Private Tutoring: a Success Story or a Successful Business?

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Abstract

Private tutoring fits in with an increasingly impact of marketing on extensive forms of learning and training. This phenomenon is not new and takes place on different continents. But today its development appears more evident in a strong competitive context. If private tutoring growths out in the shadow of the official educational system - emphasizing its deficiencies - it's necessary to understand how is running. A comparative study of "services" proposed, candidates' demands, pedagogical methods and technical supports must be connected with identified values, acting programme and competent teachers. With the answers of three companies selected in Belgium French Community we are taking parallel tracks between private and public sector for complementary issue or impasse. This short contribution could be a part of a more global study which could measure the complex implications for policy-makers and influence of good practices inside the system.

Introduction

In a global context of marketing and constant privatization of services, the whole educational system can't ignore private tutoring working in the shadow of the official system. After serious university studies and diplomas marking the successful completion of their commitment, students can't necessary find a very good job. However, for families the investment in a good initial education for their children is still the best way to give them a chance to blossom out during their life. Another fact is that the faculty and the University of the Original Diploma received by students is finally a highly determining factor. This contributes to demands of additional courses to compensate deficits or to anticipate some problems. From an economic point of view, one year of study is so expensive in term of budget but also human capital life that investment in private tutoring seems relatively valuable. But this kind of "services" is very often reserved to high social classes, even though disadvantaged parts of the population attempt the impossible to succeed. It's patently obvious that "private tutoring" contributes to increasing social inequalities. The strong demands come just before exams when the pressure of certification is more and more active. This intervention is perhaps a good opportunity to fix learning before the test. But the crucial piece of the puzzle is to understand the sense and the purpose of this action. If the first goal of learning a course is to pass an exam then we can imagine that the process will be very superficial and not oriented to develop real skills that students can reuse in appropriate circumstances. This study of "private tutoring" with its prospective processes is focused on the shadows around the official educational system where it is emerging.

The research:

A qualitative approach will be well appropriate to better understand the private tutoring stakes and purposes. We have made a selection of three active companies on the field in French-speaking Belgium. The selection is based on: **The size of the company: its importance / The equivalent proposal of courses compared to the official school / The publicity oriented to a large public.** With these considerations the selection was relatively easy but obviously not exhaustive. A short list [1] was established and the choice made. We have submitted a questionnaire by phone and the study tries to compare the different answers from a set of criteria and the place of the indicators.

The problematic: Which kind of demands stem from different target groups? Which possibilities are offered and still available? What kind of pedagogical methods do they use to leave out serious deficiencies? The answers of these questions could help us to better understand the phenomenon in a local area and also in a global vision. Private tutoring and the official system influence each other with a large complicity but is it not time to put some limits or to guarantee the actors' total independent and strong deontology?

The questionnaire: The criteria and indicators selected to create the questionnaire are: **Values (autonomy / functionality) / Learning conceptions (interactive / individual) / Tutor's role (guide / organizer) / Learner's role (active / passive).** The selection is a combination of different studies from MEIRIEU (2009), PERRENOUD (2008), WOLFS (2007) and SOUSA (2006) regarding methods and strategies in learning process. As LEE (2010) [2] proposes there are a few methodological options: short scale study (n=3), simple central questions, one researcher, a case study as a system, a contextual analysis and an approach focusing on convergences. Especially in a prospective vision, we try to look carefully at the ins and outs of the question.

Results And Comments

Values: The communication via a website is a good access to information about services for a large public today. The elected values present on these pages immediately underline the direction which viewers have to take. Here is a first look at the values presented on the websites.

CASES	A	B	C
VALUES	Scholastic attainments	Scholastic attainments	Scholastic attainments
	Personalization	Working method	Qualified personnel
	Efficiency	Support	Personalization
	Future	Planning	Outstanding services

Table1. Websites. Front page values

Questionnaire and values: Usually people looking for information about private tutoring are uncomfortable due to scholar problems and at this moment particularly fragile. The terms used are very important because it present show to elaborate actions, orientation and organisation.

