What's the point of schools, anyway?

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AS seniors, students at the American International School/Dhaka (AIS/D) were expected to take a course called Senior Project. Students were free to choose any topic that was relevant to the country they were living in. Thirty-eight students meant thirty-eight topics for my class and they ranged from healthcare to dowry violence, the MFA phase-out to HIV Aids, religion to the education system in Bangladesh. My topic, entitled "How Private Tutors Benefit from Poor Quality Private Schools" covered the failure of private schools in providing students with all that is necessary to get a decent grade in the O'Levels and A'Levels.

Before AIS/D, I used to be a student at Sunbeams and a victim of the stressful life that goes with the territory. But, as a person within the system, no matter how taxing, I never thought I was doing anything outside the norm. Like my friends, I was spending my days stuck in traffic, stressed out, from school to one tutor after another. However, after changing schools in 9th grade, I finally had the chance to look at the situation of private school students as an outsider. Frankly, I did not like what I saw. Through extensive research and countless interviews, I was shocked to find the huge number of students that turn to private tutors, the kind of hectic lives they lead as a result and the astonishing amount of money these tutors earn, thanks to the failure of private schools.

Students turned to private tutors for individual subjects, who in turn turned their professions into businesses, with hundreds of students pouring in week after week. Students claim that they do not get the chance to take enough mock tests at school and generally get better tips and advice from private tutors. In my opinion, it makes sense that students seek out tutors who can help them in their areas of weakness. However, that is not the case these days. Most students do not go to only a couple of tutors, rather, go to as many tutors as they have subjects. So, if a student is taking eight O'Level subjects, they may very well have eight tutors. This seems like pure insanity to me because it really stresses the kids out. Imagine going to school from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., rushing home through the unavoidable traffic, grabbing a quick bite to eat and then heading off to your tutors for the day. Students do not just have one tutor a day, but can have more than a couple.

Over the last few years I have seen my young cousins and friends returning home after 10 or 11 p.m., exhausted and, as they put it, "brain dead." They follow this hectic routine day after day for years, with no time to relax and just hang out. Sure, they have the occasional weekly *adda* at some fast-food joint, but, it makes me wonder if this is the kind of life the youth in our country should lead. Teenagers should be out playing sports in the evenings, spending quality time with family and friends, not running to tutors and hoping to come home and catch a few hours of precious sleep just so they can follow the same stressful schedule the very next day! What really frustrates me is that the students do not really need this many tutors. But, parents like to send their kids to as many as they can, because, it somehow ensures that their kid will get a good grade in the test. As if the pressure from school like Sunbeams isn't enough, kids have their parents thinking they are just not smart enough to deal with their studies on their own.

I admit that tutors are extremely beneficial during the last few months before the O' and A' Level, because they allow students to take countless mock exams. This practice helps students tremendously, since they now know the ins and outs of their exam. Schools do not usually offer more than a couple of mock tests due to the lack of time. On the other hand, are a few mock tests really worth all the time and money spent on the tutors? Why not just send the students to tutors a few months before the exam, solely for these practice exams? It's not like they learn anything during these sessions that they don't learn in school. Better yet, since these private tutors are popping up in every street corner, indicating their success, why don't students just drop out of schools and give their O' and A' Levels privately, since that is an alternative many are opting for these days? Clearly, parents and students alike wouldn't like that very much because they like the school labels that go with their success. They like the tag of a successful Scholastica student, or a diligent Sunbeams student, even though, theoretically, the school hasn't done much to help the student during his or her exams. I give full credit to the student and the private tutor and the mock tests. Neither places teach outside the curriculum of the O' and A' Level exams and as soon as the exams end, most students forget whatever they had learnt the last two years. So, what's the point of private schools, anyway? It would have been possible for students to get the same grade with just private tutoring.

What is the point of all the fuss and stress? It isn't like the private school students in our country that go to private tutors go further in life than anyone else. They get admitted to the same universities in the States, Canada and Europe as students there, with one big difference! Students in those countries are not going crazy in the never-ending cycle of school and countless tutors. They enjoy their teenage years and eventually go to the same universities as our students. This is definitely something that needs to be thought about carefully by our country's school system, parents and students!