

Critical Review: A Theoretical Examination of Shadow Education in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a theoretical contribution to the contemporary debates regarding the legitimacy and effects of supplementary tutoring, also known as shadow education. Shadow education is notably pervasive in South Korea, and accounting for high rates of domestic expenditure and increasing time demands on young people's lives. The paper traces the historical and cultural reasons for the widespread uptake of shadow education amongst young students in the South Korean context and problematises what it means to be educated by juxtaposing leading scholars' perceptions of the fundamental aims of education. Delving into the reality of shadow education whilst also revealing the disruptive nature of this common place practice, the paper concludes by highlighting the need for further empirical research to counterbalance the largely unsubstantiated beliefs and anecdotal evidence regarding its purposes.

INTRODUCTION

From Plato's cave to Freire's banking system, metaphors abound in the educational arena and the shadow education industry is no exception. The metaphor hints at a dark existence lurking behind an authentic self and is intriguing; 'shadow' education exists because of the public system and serves to imitate and compete with it, while being historically much less visible than traditional education (Bray, 2010, p. 413). Shadow education contributes to an increasingly large proportion of the global private education industry and Bray (1999) discusses how it has attracted increased interest over recent years (see also Lee, 2005; Oh, 2010). Especially prominent in East Asia (Bray, 2006), shadow education is notably pervasive in South Korea (Korea herein), accounting for high rates of domestic expenditure and increasing time demands on young people's lives. Accordingly, the figurative 'shadow' has been viewed sceptically, with commentators, such as Dawson (2010), even referring to it scathingly as 'parasitic': feeding off the unsatisfied demands of the formal schooling system and taking advantage of perceived gaps in its quality and provision. The controversy is peppered with accusations of social inequality and exclusion (Choi & Choi, 2016), yet this phenomenon accounts for a prominent industry with no signs of decline, contributing to the "epistemological puzzle" (Oh, 2010, p. 308) that the Korean education context presents.

Oh (2010) suggests that the key purposes of shadow education are firstly, functional in nature and include the need to supplement the perceived failings in the public-school system, assisting students with exam preparation, and secondly, symbolic, since procuring additional tuition raises the profile of families and contributes to "prestige orientation" (Oh, 2010, p. 221). This desk-based study draws on existing literature and predominantly focuses on two perspectives; Pring, Hodgson and Spours' (2009) aims of education and Reiss and White's (2014) concept of a flourishing life, to examine if the purposes

of shadow education are congruent with these theoretical frameworks. Accordingly, the research question framing this inquiry is ‘What are the purposes of shadow education?’

DEFINITION AND DELIVERY

Shadow education is frequently referred to as private tuition or supplementary education. Considering these synonymous permits the construction of a tentative working definition of these interchangeable terms. [Bray \(e.g. 1999; 2006; 2009; 2010\)](#) has written extensively on this phenomenon, yet appears reluctant to offer a concrete definition of shadow education; due to the lack of literature, research and understanding of the scale of it ([Bray, 2006](#)), due to the complexity of pinpointing what it is or isn’t, and the elusiveness of the metaphor; “Almost axiomatically a sector which is shadowy is indistinct, and the literature on this theme employs a range of definitions and therefore encounters problems” ([Bray, 2009, p. 3](#)), although [Bray \(2010\)](#) does conclude that three factors must co-exist in its interpretation; “supplementation, ‘privateness’ [sic] and academic subjects” (p. 4).

Other commentators have also proposed definitions; [Choi and Choi \(2016, p. 144\)](#) posit, for example, “Private tutoring can be defined as a set of activities, supplementary to mainstream schooling, whose aim is to boost academic performance in exchange for monetary payment”. Similarly, [Dang and Rogers \(2008\)](#) suggest that it is “... fee-based tutoring that provides supplementary instruction to children in academic subjects they study in the mainstream system” p. 62).

