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Teacher or friend? – consumer narratives on private supplementary tutoring in Sweden as policy enactment

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ABSTRACT

Private supplementary tutoring (PST) is a worldwide enterprise that comes in a variety of forms and with a growing number of students. Sweden, together with the other Nordic countries, has a relatively short history of large-scale organised supplementary education, which can be explained by its confidence in regular mainstream education. In recent years though, this picture has partly changed, and today families in Sweden are offered different kinds of education services outside the ordinary school system. This paper targets how PST is legitimized and justified through marketing as a solution to problems related to the education of children. Through a positioning analysis of three consumer narratives published online by a PST company, this paper aims to further our understanding of which functions PST fills within the Swedish education system. Results show that private tutors appear in the consumer narratives as compensating for shortcomings in schools and families as well as complementing the support that parents and teachers can offer children. These findings signal that PST marketing creates demands for different kinds of support which may, in the long run, rewrite the map of the Swedish education landscape.

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Introduction

This paper¹ targets private supplementary tutoring (PST) as a relatively new phenomenon in Sweden. PST companies sell education services to families with children enrolled in the formal school system and can thereby be seen as both products and producers of a changing education landscape. The paper aims to further our understanding of which functions PST fills within the Swedish education system; more precisely, how PST is legitimized and justified through marketing as a solution to problems related to the education of children. Today PST has a worldwide presence, involving a great variety of forms and a growing number of students (Bray 2011, 2017). In Sweden, however, the market for PST is limited because the country, in common with the other Nordic countries, has a relatively short history of large-scale organised supplementary education. The late establishment of this phenomenon in these countries has been explained by the well-developed mandatory state-funded school system. Bray (2011) states that within the EU, the Nordic states are the ones least affected by

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PST and argues that this can be seen as due to a ‘good mainstream provision that appears largely to satisfy the expectations of families’ (7).

Since Bray’s (2011) statement regarding PST in the Nordic states, this picture has partly changed, and the market for PST has grown rapidly in Sweden, together with other forms of supplementary education (Bouakaz 2012; Forsberg et al. 2015). Sweden’s education system has enjoyed an international reputation for valuing equality highly (Englund 2006; Telhaug, Mediås, and Aasen 2006). In recent years, however, a situation with falling school results and increased differences between social groups has led to questioning of the standard and legitimacy of the formal school system (OECD 2015). Governmental reforms on tax relief for various household services executed in the home were introduced in 2007 (SFS 2007:346).² These regulations created opportunities for private companies to offer services in homework support.³ In 2013, homework support got its own paragraph within the regulations (SkU 2012/13:10). These reforms were legitimized by references to declining school results and increased inter-group differences together with arguments of promoting further employment of young people. Drawing on a dominant discourse on formal education as lacking resources, the reforms made it possible for private companies providing PST to establish and to grow. Nevertheless, other reforms followed in 2014–2015, aiming at limiting the PST market through a withdrawal of tax deductions and at making supplementary education available to all children through the formal school system or through non-profit organisations (Prop 2014/15:1). According to the, at the time, largest homework support companies’ annual accounts their total turnover fell by more than 10% from 2014 to 2015.⁴ Nevertheless, the PST market was at that time so well established that, although sales decreased with these later reforms, it still remains an important actor and feature of the Swedish education landscape. The long-term development of the private supplementary education market in Sweden is still to be seen.

Theoretically, we approach PST companies as policy actors who, while working outside of the formal education system, nevertheless are part of the Swedish education landscape and thereby take part in the enactment of education policy (Malen and Knapp 1997; see also Braun et al. 2011) by marketing tuition services to families with school children. PST companies can be said to be a consequence of the ongoing privatization and marketization of education in Sweden and in other parts of the Western world (Bray 2011). Privatization of education is, as argued by Ball and Youdell (2007), influenced by the particularities of national contexts in terms of, for example, traditions of welfare provision, political culture and structure and the provision and financing of education.

