Optimization as a dispositive

1. Objectives and purpose of work
According to Popkewitz, inclusion and exclusion are part of the same process in the practices of schooling, both representing the ideal of cosmopolitanism (Popkewitz 2008). Inspired by that idea, this work focuses on the dilemma between exclusion through the production of differences in mainstream schools, and at the same time ideals of inclusion and ‘no child left behind’. Thus the object of the study is to explore constructions of students as problems and the constructions of differences in schools that lead to exclusion. Using a Foucauldian lens, the study applies the notions of problematization, formating technology and dispositives. The objectives of the work are to examine:

- How problematizations in schools and in special needs education construct differences, and define who is included and excluded?
- How these problematizations and their technologies interplay, and what dispositives govern the problematizations in present schooling?

By examining these research questions, the work seeks to define what characterizes the present problematizations and technologies. This is explored using a quantitative document analysis. The analysis of the problematizations and technologies is applied to an analysis of the governing dispositives in the construction of students and their differences.

2. Theoretical framework
The theoretical framework is inspired by the governmentality studies within educational research (Fendler 2001, Popkewitz 2008, Rose 1989), and the study is based on a Foucauldian framework. The essential concepts in the theoretical framework are: problematization, formating technologies and dispositives. According to the theoretical purpose, problematization plays a key role as the analytical tool to understand how construction of differences is carried out in modern schooling processes of differentiation. Based on literature studies of some key Foucault texts (Foucault 1985, 1997 & 1998), I argue that:
Problematization is a reaction to a historical phenomenon which constructs something as a problem, works as system of power, and produces differences, governing what is then included and excluded. It involves solutions to problems, and it operates at the individual level as well a more systems level, i.e. individuals are problematized and problematize themselves.

By constructing differences and producing the subject in various ways, problematization can thus bring different social technologies into action. A social technology can be understood as a formatting technology (Krejsler 2002 & Krejsler et al. 2009). Using the computer as a metaphor, formatting illustrates how both the student and the teacher are structured by certain rules in education, operating as technologies of the self. These technologies are often considered to be natural tools or methods in education. The dispositive is seen as a deeper rationale of power, and according to this study the dispositive defines problematizations and social technologies. The dispositive is defined as:

"a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions–in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.” (Foucault 1977).

The dispositve works as an apparatus – a deeper lying order that governs and is strategic – allowing different subjectivities, discourses, regimes of knowledge and problematization in a given period. To sum up: the theoretical framework is based on three main analytical tools: problematization, technology and dispositives. Problematization is an answer to a situation involving different solutions that can emerge as social technologies and produce the subject in various ways. The dispositive represents a deeper level forming the problematizations and technologies in a period.

3. Methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry
By using Foucaults notion of history of the present, the study draws on a comparison between how students are constructed as problems in modern
schooling with a study of similar processes in schooling in the 1930’s. The study aims to sharpen analysis of problematizations, formating technologies and dispositives leading to the construction of the student in modern schooling. The study is constructed as a quantitative analysis of files from educational psychologists and articles on schooling. Following the Foucauldian framework:

- Each file is seen as an expression of a technology and a dividing practice that produces the students in certain subjectivities and thus has consequences for special educational practice

Drawing on the quantitative analysis, I argue that different forms of problematizations and formating technologies can be constructed from the material. The quantitative analysis is carried out by recording notions used in each file and categorization of major issues in the journals. These problematizations and technologies are the basis of the following analysis of dispositives for the period. This part of the study draws partly on preconstructed dispositives and partly aims at constructing new dispositives.

4. Data sources, evidence, objects, or materials
The study consists of two types of material. First is the analysis of files of 44 students examined by to school psychologists and referred to special needs education. The files contain documents concerning evaluations of students, psychological and psychiatric examinations and objectives for how the student is supposed to develop. The files stem from Copenhagen Municipality in the period 2000-2010. Thus the files represent how modern schooling constructs differences between student that are included, and those that are excluded. A second set of data material consists of 125 articles from Danish journals on schooling and educational psychology. This kind of material offers a schooling discourse on who the student is supposed to be, and this kind of material makes possible an analysis of the rationales behind inclusion and exclusion, as well as how differences are constructed. From the two types of data the present problematizations and formating technologies are constructed.
5. Analysis and results