Upon reflection of the relevant literature, this paper employs the following narrower definition; shadow education in Korea encompasses fee-paying additional teaching for children up to high school leaving age, mostly after school yet also during school vacations and weekends, occurring outside of the traditional schooling environment. Moreover, this supplementary teaching takes place in academies or ‘cram schools’ (known locally as ‘hagwon’) which are the most common venues for Korean shadow education ([Choi & Choi, 2016](#)). A non-exhaustive list of subjects taught would include foreign languages (mainly English and Mandarin), mathematics, science and Korean along with preparation for the CSAT, the standard university entrance exam. However, this form of supplementary education does not directly result in academic qualifications or credit. I refrain from including home-based tutoring since there are only exiguous data regarding this form of supplementary education, nor online-tutoring since this is still relatively under-researched, with most students opting for face-to-face learning ([Choi & Choi, 2016](#)) despite the restrictions triggered by the recent pandemic.

Due to population concentrations and geographic socio-economic statuses of families, greater availability and quality of shadow education is unsurprisingly found in urban rather than rural areas ([Bray & Lykins, 2012](#)). The teachers in this domain come from a variety of backgrounds; former schoolteachers, students, foreign qualified and unqualified tutors of languages and local unqualified teachers (Russell, 1997, as cited in in [Dang & Rogers, 2008, p. 163](#)). Accurate information regarding the credentials of these practitioners is understandably scant, somewhat further ‘darkening’ the metaphorical shadow, since this education sector remains largely unregulated by the state and for financial and legal reasons, such as tax avoidance and the illegality of tutoring for some ([Kang Shin-who, 2010](#)), and teachers tend to be reticent to discuss their qualification statuses and work openly ([Bray, 2013](#)).

NATIONAL CONTEXT AND PREVALENCE

The far-reaching demand for shadow education at the macro level, characterised by some as a manifestation of ‘education fever’ (e.g. [Lee, 2005](#)) in this small nation peninsula, should be understood in the context of its rapid economic evolution and cultural belief systems.

Korea, a historically Confucian nation, underwent momentous change beginning in the 1960s. It transformed from an agricultural nation into an economically strong technological powerhouse, notably due to the importance placed on education in the post-war period and the drive to invest in human capital to promote economic growth. As such, the educational culture has become one which is elitist, heavily results-orientated, based on a productivist mindset ([Lee, 2010](#)) and acting “as a mirror which reflects the society from which it originates” (Bereday, 1964, p. 5 as cited in [Dawson, 2010, p.15](#)).

Additionally, the commitment to education and its symbolic importance can be related to the complex and unique Korean notion of ‘han’; “a sense of unaddressed justice, resulting in enmity that needs to be redressed and avenged by a power external to the victim, or a third-party vengeance...a

strong cultural and psychological expression of resentment and rancour” (Oh, 2010, p. 317). ‘Han’ envelops society, in conjunction with a feeling of dread that children might not succeed and prosper, so families seek to redress this animus by propelling their children through the education system with a sense of intrinsic sacrifice and devotion (Oh, 2010).

To appreciate how ubiquitous this sacrifice is, it is necessary to consider its impact in statistical terms. Lee (2005) describes the extent of the so-called ‘education fever’, or ‘parental zeal’ for shadow education at the macro level; in 2003, the total national expenditure on private tutoring reached 12.4 billion dollars, which incidentally, was “equivalent to about 56% of the national budget on education” (Lee, 2005, p.100).

In terms of expenditure at the micro level, Lee (2005) reports that there is a great economic familial burden, with average Korean households spending around 10% of their income on shadow education, rising to 30% for families with children at the middle and high school levels. Moreover, Lee (2005) explains that there is a direct correlation with those families in the higher income bracket; the more they earn, the more they invest in their children’s academic pursuits. More recent research conducted by the Korean National Statistics Office (KOSTAT) serves to frame our understanding of just how visibly looming the ‘shadow’ is: “87.4% of elementary school students, 74.3% of middle school students and 62.8% of general high school students received private tutoring in 2009, with an average monthly tutoring expenditure per student of 242 thousand won in 2009” (as cited in Choi & Choi 2016, p.144).