The consequences for individuals, nations and education systems of the worldwide emerging shadow education market are contextually dependent. However the complexity of the relations between the actors is universal. Zhang and Bray (2017) point out the dual impact shadow education may have for individuals as well as for a nation. On the one hand, opportunities for pupils to participate in supplementary education leads to increased levels of knowledge and can, in the long run, contribute to economic and social growth within a nation. On the other hand, one risk might be that increased opportunities for supplementary education contributes to both excessive pressures on individual students as well as increased social differences within a society. Zhang and Bray illuminate, through the case of Shanghai, some difficulties that can occur when the boundaries between regular school and shadow education become blurry.

There is little known about the characteristics of PST in Sweden and how it is related to formal education. In order to better understand PST companies as policy actors in the Swedish education landscape, therefore, we take our theoretical point of departure from a perspective on policy as enacted in and through discursive articulations (Ball et al. 2011), and attend to the local particularities of policy work (Ball 1998) outside of the formal school system.

One way to take a closer look at PST companies as policy actors is to focus on the marketing of PST services. Marketing works to legitimize the existence of PST companies and aims to create a consumer demand for the services they sell. In this paper, we analyse marketing of PST through parents' consumer narratives (Fitchett and Caruana 2015) published on the website of one of the largest PST companies in Sweden. These narratives are presented as written by parents and tell stories of how their decision to hire a private tutor helped to solve problems with their children's schooling. The use of storytelling is a rapidly growing marketing strategy, used by large and small brands as a way to attract and retain customers (Pulizzi 2012). By relating to customers through recognition the company can enlist consumer trust as well as create a positive image of themselves (Herskovitz and Crystal 2010). This recognition acts at both an individual level where parents can identify themselves with the characters in the stories as well as on a more collective level as the stories draw on dominant discourses on education. Within the parent consumer narratives published on company websites, the private tutor becomes the face of the company as the tutors figure as key characters in the stories. In order to promote a further understanding of how PST is legitimized and justified as a solution to problems related to the education of children we analyse the ways in which private tutors are described as parts of these solutions.

Research on private tutors in PST

Research on PST as this form of what Bray (2013) calls 'shadow education' has up until recently attracted relatively little attention from researchers and policy makers (Aurini, Davies, and Dierkes 2013; Bray, Kwo and Jokić 2015). This lack of attention is interesting as PST in, for example, East Asian countries has an 800-year history and thrives on large markets that in different ways rival formal education (Dawson 2010). We can also see that PST is an expanding phenomenon in many and diverse parts of the world (Bray 2017): North America (Koyama 2010; Burch 2009; Aurini and Davies 2004), Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Silova 2010), Southern and Eastern Africa (Paviot, Heinsohn, and Korkman 2008) and Western Europe (Ireson and Rushforth 2011; Bray 2011). PST is less developed and less prevalent in Western and Nordic European countries like France, Denmark and Sweden than in East Asian countries like South Korea and Japan (Southgate 2009). Ireson and Rushforth (2011), who have researched the use of private tutors in England points out that even though private tutoring has a long history there, it has until recently operated in a hidden market, making it difficult to get any systematic information on its nature and extent. Nevertheless, more recent studies show that even though PST has not been targeted by policy or research in the Western world to any great extent, it is spreading (Bray 2017). The existing research on PST has mainly focused on forms and efficiency of private tutoring for student learning and achievement, and less on the functions filled by PST within education systems in different national contexts.

As this paper aims to promote a further understanding of which functions PST fills within the Swedish education landscape and targets the description of the private tutor as a key factor in the legitimization and justification of PST, research on characteristics and skills of private tutors becomes relevant.

In international research on PST the private tutors are often described as school teachers having a second job or working full time for private companies. A case study of correlations between PST and college exams, targeting approximately 6000 grade 12 students in Jinan in China, Zhang (2013) shows that between 70 and 85% of the private tutors the students had met were school teachers with bachelor degrees, and approximately 10% were university students. Silova's (2010) cross-national study of private tutoring in 12 post-socialist countries in Central Asia and Eastern Europe shows a similar trend with teaching professionals from schools and universities working as private tutors. In an overview of PST in the EU, Bray (2011) shows that the range of tutor types in these regions is broad:

Tutors may be trained or untrained, and full-time or part-time. ... Some tutors are university students who tutor primary or secondary students, and even secondary students who tutor primary or other secondary students. Other tutors are retired teachers in their 60s, 70s or beyond. (Bray 2011, 39)

