

## The game of hospitality

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### abstract

In current discourse, the family is construed as the basis of the school's work. Accordingly, the family's socialisation of the child becomes a governmental task for the school. It is not enough for the school to clarify the exact expectations to the parents; the school needs the parents to imagine all the ways in which what goes on in the family is relevant to the child's behaviour in school. New technologies are applied to stretch the parents' imagination. This article presents a case study of a ludic technology used in Danish schools, 'The responsibility game', and shows that this technology is used to encourage the parents to see themselves through the eyes of the school: parents are invited to invite the school into the family. While used strategically by the school, the game co-creates new challenges for the school, because it blurs the boundaries between 'host' and 'guest' in the meeting of school and family.

### Introduction

Our story begins one winter's night at a school in the Danish city of Aarhus. Present at the event are the parents of children who have attended the school for six months. They have been welcomed by the pedagogical leader<sup>1</sup> of the school, and together they have sung a Danish children's song. They have been divided into groups of four or five and are now seated at tables with coffee and cookies, which some of the parents have prepared. On the table there is a game board with game spaces entitled 'school', 'mutual', and 'home'. One of the parents holds an envelope containing playing cards that have various statements written on them. She has just picked a card. It reads, 'Who is responsible for ensuring that the child is free to express his or her beliefs and feelings?'

Let's leave the question unanswered for a moment and ask the reader to imagine where this card will be placed on the board – and what the answer to the next question in the game will be, which is: 'What actions can contribute to the realisation of this statement?'

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1 In many Danish schools there is a team of leaders, consisting of the headmaster, an administrative leader and a pedagogical leader. The division of tasks varies, but often the pedagogical leader is in charge of laying down pedagogical goals, carrying out evaluations, arranging conversations, meetings and individual coaching with teachers, and having contact to parents.

The questions to be posed here are: Why would a school use a game to organise a meeting with parents? And what does this practice imply as far as governmental ambitions, possibilities and impossibilities are concerned?

Although the case is Danish, the findings and analysis of governmental forms of power have international relevance. The aim of the article is to contribute to a general discussion of how games can function as power, not only by means of governing the self but by means of governing the relation between self and community. What is regulated is not only the will and desire of the single parent but the creation of the community that obliges the parents to take a personal responsibility in the language of the school. The use of a ludic technology can cover the fact that 'the mutual'<sup>2</sup> itself is not for discussion.

Schools are currently regarded as depending on parents to create the foundations on which their work with the pupils is based. What goes on in the family is relevant to the school's possibilities for educating the child, and a managerial ambition evolves concerning the parents' socialisation of the child. This is the case even though the school cannot be precise about the obligations of the parents; it needs the parents to take an undefined, personal responsibility for the family as an educational space and for the social relations between the pupils in the school class. The school cannot explicitly demand this kind of responsibility from the parents and families; therefore a number of new managerial technologies have evolved. Among them are games, which have the beauty of ambiguity in terms of the status of what is being said. By means of games the school is able to invite the family to invite the school into the family. In the case analysed this invitation creates difficulties concerning how the school can be the host of the meeting with the parents. The question of 'intervening' and of 'mutual' turns out to be important and difficult. The article shows this and opens up a discussion of the paradoxes and dilemmas for the school on how to maintain the right to define the school at the same time as depending on the parents to participate and commit themselves to the school community. The responsibility game is both an ambitious governmental technology that subjects parents in the language of the school and an ambiguous technology that raises the question of who is committed to what after the game.

Various international studies have already observed how a pedagogical responsibility is addressed to the parents, often described as a creation of a partnership between home and school. Responsibility and partnership is in some studies simply seen as something to strive for (Squelch, 2006). Janet Newman investigates partnerships as a matter of governance, involving the reconfiguration of relationships between the state and civil society, the public and private sectors, citizens and communities. 'The inclusion of users, communities and citizens in public policy decision-making networks and collaborative projects is of critical importance' (Newman, 2001: 126). In my analysis of 'the responsibility game' I show that the game is not a method for involving parents in decisions concerning the school. The opening of 'the mutual' might open up a debate on what 'the mutual' involves, and it could be an invitation to a political debate on the

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<sup>2</sup> In Danish the concept 'mutual' can stand alone. In English the term would be 'shared' but I choose to maintain the concept 'mutual' because it is a point here that the responsibility is not shared; it is not described as possible to divide the responsibility between home and school.

relationship between the self and the community. Instead the parents are invited to play the game of being involved.