AIMS OF EDUCATION

Pring et al. (2009) suggest that the fundamental objective of education should encompass “introducing young people to a form of life which is distinctively human, which enables them to be and to feel fulfilled, which equips them to pursue independent lives, and which enables them to participate positively in the wider community” (p. 13). As such, Pring et al. (2009) conjecture that education in its current form does not address a broad encapsulation of aims, neglecting some of the core values which should be included in a definition of what it means to educate the whole person. Similarly, Reiss and White (2014) believe that the aims of education should precede subject knowledge; advocating an emphasis on ‘human flourishing’, which could empower individuals to develop positively, not only for both their own benefit, but to assist others in flourishing alongside them. I now consider these perspectives in relation to the Korean context.

Korea’s cultural framework causes great emphasis to be put on education, which is a key driver of the meritocratic society. As such, academic achievement is the vehicle which allows individuals to progress socially and achieve upward class mobility (Choi & Choi, 2016). Oh (2010) also describes how individuals are inculcated into the ideology of Confucian values; a pronounced hierarchy, realisation of the self, a solid work ethic and parental sacrifice for the education of their children, in line with Bourdieu’s cultural and social reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1973: as cited in Choi & Choi, 2016, p. 144-145). Accordingly, the proliferation of shadow education can be partly explained in relation to social mobility and partly due to general disgruntlement with the state school system (Lee, 2005). Additionally, competition among students has been exacerbated by the government’s equalisation policies, which eradicated exams for high school admission (Dawson, 2010) and led to an increased demand for private tutoring in preparation for college entrance (Choi & Choi, 2016). The competition for prestigious university places is “mirrored in tertiary graduation rates, where 63% of 25–34-year-olds in Korea now complete this higher level of education ... the highest proportion among OECD” (OECD, 2011) which surely has directly contributed to Korea’s *idée fixe* with shadow education (Choi & Choi, 2016).

This *idée fixe* is congruent with the phenomenon of ‘credentialism’, set forth by Lee et al. (2010). In Korea, “credentialism refers to a social value system in which educational credentials, such as ... a college degree play an important role in status attainment” (Lee, 2010, p. 98) and is comparable to a term coined by Dore (1976); “the diploma disease” (as cited in Dang & Rogers, 2010, p.169). Consequently, this predicament appears to draw attention away from the idea of ‘whole person’ development. With a seemingly wholesale focus on academic credentials, a localised and contextual definition of what it means to be ‘educated’ appears to materialise.

What does it mean to be educated?

To delve into the meaning of 'educated' and to examine how to rectify their criticisms of the status quo, [Pring et al. \(2009\)](#) pose a pertinent question; "What counts as an educated 19-year-old in this day and age?" (p. 12) and seek to answer it, by first elaborating on some of the aspects of what it means to be 'educated'. Thus, the question is reformulated: "What are the understandings, knowledge, skills, attitudes, dispositions, and capacities which in different degrees, an educated 19-year-old should have developed in this day and age?" ([Pring et al., 2009, p. 12](#)). To evaluate this question, it is necessary to look, as [Pring et al \(2009\)](#) do, at its different elements and consider it in conjunction with [Reiss and White's \(2014\)](#) aim for schools: "to prepare students for a life of autonomous, whole-hearted and successful engagement in worthwhile relationships, activities and experiences."

