

Shadow Education in Denmark: In the Light of the Danish History of Pedagogy and the Skepticism Toward Competition

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Abstract

Purpose: This article investigates the role of private supplementary tutoring in Denmark in light of the country's pedagogical traditions in schools and leisure spheres.

Design/Approach/Methods: Although tutoring activities are increasing, the phenomenon is not as prevalent in Denmark as in many other countries. In this article, we look into the history of Danish pedagogy for answers as to why this is the case. In the analytical sections of the article, we include research on parental values of child-rearing, as well as findings from a pilot study on Danish families purchasing private supplementary tutoring, the public debate about private tutoring, and contemporary youth research.

Findings: With a solid emphasis on democracy and equality in Danish pedagogy, the conditions for increasing private supplementary tutoring in Denmark have been challenged. However, a current focus on global competition, formal competencies, and higher academic performance among children and young people suggests that providers of private tutoring perhaps face a brighter future—also in Denmark.

Originality/Value: This article addresses a new field of qualitative research on private supplementary tutoring in Denmark and may be a platform for further reflection and empirical research.

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Keywords

Denmark, parents' values, performance culture, private supplementary tutoring, shadow education

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Introduction

In this article, we look at the role of private supplementary tutoring, in research also often termed *shadow education*, in the Danish welfare society. Internationally, shadow education has experienced great expansion, not least in Asia, but also in Africa, North America, and other Western societies (Bray, 2013, 2021; Bray & Kwo, 2014). In Scandinavia, and particularly in Denmark, the trend of shadow education has been less pronounced. Although private supplementary tutoring is now a growing business, the proportion of students using such services is still fairly small in comparison with other countries (S. Christensen & Williams Ørberg, 2015; Engholm, 2013). Nevertheless, with the present rise in private tutoring activities, we consider it important to question and discuss the phenomenon in Denmark, and to do so, we turn to the country's history of pedagogy. To look at new phenomena in the light of history and tradition can be a fruitful exercise, and as we move ahead, we hope to prove just that. In Denmark, the history of school pedagogy is flanked by a history of leisure time pedagogy, and shadow education in the Danish society—the way it is designed and functioning—is reliant on both of these traditions. But not only is shadow education reliant on historical context. Shadow education also affects the contemporary everyday lives of children and young people, as they navigate between the spheres of school and leisure. The question we pose in this article is the following: *How can the history of school and leisure pedagogy cast light on the role—and somewhat delayed presence—of shadow education in Denmark?*

Obviously, as shadow education is fairly new and upcoming in Denmark, the phenomenon has not yet drawn much qualitative research attention. From cross-national quantitative comparisons, we do know that Denmark is among the countries with relatively limited shadow education use (Baker et al, 2001; Entrich, 2020; Southgate, 2009). However, with the upswing of tutoring activities in the Danish society during the last 4–5 years, the area is starting to spark interest. With the formation of academic networks among Danish, Scandinavian, and international researchers concerned with the phenomenon and its development in various societies, things in Denmark seem to be on the verge of change. Accordingly, this article serves as a sort of prologue to future research on shadow education in Denmark.

Globally, private supplementary tutoring, widely known as shadow education, has grown significantly both in scale and in intensity over the last decades, and students all over the world take part in a multitude of structured academic activities after ending their formal school day (Aurini

et al., 2013; Park et al., 2016; Yung & Bray, 2017). In this article, we understand supplementary education as varied structured academic activities, which function and take place parallel to the mainstream educational system (Bray, 2009). Bray (2009) uses the term shadow education as a metaphor, pointing out that the private supplementary tutoring to a large degree mimics mainstream education. When mainstream education changes, so does private supplementary education, and due to the functioning “in the shadows,” private tutoring draws much less public attention than regular education (Bray, 2009). Shadow education is *academic* (subjects such as languages, mathematics, sciences examined by schools, excluding musical, artistic, or sporting skills learned for pleasure and personal development), *supplementary* (about subjects already taught in school), and *private* (meaning that the tutoring services are for-profit or cost covering, excluding supplementary public help or assistance from family members [Bray, 2009, 2017]) In recent years, shadow education not only mimics mainstream education, it also complements it by using different pedagogical approaches, other learning materials, and so on (Bray, 2017; Bray et al., 2016).

In the following, we focus on the state of research on shadow education in Denmark. After that, we present the contours of shadow education in Denmark, followed by a deeper look into historical aspects of pedagogy in Denmark. We do so to gain an understanding of the underlying national context that shadow education in Denmark acts within. First, we focus on school tradition and school policy, then the history of leisure pedagogy. We wish to illustrate that though the two traditions are different, they share key philosophies and pedagogical approaches essential for understanding the role of shadow education in Denmark. Especially, why private tutoring is growing at a slower pace in Denmark compared to many other countries. After the historical accounts, we introduce the analytical sections, in which we elaborate on our argument. Firstly, we look to research on parental values on the subject of child-rearing. Next, we introduce findings from a qualitative pilot study we carried out in two families in the fall of 2019. After that, we present examples from the public debate on private tutoring in Denmark and recent findings from contemporary youth research addressing a culture of performance among young people in Denmark. We end the article with brief concluding remarks.