In other studies, efforts to turn parents into responsible citizens are seen as a part of a governmentality regime. Partnerships are not only a matter of supporting the child's learning processes but also a matter of governing the family (Franklin et al., 1998; Newman, 2001: 154-160). Nikolas Rose writes about responsabilisation of the family (Rose, 1999: 74), and as he points out, 'such a moralising ethico-politics tends to incite a "will to govern" which imposes no limits upon itself' (Rose, 1999: 192). With regard to the reading pledge included in home-school contracts, he has this to say: 'In what other politics would elected politicians seek to use the apparatus of the law to require parents to read to their children for a fixed period each day?' (Rose, 1999: 193). My point here differs from Rose's in several ways: What I analyse is not 'the apparatus of law' but interactions framed as a game. And the expectations of the parents do not take the form of requirements but of an invitation to the parents to see the family in an educational gaze. And what is being governed is not only the self and the self's relation to itself – but the self's relation to the community, 'the mutual' of home and school, and the creation of the mutual responsibility.

The critical literature on games and play as a managerial tool is mainly concerned with private organizations (e.g. Kinnie et al., 2000; Kociatkiewicz, 2000; Fleming and Spicer, 2002; Meisiek and Hatch, 2008; Fleming, 2009). Only a few articles are explicitly concerned with games or play in public organizations, among them Nicole Renee Baptiste who shows that fun and play activities in organizations do not necessarily mean that the employees, in the analysed case, the managers, have fun, because the circumstances do not allow it: 'The results highlight a silence in the fun at work literature around the conditions of fun...' (Baptiste, 2009: 609). My focus is not so much fun, whether it actually is funny, boring or depressing, as much as games that challenge borders. In the article 'Dionysus at Work? The Ethos of Play and the Ethos of Management' (Costea et al., 2005) the authors analyse the new ethics and imperative of self-work and look into the changing borders of work/leisure, work/play, seriousness/fun, economy/culture. My focus is on the border public organization/citizen, which only few studies are concerned with (see Andersen, this issue; Andersen, 2009; Knudsen, 2010). I am interested in the managerial ambition of responsabilisation of the parents and how this ambition both is powerful and produces powerlessness. In his article in this issue, Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen shows how ludic technologies are used for responsabilisation of citizens concerning their health. Parallel to my interest in this article he investigates what these attempts do to the state, asking whether it turns itself into a cartoon state.

My interest here is how ludic technologies make it difficult for the school to both call for personal responsibility from the parents and avoid their interference in the school's internal affairs. I shall analyse the responsibility game as a technology of the self, turning the parents into responsible subjects concerning their parental role. But the game shall also be analysed as a technology of the mutual, turning the parents into responsible to the school community. Drawing on the concepts of translation and hospitality from Jacques Derrida I analyse the interactions on this parents' evening as a matter of transformation and shifts between different languages and different forms of

communication. Before analysing the game I shall outline the current discourse on parents' responsibility in a Danish context (for an analysis of the relationship between parents and school in a British context, see Bridges, 2010).

### **Current discourses on parents' responsibility**

Over the past twenty years state-funded schools in Denmark have shifted from single-disciplinary programs towards cross-disciplinary program, and at the same time learning has shifted in the direction of second-order learning. Knowledge is important but is no longer considered to have durability over time. Therefore, it does not suffice for children to learn a great deal. They have to primarily learn to learn, which also entails learning to see themselves from a learning perspective. This is often referred to as 'being responsible for own learning'. This means that the school develops a greater sensitivity towards other types of competencies than strictly disciplinary ones. Social and personal competencies become central to teaching. This has a variety of implications. First of all, it means a much more differentiated concept of pedagogy in school, where traditional teacher-controlled classroom teaching gives way to groupwork, projects, personal presentations, and co-operation across classes, grades, and disciplines (Juelskjær, forthcoming). The new forms are intended to support the pupils' personal and social development, but paradoxically they presuppose a great number of personal and social competences in order to be effective. The pupils must learn the different rules that apply in different teaching methods. Sometimes they are expected to act as quiet listeners; other times they need to be engaged and involved, and still other times to work together. This means that they need to be able to oscillate between many different pupil roles. And it also means that the family's socialisation of the children comes to play a much greater role (Knudsen, 2010). The school develops an interest in the families' internal creation of themselves as families. The responsibility of the families in relation to the school is displaced from specific responsibilities, such as making sure that the children show up at school and ensuring that their homework gets done, towards the creation of the family as a sound space of development and learning for the children. It is not only the children who are expected to relate to themselves pedagogically. The family has to do the same.

