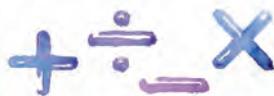


Ahead OF THE GAME

Forget fine wine, supercars, jewellery and art; if you have children, the best thing to invest in is their education. *ANNABEL HARRISON* explores the growing trend for tutoring, finds out how technology is changing our children's educational needs and investigates why some of our brightest teens are opting for transatlantic tuition

PICTURE THE SCENE. You have just sat down to relax and read the paper after a long day. In rushes your beloved son, aged 15, with Macbook in hand and a pained expression on his face. He utters the dreaded sentence 'I need help with my Physics coursework...' and you must react, swiftly. Unless you're a closet scientist and thrilled he's asked for your input, it's very likely you'd turn to Google, desperate for your son not only to complete his work but to excel in it. Coursework seems to be one of the main catalysts for this kind of search; 'Tutoring



London' returns an astounding 6,220,000 results. This is rather overwhelming if you're a parent with a child who needs extra help but have absolutely no idea how to approach the process.

There's no shortage of this type of help on offer, though; tutoring is a trend that's here to stay. Speaking to a handful of parents, I discover that word-of-mouth and proof-is-in-the-pudding recommendations in the tutoring world can cause shockwaves of interest. In the way that parents used to boast about Freddie's hat-trick in hockey or Gabrielle's top ballet exam score, now the

competitive element revolves around your children's education; if you're paying a small fortune for anything, you expect to get results. The new investment solution is education; not only are you giving your children something that cannot be taken away from them, you are also safe-guarding your own legacy by ensuring your children are capable of managing their own wealth and, indeed, their own lives.

With the aim of finding out why the tutoring trend has woven its way into the educational system of the Mayfair's teens and tweens, I sought out Howard Walmsley, a highly recommended educational entrepreneur with more than 18 years teaching and tutoring experience. One of the most interesting, and concerning, facts I learn from Walmsley is that unlike Pilates, for example, therapy or any other practice which involves physical or mental manipulation, there is no governing body regulating the training of people attempting to untangle the information and emotions in your children's heads.

So what is the difference between tutoring and teaching, and must there be one? The word *tutor* comes from the Latin for *watcher* and Walmsley emphasises that 'tutors can, and should, assist with emotional, cognitive and academic development, as well as identity building' so it is imperative that you do enough research to find someone well-suited to your child and his or her development; it is not a one-size-fits-all industry. If you feel tempted to cut out the leg-work and settle for your child's best friend's tutor, even though they have different temperaments and learning capabilities, this can result in detrimental tutoring, or over-tutoring. This creates problems rather than fixes them, resulting in what Walmsley terms 'learned helplessness': children need to be able to solve problems themselves and feel empowered, not dependent.

Additionally, Walmsley explains, 'tutoring has to be different from teaching, because this is increasingly focussing on exam-led education.' Gone are the days when exams came round once a year, and even then, not every year; now children are launched into a never-ending cycle of revision, exams and results at an early age. Common Entrance exams finished in May, we're now in the throes of GCSE, A-Level and IB, and next are entrance exams, mocks, retakes and the SAT for the kids going to America (more on that shortly).

There is little time to explore, for example, off-curriculum topics. Walmsley points out that social media is now a central part of our lives, and especially those of our children; they have Google to ask almost

any question they can think of and there is no need, necessarily, to be able to recall at will the distance of the Earth from the Sun. They need to be able to ask the right questions rather than be drilled with reams of information. Plato, indeed, believed we should not 'train children to learn by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each.'

A study of 500 teachers, conducted by school trips provider JCA, which motivates personal and social development outside the classroom, found that children who spend much of their time online find it harder to concentrate in class, are permanently distracted and have shorter attention spans. A spokeswoman for JCA

said: 'This research clearly demonstrates that students up and down the country are spending more and more time using social media... As the teachers spell out, it is this obsession

which has a direct impact on the future of our children; affecting their grades because they fail to complete their homework on time or to the standard required, and being unable to concentrate in class.'