The state of research on shadow education in Denmark

Internationally, comparative analyses have been conducted focusing on shadow education participation rates across multiple countries. Such quantitative findings indicate that there is great variety in the amount of shadow education use across nations, with countries such as Columbia, Latvia (Baker et al., 2001), Greece, Turkey (Southgate, 2009), Malaysia, and Indonesia (Entrich, 2020) showing the highest participation rates around 60%–80%. In such cross-national comparisons, the amount of shadow education use in Denmark is among the lowest, with participation rates in the last three decades well under or around 10% (for math in the 1990s, see Baker et al.,

2001; for general use in the 2000s, see Southgate, 2009, and in the 2010s, see Entrich, 2020; Bukowski, 2017). Such statistics indicate that shadow education in Denmark is not a completely new phenomenon. However, as the above numbers are based on cross-national quantitative studies, we still do not know much about the reasons behind the fact that Danish parents choose to enter a relatively small market of private education to buy after-school tutoring for their children. Shadow education as a qualitative research field in Denmark is very new, and until now, it has only been conducted on a very small scale. Therefore, little in-depth knowledge is generated. In the following, we will present findings from a few small-scale research projects, and later in this article, we will present the findings of our own pilot study among families choosing private tutoring in Denmark.

In a research paper building on narrative analyses of four interviews with Danish parents, Andersen (2019) found that some parents articulate their investment in private tutoring as insurance that their children achieve well academically. Parents also note that their children experience increasing societal expectations and a stressed everyday life. Buying academic help, for some parents, is seen as buying or outsourcing conflicts and avoiding strict rules around homework—not common in Denmark. Andersen also finds that parents are concerned with the well-being and self-confidence of their children, and they connect those with academic achievements in school (Andersen, 2019).

In her MA thesis, based on survey data and qualitative interviews with students from the Danish island Zealand with the capital Copenhagen situated to the east, Barker (2018) finds that private tutoring in Denmark is primarily an elite phenomenon. Barker reveals that many socioeconomically strong families from affluent regions and areas of Zealand buy supplementary tutoring for their children. These families do not have difficulties paying the fees, which companies require for their services. Students from lower socioeconomic strata, who are not able to buy extra academic support, see private tutoring as unjust, which makes Barker note that the marketization of academic support and tutoring reinforces the inequality of the traditional and informal homework support from parents (Barker, 2018). This conclusion is supported by international research similarly showing that there is a strong relationship between students attending private supplementary tutoring and the socioeconomic status of families (Buchmann et al., 2010; Jung & Lee, 2010; Matsuoka, 2015; Park et al., 2016). However, a recent study shows that after educational reforms and a rise in the use of shadow education in Germany, this is not entirely the case here. Drawing on statistical data from the 2012 German Life study, Entrich and Lauterbach (2019) found that private supplementary tutoring is primarily used by disadvantaged educational strata to deal with higher demands in schools, independent on socioeconomic status. Southgate (2009) also found that although social class is a predictive factor of shadow education in the majority of countries he studied, this is not the case in all societies, among them Denmark. This indicates that local educational contexts and pedagogical traditions have great impact

on parents' behavior, perceptions, and priorities concerning private tutoring, which may support our argument that the Danish school and leisure time traditions influence parents' choices and view on buying academic tutoring.

The contours of shadow education in Denmark

In Denmark, the commercial market for private tutoring is fairly new. In 2013, the leading business newspaper *Børsen* wrote an article with the headline “New Organized Industry in Denmark: Homework Help,” stating that previously, private tutoring in Denmark was unorganized and arranged privately (Engholm, 2013). A Swedish private tutoring company named *My Academy* had announced it would enter the Danish market and a Danish company “The Homework Counsellors” [Lektiekonsulenterne] was established in 2012 (Barker, 2018; Engholm, 2013). This was temporarily related to historically large political negotiations of a reform of the Danish primary and lower secondary school, the *Folkeskole* (the reform adopted in 2014). Here, the notion of *homework* cafés in schools was introduced, a feature that suffered heavy critic and proved to work poorly in many schools. A new evaluation shows that 6 years after the reform, many schools have not implemented the homework cafés (K. S. Christensen, 2019; Nielsen & Jensen, 2020). The negotiations around the reform of the *Folkeskole* ended up in a monthlong lockout of all Danish publicly employed teachers in the spring of 2013, consequently closing down a vast majority of Danish schools. This teacher lockout started the largest and without comparison most dominant private tutoring company in Denmark, MentorDanmark, as almost every Danish parent was left without schooling for their children for nearly a month (S. Christensen & Williams Ørberg, 2015; Muff, 2017). MentorDanmark, who—based on their own estimates¹—covers about 80% of the Danish market, has assisted 20,650 families with private supplementary tutoring since 2014 until today (Egmont Foss, 2019; MentorDanmark, 2020). Still, the market is relatively small in comparison with other Western countries and is concentrated in and around the larger cities in Denmark (Barker, 2018). Before 2014, the market for private supplementary tutoring in Denmark was relatively small and no public debate or political discussion about it existed either (S. Christensen & Williams Ørberg, 2015; Engholm, 2013).

