

# ***“It’s not about the grades!”* On shadow education in Denmark and how parents wish to help their children get ahead**

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**Abstract:** This article is about shadow education in Denmark. Based on qualitative interview data with families that purchase private supplementary tutoring, we analyse how this tutoring is related to child-rearing strategies in the families. With theoretical inspiration from Annette Lareau, we analyse the parents’ involvement in their children’s education as aspects of *concerted cultivation*. With the concept *parentocracy*, we shed light on the role parents’ *wealth* and *wishes* play in their children’s educational life. Finally, we look to contemporary educational youth research and the concept *performance culture*, to address implications such as stress, pressure, competitiveness, and a strong focus on grades among students in Danish upper secondary education.

**Keywords:** Shadow education, private supplementary tutoring, child-rearing strategies, youth education, inequality in education

## Introduction

In recent decades, the use of private supplementary tutoring, especially in East Asia, has intensified and is now worldwide a part of many parents’ and students’ educational choices (Bray, 2013). In the hope of improving their academic achievements and pass exams, students who attend fee-free public schools sign up for private, fee-based tutoring. The phenomenon is called *shadow education*, as it mimics, or shadow, formal schooling. The practice is popular at all levels of schooling, especially in North America, West- and Central Asia, Europe, and Africa (Bray, 2013; 2020). In the Scandinavian countries, private tutoring has not drawn much research attention - though it may have substantial policy implications. It is a private market for education growing (more or less) unregulated, in the shadows, where only the service providers and their users know much about it. In this article, we will discuss the societal implications, and reflect on whether shadow education reduces inequalities in education - or whether it increases the gap between high and low achievers, with the socioeconomically strongest pupils getting ahead (again)?

This article is based on newly initiated qualitative research, where we examine the scope of shadow education in Denmark and how it affects the daily lives in Danish families, including the child-rearing strategies parents choose. We ask the following research questions: *Which role does private supplementary tutoring play in child-rearing strategies? And which personal and societal implications, if any, do parents and students see private supplementary tutoring have?*

This article is an extension of a prior work we conducted (Mikkelsen & Gravesen, 2021), in which we reflected on the fact, that in Denmark, shadow education is growing at a slower pace than in many other parts of the world. That work was primarily based on historical

literature and we implied that due to a solid tradition of democracy, welfare and scepticism towards competition in the Danish society, the conditions for growth in the private tutoring business is limited. With this article, based on interviews with Danish families that purchased private tutoring, we wish – from a qualitative perspective - to further examine the shadow education phenomenon in Denmark.

The article has five sections. In the first section, we introduce the background and aim of the project, as well as a status on Danish and international research on private supplementary tutoring. In section two, we present our methodological approach, followed by section three, in which we concretize our theoretical framework and analytical take. In the fourth section, we bring our analysis, in which we investigate our research questions by examining our empirical findings theoretically. The analysis is structured around three categories; respectively *the choice*, *the time* and *the money*. Finally, we present our conclusion in which we discuss implications and perspectives on further studies.

## Section 1. Background, aim, and other research on private supplementary tutoring

The background of this article is a growing research interest in private supplementary tutoring in Denmark. Quantitative comparisons show that Denmark is among the countries with the lowest use of so-called *shadow education*, with participation rates -over the last three decades - well under, or just around, 10% (Baker et al, 2001; Southgate, 2009; Entrich, 2020). However, during the last 5-6 years, the private tutoring market in Denmark has developed and grown faster than before (Egmont Foss, 2019; Christensen & Williams Ørberg, 2015; Mikkelsen & Gravesen, 2021). This development follows an international tendency of a general intensified use of fee-paying out of school tutoring (Byun, Chung, & Baker, 2018). Using data from the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment Byun et al. (2018) show that approximately one third of all 15-year-old students in 64 countries across the world use private supplementary tutoring.