These ambitions for the family's inside relations create a need for managing the family. This is a problem for the school, because the family fundamentally resides outside the formal domain of the school. Traditional technologies such as fifteen-minute informative consultations with the teacher as an expert (MacLure, 2003) do not initiate the desired responsibility-taking (Knudsen, 2010). In these technologies the community, the mutual responsibility of school and home, is taken for granted. They primarily serve the purpose of informing parents of their children's progress. The meetings are an invitation to parents to support the school, both symbolically by confirming the authority of the teacher and through supporting the learning that takes place within the family such as homework help and supervision. The responsibility of the parents is given and the challenge met by the consultations is how to oblige the parents to realise the responsibility. The question posed is 'Did you take the responsibility for reading with your child today?'. Given by the new ambitions the question posed today would be more like 'Did you take the responsibility for turning your family into a learning

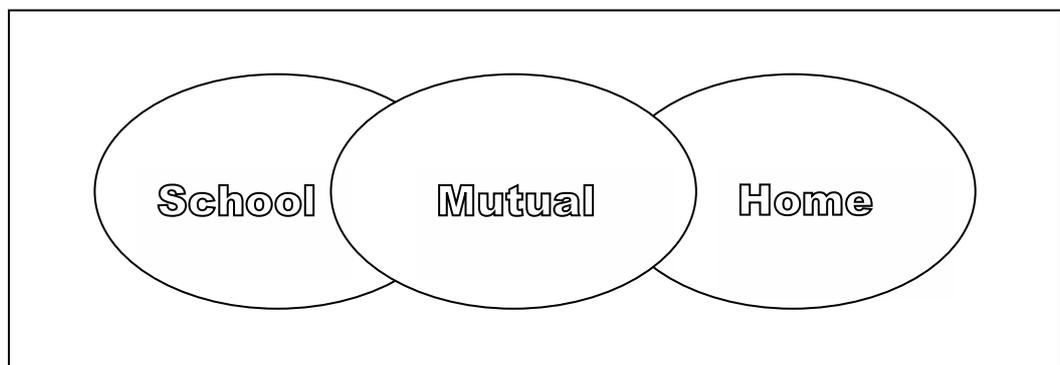
environment?'. The school is not certain of the parents' responsibility or of the school's right to define the parents' responsibility. So it is not only a matter of realising the responsibility but of defining the responsibility and creating 'the mutual' that obliges the parents in certain ways. Other technologies that are currently being employed as a way to extend the school into the family include technologies of reflection and self-development such as the family class (Knudsen, 2009) or parental class (Gillies, 2005) and technologies that authorise parents to define expectations for other parents, e.g. through group discussions or policies regarding bullying, or values outlined by the school board or other parent groups. There are also self-binding technologies such as parent contracts (Andersen, 2004; Vincent-Jones, 2006), parenting agreements and home-school agreements.

### The responsibility game

This article focuses on a game entitled 'the responsibility game', which is used in the Municipality of Aarhus, Denmark, in order to teach parents of preschool children to take responsibility. I observed parents engaged in playing this game one night at a school, and my empirical material consists of written material (Municipality of Aarhus, 2003), audio recordings and observations from this event.

Let us return to the above-mentioned winter's night. The statement from the envelope, 'who is responsible for ensuring that the child is free to express his or her beliefs and feelings?', was placed in the middle square on the game board entitled 'mutual'. The next round of the game involves the parents discussing what actions might turn the statement into reality. In the group that I was observing, the parents arrived at the conclusion that one possible action could be 'eating dinner together as a family'. This would allow parents to share over dinner with their spouses and children their own opinions and feelings, e.g. in relation to a difficult day at work, which would let the children see that it is natural to express one's beliefs and feelings.

This evening was one in a series of evenings that served at least two purposes: To establish and support a sense of community among parents of children in the preschool, and to provide parents with ideas concerning what their new responsibility as parents of school-age children might include.



### *The game board on the tables*

As already mentioned, there were 32 statements placed in an envelope, which the parents were asked to place in one of the three rings. Some of the 32 statements read:

Who is responsible for ensuring:

1. That the child is not hungry in school?
2. That the child sits down when the bell rings?
3. That the child has the things he or she needs (pencil case, books, gym clothes, etc.)?
4. That the child understands messages directed at the whole class and is able to act accordingly?
5. That the child writes down homework in the homework journal?
6. That the child learns?
7. That the child is able to handle conflicts with others?
8. That the child learns that an agreement is an agreement?
9. That the child learns perseverance?
10. That the child feels good about him or herself?
11. That the child learns to collaborate?
12. That the child is able to lose games with good grace?
13. That the child develops creativity and imagination?
14. That the child has happy days?
15. That the child learns to be a good friend?
16. That the child learns to take responsibility?