The Swedish *My Academy* is no longer on the Danish market and *The Homework Counsellors* was bought by and enrolled in MentorDanmark in 2016 (Barker, 2018). As the shadow education research is at its early stages in Denmark, there are no reliable and independent numbers as to how big the market is or how many parents use private tutoring. However, looking at publicly accessible numbers, MentorDanmark has grown rapidly and is now worth about 13.5 million Euro (CPR API, 2020; Egmont Foss, 2019). This may seem small in international comparison, but in a small country with 5.8 million inhabitants and a fairly new market, the company's growth is significant. Thus, to better understand the Danish private tutoring market, we will take a closer look at what

MentorDanmark offers. To get a fuller picture of which kind of tutoring Danish parents are buying and what services are popular, we also look at the services provided by (much) smaller private tutoring companies, such as Gotutor and Studyhouse.

MentorDanmark basically offers two kinds of private tutoring—private one-on-one tutoring on a weekly basis and intensive one-on-one help toward an upcoming exam—both on primary school and secondary school levels. MentorDanmark recommends one-on-one tutoring 2 hr per week in 1–2 subjects, and during a conversation with a representative from the company, it was stated that this kind of weekly tutoring is their top-selling product. The price of the recommended program of 9 months of tutoring 2 hr per week in one subject is approximately 2,800 Euros. This is about 20 times the amount parents pay for their child to play soccer 2–3 times a week for a season in a local sports club. The intensive tutoring before an approaching exam comes in three packages: one package is for a 24-hr exam and two packages include 10–14 hr of tutoring and a book with tips and tricks to good grades. The cost of the packages is nearly 400 Euros for the 24-hr exam help, 535 Euros for the 10-hr tutoring for a nearby exam, and 665 Euros for the 14-hr exam tutoring—the latter comes with a pass-the-exam or “get your money back” guarantee. MentorDanmark only offers one-on-one tutoring, and we have not been able to find any group tutoring on the Danish market, and seemingly no cram schools exist in Denmark (yet). Asked about group tutoring, the representative explained that they had tried to offer smaller-group tutoring with discounts to parents, but this was rejected by the parents, which made the representative note that “the Danish market is not ready for that yet.” When MentorDanmark promotes their services, the one-on-one tutoring is flanked by words like self-confidence, personal learning styles, personal needs of the child, desire for learning, fun, and joy of school (MentorDanmark, 2020). Gotutor and Studyhouse offer the same kind of tutoring, one-on-one tutoring packages and intensive exam tutoring. Gotutor also has an offer for children with dyslexia as well as language courses on all levels. Other small companies with comparable products exist and, moreover, there are private tutors offering their services on websites alongside people selling garden assistance, cleaning/cooking services, and window cleaning. Thus, the emerging private market of tutoring in Denmark does not yet resemble the private tutoring markets of East Asia or the Anglo-American situation (Bray, 2009; Byun & Park, 2012; Park et al., 2016).

Adjacent to the private market, there are nongovernmental organizations such as the Red Cross and Danish Refugee Aid that offer tutoring. This is provided in groups with other children by tutors who are not paid, but work on a voluntary basis (Dansk Flygtningehjælp, 2020; Røde Kors, 2020).

The Danish school tradition and school policy

In Denmark, 89% of children attend a school subjected to the Danish Education Act.² The Education Act underlines that the *Folkeskole* must contribute to children’s versatile development and

support the motivation and resources of the children's progress toward becoming active participants of the Danish democracy, characterized by equality and freedom (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet, 2019). The Folkeskole is not only regarded as a learning place for Danish children but also as a reflection of central notions and perceptions of the relationship between state development, political rationales, and pedagogical ideals (Degn et al., 2019). Hence, political interest and public debate is often intense. To some extent, the Folkeskole is a mirror in which it is possible to perceive what norms and regulations society wishes to construct and pose upon pupils and citizens. The Danish school tradition, as well as society's understandings and conceptions of the Danish schoolchild, is deeply rooted in pedagogical notions, institutional routines, and societal movements all founded on democratic ideals and constitutions. We argue that such pedagogical, societal, and historical movements are essential to include, if we wish to understand why private supplementary tutoring for the time being is not prevalent in Denmark. The phenomenon might even play a different role in the minds of Danish pupils, parents, educators, and politicians than what we see elsewhere. In the next paragraphs, we will shortly present some mainstream tendencies in school policies and school-pedagogical movements in the Danish society.