There are a few qualitative studies targeting private tutors. Trent's (2016) interview study of private tutors and professional identity includes six private tutors, five of whom lacked teacher training, working at PST companies in Hong Kong. Trent found that they viewed themselves as different from and in some cases inferior to school teachers; also that they experienced a lack of collegial discussion and closeness to students that they perceived as characteristic of the professional identity of school teachers. In her qualitative study of five PST providers in the Australian tuition industry, Davies (2013) focuses on the lived experiences of tutors, parents and students as stakeholders in order to target educational legitimacy for the providers and social impact for the participants. All tutors participating in the study were, in contrast to the tutors in Trent's study, well-educated and often experienced teachers. Davies found that tuition programs were described as unique and effective and thereby as different from formal education. The tutors were identified as committed to their job and passionate about teaching. There was a strong will among the tutors to identify themselves as educators and reluctance among them to see themselves as part of a business. Moreover, the tutors all stressed the value of having informal and positive relations to the students. These two studies paint two different pictures of the private tutor working in PST companies in two different national contexts. What they have in common is that the results of both studies signal that the relationship between PST and formal education can be complicated because private tutors can be seen as educators but not real teachers.

Thus, apart from quantitative data on private tutor characteristics in term of education, employment, main profession and age (cf. Silova 2010; Zhang 2013; Bray 2011) and a few qualitative studies, we know little about private tutors in the expanding industry of PST. And although trained teachers dominate the tuition industry in certain national contexts, Bray (2011) points out that many large PST companies working in national or international arenas in Western Europe mainly employ young part-time tutors with very limited or no tutor training. This is the case in Sweden today, where the larger PST companies employ students from upper secondary school or from universities as part-time tutors. They are called study-buddies, study-coaches or homework supporters and are marketed as young bright students with skills to teach, coach and support students of different ages in their

academic and/or personal struggles.⁵ Research on the characteristics and skills of private tutors in different national contexts show that a majority are trained teachers and that the relationship between PST and formal education may be complicated. The situation in Sweden where PST is a relatively new phenomenon and where the majority of the private tutors are young, untrained and working part-time as tutors differs in many ways from the contexts studied in previous research.

Our contribution to this budding field of research on private tutors is to focus on how these young part-time private tutors in Sweden are described in marketing through parent consumer narrative, being portrayed as part of the solution to problems related to the education of children. Moreover, the narrative approach makes possible an understanding of PST anchored in specific examples of parents struggling to deal with school-related problems involving their children. This is done in order to promote a further understanding of how PST is legitimized and justified in a Swedish national context in which the standard and legitimacy of formal education is being questioned.

Private tutor functions in consumer narratives as policy enactment

We approach the consumer narratives as symbolic enactments of education policy (Malen and Knapp 1997; see also Ball and Youdell 2007) promoting PST in Sweden. The use of parents' narrated personal experiences in marketing 'tap collectively held values' (Malen and Knapp 1997, 431) and thereby publicly express ideas that shape the perceptions and actions of people. These publicly expressed ideas are here conceptualised as discourses on parent and school responsibility that work to legitimize private tutoring as solutions to problems as they render the stories' credibility beyond the local (Karlsson 2013; Karlsson, Löfdahl and Pérez Prieto 2013; Mishler 1999). The consumer narratives draw on the same discourses on parent and school responsibility for the education of children as the government reforms on tax relief for homework support executed in the home (SFS 2007:346) and the later withdrawal of the tax relief (Prop 2014/15:1). In other words, we align with Peterson and Langellier (2006, 177) who view stories as 'embedded in and ordered by fields of discourse'. In this sense, the discourses on parent and school responsibility make possible a marketing of PST as a solution to problems actualised in public debate and through government reforms. In order to promote a further understanding of how PST can be understood as a solution to problems related to the schooling of children, we analyse the ways in which private tutor functions are described as parts of these solutions in parent consumer narratives.

Consumer narratives are a powerful marketing tool in any business promotion such as destination marketing (Tussyadiah, Park, and Fesenmaier 2010) or in marketing of PST (Davies 2013). Davies (2013) shows in her study on private tutoring in Australia that success stories and testimonials written by parents or children, praising the tutoring services, were used by some PST companies to legitimise their businesses as they described their benefits. In the same vein, the written consumer narratives analysed in this paper tell success stories of parents' personal experiences of buying the company's services. What is especially interesting here is what we can learn about PST by focussing on the functions filled by the private tutor as a solution to problems with the schooling of children.