‘Round one’ of the game entailed a parent drawing a card, reading it aloud, and reflecting on its statement. Subsequently the group then discussed the statement and reached an agreement about where the card should be placed on the board. ‘Round two’ asked the parents to prioritise a statement from each pile and place the rest of the cards back in the envelope<sup>3</sup>. Each group was then asked to add comments to each of the priorities, describing several specific actions that would contribute to turning the statements into reality. As the pedagogical leader described it:

The task is to describe an action, or perhaps several actions, which might turn the statement on the note into reality. If we take the statement ‘that the child feels good about him or herself’ – what would that take, depending on who is responsible – what should be done by the people who are responsible for ensuring that the child feels good about itself? How do we make the child feel good about him or herself? Is it by scratching his or her back, by giving him or her a lollipop every Thursday? – Specific actions like that.

Finally, each group had to present in plenum their conclusions about priorities and possible actions. These presentations were open to questions from the audience and were later written up and emailed to the parents and given to the class teacher, who

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<sup>3</sup> Here, the events of the evening diverge from the written material from the Municipality of Aarhus describing the concept of the game, in which it is suggested that parents choose three cards from the ‘mutual’ pile and discuss what the parents and the school respectively can contribute to the joint effort (Municipality of Aarhus, 2003: 2.22). This might have made it less urgent to discuss the school’s responsibility – which very much became the focus of this evening’s discussion.

wrote them down in the class journal and committed herself to ‘following up on them once in a while’. In this way, the suggested actions were ‘added to the minutes’ in ‘the class journal’.

## Technology of the self – and of the mutual

The objective of the responsibility game is to encourage the establishment of families and a parental group that are willing to assume responsibilities. According to the pedagogical leader, almost all of the statements ended up in the ‘mutual’ category, which is a sign of the game’s strength:

They almost always reach the conclusion that ‘wow, we really share the responsibility for almost everything that happens in school’, and I think that that awareness is really important. There are certain things that we clearly have to provide as a school. But that is precisely a question of content. If we agree that we help each other with those basic things, then it works out really well. (Pedagogical leader)

The ‘we’ of the above quote is by no means unambiguous. ‘The basic things’ encompass areas for which the parents are responsible, whereas ‘the content’ is the responsibility of the school. The responsibility game is designed to ensure that parents take responsibility for the basic things, the prerequisites for learning. They have to become parents with a responsibility for turning the family into a part of the learning space and into an important prerequisite for the school’s work – instead of just being parents.

The main point concerning technology of the self is the question of what the subjects are invited to recognise themselves as – and what they are to transform themselves into (Foucault, 1997). The transformation is one from a parent who is not conscious of being a school parent into a parent with the responsibility that results from being a school parent. The transformation involves parents seeing themselves as participants in the logic, or in the language, of the school. The technology is an invitation to translate from the language of the school into the language of the family. The parents should recognise themselves as parents and translate the statements first into their own language and then into actions. Here I shall draw on the concept of translation from Jacques Derrida to complement the concept of technology of the self. Derrida states that translation is always also a transformation:

...the translator must assure the survival, *which is to say the growth*, of the original. Translation augments and modifies the original, which, insofar as it is living on, never ceases to be transformed and to grow. (Derrida, 1985: 122, italics in original)

Translation perceived as a one-to-one relationship is not possible because translation is translation in the sense of a change from one language, context or role to another. Translation is not, therefore, a question of reciting a message or acting on behalf of someone else. Translation entails that something new is created and that one acts independently.

Translations take place in group discussions and in plenum. One of the groups discussed the statement ‘that the child develops creativity and imagination’.

Mother 2: The child cannot learn something at home that he or she does not see.

Father2: If there aren't any coloured pencils and scissors...

[...]

Mother 1: I'd like us to agree on placing this in the mutual category, because even if we don't do it and don't have the energy, I assume we all would like to be involved in it. It could also be cooking. It could be many things.

Father 2: Of course they should be involved in baking cookies and that kind of thing, so I also believe that it is a mutual concern.

[...]

Mother 1: But you have to think about it sometimes. Otherwise they sit and watch TV while you cook dinner. It's easier that way. That way you can chop vegetables in peace.

Father 2: And the TV isn't such a bad thing, but it is true that it mustn't be the only thing.

Mother 1: It shouldn't be used as a place to park the children.

Father 1: That's what it's like with everything.

Mother 2: We also sit down and watch TV at night because we're tired.