Although the phenomenon is not new in Denmark, according to statistics, and private tutoring companies enter the Danish educational stage at a fast rate, there is very little research analysing and discussing the market and its users (Christensen, 2020; Mikkelsen & Gravesen, 2021). In his research paper *From Homework Support to Learning industry?*,<sup>1</sup> Søren Christensen discusses how private supplementary tutoring in Singapore used to focus solely on grades and exams, but today includes pedagogical principles that emphasizes personal development and holistic values (Christensen, 2019). This, we believe, is important in trying to understand the rise of private tutoring services in a Danish context, as international research also emphasize that the specific local contexts of families and education are important in understanding the use and parental involvement in private tutoring (Park, Byun, & Kim, 2011). Historically, Denmark has had a strong focus on unity, equality, democracy and a child-centred, holistic approach in schools (Mikkelsen, Degn, & Dorf, 2018; Mikkelsen & Gravesen, 2021). In the Danish welfare society, and among Danish parents, there is scepticism towards competition and inequality in education (VIVE, 2000). The idea of the Danish primary and lower secondary school system, dating back 200 years, is the notion that students

1 [In Danish: *Fra lektiehjælp til læringsindustri?*]

from different backgrounds meet in (what could be translated to) *the unity school*<sup>2</sup> where they, ideally, are given the opportunity to reach their fullest potential, regardless of social, economic, religious, racial, and ethnic background (Petersen & Krogh-Jespersen, 2017). In 2011, Mark Bray noted that Northern Europe seemed least affected by the global rise of private tutoring (Bray, 2011; Christensen, 2019), due to a stronger tradition of Scandinavian schools “adequately meeting their students’ needs” (Bray, Kwo & Jokic, 2015). Today, with the emergence of a more competitive society globally, and the emphasis on education as an important parameter of success and prosperity nationally and on an individual level, the opportunity for private education in the Danish society has been established (Mikkelsen & Gravesen, 2021). Accordingly, recent school reforms focusing on increased testing, the introduction of grade requirements in upper secondary education and a general acceleration of formal learning demands (Gravesen & Ringskou, 2018; Görlich, Pless, Katzenelson & Graversen, 2019) also pave the way for an expansion of the shadow education phenomenon in Denmark. Providers of private tutoring challenge the traditional understanding of education, creating new structures of power in the Danish educational system (Andersen, 2019). On the basis of a narrative analysis of interviews with parents, the Danish researcher Anna-Lea Byskov Andersen discusses whether investments in private supplementary tutoring can be interpreted as being inventive and resourceful acts of parent-support or rather the opposite? She finds it hard to answer. From one perspective, one can argue that being able to buy such services for your children demonstrates (economic) resources and the will to act on a problem. On the other hand, not being able to help your child yourself - due to the lack of time or insufficient knowledge - could be considered un-resourceful - though it shows some sort of resourcefulness to do something about it.

Barker (2018) finds that private tutoring in Denmark is primarily used among socio economic privileged families from affluent urban areas. This way the growing marketization of academic support and education in Denmark may reinforce the inequality among students from different socio economic backgrounds, an inequality that is and has been an important goal in Danish educational policy to defeat (Retsinformation, 2021). Correspondingly, international research shows that private supplementary tutoring can be crucial when it comes to educational inequality, as the opportunity to purchase the support is most likely dependent of the students’ socio economic status. This way socioeconomic status in families is strongly linked to participation in private academic tutoring (Park, Buchmann, Choi, & Merry, 2016; Buchmann, Condron, & Roscigno, 2010; Jung & Lee, 2010; Matsuoka, 2015).

In this article, we examine parental motivations and strategies in order to understand how parents experience private tutoring - and why they prioritize it.

## Section 2. Methodology

Methodologically, this article is based on four qualitative interviews in two Danish families that have purchased private supplementary tutoring. Two interviews were carried out with parents; and two interviews with their daughters<sup>3</sup>. All four interviews were conducted in September/October 2019 in one of the largest cities in Denmark. In family 1, the mother Rita

2 [In Danish: Enhedskolen],

3 To secure anonymity, all names and places have been changed. In the analysis, we refer to family 1 and 2. In family 1 we call the mother Rita and her daughter Liliian. In family 2 we call the mother Paula and her daughter Sandy.