Narratives or stories⁶ are here seen as characterised by a content structured by temporal causality and by the function of plot and evaluation (Denzin 1989; Labov and Waletzky 1967/1997). We tell stories to make sense of ourselves and the world. Stories do the work of

sense-making as they picture changes involving characters and events in ways that explain and/or justify acts performed by or done to involved parties. In the three consumer narratives in this study, the main plots are more or less the same: parents become aware of their children having problems at school and experience a need to engage a private tutor who helps the child to come to terms with the problems. Although they appear very alike at a first glance, there are differences between the three narratives, regarding how the private tutor as story character is described and positioned in relation to other story characters. There are also differences related to how the PST company that publishes these stories (and thereby can be seen as a kind of ‘story editor’) is positioned in relation to the potential consumers or story audiences on the website. In order to problematize the consumer narratives as policy enactments and make visible how private tutors emerge through the stories as solutions to problems, we draw on positioning theory (Davies and Harré 1990; Harré et al. 2009).

Bamberg (1997) developed a model of positioning analysis of narratives as interaction that makes distinctions between positions emerging within a story and positions emerging through the telling (in this case, the publishing) of the same story. Positioning analysis often targets discursive practices of direct communication like conversations. As we work with written stories published on websites as a discursive practice, we view the publishing of the consumer narratives as an indirect act of storytelling within the theoretical framework of policy enactment (Ball et al. 2011). As positioning theory is concerned with how duties and rights are distributed in changing patterns among people engaged in various kinds of social actions (Davies and Harré 1990), we look at the written consumer narratives as social acts designed by the PST company to address certain reader audiences. Parents can be understood as the target audience for the publication of the consumer narratives on the website in the first place as they are the potential customers. The consumer narratives are explicitly used for marketing purposes by the company although they have the character of testimonies, and thereby make claims of authenticity. All in all, the policy enactment achieved through these consumer narratives works to picture PST as a necessary and desirable service on the education market which accomplishes what schools or parents fail to do. Moreover, as will be shown in the following analysis, the private tutor fills different functions in the three stories that can tell us more about PST in the Swedish education landscape.

Data

Private companies need to market their services to attract customers in a competitive market. The websites of the companies constitute the main interface between the companies and their customers. An overview of the websites of the dominant companies on the Swedish market of private tutoring (e.g. MyAcademy, StudyBuddy, Allakando) shows a variety of marketing strategies, such as images, video presentations where parents and tutors talk about their experiences, statistics, consumer ratings and written narratives. The marketing plan can be divided into marketing to families with high-achieving students and marketing directed towards families with children that struggle in school. The sources in this sub-study belong to the latter category.

In this article, the data consist of three written consumer narratives published on the website of one of the largest private companies selling tutoring services. The stories are presented as written by parents of children 10–15 years old and published under the heading ‘Family stories’. In the stories, the parents describe their experiences of using the company’s

services and particularly emphasize how these have benefited the children's ability to manage school. As the selection of data is based on the intention to provide a nuanced picture of the different functions PST can fill within the Swedish education system, these stories stand out as well suited for the purpose.

The stories are translated from Swedish to English and analysed in their entirety. The positioning of the story characters and the positioning of the company through the act of publishing the same stories are the units addressed in the analysis.

Data analysis

The model for positioning analysis (Bamberg 1997) that we apply in this paper is designed to distinguish between the story characters and the PST company as story editor (storyteller) in order to make visible how different private tutor functions are promoted in relation to discourses on parents and schools as responsible for the education of children. In other words, we ask what the consumer narrative is about and why it is published (told) this way and in this context (Watson 2007). First and foremost, our positioning analysis focuses on how the story characters are positioned in relation to each other and to the school problems depicted in the stories. Secondly, we look at how the PST company as story editor is positioned in relation to parents as target audience through the act of publishing the consumer narratives. In the third step of the analysis, we draw on the positioning of story characters and story editor and discuss how discourses on parents and schools as responsible for the education of children make possible discursive constructions of private tutor functions that transcend the local context of the company website. Altogether, this positioning analysis of the three consumer narratives aims to promote a further understanding of how PST is legitimized and justified as a solution to problems in the schooling of children which parents and schools fail to solve.