In the aftermath of the Second World War and the German occupation of Denmark, and in the light of the (re)construction of the Danish society and welfare state, there was an intensive civil and political interest in the development of Democracy (Hermann, 2007; Koch, 1995; Nielsen & Rasmussen, 2003). As a result, an educational optimism emerged, which also led to renewed pedagogical discourses within the political system, educational institutions, and teachers (Degn et al., 2018; Dorf, 1986; Sørensen, 1977). With democracy as a guiding principle, we see a pedagogical displacement from an earlier focus on children's *skills* in school to a new attention toward children as *human beings* (Hermann, 2007; O. K. Pedersen, 2011). An evolving anti-authoritarian and child-centered pedagogy from the 1960s and onward also had huge impact on the view of the Folkeskole's overall mission and pedagogical strategies. To a greater extent, the Folkeskole had to focus not only on academic skills but also on human development and "bildung." This resulted in a changed view on the Folkeskole's fundamental pedagogical obligation and a move away from pedagogical practices dominated by punishment and discipline toward a pedagogical and didactic focus on equality, democratic values, critical thinking, and children's independence.

The new pedagogical ideal emerging through the 1960s and 1970s of the critical and independent child was to be realized through an activating and child-involving pedagogical approach in schools, which would also assure equal opportunities for all children regardless of their social or economic backgrounds (Degn et al., 2018). In a new education Act in 1975, it is underlined that the Folkeskole must focus on preparing the children for co-decision-making and solving of common tasks on the basis of joint responsibility in the democratic society (Folketinget, 1975; Korsgaard

et al., 2014). Practically this meant that the didactics changed toward more project-organized teaching and problem-oriented tasks. This deeply rooted pedagogical approach might be why Danish parents are reluctant to buy academic services: For Danes, education is much more than academic achievement and performance. Furthermore, parents tend to rely on the state to give children the needed competences for life, access to tertiary education is almost unlimited in Denmark, and education is not believed to be the only way to live a good life.

During the 1980s and 1990s, ideas of New Public Management permeated political debate and became the answer to questions about how to control public expenditures, officials, for example, teachers in schools (D. Pedersen, 2004; O. K. Pedersen, 2011). With New Public Management, a new view of children and their parents surfaced. Now, to a greater extent, parents and children were consumers of a public good, rather than co-creators of it (Windinge, 2003). This was influenced by international political tendencies, not least from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (Center for Educational Research and Innovation, 1997). A human resource thinking was entering the school debate with ideas of clear objectives and more strict curriculums, affecting the teaching environments. Increasingly, the pupil was regarded a resource for development and economic growth of society (Degn et al., 2018).

With the advent of the comparative international assessments like Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in Denmark, globalization is now a very important factor in educational debate and policy-making. The first PISA assessment from 2001, and the surprises and disappointments that followed, made a huge impact on the political debate and subsequent educational legislation in Denmark (Gustafsson & Johannesen, 2014; Mejding, 1994). The comparisons and increased international focus in the educational discussions around the Folkeskole created some uncertainty about the skills and knowledge of Danish pupils. Thus, new discourses focused on performance, academic knowledge, and measurable skills, rather than equal opportunities and critical citizens.

Today, education, high performance, and formal competencies are regarded as necessities for the wealth of society and the continuance of the welfare state—accepting a clear causality between educational quality and economic growth (Degn et al., 2018; Hermann, 2007; O. K. Pedersen, 2011). For children and their parents, this has led to more pressure to do well in school to live up to the expectations of society. In conjunction with school reforms, such new views on education, academic skills, and performance lead parents to reflect on the role of education in new ways, and accordingly, perhaps be less reluctant to buy private supplementary tutoring.

The Danish leisure time pedagogy tradition

Alongside the movements in the Danish school system, the Danish welfare society also has a firm tradition of leisure time pedagogy, evenly based on institutional practices and pedagogical values.

Although the institutional tradition of leisure-time pedagogy does not go as far back as the formal school tradition, understandings of leisure time and the philosophies that surround it stem from significant pedagogical philosophers all the way back from the age of Enlightenment.