Initially, 'Mother 2' is considering whether or not to place the statement in the 'school' category, but 'Mother 1' argues that the parents should agree to see the task as a mutual responsibility and hence also as a task for and within the family. By translating what creativity and imagination means, from immediate school-related connotations – scissors and coloured pencils – to 'cooking' and 'cookies', it becomes possible for her to consider it a task for which she is able to assume responsibility. Subsequently, the parents discuss whether or not children should help to do the cooking, how much or how little TV to watch, etc. Through this translation process, the different parents' norms are negotiated, tested, and moulded towards a consensus within the group. The third form of translation that can be traced in the quote above is the parents' reflection on their everyday lives based on the school's norms for learning: How is it possible to turn cooking and other activities into an area of learning for the child? How much television is it reasonable for the child to watch – in relation to the time it needs to develop? Even if parents cannot all cope with the responsibility of helping the child to develop his or her creativity and imagination, ought they not to be doing it?

One example of how the parents can turn themselves into responsible school parents concerned the statement 'that the child becomes a good friend'. The parents in one group discussed the importance of talking about social relations and norms for spending time with their child. Another group suggested playgroups that included everyone in the class, organized by the parents and thereby including the parents as hosts for the children in the class. This not only allows responsibility to be translated into action within the individual family, but also means that responsibility can be assumed by regarding the parents of individual pupils as a single entity representing the entire class. One suggestion in response to the statement 'that the child is free to express his or her beliefs and feelings' was (as already mentioned) for the family to have dinner together and for the parents to act as role models by expressing their own difficulties and concerns. Possibly divergent norms are negotiated into mutual norms, in the same way that a general responsibility is translated into the individual family.

## **Interrupted translations, power and resistance**

Translations are not always 'smooth'; sometimes mistranslations, breaks and interruptions occur. Michel Foucault suggests using resistance as a chemical catalyst so

as to bring to light power relations (Foucault, 2000: 329; Fleming, 2002). I am inspired by this use of the counter concept as a catalyst, and I use the concept of interrupted translations to see what 'smooth translations' would look like. My empirical material is social technologies in use, played out in interactions and not only described in pamphlets, and here I use breaks and turns in interactions as catalysts to capture regularities.

### *Interrupted translations: Play or confession*

Gregory Bateson proposes a definition of play:

Expanded, the statement 'this is play' looks something like this: These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote... The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite. (Bateson, 2000: 180)

The responsibility game is not a game with very clear and fixed rules, and moreover, before the game begins, there is a round in which groups of parents relate to each other their child's experiences of starting school. It becomes a question of an 'evolving system of interaction' (Bateson 2000: 192), which means that the participants cannot predict the ways in which other people will link up to what they say. Once again, the question is whether we are *playing* parents or whether we are committed to a reality that remains in play. One father (father 2) talks about his daughter like this:

Laura hasn't had any difficulties related to starting school. She has loved school from day one... It's great every morning when you say 'time for school' that it is something you love, right, it's a wonderful thing... And I might add that we are in the middle of a divorce situation, Dorthe and me. And Laura knows all about it because we talk and tell her what's going to happen. So we don't hide anything from anybody. I think that also helps her. So far we haven't experienced any problems of any kind. I don't foresee that there will be any, either.

Next in line is a mother, who does not fully buy into the father's story about his happy daughter:

Mother 2: One day I came right after, I believe you'd just been there, right? (Father 2: yes) And she was sitting on the coach all by herself (Father 2: yes). Then I said, 'Why are you sitting here?' And she was sad because she had to get rid of her dog (Father 2: yes, that's right, that's right). So she was a little sad that day. So we talked – I was even ten minutes late for work (laughter), because we had to talk about it, (laughter), we just had to (Father 2: yes, yes). And then it came out that her father and mother were getting divorced.

Here, the communication changes from one that we might characterise as 'playing and pretending to be good parents of happy children' to a mode of 'here we talk about feelings and problems'. We can say that there has been an 'interruption' of the translation because the form of the communication changes from play to confession.

### *Interrupted translations: Play or decision*

The very design of the evening comprises interrupted translations, when the group's independently conceived ideas for actions are written down, first on a whiteboard and later in the class journal. The game stimulates the parents' imaginations with respect to how their own television consumption, board games, reactions to disabled people, etc. impact the shaping of the child's prerequisites for learning. It assumes the form of play:

The informal talk and organized play around a board game and cards signal that ‘this is fun!’ At the same time, however, it is not simply in order to have fun that the parents are gathered for two and a half hours. At some point, the fun becomes serious. The signal, then, is that ‘this is a commitment!’ The groups were told to present their ‘conclusions’, which were subsequently written down and emailed to all the parents and the classroom teacher, who – as mentioned earlier – committed to ‘following up on this once in a while’. The prioritisations and ideas that the parents presented changed status from being an element of a game to having the character of a decision. Similarly, the parents changed status from being in a process of formation, both as individual parents and as a group, to having responsibilities.