Results

As will be shown in the analysis, the three consumer narratives follow a common script which we divide into three parts based on Labov and Waletzky's (1967/1997) model of narrative structure: (1) There is a child who has problems in school which the school fails to solve; (2) the turning point pictures a parent turning to the PST company for help and engaging a private tutor; (3) the story resolution depicts a private tutor succeeding where school and/or parents have failed and the problems can be solved or handled.

If, by applying the three-level positioning analysis (Bamberg 1997; Watson 2007), we take a closer look at the three seemingly alike consumer narratives, differences become visible that relate to the problems depicted and to the different functions filled by private tutors. Through the following analysis, we will show how the positioning of story characters and of the company as story editor make visible three different private tutor functions that legitimize the existence and services of PST companies and that draw on discourses on parents and schools as responsible for the education of children. In the first story, the tutor functions as a *stand-in teacher*, in the second as an *elder sibling* and in the third as an *instrument for parent control*.

Story 1: stand-in teacher

This first story pictures characters acting to bring about change in a problematic situation. The main characters involved in this narrated process are the mother, the child and a private tutor. Other characters are a teacher, other children at school and the PST company.

The Björk family

At the end of the summer holidays I thought a lot about how to solve my son's problems with math. My son has dyslexia and we had looked for help in many different places without results. Dennis had told me that he thought it was difficult that the teacher couldn't sit down separately with him, but had to help all other children at the same time. I decided to try out homework support at home and visited the company website and emailed an inquiry.

Our tutor Josefin now visits us twice a week and she understands precisely the difficulties Dennis has with math and the best ways to help him. Now, my son and I can relax as we don't need to spend long nights with homework without results. During the fall with our tutor, we have not only seen results in schoolwork but also in Dennis' self-esteem and well-being.

The mother of a primary school pupil, Beatrice Björk

Through the description of the problem the mother is positioned as *troubled and preoccupied* by her son's problems with math. The mother is also positioned in relation to her son's problems as becoming more and more *anxious* to find a solution to a problem she cannot solve by herself. The child Dennis is positioned in relation to both mother and school/teacher as *having special needs*, through the descriptions of him as having dyslexia and problems with math. He is also positioned in relation to his teacher as *overlooked* as the teacher lacks the time to provide the individual support he needs. Minor characters, who nevertheless play important parts in the story, are the teacher and other children at school. The teacher is positioned in relation to the boy as *too busy* with other duties to support him properly. In line with this, other children at school are positioned in relation to Dennis as *distracting* the teacher and *demanding* the attention Dennis needs.

It is the mother's decision to contact the company and the arrival of the private tutor that turn the story around. Here the mother is positioned as *dealing with the problem* through the description of her contacting the PST company. The private tutor is positioned as a *saviour* in relation to both mother and son. In relation to the child she is positioned as a *caring professional* through the descriptions of her as understanding 'precisely' how to help and support him. In the resolution, the positions are changed and the mother emerges as *relieved of burdens* and the son as *rehabilitated* both academically and personally.

In relation to the potential audiences, the publishing of the narrative positions the PST company as a *rescuer of parents in need* as it sends the message that the company can ease the burdens of troubled parents by providing services that offer the resources that schools and teachers fail to deliver and the parents themselves are unable to provide. Through the mother's description of the private tutor as successful in understanding and helping the child with math problems, the company is also indirectly positioned as a *provider of professional individualised teaching*.

The story draws on discourses on parent and school responsibility for the education of children as cultural frames of reference that transcend the local context of the story world and the company website in ways that picture a tutor functioning as a stand-in teacher. The positioning of story characters and of the company as story editor invokes a discourse

on school as failing to take responsibility, in this case failing to offer enough teacher time. At the same time, the story both invokes and resists a discourse on parents as responsible for overseeing and taking part in the education of children as the services provided by the company are described as relieving the mother of the burden of struggling with homework. The service provided by the PST company is thereby legitimized as the private tutor functions as a stand-in teacher who compensates for what the teacher should have done in a way that relieves a worried and responsible parent from the burden of solving problems she lacked means to handle. The child needed a professional and caring teacher, and the company provided one.