and her husband are both medical doctors, and they live in a relatively affluent area a few kilometres from the city centre. At the time of the interview, their daughter Lilian, was in her first year of gymnasium (upper secondary education). In family 2, the mother Paula is a manager in retail, and the family lives in a hip area near the city centre. Sandy, the daughter, was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade of lower secondary education at the time of the interview. Officials from a Tutoring Company on the Danish market helped us reach the families, and they were contacted by email. The interviews were carried out in the homes of the respondents, which gave us a sense of their home environment. The sample in this study is fairly small, and we regard it a pilot study in which we have initiated beginning qualitative explorations of a small, but emerging research field in Denmark. American sociologist Mario Luis Small emphasizes that "the strengths of qualitative work come from understanding how and why, not understanding how many" (Small 2008: 8). Accordingly, our ambition was to explore *why* parents and their children choose to purchase supplementary tutoring, and *how* they feel about it, as opposed to studying *how many* families that choose such services. We conducted the interviews using semi-structured interview guides (Kvale, 1997; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Brinkmann, 2012). By doing qualitative research and by conducting semi-structured interviews, we did not attempt to get objective and hard facts, but rather find a pathway to our informants' experiences and understandings of their situation.

When carrying out interviews in qualitative research, the relationship between the researcher and the informant is essential (Hastrup, 2010), because this type of knowledge-production is conversational, narrative, linguistic, contextual, and inter-relational in nature (Kvale, 1997). According to Staunæs & Søndergaard (2005: 54), the complexity of doing qualitative interviews is due to the fact that face-to-face encounters are characterized by dialogue, reflexivity, sensitivity, flexibility, and creativity. To give room for such elements, our interview guides were open-ended, and we did not follow them strictly or instrumentally. Rather, we would pose a question, and then follow the informant's narratives and experiences, often with follow-up questions.

### Section 3. Theoretical framework and analytical take

Theoretically, when we analyse the private tutoring in the families as elements of child-rearing strategies, we are inspired by sociologist Annette Lareau's work and her concept *concerted cultivation* (Lareau, 2003). Lareau developed the term to describe middle-class parents' efforts to strengthen their children's talents and skills, by extensively supporting their schooling and leisure time activities. In the analysis, we also visit a newly developed sociological term dealing with parenthood; *enriching intimacy* (Stefansen & Aarseth, 2011), also based on Lareau's conceptualization. When trying to grasp the families' choices and views, we use Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *social reproduction* and *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 2004; 2007; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2006) in our understanding of the stratified circumstances that underlie the parents' and their children's private supplementary tutoring strategies. Moreover, we look at two concepts: *Parentocracy* and *performance culture*. The first concept was introduced by Philip Brown in his article: *'The Third Wave': education and the ideology of parentocracy* (1990) and it concerns the marketization of education and how it affects parents' attitudes to schooling. The notion of a *performance culture* causing stress, competitiveness and a stronger focus on grades among contemporary

Danish youth, is presented by the two Danish youth researchers Noemi Katznelson and Arnt Vestergaard Louw (2018).

Analytically, we are informed by Staunæs' and Søndergaard's notions of being sensitive towards the complexity of one's material (Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2005). Staunæs and Søndergaard stress that dialogue, rather than consensus, between researcher and material is crucial. The analytical challenge lies in the balance between being informed by one's research questions and prior knowledge, and making room for new, uninspected, and different takes and turns that arise in the interview dialogues. We experienced this challenge exactly, when we worked our way through the interview data. When listening to our interviews and coding the transcripts inductively, three main issues stood out. In the following section, we turn those issues into three empirical categories; *the choice*, *the time* and *the money*, and let them structure the analysis and lead to the subsequent discussion. Although we took on an inductive approach when examining our transcripts, and accordingly searched for new relevant literature to build on in our analysis, one could argue that we also worked deductively, as our understanding of inequality in education and our prior readings of Lareau and Bourdieu were well established before we even took contact to the informants, that shared their perspectives in the study. In that sense, one could say we did not work *either* inductively *or* deductively, but rather abductively. In the following section we will see how some of our findings conform to established knowledge and theory, while other findings represent new understandings of the shadow education phenomenon in Denmark.

#### Section 4. Analysis. The choice, the time, the money

*The Choice. "...it's not about the grades!"*

When the two mothers explain their reasons for purchasing private supplementary tutoring for their daughters, they say something in their daughter's schoolwork was challenging and needed a little extra attention. In both cases, the struggle was caused by specific subjects. Rita, the mother in family 1, explains that when Lilian, her daughter, was away for 10<sup>th</sup> grade at a boarding school in England, she struggled with chemistry to the extent, that they did not know if she would pass her exam.

