But student learning cannot be 'improved' in any direction as it is a certain knowledge and certain skills that are valued within governance technologies as step- and end goals, canons and national tests, while others are blocked out. Thus it is pointed out by several critics that governance technologies with their valuation of certain kinds of knowledge helps to standardize and unify students as they are expected to have acquired the same knowledge and skills at the same time, with the risk of a categorization of students in certain life stages (see eg Ahrenkiel et al. 2011, Gitz-Johansen 2009).

**My position in the field**  
When I through the above, has spent a relatively amount of space to outline the debate around the School Effectiveness Movement and the introduction of new governance technologies in the Danish elementary school this is - in the following - to outline my specific position and approach to the field.  
Through reading the literature and research in the field, I have several times thought that something is missing, or rather that among both the proponents of the School Effectiveness Movement as among the critics of this there is a lack of significant nuances of what governance is going to mean to both teachers and students.

If one starts by looking at the arguments of the School Effectiveness Movement the proponents seem mindset to the notion that as long as teachers are following the designated key factors (eg to teach according to fixed guidelines for the content of teaching and evaluating student performance), the students' academic achievement of teaching will naturally improve. Herein lies for me to see a mechanical way of thinking, where teachers' own resources and thoughts about teachers' work is neglected. This is of course also what critics refer to when they talk about a deprofessionalization of teachers' work.

On the other hand there seem to be a tendency among the critics to overlook the teachers' possibilities of action and concrete practices in relation to the new governance technologies. For me, there appears among both the School Effectiveness proponents as among the critics to be an understanding of governance as an unmediated size - as something emanating 'from above' (in terms of political decisions and orders) which acts unmediated onto both teachers as students. Either the teachers are professionalized through the process of documenting, testing and evaluation (School Effectiveness movement) or vice versa they are deprofessionalized and lose their theoretical grounding in the work (the critics).

Although this project is not explicitly about whether teachers are professionalized or the reverse as a result of the School Effectiveness paradigm in the Danish school, the above illustrates a trend in the current research to overlook the fact that governance is not just something that is reorganized into school unmediated but is something whose expression and meaning largely depends on the meaning and significance the teachers put into working with the different technologies and thus of the ways in which they are specifically practiced in the everyday life in school.

This leads on to the debate about the governance technologies' impact on students. How are we able to understand and analyze the governance impact on the pupils - whether this leads to improved student performance, as the School Effectiveness Movement believes or if it leads to a standardization of the pupils and a move away from a 'whole development', as critics argue or again whether it leads to something completely else - if we do not look at and try to understand how teachers concretely work with the governance in the schools?

What I'm trying to illustrate is that in the current research debate we often see a distinction between a teacher and a student perspective, in other words between a profession-oriented research in governance and a user-oriented, dealing with students and their development. Although the School Effectiveness Movement argues that an increased control and efficiency of teachers' work leads to increased professionalization, this only deals with the teachers' work-life to a very small extent, including the teachers’ understandings and practices in their daily work. And the reverse is the case in the profession-oriented research, where teachers' professionalism and work naturally form a strong field of interest, but where the connections between the teachers’ practices and the impact on students are neglected.

To understand the impact of governance on both teachers and students, I believe that it is not only appropriate but also necessary to link the teacher and student perspectives together. Thus governance technologies are not only aimed against one of the two categories, but against both in interaction with each other. Teachers work with and practice of technologies must therefore necessarily depend on their perceptions of and experiences with students, as the technologies impact on students' schooling necessarily must depend on how teachers understand and practice these.

Inspired by, Peter Ø. Andersen (2003) I therefore occupy a different position in the field where the professional perspective is connected to the current users of public school - the students. In other words, I work from two approaches: A profession-oriented approach where I focus on teachers' perspectives in working with the technologies and a participatory approach with emphasis on the impact of teachers' practice of governance on the students, it is directed against. In relation to this, my overall research question is as follows:  
  
*In what ways does teachers practice the new governance technologies in school and how does these practices impact the students?*

As I have tried to illustrate through the above, I understand the teachers practices as something that partly occurs in the encounter between political decisions as the introduction of different governance technologies in schools and the here to related policies (macro level) and teachers' own perceptions, ideas and resources (micro level ) and partly as something that is dependent on the meeting between the teachers and the students which the technologies are directed against – so to speak I work with an understanding of practices as something that is also formed and developed through the specific interactions between teachers and students. In relation to this it is not only my intention to study how teachers practice the governance technologies, but also to understand *why* they practice as they do. With this it is my intention to put a subjective perspective on the teachers’ practices, where their thoughts, their ways of making meaning and their experiences of governance are central.