The first aspect of [Pring et al.'s \(2009\)](#) question "understandings, knowledge, skills, attitudes..." suggests that the degree, extent and type of these attributes vary according to the individual, yet it is risky to attempt to divide such qualities into those of vocational and academic, labelling this a 'false dualism' (p. 17). As such, it is impossible to clearly differentiate between skills and knowledge in a vocational or academic context, since there are overlaps between them, as subjects such as the arts are difficult to classify under this dichotomy. Furthermore, by polarising vocational and academic knowledge, value judgements are applied to the quality of academic knowledge over skills. Therefore, it is more appropriate to focus on developing the individual for personal benefit, ([Reiss & White, 2014](#)) than to distinguish between these modes of acquisition. However, culturally in Korea, a clear distinction is drawn between weak vocational and strong academic learning due to the emphasis placed on university degrees, certainly contravening [Pring et al.'s \(2009\)](#) proposed aim to amalgamate this 'false dualism' ([2009, p. 17](#)).

Additionally, [Pring et al. \(2009\)](#) annex 'different degrees' to the question, for aptitudes among learners are certainly varied. Educators cannot expect all learners to strive for excellence across subjects. As such, the definition of an educated person cannot be applied universally and must be understood in the context of the individual's unique circumstances ([Pring et al., 2009](#)). However, a key distinction between the emphasis on autonomy in the west, and the lean toward collectivism in the east, is something that cannot readily be ignored as, in Korea, a "...consciousness of homogeneity has become deeply rooted" ([Lee 2014, p. 189](#)). As such, perhaps acknowledging differences between individuals can cause divisive lines to be metaphorically drawn in a context where the need for 'all' to excel academically is culturally embedded ([Lee & Shouse, 2011](#)).

Moreover, it seems that the degree to which students are exposed to shadow education is directly correlated to wealth rather than aptitude, intensifying social inequality. Correspondingly, [Kim and Lee \(2010\)](#) affirm that high-ability pupils from less-privileged backgrounds may even miss out on prestigious university places when not provided access to shadow education. In contrast, affluent parents may persistently strive to locate the best shadow education providers for their children, earning them the label 'intensive' (Davies, as cited in [Bray, 2013, p. 415](#)). [Kim and Lee \(2010\)](#) also report how parents invest significant portions of their household income into supplementary education, to prepare students for applications to elite universities. The long-term aim is to endow students with a wider variety of crucial life choices for the future, including high-status lucrative careers, improved marriage prospects, precious alumni relations and social prestige. As such, the leaning towards 'different degrees' ([Pring et al., 2009, p. 13](#)) is somewhat obscured in this context, as Korean parents tend to determine the volume of shadow education procured in keeping with financial status and competitive advantage rather than individual aptitude or remedial need ([Bray & Lykins, 2012](#)). Therefore, perhaps [Pring et al. \(2009\)](#) may agree that "many learners are the victims of...social and economic disadvantages" (2009, p.13) in the contemporary Korean context, too.

The last segment 'in this day and age', is significant as the objectives and interpretation of education are constantly evolving, noted also by Reiss and White in their collection of diverse definitions, including those of D.H Lawrence, R.M. Hutchins and Rosseau et al. ([Reiss and White, 2014, p. 78](#)). With increasing access to advanced technology and ongoing rapid globalization, our understanding of education is mercurial now and, unquestionably, will be so in the future. [Pring et al. \(2009\)](#) cite the contemporary 'management speak' which is so pervasive presently, acting as form of state control and turning education into an activity based on 'an ends/means' model (p. 18). Reflecting the economic trends of the time, education is awash with language borrowed directly from business;

“the consumer or client replaces the learner. The curriculum is delivered. Stakeholders shape the aims...” (Pring et al., 2009, p. 17). Thus, education has seemingly evolved into a technical process. Rather, education should consider the needs and wants of its learners, to empower them to flourish both during and after their academic career (Reiss & White, 2014, p. 77) as education both in the home and the classroom (and perhaps the academy) contribute to creating a “background that will colour everything they (students) do” (Reiss & White 2014, p. 80). Perhaps by focusing solely on academic targets, the business model is neglecting ways in which to “develop the learner for his or her own benefit” (Reiss & White, 2014, p. 78).