Rita: "Well, we tried it [private supplementary tutoring] twice. The first time, our youngest daughter was in school in England, and honestly, she just wasn't at the level of the English students. She hardly understood what was going on around her, so we had to provide her with some basic knowledge that we couldn't actually help her with ... it was chemistry, and she really didn't understand the basics. She hadn't learned it in her primary school back home... things like the periodic system... it was too much, and she just couldn't manage it all..."

Rita clarifies, that they purchased the tutoring, which then took place when Lilian was home for a holiday period during her year abroad. The short time made the course intense, and the mentor, who came to the house, made a great impact and, consequently, things improved. Now, back in Denmark for her first year of upper secondary education [in Danish: gymnasium], Lilian's view of chemistry is a completely different story.

Lilian: "I just feel, now that I am in gymnasium, it really just helped me so much (...). Now I think it's awesome, because I get it..."

When interviewing Paula, the mother in family 2, she explains that also her daughter, Sandy, struggles with a specific subject; math.

Paula: "...she performs well academically... average, I guess. Nevertheless, perhaps she is overlooked or unnoticed at times, because over there [at the public school], they have a very heavy group of students who need a lot of support..."

When Paula introduced her daughter, Sandy, to the idea of private supplementary tutoring, Sandy was sceptical. The parents made the decision, but it helped Sandy to accept it, when her parents said another girl in her class also received tutoring. In the beginning, Sandy did not want to talk too much about it, and they still do not share it with many people. "*She is only 14 years old, (...) she just wants to do what everyone else does...*", Paula explains, stressing that "*it's not about the grades!*" Rather, she says, it is about helping Sandy feel good about math, thereby protecting her overall well-being and self-confidence. It is about "*daring to raise your hand in class*", as Paula puts it.

Rita, the mother in family 1, agrees with Paula that self-esteem and well-being are the most important factors. When asked what she considers the most crucial as a mother to a teenage daughter, she reflects;

Rita: "*what's the most important thing? ...that she is happy and content... that she feels, she is capable of doing what she is doing... that she is capable of all the things she does!*"

Though both mothers stress that their choice to buy private supplementary tutoring is not based on academic ambitions on their daughters' behalf, they still recognize that today, education is very important when plans for the future and career aspirations move closer. This touches on general questions regarding Danish parents' understanding of education and why the rise of private supplementary tutoring in Denmark has happened at a much slower pace than what we witness in many other countries. In another paper, we reflected on the explanations for this fact (Mikkelsen & Gravesen, 2021), suggesting that with a solid, historical emphasis on democracy, equality, and child-centred approaches in Danish school- and leisure pedagogy, in addition to parents' scepticism towards competition in education, the conditions for a private tutoring market have been poor. However, as we illustrate in this article, winds may be changing here, too.

The scepticism towards competition in education among Danish parents (VIVE, 2000) might affect how parents conceive the private supplementary tutoring industry. At least in our data, we see that feelings and attitudes towards private tutoring, competition, and the present-day focus on grades and performance in education are accompanied by ambivalence. Rita, the mother in family 1, declares that purchasing private supplementary tutoring is "*embarrassing by some means*", because she finds it intrusive, pushy and contrary to Danish ideologies of education.

Rita: "*I don't speak too much about it... because, you know, it is quite expensive!... it can cause some envy, I think... it's not something I speak too openly about... if people ask, I will tell them about it, but I won't go on talking about it at work... (...). It's okay to help your children with their homework, because everyone does, but buying the help is a completely different project!... Then, we refute norms, standards and ideologies, I think... But then again, it had me thinking... what else would I want to spend my money on? I would rather do this than go and buy a new shirt. I would much rather spend it on education."*

At some point Lilian, Rita's daughter, is also sceptical about the private tutoring, as she sees it as a symbol of the performance culture that she and her peers confront in their everyday lives. Lilian says there is a great deal of pressure, and often students in her class are afraid to ask questions out of fear of presenting themselves in an unfortunate way. Such an environment can be stressful, and Lilian says the great thing about having a private mentor is allowing yourself to ask all the questions, you want. Sandy, the daughter in family 2, also experiences

pressure, when parents, family and teachers ask her what she wants to do when she grows up. Term marks and grades are part of her school in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and though Sandy likes grades, she also feels the pressure coming alongside with them.