In the form of play, the subject is played forth while playing. In play, one is not a predefined subject. Play turns the player into a subject by offering the player the possibility of doubling herself. It is different in decision communication. In decision communication the subject is presupposed as preceding the decision. A decision refers to a subject outside the decision to whom the decision can be assigned and who can be observed as decision maker. (Andersen, 2009: 84)

What the school wants to get out of the parents’ evening are decisions that may serve as the building blocks for the school as an organization. The school attempts to move outside the school and manage on the basis of the families’ self-reflection and install learning as part of that reflection. I argue that this is only possible because it takes the form of play: It is meant to be fun. But at the same time, it is not just meant as fun since specific actions are suggested in plenum and minutes are taken. The objective is thus collectively binding decisions. The communication shifts from assuming the form of play to the form of decision (Andersen, 2009; Knudsen, 2010).

### *Interrupted translations: The mutual and the problem of interference*

The pedagogical leader expresses the goal and the outcome of the evening like this:

It makes it apparent to the parents over the course of the evening the extent to which it is a mutual task. And we are not able to run the school if we do not collaborate... If we agree to help each other with those basic things, then it works out really well. (Pedagogical leader)

This indicates a ‘we’ consisting of both parents and school that can agree. However, the parents are not allowed to take responsibility for the prerequisites for learning that are created by the school. Because, as the pedagogical leader says: ‘there are certain things that we clearly have to provide as a school, but that is precisely a question of content.’ Some of the parents have not understood that they are only supposed to talk about things going on in the family; they assume that if they are to take responsibility, they can also contribute to the part of the ‘mutual’ concerning the school.

In their presentation, one of the groups made suggestions aimed at both the school and the home. In response to the statement ‘that the child feels good about him or herself’, the parents suggested that the teachers should talk to each other to find out how the children were getting on in different subject areas, learning about their strengths in contexts different from their own. This division of ‘mutual’ into a ‘both-and’ (or ‘shared’), with parents making specific suggestions for the school, was passed over in silence. Another mother called for further training of the teachers in project-based work in the young classes because she had noticed problems among older pupils, who found

it difficult to work independently on projects. The mother thus identified areas of prerequisites for learning within the school. 'We already pay a lot of attention to this', responded the pedagogical leader, without revealing any details of how this is done, thereby underlining that the responsibility for defining the school's responsibilities resides with the school.

In the final presentation, several parents pointed to the fact that it was difficult to unambiguously designate any of the 32 statements as the school's responsibility. There was a clear expectation from the parents that the responsibility of the school was up for discussion as well. However, it became obvious in the concluding presentations that it had been difficult for the parents to place anything in the 'school' category. One group said:

It was difficult for us to place any responsibility with the school alone, but we agreed that it had to be the school's responsibility that the children play well during recess (laughter from the audience).

Another group said:

We aren't really very proud of it [the card that they placed in the 'school' category, HK], but there were only two cards left. And therefore we have 'that the child writes down homework in the homework journal' (laughter from the audience). It was a choice between two evils (laughter from the audience).

The concept of 'mutual' only pertains to the school to a minimal extent: 'mutual' responsibilities represent the family's responsibility in relation to the school. This, however, was rejected by a couple of parents in the final plenum. The pedagogical leader asked at one point:

Did you openly say 'why are those school things not written down anywhere?', that is, 'there is an expectation of the school we might have but which simply was not there'? And which you wanted to come up with for yourself?

The mother who was asked this question responded:

No, we actually did not. It isn't the school's responsibility alone that the children are motivated to learn. That's something they need to be given at home: Interest and drive and willingness and things like that. The fighting spirit, so to speak. If we shut them down at home, what exactly is it we expect them to want to do here?

This mother, accordingly, accepted that what is at stake are prerequisites in the form of interest, drive and willingness, and that these are prerequisites that the children should be given at home. But she also says, 'It isn't the school's responsibility *alone*...', thereby acknowledging that the school has a responsibility as well.

Another mother felt that there should be a general statement directed at the school: 'To teach my child professional competencies.' Another parent supported this with the question: 'Then what is your responsibility? I assume it is to organize teaching?' The pedagogical leader responded:

I think that, on behalf of the classroom teacher, I can assure you that the question of professional competencies is going to be handled. We guarantee that, and it happens in strict accordance with

the Ministry of Education's paragraphs and objectives and all that, it really does weigh heavy on the teacher's consciousness, so you don't have to worry about *that*.

Thus, it is clearly marked that it is the school's responsibility to define the school's responsibilities. At the same time, it is also the school's responsibility to define the framework for the parents' definitions of their responsibility. Through the responsibility game, the parents are supported in their effort to recognise their own responsibility in relation to the school. Despite the fact that 'school', 'home', and 'mutual' are all in play, there is no initiation of a dialogue in which a disagreement can arise about who is responsible for what, or through which parents may air their opinions about the teacher's practice.