**The relation to the theme of summer school**   
Thus the above relates to the theme for this year's summer school in several ways. First, in relation to illustrate how changes in the Danish educational and school policy - in this case through the introduction of new governance technologies - creates new demands to the teachers. And second, in relation to my desire to understand the significance of these changes, notably from the teachers' subjective perspectives. The way teachers practice governance technologies, is also creating specific (learning) cultures in schools - both in relation to the students and what there are expected to acquire and in relation to teachers, who through the practices learn how the governance can (or cannot) make sense in the daily work and in relation to the students.

In this way, the governance technologies and practices of these also produce a certain learning – with both students and teachers - on how to respectively 'do' teacher and pupil. Thus, the governance create and influence the (learning) culture in public schools in different ways in the sense that culture also must be understood as something that subjects constructs through their practicing - in this case of governance technologies.

**Theoretical framework**With my understanding that governance not only works from the top down, but is being reshaped and recontextualized in practice I have chosen to use the education sociologist Basil Bernstein's theory of coding, classification and framing.  
In Bernstein’s theory it is a recurrent point that overall power relations (governance) not only sits through unmediated, but is converted at the micro level – this is what Bernstein calls the recontextualization process. Thus, although Bernstein does not deal directly with the subject, he points out that individuals – in the meeting with governance - have the potential to act back on and reshape it (Chouliaraki 2001: 39).

As I have earlier mentioned, I see a tendency in the current research debate to neglect the focus on teachers' own considerations and possibilities to act in working with the governance and thus it is not emphasized how teachers concretely practices the new technologies. Often the focus is on the governance technologies alone - that is the technology as a measuring tool and at the macro-structural (governmental) intention with this technology. Based on this the effects of the governance tools at the micro level (in school) are further concluded, apparently without seeking to describe the relationship between the two levels - in other words, without elucidating the processes, which so to speak connects the two levels. With Bernstein's concepts of coding, classification and framing, it will be possible however, with the use of a quote from Annegrethe Ahrenkiel’s Ph.D. thesis

'... To build bridges between the general sociological description of societal mechanisms and the specific interactions and conversations in a classroom.’ (Ahrenkiel 2004:81).

At the same time it is stressed by Bernstein that teachers' opportunities for action and transformation of governance depends on the strength of the framing - in other words on how strong the framework for the use of the technologies is, for example in the policies on them.  
Thus, the strength of Bernstein lies in his discussion of the relation between the external macro-structures and local constructions of meaning, which makes it possible to look at the actual educational practice, as this unfolds in the space between external demands and governance and the teachers own possibilities to act. Thus, Bernstein's theory opens up to elucidate what the teachers actually *do* with the governance (depending on the strength of the framing), and thereby avoid the thinking of governance as something unmediated, which as mentioned earlier, characterizes some of the current debate about governance technologies in schools.

Bernstein's theory is in many ways suited to illuminate pedagogical practices or what he calls the pedagogical code. Thus, the theory offers a number of concepts that make it possible to analyze the nature of a particular pedagogical practice. With the concepts of 'classification' and 'framing' Bernstein thus shows how the strength of respectively power- and control modes manifests itself in various forms of teaching approaches which partly includes the criteria for what is regarded as knowledge or not - Bernstein calls this the discourse of teaching, and partly the criteria for attitudes, character and behavior, also called the regulative discourse (Ahrenkiel 2004, 94f; Bernstein 2001, 80f).

With so Bernstein opens up to look at what he calls respectively legitimate and illegitimate communication in educational practice - in other words, what's through the teachers' re-contextualization of governance technologies is expected of the students – in regard to both their learning and social skills.  
With Bernstein's linkage of the macro and micro levels and his point of the framing as influential on the teachers' options to act the theory also opens up for an analysis of what counts as legitimate or illegitimate communication among teachers, as well as the discourse of teaching and the regulative discourse is also discourses that can be said to cover the teachers' work. Even though the teachers themselves are participants in creating and transforming the two kinds of discourses, they are also 'subject to' these.

To return to the theme of the summer school 'Learning Cultures' cultures of learning ', Bernstein's theory is well suited to illustrate how governance technologies and teachers' re-contextualization of these is creating and influencing the (learning) cultures in schools for both teachers and for pupils in the form of certain communication principles and pedagogical codes.

However, I find Bernstein's theory inadequate in relation to my desire to illuminate teachers' subjective perspectives on working with the technologies. With the concept of framing Bernstein can illuminate the nature of teachers' options, but not *why* teachers act or practice as they do and hence the considerations they make in relation to those practices. In other words, I miss a theory that can capture the professional perspective on practice. Therefore I put this paper up to a discussion of theories or concepts of practice that incorporates the professional, subjective perspective and which also understands practice as something that also occurs and is reshaped in concrete situations and interactions - both teachers among and between teachers and students.