Story 2: older sibling

The main characters involved in this second story are the mother, the child and a private tutor. Other characters are a teacher and the PST company.

The Phil family

One afternoon before the Christmas holidays in 2012 I got a call from my son's teacher. The words I heard made my stomach ache. 'Your son Marcus will fail in two subjects'. After some time, I understood that my son simply needed help to regain the structure in his homework reading.

Only a week after I had posted an inquiry on the website we met our tutor, and since then I have seen big changes in my son. Marcus's tutor hasn't just helped him catch up in school but has also become a mentor and friend as they have many interests in common. They have developed such an incredible understanding for one another and today our tutor is one of our son's great role models.

Mother of a middle school pupil, Pernilla Phil

The problem is at first presented through a description of the mother getting bad news from the teacher. Through the description of her physical reaction to this news, the mother is positioned as *taken aback* by what the teacher told her about her son's school situation and as *reactive* when she is described as realising that he needed help. The son Marcus is positioned in relation to the school as *in trouble*, through the way he is described as being at risk of failing in two subjects. The teacher is positioned as a *bringer of bad news* in relation to the mother and son. This whole initial description of the problematic situation works to position both mother and son as *passive* in relation to the school which is positioned as an *authority*. The teacher's assessment is not questioned in the story and, similar to the previous story, the child, is positioned as *in need of help*.

As in the previous story, the turning point comes about when the mother turns to the company for help. Here the mother is positioned as *pragmatic* through the description of her realising what was needed to solve the problem and taking action. The private tutor is positioned as a *bringer of positive change* in relation to both mother and son through the description of how the problematic situation was instantly turned around. Moreover, and somewhat unexpectedly, the tutor is positioned as more of a *helpful peer* than a tutor to the child through the description of how the tutor did much more than just help him with school work. The recounting of the tutor's positive impact on the boy in the story's resolution positions the boy as *strengthened* academically but also as *acknowledged* as a person by the tutor.

The company as a story editor is through this story positioned as a *provider of personal support to children*. A personal support that exceeds what one could expect from teachers in school, from parents or from any adult. This is presented in the description of Marcus and the tutor as good friends. At the same time in this story, the company is positioned as a *provider of family assistance* that does not challenge the skills or authority of parents as it does not aim to compensate for a lack in their ability but instead brings in something new.

The story clearly draws on a discourse on parents as responsible for the education of children. Through the ways in which the story characters and the company as a story editor are positioned, a discourse on parents as responsible for the education of children is invoked in ways that picture a tutor who functions as an older sibling, a function somewhat more closely related to the family than to school, which was the case in the first story. What is needed to solve Marcus's problems, however, cannot be provided by either school or parents. Instead, parents take responsibility for the education of their children by providing a different kind of support that can be seen as complementary in relation to school instead of compensatory as in the first story. This tutor provides personal support in forms of mutual recognition and a sharing of interests in ways that brings about positive change. The service provided by the PST company is thereby legitimized through the ways in which the private tutor functions as a older sibling, a complement to what schools or parents could or should do to manage the situation. The child needed help to catch up on school work, and the company provided that and more.

Story 3: instrument for parent control

In this last story, the characters are the parents, the daughter, the school, the PST company and a private tutor. Here the father is depicted as a parent who is well aware of his daughter's problems.

The Alm family

My daughter Moa has the prognosis of ADD and, as the school couldn't help her sufficiently, I started to look for help outside of school. Thanks to the help from the company, we have been able to take selective measures where they are needed so that Moa can meet the school's requirements. We have seen a clear improvement in my daughter's basic knowledge, and this has led to her now reaching the goals and managing school.

With help from our tutor we have been able to take control over Moa's education. It isn't about tomorrow's homework anymore but long-term goals that facilitate my daughter's learning. I'm grateful for the opportunity to get homework support and it should be made available to all through more subsidies. The help from the company works and it's here to stay.