CASES	A	B	C
VALUES	**Scholastic attainments**	**Scholastic attainments**	**Scholastic attainments**
	TO SUPPORT TO IMPROVE TO REVIEW	TO PREPARE TO REVIEW TO SUCCEED	TO REVIEW TO SUPPORT TO HELP TO SUCCEED
	Personalization	**Method of working**	**Personnel qualified**
	RELATION CONFIDENCE MEDIATION	TO MAKE UP AUTONOMY TO KNOW O.S.	CONFIDENCE MEDIATION RELATION
	Efficiency	**Support**	**Personalization**
	TO SPEAK TO MOTIVATE TO COLLABORATE	ADAPTATION HELP SUCCESS	FLEXIBILITY ADAPTATION LISTENING

Table 2. Questionnaire. Utterance values

For all of them, the scholastic attainment arrives in first. The personal background, homework books, exercise books and notebooks are recognized as an essential piece of the puzzle. The intervention is done in parallel with the official demands. Private tutoring adjusts its action to the track of the regular system. In this sense the communication is a crucial key to establish a short time target: success for

an exam, recovering of a good standard attainment or improving and exceeding expectation in the results.

Two remarks: 1. For private tutoring, scholastic attainment is a personal concern that requires an individual approach to create selective action in a limited period of time and with proximity in the learning process. 2. The collective dimension is totally avoided: the services are an answer to an emergency need in a short term-dated period. There is a tendency to isolate the candidate and to work on his/her own perception.

Learning conception

CASES	A	B	C
LEARNING	**Methods**	**Methods**	**Methods**
	DISCUSSIONS PLAN COLLABORATION	ANALYSIS SCHOLAR ACTIONS LEARNING ON LEARNING	ANALYSIS SCHOLAR ACTIONS LEARNING ON LEARNING HELP, BEING WITH
	Interventions	**Interventions**	**Interventions**
	TARGETS FOLLOW UP PRE - TEST VACANCY WORK	ON DEMAND	ON DEMAND TARGETS FOLLOW UP PRE- TEST
	Technological supports	**Technological supports**	**Technological supports**
	STUDENT FORM EMAIL TELEPHONE	QUESTIONNAIRE EMAIL WEBSITE	TELEPHONE SCHOLAR SUPPORTS QUESTIONNAIRE EVALUATIONS

Table 3. Learning conception

Personal approach and individual needs is a concentric vision of the best way to achievement. Inter-personal communication and analysis of scholar supports create confidence before the elaboration of an acting plan. Tutors repeat lessons and exercises with more explanations in order to clarify theory and often return to previous basement knowledge. And afterwards comes the reflexion on "how to do", the best way to study, "learning on learning". First priority is the knowledge: the reproduction and the restoration of the material and the subject of the different courses. In a second step comes the deep learning that can be used for a long time [3]. The collective vision or the construction of learning through interactions with peers is totally avoided. The intervention is essentially based on control and reinforcement of the learning process. Verbal communication (direct or indirect) or scriptural contact between "tutor and tutoree" and the family are also important to succeed in this project. This "systemic [4]" dimension is relatively interesting in the French-speaking Belgium context where the relation "school-family" takes a good place in the dynamic of the student life. Proximity is pointed out to favour social cohesion in a society affected by several economic crises and where the school's emancipation role is damaged.

Two remarks: 1. For private tutoring, scholastic attainment is a personal concern but with an affective connection which helps learners in their study. 2. An appropriate answer to a specific need is a question of support to repeat what is done at school.