Naturally, having to perform is a part of going to school, and always has been. However, contemporary educational youth research documents, that a permeating *performance culture* is emerging in upper secondary education institutions in Denmark (Katznelson & Louw, 2018). When students internalize a performance-oriented attitude, they tend to focus a lot on grades, and on how to get good grades.

*“A performance-oriented student will be product-oriented and busy identifying - and trying to live up to - teacher- and school expectations and fixed standards for knowledge presentation and -production. In addition, the student will be concerned with how to perform in comparison with others.”* (Katznelson & Louw, 2018: 14)

The students’ focus on grades is often ambivalent. They want them, and fear them (Katznelson & Louw, 2018: 33). Students also express that too much focus on grades will affect their learning, because one becomes more concerned with performing well in the eyes of others, especially teachers, than by learning something.

*The time. Just another structured after-school activity?*

In her influential contribution to our understanding of classed parental strategies, *Unequal childhoods*, American sociologist Annette Lareau notices “*social class differences in children’s life experiences can be seen in the details of life*” (Lareau, 2003: 35). Indeed, Lareau’s work shows in great detail how parents’ attitudes to their children are very different, not least based on how involved parents are with their children. Rita and Paula easily fall into the category of mothers who engage in a process of *concerted cultivation*, which Lareau uses to describe middle-class parents’ parental strategies aimed at strengthening their children’s talents and skills through adult-structured activities in their after-school hours.

During the first year of contemporary Danish Gymnasiums, there is a specific exam called *general language understanding*. Ahead of the course and the exam, Lilian and her mother Rita discussed how to understand the assessment, and did some research on the internet to find more information. It was difficult for them, and it is clear from the interview with Rita, that she was very involved and spent a lot of time trying to figure out what to do.

In Kari Stefanson’s and Helene Aarseth’s (2011) inspiring paper *Enriching intimacy: the role of the emotional in the ‘resourcing’ of middle-class children*, in which they partly build on Lareau’s work in *Unequal childhoods*, Stefanson and Aarseth reflect on the emotional bonding between parents and children and the intimacy they share through their mutual activities and involvement with each other in daily life. Sharing the same enjoyment may be seen as passing on cultural capital from one generation to the next, which is also a key aspect of Lareau’s discussion on inequality. This is a view she shares with work by Pierre Bourdieu and his colleagues (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2006, Bourdieu, 2004; 2007). In Lareau’s words;

*“Still, there is no question that we live in a society characterized by considerable gaps in resources or, put differently, by substantial inequality.”* (Lareau, 2003: 8)

In our data, we see many examples of how resources are passed on from the mothers to the daughters. Often, a shared intimacy and interest in specific cultural aspects of their lives are forming the concerted cultivation.

According to Rita, '*Lilian is not a humanist*', and hence, Rita believes, Lilian needs support during the above-mentioned *general language understanding* course and exam. In the interview, it is obvious that Rita enjoys academic discussions with her daughter. Furthermore, Rita explains that sometimes she reads the novels in Lilian's curriculum, and often spends a lot of time supporting Lilian with her homework and discussing school-related issues. Accordingly, Lilian says sometimes she feels that her mother puts pressure on her, possibly because Rita enjoys schooling and learning herself.

Apart from doing homework, Lilian speaks of other leisure-time activities she likes to spend time on. In general, she has an active and sometimes hectic leisure life. Her mother is very aware and supports her daughter - with one exception; Lilian works in the local supermarket, and Rita thinks it is "*brain-dead*", as she puts it. "*I offered her the money*", she laughs, "*but she likes to earn her own!*". Lilian is also engaged in a triathlon club, and she trains three times a week. Her father is a triathlete too, and training is a thing they share. Lilian participates in local tournaments, and with three weekly trainings and competitions sometimes on weekends, it adds up to a busy schedule.