Similar to Pring et al.’s (2009) discontent with the language associated with contemporary education, Fielding and Moss, in their discussion of the perilous state of the UK education system, demonstrate how the discourse of ‘management speak’ has affected the perspectives of educational stakeholders:

“What emerges from this impoverished and impoverishing public discourse is the image of the child as an empty vessel, to whom information, prescribed by the curriculum, must be ‘delivered’; the teacher as a technician, whose task is to unwrap and present packages of prescribed information; the parent as autonomous consumer; concerned only with securing the best buy for their child; the school as a business, competing against other school-businesses for the custom of these parent-consumers...” (2011, p.17)

I find it remarkable how Pring et al. (2009) and Fielding and Moss’ (2011) words above seem to resonate with shadow education in Korea; from the learner as a metaphorical vessel that needs repeated re-filling, to the high stakes competition between each cram school, with ‘consumers’ often alternating between ‘providers’ in search of the most desirable supplementary education. Consequently, this framework can compel shadow education providers to differentiate themselves substantially from state schools.

Transcending public education

Accordingly, shadow education does not exclusively seek to emulate the public sector but serves to transcend it; evidently, according to Lee (2010) the Korean education system has long relied on rote memorisation, exam scores and a didactic, authoritarian style of teaching. However, as observed by Bray, “some tutoring providers attract clients with promises of advanced and diversified learning types that go considerably beyond the standard offer of regular schools” (Lee, 2010, p.10). Kwok (2004), in his study, also observed that “tutees had the opportunity for free questioning time and more thematic, intensive learning than in daytime schooling...suitable to tutees learning needs” (p. 67). Private academies, especially those offering English tuition, often incorporate student-centred and interactive activities (Bray & Lykins, 2012), perhaps borrowing from western-oriented trends and distancing themselves from what Seddon (2008) terms ‘deliverology’ (as cited in Pring et al., 2009, p. 16). Pring et al. (2009) are explicit in their opinion that pedagogy cannot be broken down into ends and means; teaching is a holistic process, not a metaphor drawn from the realm of business management (Pring et al., 2009). I suggest that academies may enhance the learners’ competitive edge in school and present them with interactive activities that they “whole-heartedly and enjoyably immerse themselves with” (Reiss & White, 2014). From my own experience, examples of these could include debating, presenting and project-based work, mostly unavailable in the formal school.

As such, classes which assist pupils in mastering the practical knowledge and cognitive skills connected to formal daily schooling also embed additional learning opportunities (Kwok, 2004). So, turning to the perspective of Bernstein (1975), perhaps academy tutors can figuratively cast aside the strong-framed government prescribed textbook “which tacitly transmits the ideology of the collection code” (p. 29) and vary their pedagogy. Practitioners of shadow education do appear to be affecting a shift from the traditional didactic model, in which authoritative teacher-centred instruction is the norm. Control may be replaced by cooperation during a variety of pedagogically diverse activities, taking the place of formal assessments, speaking to Bernstein’s (1975) invisible pedagogy and weaker framing. Thus, the students emerge as co-constructors of knowledge, engaging more actively in the learning process. Moreover, the remodelling of strict, perhaps impersonal, relationships occurs if the teacher concentrates on the “the whole child” (Bernstein, 1975, p. 32). Accordingly, by harnessing more student-

centred approaches, tutors may show students the “the importance of the ways of knowing, of constructing problems” ([Bernstein, 1975, p. 33](#)) which is consistent with the need for practical, yet worldly, knowledge as presented by [Pring et al. \(2009\)](#) and [Reiss and White \(2014\)](#).

[Pring et al. \(2009\)](#) further explain that a well-rounded individual is encouraged to look deep within and contemplate what life to lead to experience fulfilment. This can be achieved with a student-centred approach; encouraging students to explore the “arts, drama and literature, through group activities and individual pursuits” ([Pring et al., 2009, p. 21](#)). In academies, being exposed to a variety of subjects in more depth, with a lean towards learner-centred pedagogy, could foster the comprehension of key ideas about the world and lead to heightened ‘knowing of the self’ (Socrates, as cited in [Pring et al., 2009, p. 21](#)). Moreover, in line with Reiss and White’s suggestion that in-depth career guidance should be available to students, [Byun \(2014\)](#) reported that some Korean academies do provide learners with a diverse array of services, including career counselling, perhaps aiding learners in contemplating how to achieve fulfilment.

