

Book Review

Bray, Mark (2009). *Confronting the shadow education system. What government policies for what private tutoring?*

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Periodically, a political debate about adequate support for socially deprived families emerges in Germany. Recently, the idea of “education vouchers” to substitute monetary support was discussed. These educational vouchers can be used, e.g., for private tutoring (PT) to help low achievers at school. When the Federal Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Ursula von der Leyen, campaigned for this measure, the education ministers of Germany’s 16 federal states remained surprisingly silent. Their non-response perfectly illustrates Mark Bray’s argument that the obvious focus on the public systems of education neglects the so-called shadow education system – particularly PT.

In contrast, Bray, former director of the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and a leading expert in the field, argues that the phenomenon PT deserves much more attention. In his book, Bray analyzes the

development and growth of PT in the past decades and focuses specifically on measurements to contain the tutoring market. His main sources are papers and discussions from the IIEP policy forum on PT held in Paris in 2007. This forum gathered together planners, policymakers, practitioners and researchers for a much needed discussion. In addition, Bray integrates numerous additional references to enrich the available information.

Despite speaking of “confronting” the shadow education system, Bray does not, however, limit himself to its disadvantages, e.g., the maintenance or exacerbation of existing social and economic inequalities, or the shortening of children’s leisure time. He also identifies the advantages of PT, such as pupils receiving assistance in studying and thus the augmentation of human capital. It is characteristic for the author’s broad approach to not only take into account educational effects of PT but also address its economic impact, like the additional income for the tutors, who, in many countries, are teachers in chronically underfunded education systems.

The book comprises five chapters. The *Introduction* establishes aims and provides the definition of PT. The *Diagnosis* chapter describes the scale of PT and its economic, social and educational impact. The chapter on *Policy Responses* elaborates on the controls of the PT market. In the following chap-

ter, *Monitoring and Evaluation*, the first steps of an analysis of the tutoring market are re-addressed. The chapter *Conclusions* reflects upon past developments of the topic.

The methodological approach is comparative. The book revisits research from a wide range of countries in different cultural and economical contexts and compares modes and scales of PT and political measures needing to be addressed.

In the *Diagnosis* chapter, Bray reflects upon the nature, intensity and mode of PT in various countries. In addition to the data outlined in his first book on the topic (Bray, 1999), he summarizes studies from the last fifteen years about the extension of PT, which for the most part have not been published in international journals and would otherwise be largely inaccessible. Bray attempts to classify patterns of PT along geo-cultural lines and contrasts, e.g., the wide spread of PT in East Asia where education and diligence are highly appreciated in contrast to the growing but still modest scale in Western Europe, North America and Australia.

Besides these descriptive data about the scale of PT, Bray lists its different modes and media. For a German, used to one-to-one tutoring or small group PT, it is fascinating to read that elsewhere, students squeeze into lecture theatres to learn from one tutor. The internet facilitates cross-border PT, and therefore, a tutor in India can easily assist a student in the US.

In a next step, Bray addresses the economic, social and educational impact of PT. He underlines its enormous economic effect, as more than a billion US\$/pa are spent on PT in each of the

countries he lists as examples. In countries such as Sri Lanka and Tajikistan, some hours of tutoring significantly increase a teacher's income.

Examples from Egypt and France illustrate the social benefits of PT. It helps outsourcing homework as a source of family "stress", and allows students to meet with peers from the opposite sex. Bray also comments on gender disparities and rural-urban differences.

Concerning the educational impact of PT, Bray reports promising results from state-funded tutoring systems in the UK, Australia and the US. But there is still no clear evidence to underline the success of PT. Data about the effects of market-driven tutoring is even rarer and Bray focuses here on problematic phenomena like school absenteeism to attend PT in exam periods. But references at this point are limited to remarks of several participants during the IIEP policy forum and systematic empirical studies are missing. Positive and negative educational impacts of PT are summed up in a table at the end of this section of the book.

The *Diagnosis* chapter concludes with three case studies from South Korea, Mauritius and France. These countries stand in an interesting contrast as tutoring is very common and embedded in the societies of South Korea and Mauritius, a fact that several official attempts addressing symptoms and root causes failed to change. In contrast, the current French government encourages the attendance of PT by tax incentives for families investing in PT. Therefore, the tutoring sector in France has seen a considerable growth in past years.

It is in the following chapter only, in which Bray elaborates more systematically on *Policy Responses* to confront PT that he argues for more sufficient data collection. For educational planners, he provides a well structured table to classify the tutoring market. The present and desirable extent of PT should be analyzed, depending on such factors as providers, modes, gender, income or ethnic group. This way, sensible measures can be identified. In addition, Bray addresses the aspects of demand and supply. He gives helpful examples from several countries, for which measures to stimulate or dampen the tutoring market failed or succeeded in different contexts. With others, he discusses the role of high stake examinations and the role of public confidence in the education system. On the supply side, Bray warns of teachers creating their own market by forcing students into their tutoring classes, a problem which arises particularly in underfunded educational systems with low accountability and is clearly named as a form of corruption.

Many countries lack systematic regulations concerning PT. The author lists some countries trying to regulate the tutoring market with minimum standards, e.g. instructors' academic requirements or safety standards in tutoring centers.

Bray dedicates *Monitoring and Evaluation* to discuss adequate forms of collecting data on PT. He is rather critical regarding tutoring items used in the questionnaires of the Trends in Mathematics and Sciences Studies (TIMSS), and analyzes in detail the facets of PT they do not cover. Much can be derived here to improve the planning of future studies. Nevertheless, sever-

al large-scale studies on the nature and extent of PT are positively acknowledged and said to enable the international benchmarking of national extensions of PT.

In his *Conclusions*, Bray summarizes that PT has become a global phenomenon. It is present in nearly every country and crosses borders via the internet and through the extension of multinational tutoring companies. Bray warns that in some countries the fee-free public education system is undermined by the large extension of the private tutoring market. This threatens social equality. He calls for caution in countries, where the government encourages PT. A stimulation of the tutoring market might change the culture of school systems in an unintended way. Indeed, it is hardly a proof of trust in their own system if a government itself advises low achievers to search for additional support on the private market.

All in all, Bray integrates an enormous amount of information into a well-structured analysis to shed light on the shadow education system. His style is clear and easily accessible. Bray primarily addresses educational planners and policymakers. They will certainly profit much from this concentrated presentation of possible measures and experiences in different countries to handle the tutoring market. But researchers will profit from the book as well. They get an overview on current research on PT and will understand that not only this book but the whole field lacks well founded theoretical approaches as well as methodologically sophisticated empirical analysis of the motives to attend PT and even more of its educational impact. Bray's book with

its numerous aspects about PT provides a fruitful stimulus for further research projects on the topic. The author, in line with his constant claim for more attention for the shadow education system, would certainly appreciate such projects.

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Reference

Bray, M. (1999). *The shadow education system: private tutoring and its implications for planners*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.

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