Among the most prominent was Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his groundbreaking thoughts about child-rearing (Rousseau, 1993). With *Émile* from 1762, Rousseau marked childhood as a separate and special world—a world in which (the notion of) pleasure and freedom became integral elements of an increasingly less restrictive and less authoritarian pedagogical norm. Other prominent pedagogical thinkers such as John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Alexander Sutherland Neill found inspiration in Rousseau's work, and the same applies to the German pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel, who created the Kindergarten as an institution in 1817 (Ankerstjerne, 2010). Despite the fact that Kindergartens are suited for younger children, the idea of giving space for natural growth and respecting the child's free, independent development combined with giving access to adequate materials and promoting dialogue inspired and formed the Danish leisure-time pedagogy and the approach toward older children and young people too (Ankerstjerne, 2010). Initially, leisure-time pedagogy or after-school programs in Denmark were meant to keep children off the streets. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, along with urbanization and industrialization processes in the Danish society, many children and young people lived in cities. Earlier, most often minors lived in rural settings, helping and working in their families. To keep city-based children and youngsters away from petty crime and straying, various after-school programs were institutionalized, and after the Second World War, the growing welfare society increased the amount of leisure homes (in Danish: Fritidshjem) and youth clubs around the country (Ankerstjerne, 2010). In addition to providing a place where children and young people could spend their after-school hours, such after-school institutions promoted specific pedagogical values, such as creating indoor and outdoor facilities to inspire children and young people to engage in cultural and creative activities and nurture and strengthen their friendships and communities. And whereas early leisure-time and after-school pedagogy was aimed at vulnerable and troubled children and youth, later, from the 1960s and onwards, after-school services became mainstream, aiming at all children and young people in Denmark.

Increasingly, the after-school programs and youth clubs were considered places for personal and collective development, and throughout the 1980s and 1990s and up till today the idea of protecting and taking care of children's and young people's right to free time and self-initiated activities gained ground. Whereas school is considered formal, compulsory and adult-organized, leisure time and leisure-time pedagogy are based on the opposite values: informal activities and relationships, voluntariness and children's and young people's perspectives and requests. Although not every child or young person attends an after-school program, the nonformal philosophies and values of voluntariness apply to the leisure sphere in general—a time for relaxing and/or doing whatever one likes to do. In addition to the pedagogical after-school programs, the Danish society

has a long-standing tradition of sports and leisure associations driven by volunteerism, and today, according to research conducted by the National Council for Children in Denmark, 67% of Danish students in the ninth grade voluntarily partake in a leisure-time activity in their after-school hours (Børnerådet, 2019). They do so, not because they have to, but because they like to. The following top three states what the ninth graders cherish most in their after-school hours:

- socializing (online and off-line),
- freedom and time to choose and do what you want,
- leisure activities, training, and sports (Børnerådet, 2019).

The above disclosures reveal that in Denmark, children's and young people's leisure sphere is treasured as something distinctively different from school, something that holds other values and qualities and, perhaps, something that needs to be protected. Today, many young people are busy, not only in school but also in their leisure life. The ninth graders that participated in the above-mentioned study generally express that they enjoy their leisure life, although they find it quite busy, and therefore need to prioritize and plan appropriately (Børnerådet, 2019). Following this, it is worth mentioning that the school reform implemented in 2014 resulted in longer schooldays for all students in primary and lower secondary school, causing a decrease in students' leisure hours.

The fact that young Danes are eager to plan and prioritize their leisure sphere carefully brings to mind Article 31 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which emphasizes the "right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (The United Nations, 2019).

As illustrated in this section, the notion of leisure time as something that contrasts school is a common understanding in Denmark. Therefore, we argue that Danish parents and children are reluctant to invest much leisure time and energy in activities that resemble school, such as private supplementary tutoring. We will elaborate on this argument in the following sections, when we take a closer look at Danish parents' values on child-rearing, partly based on research conducted by the Danish Center for Social Science Research (VIVE) and partly based on our pilot interviews. After that, we will present notions from the public debate on private tutoring and findings from contemporary youth research in a joint analysis that leads to our concluding remarks.

Danish parent's values on the subject of child-rearing

A report conducted by VIVE scrutinized Danish parents' values on the subject of child-rearing (VIVE, 2000). The report points out major value tendencies among Danish parents, including competition and solidarity, which we look at in the following.

When focusing on competition among children, the report concludes:

Competition as an element of child-rearing is a theme with strong and divided opinions (among parents)(...). Thus, there is a considerable resistance against competition in a general sense (e.g. between children in school), alongside an acceptance of elements of competition in well-defined areas (e.g. in sports and games). (VIVE, 2000, our translation)

On the one hand, most parents are against competition in school, which parallels the history of democracy, equality, and critical thinking in Danish pedagogy. On the other hand, parents tolerate competition in other arenas, such as sports and games. But perhaps with a more globalized society, this dichotomy of toleration has changed in recent years in Denmark, as private supplementary tutoring has entered the leisure sphere with its services offering after-school activities in line with sports and other (traditional) leisure-time activities. The combination of things seems important: the growth of the competitive globalized society, the rising focus on academic performance in school, and now the possibility for private tutoring as (just another) leisure-time activity. Baker (2014) argues that this has caused an educational revolution, fundamentally transforming our world into a schooled society, changing how parents understand and conduct child-rearing. Seemingly, all such aspects are changing what parents perceive as important and what they encourage their children to engage in. And perhaps this is why we, although modest, see an increase in the demand for private tutoring, despite the (traditional) resistance against competition in school. Is the increasing pool of parents buying private supplementary tutoring a parental answer to the political and societal call for better academic performance, knowledge, and skills, as seen in recent political discussions and educational reforms?