Perhaps then, the middle-class shadow education custodians have effectuated this shift, borrowing from the west (the fusion of traditional eastern values and the westernization of Korea being increasingly apparent) and appreciating to some degree the introduction of a pedagogy of competence over performance, disconnected from the formal school. However, with the widespread consumerism of shadow education currently, one must concede that it is not limited to the middle classes. Moreover, from [Bernstein’s \(1975\)](#) standing, shadow education would fail to present a fully student-centred environment in which students are at liberty to experience learning as they desire; what ultimately happens in the classroom needs to be reported back to parents as consumers, meaning that the pedagogy will in fact be visible to the main stakeholders, who frame the educational aims ([Pring et al., 2014](#)). Undeniably, in this context, a key stakeholder is the ‘mother’ in a society still largely featuring clear gender divisions. Therefore, mothers primarily emerge as the discerning customers, for they tend to invest the most time and energy into educational decision-making and form networks with peers to discuss tuition selections ([Park, Byun & Kim, 2011](#)). This echoes [Bernstein’s \(1975\)](#) image of the mother as “a powerful and crucial agent of cultural reproduction who provides access to symbolic forms and shapes the disposition of her children so that they are better able to exploit the opportunities of education” (, p. 28), so that they may live a rewarding life, and become ‘educated’.

The what and the how

However, to emerge as a rounded, educated individual, certain conditions must be met; including the ‘what’ and the ‘how’. In consonance with [Pring et al. \(2009\)](#), there must be exposure to the varying fields of knowledge so that an individual can think critically about the world; these domains include the sciences, arts, mathematics and humanities. While the acquisition of knowledge is only a fraction of the whole person, it is necessary in allowing an individual to “enter into a world of ideas” ([Pring et al., 2009, p.19](#)). Alongside the theoretical awareness acquired, learners need practical capabilities to address and rectify problems occurring in real-life situations; here is an evident merging of the dualism of skills and knowledge. In line with this, [Reiss and White \(2014\)](#) offer the example of science education in offering some practical benefit if applied to concepts, so that learners can traverse the gap between ‘knowing and doing’ or, put simply, the ‘what’ and the ‘how’. Perhaps subject-specialising cram schools with their reduced class sizes, variations in pedagogy and desire to satisfy stakeholders may offer a way to bridge this gap, and in doing so, stimulate increased demand leading to greater commercial success.

Yet currently, an educated 19-year-old in Korea is perhaps someone who has not only excelled on the CSAT, but also one who has spent countless hours toiling away in academy sessions to arrive there. So, does shadow education exist largely for the ‘cultivation of the intellect’, (Hutchins, as cited in [Reiss & White, 2014, p. 78](#); Newman, as cited in [Pring et al., 2009, p.19](#)) in so far as intellect can be evaluated by success on an entrance exam? Can intellect be cultivated purely in relation to how many hours one spends in a classroom? [Pring et al. \(2009, p.18\)](#) assert that ‘intellectual excellence’ is just one facet of an educated individual. Surely, a well-rounded autonomous learner should engage in various extra-curricular pursuits outside of classrooms, as espoused by [Reiss and White \(2014\)](#). However, in the Korean context, with students often not ceasing their daily studying until 10 pm, it is difficult to comprehend how learners may truly emerge as ‘well-rounded’ and causes one to question the possible mental and physical health implications ([Choi & Choi, 2016](#)) which arise in the pursuit of academic

excellence. Moreover, it was not until 2006 that the education authority imposed a curfew on cram schools, outlawing any tuition after 10pm (Choi & Choi, 2016, p.144). Previously, it was commonplace for pupils to be studying after midnight in academies, possibly impinging on their engagement with the broader community.