An attempt is made to make the parents responsible – but without the opportunity to take responsibility for a whole, because the 'mutual' only covers the parents' part, not the school's. The game establishes the possibility of expecting that the school's responsibility can be discussed. The rather heavy-handed way in which the pedagogical leader shuts down any attempts at such a discussion (with reference to the highest authority, the Ministry of Education) indicates that a lot seems to be at stake right here. The pedagogical leader is made to 'defend' the school against parental interference.

## The game of hospitality

In his books 'Of Hospitality' and 'On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness', Jacques Derrida discusses the question of how to limit the hospitality of France in connection to refugees and other foreigners coming to France. I use the concept of hospitality from Derrida as a way to describe the impossibilities of the responsibility game. According to Derrida, there are several impossibilities concerning hospitality. One is that hospitality will always consist of *both* the unconditional law of unlimited hospitality *and* the conditioned and conditional laws of hospitality, the rights and obligations. 'These two regimes of law, of the law and the laws, are thus both contradictory, antinomic *and* inseparable' (Derrida, 2000a: 79). Hospitality is both the door (if it even makes sense that there is a door) being opened to everybody without any questions or demands *and* the questions and demands necessary to hospitality because the limitless hospitality is not possible. The questions concerning who to let in, who to reject, and on which conditions – are down to a political decision.

Another impossibility of hospitality is that by welcoming the guest at the same time, the host affirms that the right to welcome and the home belongs to the host. 'It does not seem to me that I am able to open up or offer hospitality, however generous, without reaffirming: this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home' (Derrida, 2000b: 14). If the host is not the master in his own home he cannot welcome the guest. '...the host, he who offers hospitality, must be the master in his house, he (male in the first instance) must be assured of his sovereignty over the space and goods he offers or opens to the other as stranger.' (*ibid.*)

The questions in this connection are: What are the laws of hospitality? Who is the host and who is the stranger/guest? What is the 'mutual'? And who creates the laws of hospitality? The school invites the parents to come to the school, to bring their own

cake, and to talk with each other, with the leader and teachers – and even take pride in refraining from talking to the parents. The teachers and the pedagogical leader stress how positive it is that they are not needed in the discussions during the event, how good it is that parents display a ‘great desire to talk around the tables’ – amongst themselves – that the school’s professionals are simply facilitators and ‘game masters’. The management of the families cannot take the form of giving orders, which are then translated and followed by the parents. In order for the school to reach into the families, it has to reach out through an invitation to dialogue. However, this dialogue is not a dialogue in the sense of seeking to understand someone else’s perspective. The dialogue is an occasion of self-reflection. The objective of the dialogue is described in the written material as allowing ‘parents, teachers, and educators to test their ideas and opinions and to listen to others in order to better understand their own opinions’ (Municipality of Aarhus, 2003: 2.1). The dialogue is not a dialogue between two parties but a self-dialogue initiated by the other. The school welcomes the parents but with the ambition of saying ‘this is not mine; this is our mutual concern – defined by me’, thereby making a dialogue on ‘yours’ and ‘mine’ impossible.

The school is the one inviting but it is not obvious that the school fulfils the obligations of being a host, and this makes good sense because the school, in the current discourse, is described as depending on parents providing prerequisites for the school’s work. At the same time the school cannot put forth explicit and exact expectations for the parents but depends on them to determine which action could promote the prerequisites. The school is described as depending on the parents, and the parents’ responsibility is open. The responsibility game stimulates the imagination of the parents concerning their responsibility and actions without opening a dialogue between home and school.

So the invitation to play the responsibility game is actually an *invitation to the parents to invite the school into the family* – on the school’s conditions and in the language of the school. The invitation could be expressed like this: ‘We need you to invite us into your family, because in the family the prerequisites for our work are created.’

The meeting takes place in the language of the school but with the ambition of obliging the parents to take responsibility. What are the chances of the parents being obliged? A contract or agreement is only possible if it takes place in two languages at the same time: ‘If it takes place in only one tongue, whether it be mine or the other’s, there is no contract possible’ (Derrida, 1985: 125). In order to have an agreement, there must be a simultaneous ‘yes’ in two languages at once. If the school needs parents to demonstrate active participation and to show that they are willing to take responsibility, the school has to allow the parents to express themselves in their own language, since ‘if one is not responsible when one speaks the other’s tongue, one is left off the hook in advance’ (*ibid.*: 124).