**Fieldwork and methods**

With my foundation in Bernstein's theory it is central to my methodical approach to focus empirically on both the macro- and the micro level. To illustrate the transformation or re-contextualization of the governance technologies, it is thus necessary to involve policy papers on the various governance tools (macro level). Through policy analysis, I will direct my focus on the intentions which forms the background for the introduction of governance technologies in schools, just as I will focus on the kinds of knowledge, skills and competencies that are here, respectively valued or ‘blocked out’. To illustrate the impact of the framing on teachers work with the technologies, I will also focus on how, the role of respectively the teacher and the pupil appears in these documents (eg. in relation to both explicit and implicit expectations for teachers and pupils).

Since my main focus in this project is on the practices of governance technologies and their impact on students, the micro level (school) will naturally constitute a large portion of both my empirical material as of my analysis.  
At one or two selected schools, I will combine qualitative interviews with teachers (about 8) with shorter 'walk and talk" interviews and observations. My reason for combining these methods is really quite simple, namely that by only using either interviews or observations I would not be able to achieve a sufficiently nuanced picture on the use and impact of the governance technologies on students in public schools.

By conducting qualitative interviews with teachers, I will thus be able to gain insight into the considerations the teachers have about both the use of governance technologies as their role as teachers - considerations I would not be able to discover through observation alone. This focus can also shed light on *why* teachers are practicing like they do. On the other hand, I would - with interviews alone - not get the opportunity to study the actual practices in schools and the concrete situations in which the technologies are taken into use and so to speak are recontextualized. Thus, by combining the two approaches I get the opportunity to elucidate the complex process of recontextualization and the space between macro structures and local constructions of meaning.

As stated in my overall research question, I have chosen to relate quite openly to the impact the teachers' practices of governance technologies can have on the students. This open approach is linked to a desire not in advance to 'close' the field, eg by focusing only on the students' academic developmental processes. As I earlier mentioned, the current research debate is characterized by conflicting ideas about the technologies impact on the students’ development and learning. Instead of following this debate and thus occupy myself with whether the technologies so to speak, improves student performance and academic achievement or vice versa and by this is creating a movement away from a ‘whole development' of the pupil, I want to initially led the field speak to me. This approach means that I in both my interviews with teachers as in my observations must seek to relate openly to the field.

Accordingly to this the interviews will be performed as semi-structured and will include some very open questions where the teachers' own articulations of practice will be central (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).  
Although I largely let the teachers choose what they find important to talk about, I obviously have an analytical focus, which will subsequently form the basis for my treatment of the empirical material. Thus I wish to elucidate the possible challenges and ambivalences, teachers might face in the meeting with governance and the experiences they have of the technologies’ impact on the pupils. A central perspective, would by extension of this be ways in which teachers create meaningfulness in working with governance tools - including whether it is possible to create such meaningfulness?



As mentioned, the interviews will be combined with observations. In relation to this, it is my intention to gain access to different situations and contexts in which the governance technologies are being used and discussed. Thus, I imagine to partly observe on teacher meetings, on team planning meetings or other pedagogical meetings, where eg the use of tests or student plans are discussed - and partly to observe specific teaching situations where the technologies can be more or less in game. Especially in relation to the latter, I imagine to make use of the mentioned 'walk and talk "interviews. By immediately after a teaching situation or the like to gain insight into the teachers’ experience of the specific situation I can get a picture of the criteria the teacher operates and, by extension, how the technologies seem to influence practice.

**Points for discussion**

As there exit a myriad of governance technologies in schools, it has been a challenge for me to delineate the field and decide how many or which specifically governance technologies, I shall occupy myself with. As I am interested in the impact of the new technologies on the students, I have chosen to focus on the more student-oriented technologies – that is the technologies that are aimed at improving students' learning outcomes and their academic achievements. Despite this I still find it difficult to determine exactly how many and which of these technologies, I must focus on. At the same time the technologies can be said to be linked to specific situations at school, eg testing situations, conversations between school and home, teacher-student conversations, etc., which can make it difficult to see the impact of the technologies as part of everyday school life and teachers' daily practice. This does nonetheless not mean that the technologies are irrelevant outside the specific situations where these are in directly use. Thus, my assumption is that these also play a role in the daily practice at school, such as in teaching. Still the question is how I can actually spot this – thus it can methodically be problematic to explain if the daily practice is influenced by the technologies or whether it is entirely different things that play into this. With this paper I therefore wish to initiate a discussion of how I can illustrate the connection between the technologies and the daily practice at school.

As previously highlighted, I also like to discuss possible theories or approaches that can capture the teachers' subjective perspectives on working with the technologies and simultaneously opens up a discussion of *why* teachers are practicing like they do. Thus, I am looking for a certain concept of practice that provides a subjective and interactional perspective on practice with an understanding of practice as occurring between people in certain more or less strongly framed contexts.

**Litterature**

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1. Foreseeing 9-12 key factors depending on the sources [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to the Danish Primary Education Act a part of the goal in the Danish school reads as follows: The Primary school shall in cooperation with the parents give the students knowledge and skills that: promotes the individual all-round development (Primary Education Act 2010 § 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)