

BOOK REVIEW

Confronting the Shadow Education System: What Government Policies for What Private Tutoring?

by Mark Bray (2009), 135pp. ISBN: 078-92-803-1333-8
Paris: IIEP/UNESCO Publishing.

While private tutoring has long been a part of the education scene in many countries of East Asia, during the past two decades private tutoring and other forms of supplementary schooling- what Bray calls 'the shadow education system' - have now become widespread throughout much of the world. They can now be found in most countries in Asia, the former states of the Soviet Union, Western Europe, North America, Australia, Africa and even Latin America. How should governments regard this phenomenon? Should they ignore it, regulate it or seek to prohibit it? All three have been tried, in different countries, with limited success. This book examines the whole issue of the shadow education system; what it is; who benefits; what are the implications for families and for mainstream schools; what policy implications arise and how should governments and planners respond? It is based on the discussions that arose out of a 2007 forum held at the UNESCO Institute for Educational Planning in Paris.

Bray's thesis is that so many issues and challenges are thrown up by the growth of supplementary forms of schooling that they need to be both recognised and challenged. They can create social and educational inequalities. They can undermine the regular state provided education system. If practising teachers are involved in private tutoring in order to earn additional salaries they might have divided loyalties. Private tutoring can also distort the lives of children by denying them a normal, healthy and varied childhood, simply because of the excessive pressure and long hours that they spend in studying or cramming. On the other hand they can enable students to cover the whole curriculum, they can encourage state schools to improve and they can occupy children outside normal school hours. This book addresses most of these issues and concerns. Although private tutoring can apply to pre-school children as well as to university students the scope of this book is confined to tutoring for primary and secondary school students.

There are essentially three main components to the book. The first sets out the scope and shape of supplementary tutoring. It highlights that the picture is confused and varies across the world. There is usually increased demand just before crucial examinations, boys are more likely to benefit than girls; delivery ranges from individual tutors through to commercial enterprises, from one to one sessions to large classes in lecture halls, from correspondence courses to TV and the Internet. The variety and scope make it difficult to regulate what is happening. The social, economic and educational impact on society is then analysed. Finally three very different case studies from Korea,

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Mauritius and France are used to illustrate different policy responses. The second part examines some policy responses in general terms, recognising at the same time that data is often hard to come by. Whatever the context policy makers should begin by trying to map what exists, who the clients are, the size and shape of what is being offered, the issue of supply and demand. The chapter also looks comparatively at some national legislative attempts at regulation. A third chapter stresses the need for more comparative data to assess the best ways forward and a number of international surveys are cited.

The literature on supplementary education provision has been growing remarkably over the past twenty years as more and more countries experience the growth of this shadow education system. Bray's book, however, is an excellent summary of much of the known research in this area as well as being a synthesis of the 2007 forum discussions. It is full of useful insights and suggestions. It provides some valuable comparative data and if no other book on the subject was studied, a reader would have a good understanding of the complexity of the issues raised by supplementary tutoring simply by reading this one. It is a valuable addition to the literature.

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