As mentioned, the VIVE report points to solidarity as a key value for parents bringing up their children in Denmark:

Solidarity, partly understood as an expression of tolerance of people with a different background than your own, partly as a requirement to pay attention to the well-being of other people and to share with those who are underprivileged, is something most parents will consider important when raising a child. (VIVE, 2000, our translation)

This corresponds with the emphasis on equality, democracy, and community as key aspects in the history of pedagogy in Denmark. The skepticism toward private tutoring in Denmark, and the somewhat delayed marketization, is probably nurtured by the parental drive toward solidarity. In our pilot interviews, parents express mixed feelings about the tutoring services they purchase for their children. The parents are aware of the inequality issues that private tutoring raises and, accordingly, they speak of the phenomenon as tabooed, for example, in relation to what they choose to display to relatives and other acquaintances. In the following, we elaborate on the findings from our pilot study.

Private tutoring pilot study

In the fall of 2019, we carried out a pilot study,³ examining values and concerns in families purchasing private supplementary tutoring for their children. We conducted four interviews in two families that are engaged in tutoring provided by MentorDanmark.⁴ In each family, we interviewed the mother and a daughter. Equipped with pre-prepared interview guides, we conducted the interviews in the homes of the respondents. Due to notions of qualitative research being inter-relational and based on dialogue, sensitivity, and reflexivity (Hastrup, 2010; Kvale, 1997; Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2005), we strived to follow our informants' narratives, rather than strictly stick to our interview guides. After conducting the interviews, we transcribed and color-coded the transcripts for further analysis. As this part of the article focuses on parent's attitudes and values, in the following analysis, we focus on the mothers. Obviously, with such a tiny sample of informants, traditional generalization and/or representativeness is not our ambition. Rather, we strive to get an in-depth understanding of *how* and *why* the parents choose private supplementary tutoring, more than *how many* (Small, 2008; see also Brinkmann, 2012; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2005; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, for discussions on qualitative research). Our analysis should be read as such.

I feel a little uncomfortable about it, you know . . .

Rita,⁵ a mother whose daughter is in her first year of gymnasium/high school, expresses ambivalence when giving details about purchasing private supplementary tutoring.

It's a bit embarrassing, right? Somehow . . . It's a little indiscreet and a bit pushy, too . . . like striving for overachievement . . . It does not fit very well with the ideology we have in Denmark, you know. You shouldn't buy your way ahead at the expense of others . . . I feel a little uncomfortable about it, you know . . . On the other hand, I was thinking that it is something worth spending my money on—my children and their education—and their ability to cope with their everyday life and be happy!

Rita emphasizes that assisting your children with homework within the family is common and widely accepted. When you buy this as a commodity, however, it is “a completely different project,” as it contradicts the norms and standards among parents in Denmark. In the previous section, we saw that Danish parents value solidarity and equality, whereas they are skeptical toward competition. Seemingly, this is exactly the dilemma Rita is confronted with when she and her husband purchase private supplementary tutoring for their daughter. The dilemma also causes other delicate moral issues; Rita declares that she seldom speaks openly about the supplementary tutoring because it is expensive and might create envy among other parents.

When Rita (in spite of all her mixed feelings about paying for extra tutoring and the taboo she experiences) emphasizes that private supplementary tutoring is something she prioritizes spending money on, she illustrates what has been discussed as *intensive mothering* by British sociologist

Carol Vincent (Vincent, 2017). Also, American sociologist Annette Lareau's work on parental attitudes seems highly relevant here (Lareau, 2011). Based on thorough ethnographic studies in American families, Lareau found that privileged middle-class families engage in a process of *concerted cultivation*, when they raise their children. This parental strategy promotes intensive support when it comes to enriching the children's talents through adult-organized activities, not least in their leisure sphere. Accordingly, Rita fights for her daughter's positioning in the field of schooling, when she intensifies her studies by buying extra tutoring in her after-school hours. When passionately monitoring her daughter's achievements, Rita offers help and coaching with educational planning, career opportunities, and how she should optimize her time. In the interview, Rita mentions that though she approves of her daughter's leisure-time life with elite sports, job, and friends, she would prefer if she quit working, so that she could invest more time on what Rita regards as reasonable activities, such as school work and family life. Laughingly, Rita declares that she even offered to pay her daughter what she earns at her job at the local grocery store. An offer her daughter turned down because she likes to earn her own money. Not only do Rita and her husband assist their daughter with schoolwork and life planning, they also share sports and literature interests, which allow them more time together. Stefansen and Aarseth (2011) understand such child-rearing and everyday parent-child interactions as forms of *enriching intimacy*—closely related to Lareau's understanding of concerted cultivation.