Tutor's or coach's role

CASES	A	B	C
COACHS	**Role**	**Role**	**Role**
	PARTNER YOUNG - YOUNG	ACCOMPAGNYING GUIDE PLANNER	PARTNER YOUNG - YOUNG ACCOMPAGNYING GUIDE
	Recruitment	**Recruitment**	**Recruitment**
	STUDENT COMPETENT COMMUNICATOR	STUDENT FREELANCE STATUS COGNITIVE PROXIMITY	STUDENT TEACHER in FUNCTION
	Initiatives	**Initiatives**	**Initiatives**
	CREATIVITY FREEDOM REORIENTATION	GOOD STANDARD REORIENTATION	GOOD STANDARD REORIENTATION

Table 4. Tutor's role

The tutor's or coach's role appears to be like a partner in the learning process. The tutor is a student with more experience, with a similar background and obviously a good knowledge of the subject. The positive connivance between partners who live or have lived the same situations reduces the inter-generation gap and creates empathy to face difficulties. Coaches are doing this job for additional money to pursue their master or doctorate and private tutoring companies use them because they have no professional experiences so that lower salaries can be given. It's also easier to have freelance workers to avoid charges with social security. A few teachers take part in the project with a couple of hours just to complete their full time job. In any case, the tutor benefits from a large liberty to communicate and guides the process. If the situation is too complex, learners are reoriented to specialists in psychology or linguistic. Each one holds respect to the others with consideration for their specificities.

Two remarks: 1. For private tutoring, complicity with learners (similar age and previous experiences) is a key point to succeeding in the project. 2. Pedagogical reflexion about the coach's place in the relation school/teacher with deontological impact on the relation is not present.

Learner's role

CASES	A	B	C
LEAR-NERS	**Role**	**Role**	**Role**
	ACTIVE	ACTIVE	ACTIVE
	Motivation	**Motivation**	**Motivation**
	ADAPTATION TELEPHONE CALL	FREQUENT EVALUATIONS	RELATION and CONFIDENCE

Table5. Learner's role

In these conditions, the learner's role is normally an active one. We suppose that the charges for learning hours prompt learners to participate in their voluntary project. In this study we only consider the "producer" point of view and not the consumer one which needs another study. Motivation seems to be reinforced and the "producers" speak about a high satisfaction due to the good quality of verbal communication and construction of confident relation between the partners.

Two more questions: 1. For private tutoring, the economic investment is a guarantee of success. But does this create a sense of functionality in the learning process with the power of money: I get my success when I pay for success? 2. What is the part of the personal learner's responsibility and the part of the official educational system's responsibility in the difficulties students are facing?

Conclusion

The sample is very limited (n=3) so that we shall propose general remarks knowing that further investigations with all partners (learner, family, teacher, school leader) are required. This study only focused on the "producer" side of private tutoring.

Individualism versus collective construction. Private tutoring aims at scholar success by individual actions to solve personal learning problems. Nevertheless, several studies [5] are showing the limits of this kind of help outside the classroom. Isolated students outside the group put themselves much more in a dependent attitude and a negative self-consideration creating an opposite effect. Other researches [6] points out the efficiency of the "learning between peers" on the quality for long term memorization.

"Metacognition" versus immediate results. Preparing an exam or a test is essential in the demand received by the private tutoring companies. Usually in a rush and extreme emergency, the action is curative and not oriented to prevention. The very in-depth learning in order to be reused and transferred to similar or different situations is not recommended.

Economic barriers versus social equality. The real cost of private tutoring represents a barrier for families with modest incomes who cannot benefit from such "services". In Belgium, the official educational system is particularly opened to everybody and one of its first missions is to "encourage a democratic educational system with equal chance of success for everybody". Is private tutoring confirming the vision of variable education in function of social, economic or cultural statue?

Deontology versus opportunism. A few actors (teachers or students) inside the official educational system can take advantage of the fragile position of other students facing an uncomfortable situation, especially when the exam period comes soon. No deontological code is implemented. The door is opened to confidence tricks but we believe and we postulate that persons with solid scientific background used good ethic principles in their commitments.

In conclusion, new tracks must be explored to study and to better understand the working system of private tutoring. With regard to this approach, the official educational system could start a self-reflexion on the causes and the influences of these "companies" running in its shadow.

References

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