



Prof. Dr. C. Katharina Spieß, Head of the Department Education and Family at DIW Berlin

#### EIGHT QUESTIONS TO C. KATHARINA SPIESS

## »Adolescents from low-income households use private tutoring the least frequently«

1. How much are German schoolchildren being tutored? The usage of tutoring in Germany is noteworthy. Among secondary school students, 18 percent reported having been tutored in the past 6 months. Among primary school students, it's clearly much lower, at 6 percent. However, it's remarkable that even first-graders report that they have received tutoring.
2. How has the use of tutoring developed over the past few years? Among the children who were 17 years old in the year 2013, 47 percent report that they made use of tutoring at least once over the course of their school careers. In 2000, this figure amounted to 27 percent—that is, much less.
3. What's caused this growth? Our study is more geared toward trends and less toward causes. Our analysis does show, however, that certain groups remain underrepresented among those students who are receiving tutoring, and that tutoring among middle-class students in particular has increased strongly and disproportionately over the past few years.
4. What role does the parents' level of education play here? The parents' level of education certainly has some influence, but it isn't major. Children of parents with lower levels of education take advantage of tutoring to a lesser extent, and children from better-educated parents are more likely to receive tutoring. Although an overall increase has taken place and usage among all groups has changed over time, the gap in usage between the children of better-educated and less highly educated parents—and this is quite remarkable—has not changed much.
5. Are students who cannot afford tutoring in danger of falling behind their classmates? That's definitely an important issue. In our study we examine only paid tutoring—we do not know, for example, how often students

use unpaid tutoring. If children from poorer families were receiving unpaid tutoring much more frequently, then there wouldn't be as big of a difference, per se. But if we focus solely on paid tutoring, then it is indeed the case that these children continue to have a lower likelihood of receiving help from a tutor. However, it is important to note that an increase in paid tutoring usage can also be observed among lower-income children, and that children from households receiving transfer benefits are being tutored significantly more often than they were in the year 2000.

6. Has tutoring become an important business sector? Tutoring is actually a relatively huge market, and is now recording substantial revenue. There are commercial tutoring businesses, but paid tutoring is also available from within the non-profit sector. As we are unable to distinguish which kinds of providers are being used, we have primarily explored things from the demand side.
7. Does tutoring bring about the desired academic success? Finding an answer to this question was not part of this investigation. There are other studies, however, that provide some hints that tutoring actually improves academic performance.
8. What do these results mean for educational policy? Our results are interesting from an educational-policy standpoint, because we still have major educational inequalities in Germany. Children from educationally disadvantaged family backgrounds often perform worse in school. If tutoring can contribute to improved school performance, and children from lower-income and less-educated families continue to use it only to a limited extent, then educational inequalities might continue to exist.

Interview by Erich Wittenberg



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#### Layout and Composition

eScriptum GmbH & Co KG, Berlin

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