Father of a middle school pupil, Anders Alm

This story pictures the problem through a positioning of the father as *concerned* about his daughter and her school results and as *efficient* in dealing with the situation. Although the story is told from the father's perspective to begin with, his spouse indirectly appears as a character through the father's use of the pronoun 'we' in the description of how they turned to the company for help. The daughter Moa is positioned in relation to the school as *having special needs* due to her ADD (attention deficit disorder), in the same vein as in the first story. In contrast to the other two stories, this one lacks a teacher story character. Instead, the school is positioned as a character *incapable* of meeting the needs of the child

through the short description of it not being able to ‘help her enough’. In a way, the child and the school are both positioned as *powerless* in relation to each other. On the other hand, the school is indirectly positioned as *demanding goal achievement* through the recurring descriptions of the problems having to do with the child not attaining basic knowledge skills.

As in the other stories, the turning point comes about when the father begins to search for help outside of school. The company is here positioned as a *service provider* and the private tutor a *service executor* in relation to the parents. The story resolution depicts how this service has made it possible for the parents to help their child achieve the educational goals set by the school and to enhance her basic knowledge. In this story, it is not the lack of the parents’ resources that legitimize the search for help, which was the case in the first story. Through the description of the parents as taking appropriate measures, taking control over, and setting goals for the child’s school situation with the help of the company service, they are positioned as *managers* of their child’s education. In contrast to the other two other stories, no personal or practical relationship between the child and the tutor is depicted. The story ends with a coda (Labov and Waletzky 1967/1997) in which the father states that private tutoring should be made more accessible for all families. This statement positions him as an *advocate* for state-subsidized private tutoring.

The company as a story editor is indirectly positioned as a *provider of customised service* for parents who know what is best for their children. This point of view is strengthened by the explicit positive attitude towards homework support and the political stance on tax deduction and availability for all that ends the story.

The story draws on discourses on both parent and school responsibility for the education of children in ways that picture a tutor functioning as an instrument for parent control. The story characters and story editor are positioned in relation to a discourse on schools as failing to take responsibility for the education of children, but in a different way than was the case in the first story. What differs from the first story is that here it is not the needs of the child but of the parents that are foregrounded in the way the story is told. It is the parents’ need to take control of their child’s schooling rather than the educational needs of the child that are in focus. This focus on parents’ need to take control can be seen as being told within a discourse on parents as responsible for overseeing the education of children. The company provides the tutor as the customised instrument parents need to be able to responsibly manage and take control of the schooling of their child.

Conclusion

As shown in the analysis, although the consumer narratives follow a common script, the private tutors are positioned in different ways in relation to parents, children and schools/teachers. These differences point to the marketing of private tutoring as an offering of services that target diverse problems that nevertheless are each related to children’s problems in school. In line with this, the private tutor as an educator and homework support as a service are perceived as a remedy for shortcomings in school and/or within the family. The company thus offers solutions to problems related to both teachers’ and parents’ lack of resources for solving problems related to the schooling of children. With this said, it is interesting to also look more closely to what the private tutors bring into the problematic home–school–child situation that helps solve the problem. Apart from having the necessary academic knowledge and skills, the tutors in the first and second stories are described as

engaged, encouraging and motivating on a more personal level than can be expected from school teachers. This aspect of private tutoring raises questions concerning what functions this service is expected to fill in relation to home and school. One way of understanding this is to look at the private tutors as doing what teachers in school should do and more, as some kind of ideal teachers. Another way of understanding this is to look at private tutoring as a service that helps families cope with their everyday lives in which schools are just one of many aspects.

Overall, the three consumer narratives draw on discourses on parents and schools as culturally expected to take responsibility for the education of children. The private tutor appears in these stories as a solution to problems that are beyond both parents and school, and thus as indispensable. At the same time, parents are portrayed as accepting culturally expected responsibility for their children's education when they realise that they have to hire a private tutor. In this sense, the marketing of private tutoring can thus be understood as an enactment of government policies on homework support that work to delegitimize formal education and encourage parents to take the expected responsibility for the education of their children by looking for help outside of the formal education system.