Later in the interview, Rita talks about the norms and standards that she referred to earlier in the interview. She accentuates that, ideologically, she would rather support public education and thereby defends the ideals of solidarity. Moreover, she is skeptical about the marketization of education that MentorDanmark represents, and even unconvinced about their expertise—which she considers overrated and false. “They want to give the impression that they are professionals,” she declares, although “their primary objective is to sell a product.” Despite such reservations, she states that if her daughter needs help with a specific subject in the future, she will be glad to purchase a new round of tutoring.

Paula, the mother of a 14-year-old daughter in eighth grade in lower secondary school, tells us how she feels about purchasing supplementary tutoring. She says that she tries, also when talking to her daughter, to regard it as something they should not be embarrassed about. In contrast, she wants to communicate that it is “cool” to want to improve one's academic skills. The above expressions indicate that Paula is aware of the stigma that surrounds private supplementary tutoring in Denmark, but also that she does not want to succumb to such feelings of shame. Paula would recommend other parents to purchase tutoring, if they feel their children could use extra support with homework. In the interview with Paula, she compares private tutoring with other traditional leisure activities, such as badminton, dance classes, and choir, which are all examples of activities her daughter attended when she was younger. In that sense, Paula juxtaposes the wish to improve

one's (daughter's) academic skills (in the leisure sphere) with the wish to improve one's (daughter's) cultural skills in "traditional" after-school activities. In doing so, Paula downplays the moral shame that she said she would not give in to. For Paula, private supplementary tutoring and traditional leisure activities are not that different. Both are activities you can choose—and pay for.

Another aspect both mothers touch upon when discussing their daughters' tutoring is the underlying reasons for purchasing the services. They both articulate that although the initial reason for starting up the tutoring programs was their daughters' difficulty with specific subjects, their overall aim is more about strengthening the daughters' self-confidence than about actual grades. Daring to participate in what goes on in the classroom, resilience, and the ability to develop coping strategies are what the mothers accentuate throughout the interviews. Another issue that both mothers discuss is their daughters' hectic leisure life during after-school hours. The tutoring and other structured activities, such as afternoon part-time jobs and sports, all add up to a busy leisure sphere that takes motivation and dedication. Although the mothers approve of their daughters' leisure lives, and to a great extent even encourage and require them to be active, they also express concern on their daughters' behalf. Despite their concern, Rita and Paula are more than willing to spend money and time on fees, equipment, and transportation, all of which express the intensive mothering and concerted cultivation strategy they both embody.

As illustrated, a number of ambivalences surfaced during the interviews. Some of these ambivalences correlate the findings and arguments raised earlier in the article. When the mothers articulate concern about their daughters' hectic leisure lives, they presumably do so because they are aware that school-like activities in the leisure sphere to a certain extent contradicts the traditional Danish understanding of what after-school hours should be about. And when they feel uncomfortable and (put effort into not being) embarrassed, they are aware of the ideologies they confront and the stigma that might follow. Skepticism toward competition and faith in solidarity are normative standards among parents in Denmark, but as illustrated historically, scientifically, and empirically, such standards no longer stand unchallenged.

Do children need to master more than school?

Not only parents are skeptical about tendencies of enhanced competition and international comparison in schools. Also scholars and debaters criticize the emphasis on qualification of measurable competencies in education, and the schoolification of life arenas that used to be about play and leisure time (Ankerstjerne, 2010; Højholdt, 2012; Øksnes & Sundsdal, 2017; Stanek & Hvidtfeldt, 2019). Today, formal schooling and school preparatory activities are directed at children at a younger age (K. S. Christensen, 2019; Kjær et al., 2019). And for the last decade, formal school hours have been extended in all grades in primary and lower secondary school. With the state-driven launch of pedagogical curriculums in preschool institutions, such as nursery homes and

kindergartens in the early 2000s, we see a much stronger focus on literacy, math, and science. Not only is the emphasis on formal schooling affecting younger children and the pedagogical preschool settings that used to be focusing (more) on play and child-centered activities. Also, the leisure life of school children is affected and, to some extent, captured by a learning agenda. In their article “Remember That Life Is More Than Schooling” (our translation), Stanek and Hvidtfeldt (2019) stress that today, we seem to underestimate life outside of school. Under the headline *We Need to Master More Than School*, the debaters state:

To do well in relation to school, work and the advancement of society, also requires that we can, are allowed to, and actually do something different with each other and ourselves, than go to school. Life outside school is equally important, and kindergartens and the old leisure homes (in Danish: fritidshjem) used to focus on such informal pedagogical values. (Stanek & Hvidtfeldt, 2019, our translation)

Stanek and Hvidtfeldt also articulate that the emphasis on formal schooling is a problematic tendency that can jeopardize the thriving and well-being of children and young people, especially those who struggle in life—both in and out of school. Whereas formalistic learning is important for getting along in academic environments, less formalistic learning is similarly important for getting along in life. Such critical notions seem similar to the skepticism articulated by Danish parents, as illustrated in earlier sections. When purchasing supplementary tutoring for your children, not only do you contradict traditional educational ideologies, you also challenge the conventional understanding of leisure time as a free, voluntary space, revolving around children’s and young people’s own perspectives and requests, informal activities, and independence. When Rita and Paula from our pilot study sign their daughters up for supplementary tutoring in their leisure sphere, we believe their priorities illustrate the learning agenda and schoolification of life that permeates Danish society today. Undoubtedly, this is a societal development that enriches many children’s and young people’s academic talents, but on the other hand means that more children and young people experience a hectic, adult-structured, and—for some—even stressful everyday life.