5.1. Problematizations

I argue, that three main problematizations are leading the constructions of students and the production of differences in the schools. The problematizations are learning, to be social and reflexivity. These problematizations distinguishes between behavior which should be, and can be included and which behavior excluded. Through the analysis of the files and the articles the following figure can be constructed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problematizations:</th>
<th>Who becomes a problem?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>The non-curious, disinterested student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be social</td>
<td>The too emotional or aggressive student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td>The diagnosed student (ADHD/autism as signs of non-reflective)</td>
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The analysis argues that the problematization of learning dominates modern schooling, showing the lifelong learner as the idealized subject. As a problematization, the ideal of becoming a ‘learning’ subject marks the distinction between normality and deviancy, not only in schools but in society as a whole. As such learning represents a certain logic defining how students are constructed as problems, how differences between students are constructed, legitimating who to be included and excluded. Learning gives rise to a range of technologies which reinforce the construction of the learning subject, but also compensate and reposition the excluded student in mainstream schooling. The following example stems from a strategy paper for a student receiving special needs education.

“Aims in special needs education: “To talk nicely to other people, to put up my hand when I know something, to put up my hand when I need something, accept the help of the teacher. Other goals for Y’s learning: That Y acquires the interest for and courage to learn something new. That Y builds a choice of effective learning strategies. That Y attains the understanding that she needs to do something herself to do progress in her learning”.

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The student is surrounded by an atmosphere of individualized responsibility, positioned not merely as an object for normalization, but as an equal person, that needs to attain a deeper level of self-understanding. The problematization of learning constitutes the student in a never-ending process of realizing his potentiality, as opposed to being talented, or not. The idea of ‘learning’, expressed in the files, intends to lead the student to becoming a successful school subject. I argue that the strength of inclusion as a discourse in modern schooling, combined with the equally strong problematization of learning implies an ideal of the student as never fully excluded. Everybody is expected to be learners but not everybody become successful learners. Following this argument, a student receiving special needs education fails in being a successful student because their learning is not successful enough. Educational technologies, like dialog techniques, individual student plans and methods for conflict resolution keeps the student responsible for his learning process and ability to adapt to the disciplines of modern schooling.

Behaving as a ‘social’ and ‘reflexive’ subject is closely connected to the problematization of learning in the files. As for learning, the modern problematizations in schools do not merely serve normalizing technologies that leave the schools primary function to be that of sorting the talented from the less talented but also evaluates a student’s abilities to function in the society of modern schools:

“Social functions: How does the student function in social relations, in breaks, when playing and during meals? Y really wants to be a part of social relations, but she has problems in bonding to more than one person, at the most two friends. This which is also the case concerning the adults around Y. Y has difficulties in navigating in social groups in the school, she becomes easily distracted, and gets into conflicts”.

This teacher evaluation is not only about student-behavior in the classroom, but an evaluation of the student as a social subject. The problematization of sociality in modern schooling is not a ‘social sociality’ dealing with values like solidarity and contributing to the school as a community. Rather, it is about providing the student with social competencies and preparing her to be productive and efficient in her future work life. Sociality in schools, then, takes the form of an ‘individualized sociality’, equipping the student with necessary competencies to survive in modern
society. The question of sociality is problematized as an answer to society’s need for social competencies like empathy, social intelligence, leadership and management – as opposed to skills like following routines, being stable and loyal needed in the industrial era. Failing to show oneself as a social subject in schools is constructed as a problematic behavior that can lead to exclusion. The problematizations of learning and sociality are closely connected to the problematization of reflexivity in schools and within special needs education. The following example shows how the idea of reflection plays a central role in teacher evaluations of students.

“X is a very reflective boy with a high capacity for abstraction (...) whenever X gets violent towards his classmates in the schoolyard, he rarely considers the implications of his actions on the other children. He can’t see that he’s doing anything wrong. In a following dialogue, he’s able to understand hurting other people is wrong, but he can always talk himself out of his actions”.

The problematization of reflexivity demands for the student to take responsibility for his learning process, to involve in dialogs with peers and teachers and to learn various forms of conflict resolution and management of temper. Reflection mirrors an idea of the student being in a never-ending self-contemplation process on his way to realizing himself as a lifelong learner. Reading the teacher evaluations in the files, this realization of the student’s potential is as much a possibility as it is a duty. As an agenda, inclusion is directed towards schools as well as society as a whole, demanding the individual, through learning and reflection adapt to the attitude of being a participant. Participation is thus a project for the community as much as it is required as an individual competence in the era of inclusion.