In family 2, Sandy also lives a fairly busy life. Her mother Paula is very enthusiastic about Sandy participating in structured leisure activities, and during her childhood, she has attended many activities, e.g. badminton, dance classes, and choir. Currently, apart from her afternoon part time job helping out in a local kindergarten, the private supplementary tutoring is her primary structured leisure activity. While being tutored, Sandy is allowed a pause from badminton. When asked why participating in structured leisure activities is so important, Paula explains that the social relationships in such groups are important for her children's well-being. "I did three types of sport", Sandy explains. And her father being a musician, she has musical skills and sang in a choir for years.

As illustrated, both Lilian and Sandy lead busy every-day lives. Private supplementary tutoring, it seems, is something they consider an option among other traditional structured after-school activities to choose from – and pay for. But perhaps comparing traditional after-school activities, such as sports and arts, with private supplementary tutoring is like comparing apples to oranges - comparing formal and compulsory activities with informal and voluntary activities?

*The money. "It's an investment!"*

Purchasing private supplementary tutoring is expensive, and in both families, the costs have been the subject of discussions. Nonetheless, both mothers explain that they see it as an investment. When asked if her husband agrees, Rita replies:

Rita: "*Yes! And this is also why we sent her to England. Because, when you get some education, it gives you opportunities, it gives you some skills... it gives you the ability to cope in life... (...). You become resilient, you develop coping strategies, and if things fail, you just have to try again, and again, and again... there is something about coping in life, when you are educated. And that is what we want to spend our money on...*"

Paula is also aware of the cost, and with Sandy's brother away on an elite football boarding school, the family had to consider their budget.

Paula: "*It's not something that worries us... we did consider before, though... and when I had to make the final decision, I definitely saw that it was a lot of money... but again, as long as it's within the budget. It could be a boarding school or whatever. It's not something we think about... (...). It's a choice, we made (...). It's something you invest in, it's expensive... it's like horseback riding classes... very expensive, too!*"

The daughters are also very aware that their parents provide the means for the tutoring activities. Indirectly, Lilian notes that you pay for the ability to ask all the silly and stupid questions without fearing it will affect your grades. She is also aware of the abstractness of it - as you will never really know what you get.

Lilian: *"If you buy an expensive bag, people can see that you bought an expensive bag. You can carry that bag for many years... whereas, when you pay about 300 Danish kroner for an hour of tutoring... (...), you do not know what the effect will be!"*

That Danish parents, to a greater extent, are willing to pay for their children's educational thriving and success, brings to mind Philip Brown's concept *parentocracy*. In 1990, Philip Brown published an important article, in which he launched the idea of the 'third wave' in the socio-historical development of British Education (Brown, 1990). In the article, Brown introduced the related concept *parentocracy* as a way to characterize crucial changes towards higher degrees of marketization and free choice for parents in education.

*"To date, the 'third wave' has been characterised by the rise of the educational parentocracy, where a child's education is increasingly dependent upon the wealth and wishes of parents, rather than the ability and efforts of pupils."* (Brown, 1990: 66)

To this day, Browns reflections seem utterly relevant, not least within the scope of the analyses presented in this article. According to Brown, the distribution of knowledge, power, and life chances ought to be a political question, rather than one answered by the free play of market forces (Brown, 1990, p. 80). The question of social reproduction, and the role of the state and the educational system in that regard, is a concern Brown shares with important parts of Bourdieu's work, and, as we have discussed in this article, also with Lareau.

Rita, Lilian's mother, emphasizes that Lilian is very aware of the financial cost and, consequently, wants to do her absolute best to make the tutoring a success. Sandy is also conscious of the money involved, and she has a clear sense of what her parents are paying for:

Sandy: *"I know my parents really want this... they want me to be happy, get good grades and a better education... and then you just feel like OK, this is actually important! ...this is not for fun; it's not free of charge... (...). When it is so expensive, you know that they [the mentors] are actually professionals that can handle it."*

With parents that are willing to invest not only money, but also time and energy in the wellbeing of their children, share discussions related to issues in school, leisure life and future aspirations, Sandy and Lilian are members of a privileged group of students, who experience such support from their home environments. As a consequence, the girls are likely to feel entitled and contented when future challenges arise. According to Lareau a sense of entitlement is a consequence of the child-rearing strategy *concerted cultivation*, thriving among middle-class parents (Lareau, 2003: 31). This sense of entitlement is part of the unequal distribution of resources that characterise our stratified societies. Not all children are born into families able to finance private supplementary tutoring. As a result, as the tutoring market expands, educational inequality is not only moulded in the formal educational system, but also in the leisure sphere.

