BOOK REVIEW


While schools continue to thrive as the main form of education for all children, shadow education (private supplementary tutoring which closely follows formal schooling), has also expanded at a global level. Although this type of private education usually develops outside of government control, the present book argues that shadow education requires more proactive measures by policy makers and planners worldwide. Written by the leading author in this field, the book suggests that appropriate policies for private tutoring differ by context, and that the very problematic aspects of the phenomenon should be regulated. At the same time, the book suggests that shadow education may be encouraged under certain contexts and may provide some important lessons for mainstream schooling.

The book starts with a diagnosis of private tutoring, where the author identifies the size and shape of private tutoring worldwide. Despite the lack of data and the complexity of the phenomenon, Bray clearly lays out the nature of private tutoring to identify its patterns across the world. He shows that private tutoring is found in almost all regions of the world, including East Asia, former Soviet and Eastern Europe, Western Europe, North America and Australasia, despite differences in their geography and income-levels. The book is generally concerned with tutoring that meets the following three criteria: private tutoring in primary and secondary schools, paid tutoring, and tutoring in academic subjects taught in mainstream schools.

As shadow education varies in its characteristics, Bray identifies the following important variations: 1) market-driven or government-driven tutoring, 2) internet or face-to-face tutoring, 3) obligatory tutoring versus tutoring voluntarily sought by parents, 4) tutoring provided by trained professionals versus tutoring provided by untrained students, and 5) one-on-one versus large lecture-style tutoring. In addition to these classifications, Bray analyzes the impact of shadow education. Economically, shadow education means more household spending and additional income for teachers. Socially, it may exacerbate inequalities and increase pressures on families, while it may also provide support and relief for some families. Educationally, shadow education relates to issues such as the use of school facilities, instructional time, educational content and pedagogy, and student learning.

Such diagnosis is followed by the three instructive case studies of countries with particular histories and circumstances. In Korea and Mauritius, private tutoring is driven by a competitive...
educational environment with high stakes testing. Although excessive reliance on private tutoring was a problem, its prohibition did not have great effect in either country. In contrast, in France, private tutoring is driven by government initiatives. In addition to the social and economic forces that drive tutoring, the government has a tax system that encourages families to invest in tutoring. These cases show the interesting contrast between situations where private tutoring has become deeply ingrained in society and seen as parasitic and wasteful, and situations where private tutoring is still new and seen as useful and promising.

Based on the above diagnosis, the book discusses policy responses. As the title suggests, different approaches are necessary for private tutoring under different circumstances. Bray suggests that we begin by mapping contexts and identifying the mechanism of tutoring, including the supply and demand sides. In doing so, two general approaches to private tutoring are identified. One is to see private tutoring as a problem that needs to be solved and the other is to see it as a potential asset that needs be encouraged. Bray proposes a chart for classifying private tutoring in which he identifies providers of tutoring, learning modes, and various dimensions such as income, gender, ethnicity, location, intensity, quality and cost of tutoring.

One possible solution Bray proposes is to change the educational system, by reviewing the nature of high-stakes examination and widening the gate. However, as Bray realizes, these solutions are not always straightforward since private tutoring is more than an educational issue that involves parental and market interests. Bray maintains that policies should address the root causes of the demand for private tutoring rather than the superficial symptoms. He suggests that the efforts of governmental agencies in education alone may not be enough, and cooperation between multiple agencies is necessary, as the issue concerns the wider domains of culture and economics.

When private tutoring is already prevalent and cannot be eliminated, an option may be to “bring the shadow system more fully into the light.” Such public support, however, may involve the dangers of hidden privatization. Another possible option is to professionalize tutors’ activities, by having them monitor themselves, developing a self-regulating body so that the government can interact and negotiate for the common interest of the students. As a final option, the government may improve regulatory structures for private tutoring. Bray quotes the legal frameworks of several European and Asian countries that clearly regulate certain aspects, including teachers’ qualifications, codes of ethics and curriculum.

The book moves on to discuss the necessity for the monitoring and evaluation of private tutoring. Bray emphasizes the need for quality data, which captures tutoring practices at multiple levels such as at school, district, country and international level. In particular, for international data, Bray asks that the ambiguity in defining the nature of private tutoring should be clarified, so that the response will only involve private tutoring with certain characteristics.

In conclusion, the author convincingly tells us to confront shadow education early when the system is modest in size, rather than waiting for it to become deep-rooted. When shadow education is already rooted in society, general prohibition is not a viable option, but a more nuanced approach is necessary. Mainstream schools will learn from shadow education that private tutors tend to be more responsive and client-oriented in terms of individual care for students and the use of technology.
Overall, the book provides a balanced and comprehensive view on private tutoring and possible measures that bring the best outcome. Bray refers to both the positive and negative impacts of private tutoring, drawing from experiences around the world. Policy makers will find the book useful as it clearly lays out what policy works in what context, and what issues are the keys to successful implementation. Indeed, readers will be surprised to know how many solutions have already been attempted worldwide. In this way, Bray’s comparative analysis is meaningful and will serve as a great source of discussion.

While the book is primarily written for policy planners, scholars will also find the book interesting. For example, Bray’s identification of patterns of private tutoring suggests some links to theories. In the book, Bray writes that shadow education is increasingly being structured and delivered in systems alongside formal schooling, departing from the older form of more informal tutoring. This institutionalized evolution of an educational system has been discussed elsewhere (Baker & LeTendre 2005; Meyer 1977). Bray also mentions that the ‘Making Good Progress’ scheme in England, a policy measure for private tutoring, was created by assessing evidence from Australia and the United States, as well as from its own pre-existing system. Such references to other countries suggest the possibility of policy borrowing (Steiner-Khamsi 2004).

One question that still remains is what to do with private tutoring for high-achieving students. As Bray suggests, governments may encourage private tutoring for low-achieving students so as to promote equity. However, families with high-achieving students may still seek tutoring in order to gain an edge. We know from the book that strict prohibition of private tutoring to reduce competition may not work, and that we should keep the monitoring and evaluation. But the ultimate decision may depend on the particular society’s view of the public and private natures of education. Do those high-achieving students receive tutoring merely as consumers of tailored services, or is tutoring a necessary social service that must be provided for all students? It remains to be seen what policy makers can do in relation to such an issue.

As Bray’s influential book written in 1999 opened the way for the worldwide study of shadow education, the present book also deserves the attention of policy planners and researchers across the world. With important conceptual considerations and helpful details from various countries, Bray encourages policy planners to carefully review the nature of private tutoring and design appropriate measures that fit their own circumstances. The book makes an important contribution to the field and will attract readers who are interested to know what can be done about this complex phenomenon.

References


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