Furthermore, Pring et al. (2009) identify that an educated person requires connections to the wider community, which can be achieved if citizenship is promoted. As such, one aim of education should be to promote liberal democratic values, allowing students to offer valuable contributions to the community and benefit from their membership to it (Pring et al., 2009) as informed and active citizens (Reiss & White, 2014). As such, education cannot exist in a knowledge-based vacuum; fostering the acquisition of academic knowledge is just one legitimate expectation of the education system. Equally importantly, autonomous young people need a wider understanding of their position in the local, national and global community, and in doing so, can embrace morality. The 'whole' person may achieve a level of utilitarian understanding so he/she can establish which direction life will take, in accordance with what is morally right. Thus, education can build upon and extend the ethical guidance received in the home (Reiss & White, 2014) and promote both 'moral' and 'intellectual' virtues (Pring et al., 2009, p. 20). Yet in terms of shadow education, with its emphasis on time-bound competitive academic learning, it is unclear how far moral virtues and community spirit may be represented in its pedagogy. In addition, while Reiss and White (2014) suggest that a flourishing life involves assisting others in thriving, perhaps the apparent absence of values in shadow education would make it incompatible with this notion. Moreover, Han and Lee (2016) suggest shadow education is so academically narrow in scope that it does not encourage social development, cultural awareness or the promotion of citizenship.

As Pring et al. (2009) emphasise the need to educate holistically; to address moral values, democratic principles and self-knowledge, is an overreliance on 'intellectual virtues' seemingly divorced from 'moral virtues' (p. 21) harmful? Can this culture of educational pressure ultimately suppress flourishing? Reiss and White (2014) claim that a flourishing life is one that allows students to develop both as individuals and citizens who can contribute to a better society by engaging in a variety of interesting and fulfilling pursuits. With a seemingly wholesale focus on academic subjects, could the duality of public and shadow education confine students or even oppress them? In many cases, they are unable to escape the metaphorical shadow, even from a young age (Bray, 2010). A flourishing life should surely embody much additional secondary socialisation: hobbies, free play, sports and more. Bray raises this issue succinctly, outlining how shadow education "may dominate children's lives and restrict their leisure times in ways that are psychologically and educationally undesirable; and it can be perceived in some settings as a form of corruption that undermines social trust" (Bray, 2009, p. 13-14). Evidently, the educational environment is impinging on notions of autonomy and flourishing. Moreover, Aurini et al. (2014, p. xvi) posit how shadow education "has altered the very experience of childhood and youth", lamentably signifying how it may inhibit child socialisation and recreation, due to the "educational arms race" (Aurini et al., 2014, p. xxi), or the battle to excel in exams.

A Flourishing Life?

Reiss and White (2014) state that the notion of a flourishing life is derived from western ideology. If the definition of success set by society is a rise in socio-economic position resulting from entrance to a prestigious university, then is this what constitutes flourishing for Korean citizens? Reiss and White (2014) may suggest that desire satisfaction can include financial gain, but of course it should not be set apart from other worthwhile pursuits. As such, education should "prepare students for a life of autonomous, whole-hearted and successful engagement in worthwhile relationships, activities and experiences" (Reiss & White, 2014, p. 79). I suggest that in any context, engaging in such worthwhile character-building pursuits and sustaining healthy relationships are virtuous ideals, but it is potentially difficult to neatly slot these paragons into the educational context of a society driven by competition and suffering from the 'diploma disease' and 'classic prisoner's dilemma' (Choi & Choi, 2016, p.146).