Discussion

What can we learn from this analysis of the functions filled by PST in the Swedish education system as we look at marketing of PST as enactment of national education policy? As shown by the analysis, private tutoring is marketed as a service for parents with children who fail in and who are failed by schools. The consumer narratives clearly invoke, in the same vein as the government reform on tax relief for homework support (SFS 2007:346), a discourse on parents as responsible for the education of their children. The very use of parent consumer narratives on PST as a marketing tool can be seen as a discursive practice through which education policy is symbolically enacted (Malen and Knapp 1997; Ball 2009) in ways that work to legitimize PST and encourage parents to get involved in their children's schooling. This kind of education marketing is a new phenomenon in the Swedish education landscape, and can thereby tell us more about whether and in what ways PST may impact the formal education system. An easily drawn conclusion could be that this is just another example of the ongoing degeneration and delegitimization of the Swedish education system, but our analysis of the different tutor functions adds complexity to that picture.

As mentioned by Bray (2011), many large PST companies working in national or international arenas in Western Europe mainly employ young part-time tutors with very limited or no tutor training. The tutors pictured in the consumer narratives and marketed by the largest PST companies in Sweden fit this description and differ significantly from the professionally trained teachers who use private tutoring as a second or full time job in for example China (Zhang 2013) or in Eastern Europe (Silova 2010). This young untrained tutor is a new actor in the Swedish education landscape who can, as shown in our analysis, fill different functions when taking part in the schooling of children outside of formal education. Although the private tutors figuring in the three consumer narratives can fill *compensatory* functions in relation to schools, teachers and parents, they also fill functions as *complements* to both families and schools. The descriptions of the private tutors in the consumer narratives as Stand-in teacher, elder sibling or instrument for parent control differ from the private tutors described by Trent (2016) and Davies (2013). Trent and Davies

both paint pictures of private tutors as different from and sometimes inferior to school teachers. What stands out in the parent consumer narratives is that the tutors play a very different role from school teachers even if they, as stand-in teachers may compensate for what is lacking in schools. While the private tutor as stand-in teacher can be seen as an extension of school, the tutor as elder sibling in turn can be seen as an extension of the family. In the latter case, the private tutor offers something neither parents nor schools can offer, a young role model with whom the children can share interests and who can boost their self-confidence. The fact that Swedish parents can buy education services in the form of a young role model to help their children manage school tells us that although teachers are still seen as the main educators in society they lack the characteristics, time and skills to offer the support of an older and more experienced peer. One wonders if these different tutor functions can paint a more nuanced picture of the crisis of the Swedish school than the one presented in media and political debate. On the one hand, parents who experience desperation on behalf of their children having a hard time in school can engage a private tutor to get the individual support not given by teachers in school. On the other hand, the fact that parents obviously choose to pay money for having young students without proper teacher training to tutor their children indicates that it is time for individual attention or contemporary study experiences and not teaching skills that is in demand. Maybe one could dare to suggest that the dual-worker family and the individualized society has outgrown the clothes of traditional mass education in the sense that our children need individual attention more than they need to be taught by trained teachers.

There is a meta-story told between the lines of the three consumer narratives telling us that schools in Sweden are failing to take responsibility for the education of children and that parents should act responsibly and look for help elsewhere. PST is thus legitimized by this dominant discourse on the Swedish schools as inadequate in terms of resources and equality, characteristics that not so long ago were trademarks of the Swedish school system. The government reforms on tax relief for parents who buy private services for homework support created the foundation upon which a PST market could establish and grow. The market is still here even though the tax reliefs are not. This tells us that enactments of government education policy on private markets such as PST marketing are productive in the way that they can create demands for other education services than the ones government regulations aimed at compensating for in the first place. PST marketing creates demands for something different and this something is what may turn out as a new landmark on the map of the Swedish education landscape in times to come.

Notes

1. This paper is written within the project 'Homework support as shadow education', financed by the Swedish Research Council. The overall aim of the project is to develop knowledge on homework support and its implications for practices and participants, as well as to analyze how homework support shadows regular education.
2. Similar measures have been taken earlier in other parts of the world, for example in France (Bray 2009).
3. Homework support refers to support with school work in many forms that take place outside of school hours and outside of school facilities.
4. MyAcademy, Studybuddy, Smartstudies, Allakando, Upgrades.
5. See for example <http://www.studybuddy.se/>, <https://myacademy.se/>, <http://www.allakando.se/>.

6. In the following we use the term ‘narrative’ when referring to the consumer narratives as a genre and ‘story’ when referring to the analysis of the data.

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