

## **The phenomenon of private tutoring: Implications for public education**

### **1. Introduction**

The phenomenon of private tutoring is defined, according to Costa, Neto-Mendes and Ventura (2008) as a structured set of activities developed outside of the school that has as main objective to improve school performance of students.

According to Mark Bray (2008), this phenomenon has grown in the last decades in all regions of the world. Bray (2008) argues that private tutoring is stimulated by a competitive climate and a strong belief in the value of education for economic and social progress.

Thus, this research study intends to describe and analyse the nature and the extension of private tutoring in one of the largest secondary schools of the Autonomous Region of Madeira (Portugal).

### **2. Brief review of the literature**

This phenomenon (private tutoring) has had a significant increase in Portugal and has not been a target for research by social and educational investigators (Neto-Mendes et al, 2003).

Bray (2006) has studied this issue at the international level and concluded that this phenomenon has been on the “shade” for different reasons: a) it exists because the normal system exists; b) copies the regular system and follows their changes; c) the public focus its attention at the regular system and not on the “shade”; d) the characteristics of the phenomenon on the “shade” are less distinct than the regular system.

The implications of this parallel educational phenomenon are significant either for the specific student learning either for the future of the students who attend it. In fact, it raises questions of equality and equal opportunities as many families don't have the

financial capabilities to support that extra effort. Furthermore, the public system is not capable of providing the educational needs of its own students and families. A study conducted by Neto (2006) found that are the parents with higher educational degrees and better, financially, who look for private tutoring for their children.

Some studies have found a positive correlation between the frequency of private tutoring and academic success. In Germany, Haag (2001) cited by Bray (2006) compared the academic success of a group of students of secondary education that had attended private tutoring with another group for control. The results indicated that the students who received private tutoring had improved their academic level as well as their motivation. Similarly, in Quénia, Buchmann (2002), concluded that the frequency of private tutoring was related to less academic retention and bigger academic progress. On the other hand, it has been found that private tutoring contributes for the social stratification. The most prosperous families can invest in better and more private tutoring services than families with little possibilities.

### **3. Methodology**

This research study intends to describe and analyse the nature and extension of private tutoring in the senior students of one of the largest secondary schools in Madeira (Portugal). The collection of data was carried out by inquiry means, the type of inquiry that in the opinion of Tuckman (2002) is very frequent in the field of education and it has an undeniable value in collecting data from a big section of a population.

Four hundred and thirteen senior students of one of the largest schools in the Autonomous Region of Madeira participated in this study by responding to a questionnaire. The questionnaire, with 22 questions, was designed to get data on demographics and specific information on private tutoring participation. The questionnaire was anonymous and took about fifteen minutes to complete. It was used the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, 16.0 version) program to process the data.

### **4. Results and discussion**

Of the 413 respondents, 56.4% are of masculine gender and 42.1% are of the feminine gender. The average is 17,9 years ( $SD=0,94$ ) of age and students are distributed by five

areas of knowledge, namely, Sciences and Technologies (48,7%), Languages and Humanities (19,4%), Visual Arts (14,5%), Socio-economics (9,7%) and Computer Technology (7,6%).

Taking into account the education level of the parents, it is verified that of the total of respondents, 10.2% of parents and 15% of the mothers possess higher education degrees. However, a reasonable percentage of students (31% parents and 20.4% mothers) come from families whose schooling is equal to or inferior to 4 years.

Private tutoring classes took place at Tutoring Centres (66,7%), at homes of tutors (31,4%) and some other places (1,9%). These results are different from the ones gotten by Bento (2009). According to this author the majority of the students had tutoring sessions in the home of their tutors. However, according to Costa *et al.* (2008) the use of the Tutoring Centres is increasing at a world-wide level.

## **5. Conclusions**

This research study intended to describe and to analyze the nature of the phenomenon of private tutoring in the Autonomous Region of Madeira. The 413 respondents, secondary senior students, have ages between the 17 and 23 years. Of the total of respondents, 56.4% were of feminine gender and 42.1% were of masculine gender. During secondary education, a significant number of students attended weekly private tutoring sessions, on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, 44% and 41.9%, respectively. Mathematics is the subject that makes the majority of students to look for this type of educative service (87,7%). A great part of students spend between 4 and 6 hours, weekly (68,4%) in private Centres (66,7%) and the financial expenses average 80 dollars a month (56,7%). The majority of the students consider positive (87,7%) the frequency of private tutoring sessions.

This parallel educational issue raises important questions that need to be studied and reflected on: a) the inequity introduced in the student population - are the prosperous families that can get the better and longer private tutoring services. In Portugal, the government introduced legislation (1999 and 2005) in order to regulate this phenomenon (i.e., permission needed for teachers to provide private tutoring and prohibition to provide private tutoring to own students or students of their own schools) however, this legislation has not been followed neither controlled; b) the other important question is the quality of public education – public schools are not providing

the educational services that families and students look for; c) another important question is related to rankings of schools – the schools that are on the first places (which in Portugal are private schools) are benefiting from the private tutors who prepare their students introducing one aggravation for public schools which are not able to select their students. These issues need to be addressed in future studies.

## 6. References

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