**Formating technologies in modern schooling**

The formatting technologies in the analysis seek to reposition the excluded student by different technologies in a Foucauldian sense. These technologies can be categorized as having either a disciplining (normalizing) function or leading the student toward self-governance. Both kinds of formatting technologies seek to reposition the student as a learning subject.
Formating technologies - intends to reposition the student as a learning subject

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<tr>
<th>Disciplining technologies:</th>
<th>Technologies leading to self-governance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Teacher work as a role based authority</td>
<td>4) Teacher work through counseling and care of the student</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Structure as an educational method</td>
<td>5) Emotional work (as a means of making the student confident)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Diagnosing</td>
<td>6) Appreciation of the student (positioning the student as being competent and motivated)</td>
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</table>

While disciplining technologies like role-based teacher authority, and structure as means of taming impulsive behavior, still have an important normalizing function; this study suggests the technologies leading to self-governance seem to be the most important in modern schooling. Emotional work through affection and reflexivity are places where newness emerges, when it comes to the production of the learning subject. Likewise, appreciation and positivity work as ways to frame the student as motivated, responsible and self-reliant – ways in which the student is optimized as a lifelong learner. Diagnosing can be seen as another important technology functioning as a disciplining technology that tames difference, and works as a useful supplement to the softer kinds of technologies mentioned above. The frequent use of diagnosing seen in the files, makes psychiatry an equally important regime of knowledge to educational psychology in legitimizing and producing differences.

According to my findings, the teacher is seen as a manager of discipline, structure and management who intends to resolve the student’s potentiality as a lifelong learner. In doing so the teacher develops a model for self-management. Even more significant is the image of the teacher as a master of relations involving individual care, winning the confidence of the students by guiding and coaching, thus releasing their inner potentials as learning subjects. This image is seen in the following evaluation of a student in special needs education.
“Compared to her peers, Y needs an adult to guide her and to make sure she relates to more than a few persons. In order to make Y accepted on an equal footing and to prevent too many misunderstandings, the professional needs to assist the other students in translating/understanding Y’s often different behavior. Since she doesn’t answer collective messages she needs to get them repeated”.

The teacher is positioned in an equal relation, and leads the student to reflect and work with her challenges. Self-technologies like student plans and evaluations situate both teacher and student in a contractual relation, the teacher playing the role as a consultant to a process that tries to mediate between the individual and the group in the classroom, and guides and encourages the student to show self-responsibility. The teacher work functions as a pastoral power leading the student on her way to salvation as a learning subject. By doing so education works as a practice of care, subjecting the child to take requirements to take herself as a learning subject.

As a learner in modern schools the question is not merely who you are, but who you can be. As a student you are encouraged to perform competencies of development. These competencies are closely related to formatting technologies like the teacher’s emotional work and appreciation of the student. My findings show that the student’s emotional life plays the role of a sacred place where something new can emerge. Knowing one’s feelings, readiness to talk about them and capacity to change oneself are highly valued signs of success in the processes of inclusion and exclusion. The significance of this particular competence is illustrated in the following three examples:

Example 1. “X has difficulties expressing his feelings – to tell what makes him happy, what makes him sad, or what he likes to do.” Example 2. “X is able to feel and say no, whenever there is something he can’t manage”. Example 3. “Is able to talk about inner emotions (...) Shows in some situations understanding that other persons have feelings (too)”.

The student is subjected in a process of work with himself and his emotions. These students are often categorized as vulnerable and as someone who needs to improve their self-confidence and self-esteem. Emotional work takes the form of a confession. Governing the student as an emotional subject, the teacher serves as
either therapist or a coach. I found that, ‘know yourself’ seems to function as an imperative, formatting the students potential as learning subjects, at the same time excluding those who can’t. In the various forms of special needs education, the excluded are required to reposition themselves as learning subjects.

Another technology is to characterize a student’s emotional work as fundamentally positive, like: ‘she might have problems but basically she’s positive and motivated.’ This technology legitimizes itself by claiming to see the human being behind the student. As a consequence, the student is described in terms of competencies, potentials and resources. A few examples from the school psychologist’s files indicate that:

Example 1: “He was a happy and charming boy, but had big troubles acquiring knowledge as well as behaving socially in class”. “Frequently X shows up with a positive attitude in the morning. He wants to talk and seeks contact.” Example 2: “He wants to tell the teachers and the students in the class about his toy or something he experienced. Moreover X is a very lovely and nice boy, but his view on situations is very black/white”.

I argue that appreciation must be seen as an alternative to processes that have been too oriented towards evaluating the student as a problem. As a formatting technology, appreciation compensates for negative labeling. The technology is seen in student evaluations in special needs education and works as a contractual relation between student and teacher, placing the student in a relation between freedom and obligation to realize oneself, according to the aims and strategies set by the teacher and the school. As a technology of the self, appreciation requires students to realize their potentials – to fulfill an obligation to optimize themselves as lifelong learners. As for the excluded student, he is expected, through self-appreciation, to reposition himself as a subject qualified for inclusion.