Lilian, the daughter in family 1, is very aware of this societal implication, calling it a vicious spiral that students, who may actually need the support and supplementary tutoring the most, are probably the ones whose parents cannot afford it. Eventually, this spiral could enhance inequality in education. Because in a parentocracy, to keep Brown's concept and wording, a child's education depends on the *wealth* and *wishes* of parents. Such monetary realities affect the power structures and social reproduction educational policy makers have

known (and tried to combat) for decades. In that light, it seems relevant to keep a critical eye on the growing tutoring business and develop further studies on the phenomenon. On the other hand, private supplementary tutoring could be an excellent (and equalizing) opportunity that under-privileged families can rely on to impede the traditional forms of social reproduction and imbalanced transfer of cultural capital between generations. All it takes, it seems, are financial priorities and an openness to buying educational products on a free market.

## Section 5. Conclusion

In this article, we posed two research questions; *Which role does private supplementary tutoring play in child-rearing strategies? And which personal and societal implications, if any, do parents and students see private supplementary tutoring have?*

Our analysis indicates that private supplementary tutoring, and the performance culture it is a part of, may have personal as well as societal implications. Stress among students (Katznelson & Louw, 2018: 71-75), product-orientation, competitiveness, and a stronger focus on grades are all elements of the performance culture. Those elements make a positive environment for companies that provide private supplementary tutoring in Denmark. And, accordingly, the rise of private tutoring activities may increase the gap between social classes in the country, as the well-off families are able to purchase tutoring to help their children overcome challenges in school, thereby getting ahead of the game in education.

However, with so little research on the phenomenon in Denmark, we do not yet know enough about the mechanisms at play. The empirical data underlying our analysis does not deliver sufficient or comprehensive answers. But generalizability and objective facts were never the intention of qualitative research (Small, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Bertaux, 1981). What we *can* do, though, with our qualitative interview data and the related analysis, is point to feelings, attitudes, as well as identify some of the ambivalences that may not have been visible before. Accordingly, for future theoretical and empirical research and indeed for policy recommendations, it would be preferable to build argumentations and analysis on larger sample sizes in qualitative studies.

On the basis of our coding process, we focused our findings and correlated analysis on three main issues; *the choice, the time and the money*. Firstly, when parents choose to purchase private supplementary tutoring, they do so because their children are struggling with specific subjects in school. However, the parents say it is "*not about the grades*", but rather to protect their children's wellbeing and self-confidence. This illustrates an interesting contradiction. We would like to follow up on this in future studies. Secondly, we focused on the time perspective of private supplementary tutoring. Parents are aware of their children's busy schedules, and the sacrifices they must accept when spending time on being tutored. Often, parents and their children discuss schooling and enjoy many common areas of their everyday lives. Such emotional interrelating is termed *enriching intimacy*, and we see many examples of that in our data. Thirdly, we looked at the financial aspects for families in choosing private supplementary tutoring. Parents discuss prices and priorities with service providers. The children are aware of the cost, and are eager to make the tutoring process successful.

Throughout the analysis sections, we organized our reflections on personal and societal implications around two theoretic concepts; *parentocracy* and *performance culture*. Private supplementary tutoring is a growing business in Denmark, and hence Brown's concept from

1990 is relevant and important. The *wealth* and *wishes* of parents become crucial, when traditional understandings of education as a public domain is challenged. Furthermore, our analysis illustrate that with the rise in private tutoring activities, our traditional understanding of children's leisure sphere could be challenged. To a growing number of children and young people, educational activities are now 'corrupting' (strongly put) the after-school hours that used to be filled by other activities - based on informality and voluntariness. Accordingly, contemporary youth research documents an emerging performance culture among students in upper secondary education. Related implications are stress, pressure, and a product-orientation causing a strong focus on grades and competitiveness among peers.

These implications raise questions about inequality in education. Bourdieu and Lareau impacted our understanding of social reproduction and cultural capital, and now, with a growing private market offering private tutoring services in Denmark, new aspects can be added to the necessary reflection and analysis.

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