

BOOK REVIEWS

Confronting the shadow education system: what government policies for what private tutoring?, by Mark Bray, Paris, UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), 2009, 132 pp., €20 paper copy, electronic copy free of charge from www.iiep.unesco.org, ISBN 978-92-803-1333-8

This ambitious book builds on from Bray's 1999 publication 'The shadow education system: Private tutoring and its implications for planners' and 'Adverse effects of supplementary tutoring: Dimensions, implications and government responses' published in 2003. For the current volume the author was instrumental in bringing together 37 researchers, policy-makers, planners and practitioners from a variety of countries to discuss the important yet often neglected topic of shadow education. A large proportion of this book is the culmination of the IIEP policy forum held in Paris in July 2007 entitled: 'Confronting the shadow education system: What government policies for what private tutoring?' Bray employed the same title for his new book. This policy forum facilitated the publication of accurate comparative discussion, although the distinction between the forum proceedings and other research studies are somewhat blurred and would benefit from further clarification.

Despite the rapid expansion of shadow education worldwide, private supplementary tutoring has received relatively little attention from academics and policy-makers. One reason for this may be its hidden nature and the wide variety of forms it can take. Bray states 'tutoring is a very complex phenomenon, driven by multiple ingredients which vary across cultures, economies, geographic locations and social classes' (103).

The author uses five chapters to answer the question posed in the title: 'What government policies for what private tutoring?' Following the introduction where the metaphor of the shadow is explained, the second chapter entitled 'Diagnosis' describes the scale, intensity and mode of private supplementary tutoring. This section provides the reader with a better understanding of the huge variation in scale and mode of private tuition and later describes the consequential economic, educational and social impact. Clear and precise examples are included to demonstrate both the positive and negative impacts that have arisen as a result of the growing private tuition market.

A particularly interesting part of this volume comes in the latter part of Chapter 2 where three country case studies are included: Korea, Mauritius and France. Although brief, these case studies emphasise the contrast in government responses to the growth of private tuition. With regard to regulating the industry, Bray argues that 'in general, the domain needs greater clarity, which can be facilitated by cross national comparison' (92). Cross national comparison is one of the main aims and strengths of this book, these case studies provide a comprehensive account of the form and content of private tuition in different contexts and the subsequent government responses.

In Korea household expenditure on private tuition is estimated to be equivalent to 80% of government expenditure on primary and secondary education. The author argues that the practice of extracurricular preparation has been widely criticised for 'the stress it created

for children, the financial burden on parents, and the way that it exacerbated social inequalities' (48). Bray discusses the numerous failed government attempts at reducing or prohibiting forms of private supplementary tutoring. Despite these efforts the number of Korean students known to receive private tutoring has risen sharply in the past 30 years.

Two former education ministers from Mauritius attended the IIEP policy forum where they discussed the problems posed by private tuition. Due to the competition to attend top secondary schools in Mauritius, Bray states 'the more academically able the students, the more likely they were to receive private tutoring' (56). In Mauritius shadow education became 'a self-fulfilling prophesy' (56) where teachers assumed their students were receiving private tuition so consequently made less effort to prepare the students for forthcoming examinations. Several reforms were attempted including proscription of private tuition for early primary grades and reducing the disparity between top, second and third rate secondary schools. However, no reforms have been successful and private tuition has been described as a vicious circle where parents dare not send their children to receive extra tuition because all other parents are doing so.

By contrast, the French government are actively encouraging the growth of shadow education by providing parents with tax relief when they pay for private tuition. The government allows 50% of the cost of tutoring to be deducted from liability for income tax. Bray states 'the authorities have aspired to raise levels of educational achievement while sharing the financial burden' (65). Although this means more families can afford the cost of tutoring, this initiative favours those families who are 'able and willing to make some sacrifice' (65). In an attempt to reduce this social inequality, the government has financed state-run homework support systems and made them available to all pupils.

Chapter 3 extends the case studies and continues to elaborate on different policy responses including examples of both successful and unsuccessful reforms in this field. Among the delegates at the Shadow Education policy forum, Dawn Taylor representing the DCSF,¹ presented plans on the Making Good Progress Pilot.² Bray mentions this pilot at several intervals throughout the book as an example of a policy response to actively employ teachers as tutors in the public sector. At the end of Chapter 3 the author notes the potential for corruption when tutoring is completed by teachers of the pupils for whom they already have responsibility within the classroom. While this concern is justified in a number of different contexts, it may be unfounded in the English setting due to the remuneration provided to the teachers, the limited 10-hour period for which each child is tutored and the specific students who are targeted as part of the initiative.

In Chapter 4 Bray advises policy-makers to monitor and particularly to assess the impact of private tuition; he provides suggestions on how to collect precise data on the nature and scale of this phenomenon. This book contains the same warning voiced in Bray's earlier work in this area, although here it is given further emphasis. The author warns policy-makers and planners not to ignore the shadow education system and stresses the need for continual monitoring and analysis.

In Chapter 5 a further warning is directed at English policy-makers. Bray states that 'well intentioned government initiatives to encourage tutoring for low achievers could change the cultures of school systems in unintended ways' (103). This warranted caution should be heeded by policy-makers who have been urged throughout this volume to monitor carefully the shadow system and particularly the impact of specific policy interventions.

Bray returns to the shadow metaphor at the final section of the book entitled 'learning from the shadow'. Here the focus changes as policy-makers and planners are encouraged to consider why parents are prepared to invest large sums of money to supplement mainstream schooling.

As the title implies, this book aims to confront the issues presented by the shadow education system by increasing awareness. This short volume provides a taster and good starting point for some very important yet neglected issues that need to be given further attention. Various government responses are presented assisting policy-makers and planners to identify appropriate action to suit their own circumstances (14). The clear structure and helpful layout (including featured text boxes, graphs and charts) assists the reader to navigate through this complex topic. This book will deservedly find a place on the shelves of policy-makers, researchers and practitioners working in this field across the globe.

Notes

1. Now the Department for Education (DfE).
2. On 6 June 2007, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, announced a major two-year Making Good Progress Pilot from September 2007. The pilot trialled new ways to assess, report and stimulate progress in schools. Part of the pilot included the introduction of 10 hours one-to-one tuition in maths or English for pupils struggling to make the expected progress in KS2 and KS3.

References

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Educational opportunity: the geography of access to higher education, by Alexander D. Singleton, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing, 2010, 203 pp., £62.07, ISBN 978-0-7546-7867-0

This book explores ‘the multiple dimensions of social, spatial, and temporal processes which shape access to Higher Education’ (185) and the social inequalities in access to higher education. What distinguishes this book from others on the topic is its emphasis on the geographic manifestations of these inequalities through its use of geodemographic classifications to analyse higher education access and participation. Geodemographics – not actually defined anywhere in the book – is the description of people according to where they live, derived from the study of spatial information.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The first two set the scene and discuss the geographies of access to higher education and educational data sources, tools, and profiling techniques. The next few chapters focus specifically on the use of geodemographics analysis and classifications in higher education to assess the effectiveness of widening participation policies and trends in access to higher education, including data on the role of schools.

According to the book’s introduction, the book evaluates the socio-spatial implications of changes in higher education and ‘presents a systematic spatial framework for widening participation and extending access in an era of variable fees.’ (1). It shows how higher