However, in a society where fear of failure and social pressures dominate, how can citizens shun shadow education and release their children into a world of diverse socialisation and recreation? If children do not receive adequate preparation for the future ahead, do parents have a social obligation, a commitment, to invest in the future of their children? It is plausible to suggest that across cultures,

there is an inherent parental inclination to pursue the finest resources available for children's future lives. Arguably, the key motivating factor of shadow education is fostering 'powerful (exam-based) knowledge' (Young, 2015) which facilitates a competitive edge in this cultural climate. Therefore, perhaps in the Korean context, a premium resource is supplementary education, ultimately aimed towards the CSAT, since socio-economic status directly affects more than employment potential; to reiterate, it is inextricably linked to familial reputation, individual status and marriage prospects. From this standpoint, investing in shadow education is perceived as an intrinsic commitment to lifelong gains, with parental sacrifice firmly embedded in Confucian traditions (Oh, 2010). Therefore, while Reiss and White (2014) present an idealistic and attractive notion of flourishing, with its nods to hedonism, self-development and desire satisfaction and Pring et al. (2009) seek to truly develop the whole individual, it is questionable how compatible this is with the shadow education context. Accordingly, while Pring et al. (2009) and Reiss and White (2014) present noble assertions, the reality in Korea is perhaps somewhat bleaker, and shadow education seemingly fails to foster a flourishing life or whole person development. Consequently, are the notions of an educated person and a flourishing life culturally dependent?

CONCLUSION

I have found it insightful to juxtapose Reiss and White's (2014) proposed aims of education and Pring et al.'s (2009) pivotal question with the shadow education context. Reiss and White (2014) believe individuals can enjoy a "flourishing life" if the aim of education is "to prepare students for a life of autonomous, whole-hearted and successful engagement in worthwhile relationships, activities and experiences" (p.79) while "introducing young people to a form of life which is distinctively human, which enables them to be and to feel fulfilled, which equips them to live independent lives and which enables them to participate positively in the wider community" is set forth by Pring et al. (2009, p. 213).

At the societal level, supplementary education may serve to compensate for perceived limitations in the public system, assist with exam preparation and facilitate class reproduction (Choi & Choi, 2016). Conceivably, the consumption of shadow education promotes investment in human capital, perhaps improving the skills and knowledge of the next generational workforce. Moreover, the following positive gains at the student level may be adumbrated: tutees receive greater individual attention in small classes, are exposed to new social relationships with co-tutees (Chapman & Bray, 1999) and may be engaged in richer, student-centred pedagogical experiences.

Yet shadow education has a more disruptive role if the opportunity cost it presents undermines students' development into fully rounded individuals; from the reduction in socialisation and recreation outside of classrooms, to the potential harmful side effects from excessive examination pressure, which Choi and Choi (2016) suggest has direct implications for both the physical and mental well-being of pupils. Additionally, it is worth considering how the investment in a child's future can be at the expense of other familial gains: financial security, better housing, leisure pursuits and material possessions. Thus, with an apparent unilateral focus on academics, I suggest that many aspects of "a flourishing life" (Reiss & White, 2014, p. 79) and "a distinctively human life" are absent (Pring et al., 2009, p. 213). Shadow education is incompatible with these perspectives in the philosophical sense, since embracing a fully human life would encompass greater learner autonomy and allow for more recognition of aptitude and personal interests. Students, however, seem constrained by rigid cultural, societal and familial demands, which embed the functional and symbolic purposes of shadow education firmly in its cultural context.

Returning to the controversy, I propose that the industry could potentially even be nocuous to society; the over-reliance on private sessions which are perceivably necessary to supplement the failings of the state system invoke a vicious circle; the less engaged students are in public school causes less confidence in it, which in turn raises the value of shadow education, which subsequently reduces students' engagement and satisfaction with the public system (e.g. Lee et al., 2010; Lee & Shouse, 2011). Moreover, Lee et al. (2010) expound the suspicion that society tends to rely on unsubstantiated beliefs and anecdotal, symbolic evidence regarding the advantages of shadow education. Accordingly, Lee et al. (2010) cite the need for further empirical research to display a direct causal link between shadow education and academic results, which would allow parents and society to objectively appraise 'the shadow' and question its purposes and desirability in the future.

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