Another significant technology mentioned in the files is what I call ‘structure’ as a pedagogical method. As a method, structure functions as the ‘pedagogical answer’ to students that are either categorized as 1) controlled by their impulses/challenging/behaving aggressive, 2) vulnerable 3) or as extremely talented. As a technology, structure is brought into play when other ‘softer’ technologies have failed to govern of the child as a learning subject. As is the case in the two following
examples of teacher evaluations, ‘structure’ is constructed as a personal choice by the student.

Example 1: “needs a structured environment”, “needs a clear and predictable day”, “It is necessary to work with his temperament and to focus on his abilities to establish relations and to teach him an understanding that you maintain friendships”. Example 2: “Has an extreme need for steady structure in his everyday life. The school day needs to be structured because he thrives when he knows what will happen next. Loves routines and fixed boundaries. ‘Prefers to work alone’.”

Making structure a question of personal choice constructs the child as a self-dependent student. In doing so, structure, as an aim and as a method, functions as a highly effective technology of power making the child responsible and self-reliable. Structure works as a more efficient technology whenever dialog and emotional work fail. As opposed to earlier periods ‘the need for discipline’ does not appear as legitimate. In this paper, I argue, that by using the phrase ‘need for structure’ discipline is sneaked in by the backdoor. Discipline is legitimate as a general need for schooling and the classroom, but not as specific aim directed towards the individual student.

I argue that diagnosis is a fifth important technology visible in the files. The diagnosed student represents an exception to what is constructed as normal in modern schooling. This study argues that normalcy is constructed in accordance with the claims of being a learning, social and reflexive school student.

In special needs education the diagnosed student is intended to be repositioned as a learner through self-technologies. Through these technologies, the student is expected to develop and come to an understanding of his handicap. This process takes various forms: like working with the diagnosis in dialog with the teacher, in the production of posters communicating the diagnosis and in “social-classes” aiming at developing the social competencies of the students. The following quote from an evaluation of a student in special needs education illustrates these technologies:

“We want to work with ‘handicap comprehension as a subject’ for the whole group, intending that they not merely gain an understanding of their own handicap, but also gets an impression of how autism expresses itself among their mates. (....)
Moreover it is our idea that the boys from a broad presentation of statements concerning typical autism thoughts and behavior, realize how their own autism expresses itself”.

The diagnosed student represents a shady side of the three problematizations. As a student, having problems with being reflective, controlling impulses, as well as lack of social and emotional competences in general, the diagnosed student represents the opposite to what is required in modern schooling. Does this significance of the diagnosed subject represent a change from a psychological subject to psychiatric in the mechanisms of exclusion in modern schooling? The analysis indicates that the technology of diagnosing rather supplements the psychological categorizations in the files. Diagnosing adds the biological dimension to the: ‘know yourself’ imperative.

As with structure, diagnosis serves as a normalizing and disciplining sort of technology. As a regime of knowledge, psychiatry has a special capacity when it comes to construction of differences in schools. Testing of intelligence served as the most important dividing practice in Danish schools in the 1930’s and 1940’s. In present schooling these sorting functions are made even more efficient by psychiatry as the regime of knowledge par excellence defining who should be included and who should be outside in modern schooling.

**Optimization of the subject - conclusion**

The analysis shows that the ability to fulfill the fullest of your potential and willingness to optimize oneself as a student is essential. ”Know yourself and realize your potentiality” seems to function to as an imperative in schools. Modern leadership is not about mere discipline, rather it is about leading the potentiality of the student, inviting him to realize and optimize himself. Emotional work, appreciation, and diagnosing work as ways of optimizing school pupils and in so doing, it operates at the same time to include and exclude. Excluding, because it standardizes a norm for being a student; including because the technologies aim at repositioning the excluded subject. These problematizations and formating technologies are led by different dispositives. I argue that optimization functions as such a dispositive. It operates both as a governmentality by leading the the students
in accordance with political and educational agendas, and as function of a biopolitics sorting out the students for their future life, and for the benefit of society.

6. Scientific or scholarly significance of the study or work
This study is a contribution to the existing studies on governmentality within education and studies in special needs education. Optimization is seen as a type of rationality supplementing governmentality as the modern way of expelling power, constructing differences in schools and constructing what to be included and what to be excluded. As a theoretical contribution the study aims to elaborate problematization as an analytical tool in the examination of the production of differences and construction of identities in education.

7. References


