

## Pull-out supplement

## theFocus

## Supplementary education in Asia

The theme of this issue of the Newsletter, supplementary education, embraces lessons beyond school time in domains that relate to the official school curriculum. The focus is on programmes that charge fees and are operated by the private sector. Japan's *juku* and South Korea's *hagwons* are major manifestations of this phenomenon. In some countries, teachers provide extra lessons for their students in exchange for a fee. Other forms of supplementary education include one-to-one tutoring by university students for secondary students.

The existence of supplementary education may be contextualised within wider patterns. Education has become increasingly central to national self-perception and public discourse. Some of this prominence has been stimulated by UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) agenda and by the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Some policy themes and research foci – such as accountability, choice, and excellence – have spread globally and serve as cornerstones for public debates and understanding. Yet despite this attention, the growth and spread of supplementary education has generally escaped public scrutiny. The phenomenon deserves more attention, in Asia as much as in the rest of the world, especially since some of the most securely institutionalized systems of supplementary education can be found in Asia.

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# Supplementary education in Asia

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13 >

## A variety of contexts and patterns

The societies examined in this Focus section represent a variety of cultures and income levels. Value systems and other dimensions of cultures in Japan are very different from those in Vietnam, which in turn are very different from those in Australia. Cultural contexts are important because, in combination with economic and other forces, they provide much of the explanation for the scale and form of supplementary education. Related factors include perceptions about the rewards for success in education systems, and the extent to which success can be enhanced through supplementary activities.

The articles in the Focus include examples of three common types of supplementary education. One type, prevalent in East Asia, is structured by entrance examinations and aimed mainly at high achievers. Much of this tutoring is provided by companies of various kinds. Another type, more common in low-income countries of Central, Southeast and South Asia, is tutoring provided by teachers on their own initiative to supplement their wages. A third type, exemplified by dominant patterns in Australia, is more concerned with study skills, self-confidence and widening of horizons.

## Scale of the phenomenon

Supplementary education has become a huge enterprise, occupying significant proportions of the time of students and their families, providing substantial employment, and generating large revenues for individuals and corporations. A few indicators for the Asian region (see Bray 2009: 18-21) include:

### Bangladesh

National survey data indicate that in 2005, 31.0% of primary school students were receiving tutoring (28.2% in rural areas; 51.73% in urban areas).

### China

The 2004 Urban Household Education and Employment survey covered 4,773 households. It indicated that tutoring was received by 73.8% of primary, 65.6% of lower secondary, and 53.5% of upper secondary students.

### Hong Kong

Government statistics suggest that 34% of primary and secondary pupils received tutoring in 2006. A 2004/05 survey of 13,600 households suggested that among pupils at each level, proportions receiving tutoring were 36.0% at primary, 28.0% at lower secondary, 33.6% at middle secondary, and 48.1% at upper secondary education.

### India

A survey of 6,948 secondary school students in four states found that 41.3% were receiving private tutoring. In the top grade, the proportion was 53.8%.

### Japan

A 2007 survey found that juku served 15.9% of Primary 1 children, that this proportion rose steadily in later grades, and that it reached 65.2% in Junior Secondary 3. In addition, 6.8% of Junior Secondary 3 pupils received tutoring at home, and 15.0% followed correspondence courses.

### Vietnam

In a 2001 sample survey of 72,660 Grade 5 pupils in 3,639 primary schools, 38% of pupils indicated that they were receiving tutoring. In 2002, tutoring was said to have consumed about 20% of household education expenditure. The figure peaked at 29% for pupils preparing for university entrance examinations, and was especially high in urban areas.

In financial terms, the most reliable figures on the size of this industry are available for South Korea, where household expenditure on private tutoring in 2008 was estimated at US\$24 billion, or 2.9 per cent of Gross Domestic Product.

South Korea probably has the highest per capita expenditures; but other societies are moving in the South Korean direction. During the last decade, tutoring has expanded significantly throughout the region. Australia is perhaps at the other end of the scale from South Korea; but among the companies headquartered in Australia is one, Kip McGrath, which operates in 10 countries on four continents. This shows that tutoring is not just a local or a national phenomenon, but that it has attracted large multinational companies. Kumon, headquartered in Japan, claims to have four million students studying in 26,000 centres in 46 countries.

## Public attitudes to private tutoring

Supplementary education as a for-profit activity generally relies on a relatively liberal marketplace. The most prominent exception is South Korea, the government of which has attempted to contain the runaway household costs associated with tutoring in order to reduce inequalities of access to education.

The operation of supplementary education as a business raises questions about government regulation. Not all jurisdictions require registration of tutoring businesses, and even fewer have regulations on the qualifications of teachers or the content of classes. The growth of supplementary education thus represents a return to the pre-modern forms of private education over state-run or state-supervised instruction.

In most settings, a whiff of illegitimacy adheres to various forms of tutoring. The terminology of 'cram schools' suggests an activity that has a questionable teaching method. The term 'shadow education', which is also common in English-language discourse, may also have a negative flavour. While many Asian societies value educational attainment and emphasize effort as a necessary ingredient for success, the teaching-to-the-test that is frequently offered and perfected by supplementary education is not widely seen as a form of education per se. Such matters raise major questions both for policy makers and for academics.

## Attention from researchers

One reason why researchers have neglected the topic of supplementary education is that it does not fit squarely in the perceived mandates of Colleges of Education and similar bodies. The topic is a new one for researchers in almost all contexts. Institutionally in-between several subdisciplines (not school-based, but not adult or lifelong learning either) and eschewed by policy-makers, few projects beyond those included or referenced in this collection shed light on the shadow education system in Asia.

However, patterns are beginning to change. PISA and other studies of educational attainment are prompting a renewed interest in comparative studies of education. Also, the global 'fashion' for promoting market mechanisms in education is according a new status to some forms of supplementary education in the marketplace.

These factors were among the foci of a 2010 workshop on "The World-Wide Growth of Supplementary Education" held at the University of Waterloo, Canada. The event, which received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, led to some of the articles presented here. The workshop was co-organized by Janice Aurini (University of Waterloo), Scott Davies (McMaster University) and Julian Dierkes (University of British Columbia). Presentations at that workshop about patterns in Asia focused on Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam. The workshop also brought perspectives from North America and Europe for instructive comparative analysis. This is just one example of the growing attention to the theme, which is much to be welcomed.

## The groundwork for closer attention

With these remarks in mind, the present issue of the Newsletter aims to stimulate further attention to supplementary education. The phenomenon needs closer attention from a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, trade unions, teachers, community bodies, and parents' associations. The research community may contribute with data and analysis from many angles. The articles in this Newsletter mainly take macro-level perspectives, but equally important are micro-level perspectives that draw on the disciplines of sociology, pedagogy, psychology and other domains. We invite readers to get in touch with us to share insights and perspectives on this domain.

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## Reference

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