That young people find the current weight on formal schooling somewhat stressful seems evident when reading through the recently released publication on grades, learning, and student strategies in a culture of performance (Katznelson & Louw, 2018). In this publication, the research team looks at current political ambitions related to strengthening the academic performance of Danish students and how such ambitions affect the lives of young people in upper secondary education. Although the researchers did not intend to focus on thriving and stress among the participating students, when going through their data, they discovered these issues. According to the authors, the experience of feeling stressed is related to a youth culture of perfection and performance, naturally linked to the grades that determine which educational doors are open in colleges and universities after upper secondary school. As noted earlier, the right to play, rest, and

leisure is enshrined in the UN rights of the child. With the permeating move toward formal learning in both the school and leisure sphere, perhaps that right is challenged. And perhaps the somewhat quiet but steady expansion of shadow education in Danish society plays a role in that movement.

Concluding remarks

As we have seen, though Danish pedagogy is still based on democratic and egalitarian values, a globalized tendency toward a stricter focus on formal schooling, competitiveness, better academic performance, and a more hasty leisure sphere has changed children's and young people's everyday lives throughout the last decades. In that light, more parents and their children seem to be ready to be customers of fee-based tutoring services, although they face a number of dilemmas when doing so. Although parents from our pilot study addressed several dilemmas and ambivalences, the urge to help their children perform and thrive better in school defeated their wish to conform to traditional parental values and societal ideologies of pedagogy in Denmark. After analyzing the conversations with the two mothers, we found that their urge to help their daughters were comparable. But we found important differences. Whereas Rita's daughter performs well in all subjects, Paula states that her daughter is an average performer in school. Such differences are also found in international studies on shadow education. Entrich and Lauterbach (2019) point at two parental strategies in choosing to buy private tutoring, a compensatory strategy and a status attainment (or upgrading) strategy. With the status attainment strategy, parents seek to increase students' chances to enter high-ranked universities and other tertiary education by achieving above-average grades, whereas the compensatory strategy is remedial in the sense that parents seek to support low-performing children to achieve higher academic levels. Similar parental strategies are also detected in an American study conducted by Ho et al. (2019) framing parents' strategies as either "catching up" or "getting ahead." Rita and her husband, both medical doctors, may represent the status attainment/"getting ahead" strategy, whereas Paula's strategy is more about her daughter catching up and compensating for average results. These differences are interesting and reveal some of the underlying reasons for why parents choose to purchase private tutoring. Such underlying motives can be scrutinized using qualitative research techniques, and we aim to follow up on the findings in future studies in Denmark. Park et al. (2016) note that interviews and ethnographic data may be better than statistical analyses to reveal the cultural meanings, goals, and motivations that students and parents attach to supplementary tutoring. The fact that private tutoring attracts different family and student types, such as high achievers and more average ones, may be able to explain the growing success of this type of business in Denmark. Thus, MentorDanmark and other providers of private supplementary tutoring could be heading toward a golden era. However, with the strong Danish skepticism toward competition and inequality, the providers may face a great deal of reluctance. We hope that future research will show how

and in what way shadow education may find a foothold in Danish society, and how it will affect the lives of families, children, and young people. Until then, we can only guess, what the rising trend means for our society.

Contributorship

Sidse Hølvig Mikkelsen was responsible for writing the abstract, parts of the Introduction, the sections “The contours of shadow education in Denmark” and “The Danish school tradition and school policy.” David Thore Gravesen was responsible for writing parts of the Introduction, the sections “The state of research on shadow education in Denmark” and “The Danish leisure time pedagogy tradition.” The sections “Danish parent’s values on the subject of child-rearing,” “Private tutoring pilot study,” “Do children need to master more than school?” and the concluding remarks was written jointly. The preparation of the revised versions of the article after peer reviews was also discussed and written jointly. Sidse Hølvig Mikkelsen handled setting up the article and checking references.

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Notes

1. This estimation was articulated in a meeting with a representative of the company.
2. In all, 78.8% attend municipal primary and lower secondary schools (100% public-funded), 17.8% attend private schools (partly public-funded), and 1.4% attend a boarding school (partly public-funded).
3. Currently, we are organizing an expansion of our research activities, with contacts to new informants, grant applications, and so on.
4. The company helped us get in touch with the families.
5. To ensure anonymity, informants’ names have been changed.

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