The school comes to depend upon the parent group’s ability to arrive at a definition of their responsibility and to mutually commit each other. At the same time, the school’s authority is put at stake as it seeks to use the responsibility game to extend its authority to include internal family relations – but without making this explicit and therefore open to parental acceptance (or rejection). It becomes impossible for the school to sustain its own authority. It sets the scene for the parents’ mutual dialogue but does not participate

as a partner in the dialogue. And the responsibility game makes it possible to always claim that it is just fun, for both sender and recipient, for both the power-superior and the power-inferior in the relationship.

The ambition with the responsibility game can be described as inviting the family to invite the school into the family. In this distribution of roles between host and guest is it possible to assume responsibility for the responsibility game? Is it possible to assume responsibility for the way that parents may assume responsibility and what the norm should be for the 'good parent'? One of the points of the game is that it opens up the possibility of different forms of norm and subject formation rather than a traditional description of roles (e.g. in job descriptions, rules, and orders). This renders the formation of norms more difficult to control. The responsibility game distributes the formation of norms in at least four different ways:

1. One element of the formation of norms and thus leadership depends upon the design of the game: Which statements the parents are expected to respond to, the design of the game board, groupings, conversational forms, shifts between different elements, the course of the game, etc.
2. Another element has to do with the very fact that it is a game. A game has a specific internal logic, which includes the possibility of competing, cheating, winning and losing. One participant thought that it would amount to cheating if the parents took all 32 cards out of the envelope and prioritised them instead of 'following the rules' and only prioritising the cards that were picked at random.
3. A third element resides with the 'game master', who in this case is a pedagogical leader. His or her way of dividing parents into groups, summing up, following or deviating from the description of the concept helps to shape the conditions for creating fictions.
4. A fourth element has to do with the participants and the interaction itself. The mother who comments on the father's description of himself and his daughter establishes what has been said and produces a fiction about the good parent. Part of the right to interpret and judge is located with the participant and in the interaction.

## Concluding remarks

The boundary between school and family is not primarily determined through superior decisions (in recommendations, regulations, principles, etc.) that bind the future through mutual expectations. Rather, the boundary between school and family is negotiated through interactions with the parties involved and with the prospect of an open and imagined future or present (Juelskjær et al., 2011). One might also say that the political act of determining the boundary between school and family is transposed from superior decisions in defined forums to being carried out in numerous interactions, facilitated by social technologies like games.

The responsibility game aims at turning the parents into responsible subjects. At the same time, however, the responsibility has to be taken in the language of the school. The parents are not given the chance to formulate new cards or to have opinions on e.g.

teaching methods, and so there is an established limit to the openness. The parents are invited into the school; at the same time they are supposed to keep out. They become a monster, both situated inside and outside the school (for an analysis of how this is handled through role plays with teachers and an actor playing 'the parent', see Knudsen, 2007).

Seeing itself as depending on parents' non-defined contribution, the school needs the parents to describe themselves and the family in educational terms. The school depends on the family. Benjamin Baez and Susan Talburt analyse how the pamphlets 'Helping your Child Series' from the US Department of Education seemingly empower the parent as teacher, extending the school into the home, positioning the teacher as depending on the parents: 'The expert here is positioned as needing help' (Baez and Talburt, 2008: 37). The expert is not only positioned as needing help, I would say, but also as depending on the parents to create the preconditions of the expert's work. Moreover, in the current ideology of differentiation, the authority of the teacher rests on the confirmation of the pupil and the parents (Bjerg, 2011). Justine Pors points in her analysis of the current political demand for a strengthening of the culture of evaluation in schools to the fact that the paradoxical conditions for governing produce a power regime of indecisiveness (Pors, 2009: 210). This indecisiveness is not turning smaller by the use of games and play.

The game, which in its playful way opens up for new forms of subjectivity and normativity, makes it difficult for the school to take responsibility for the way in which collaboration with parents takes place. It becomes difficult to assume responsibility for the responsibility game because the formation of norms has been distributed – onto the design of the game, the game master, and the interaction among participants. What initially seems like a 'clever' and powerful technology, committing parents to playgroups or to having dinner with the family, runs the risk of letting the parents off the hook in advance. And it runs the risk of depriving the school of the possibility of being the host. The conditions of impossibility can be described as the school inviting the parents to invite the school into the family, without interfering in the school themselves. The parents are given an invitation that cannot be rejected – because it is only a game. And the teachers and leaders of the school have difficulties in assuming the responsibility for being the host – because it is only a game and because they need the parents to be the host.

The game turns out to be both a clever managerial technology, interfering in relations in the family, and a challenge to the school's possibility for taking responsibility for being the host of the meeting between school and family.

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