However, social media is most certainly here to stay, so surely we need to work with it, not against it? This study also reinforces the fact that the one-size-fits-all model doesn't work, whether we're talking about schools, tutors or even exams: these recognise a particular kind of intelligence and are, Walmsley believes, 'preparing children for a world that doesn't exist'. Opinions vary over which jobs are most in demand in today's market but one thing is certain; the career landscape has changed irreversibly. Just a decade ago, a teenager would have been approaching university in a world where Facebook, YouTube and Twitter didn't exist and Google was in its infancy. Facebook now has over 3,500 employees and Google more than 30,000. It is possible that students entering university today could be studying for three or four years for jobs that may not even exist in a decade.

At least, *British* students could be. For US students, it's a different matter; they can study a range of subjects as

Tutors can, and should, assist with emotional, cognitive and academic development



Illustration: Mai Osawa



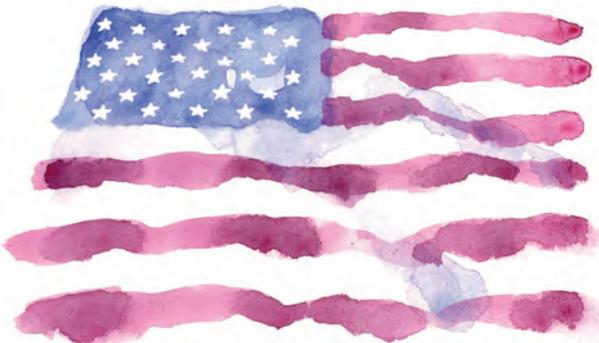
► they don't have to choose one in which to 'major'. Chris Ajemian, founder of CATES, a private tutoring, test prep, and applications and admissions support company, believes that our students are flocking to US colleges for this liberal arts education. 'They are not ready to declare a major. As humans, by our very nature, we tend to change our minds. The idea of being able to choose and change academic course really appeals to today's British students.'

This is confirmed by Scarlett Lesley, currently taking her AS-levels at the Harrodian School in Barnes. She has just returned from looking at universities in Boston and is drawn to these because 'I'm not 100 per cent certain of what my future holds; who is at 17?' She does have a passion for media and in terms of courses, equipment, expertise and environment, the US colleges come up trumps, especially Emerson College, Boston: 'It offers internships across the world and this is completely inspirational. I know it will be a big change from London but I think that it will give me the experience and confidence I need to make the transition into adulthood successfully.'

Beatrice Petit
Bon is now
studying at
Brown, having
transferred from
UCL, because
she 'wanted to
explore different
disciplines of thought.'

Serena Guen, educated in Chelsea and studying at NYU, was attracted not only by the courses on offer but also by the support system: 'I have small classes and amazing pastoral care that encourages me to develop my interests and choose my majors [French & Liberal Studies]'. Walmsley confirms that because US colleges are financially independent, they provide better service: 'They are hellishly expensive but your child will be connected worldwide and will receive a higher level of pastoral care'. The gap between our fees and fees in the US is also narrowing.

However, the big stumbling block for UK students



Preparation is essential; UK students are up against US students who have been prepared for the SAT throughout their education



comes in the form of three little letters: SAT. Essentially, this is the primary college entrance exam offered by the US College Board. More than two million students take it each year and it gives colleges a way to rank applicants quickly, making it an important part of the admissions process, second only to a student's academic record.

Ari Butler, head tutor at CATES, confirmed the growth

of international interest in taking the SAT: 'We opened the London office in response to a huge need.'

Butler advises that

preparation is essential as UK students are up against US students who have been prepared throughout their education for 'a test of how you think rather than what you know'. It is a specialised, intense process, as Scarlett confirms: 'On top of my A-levels, I need to sit the SAT. You have to learn a huge amount of technical theory, the exam is multiple choice but you get penalised for wrong answers and the way you fill in the application is totally different.' The test includes mathematics, in addition to critical reading and writing: Chris stresses that 'the SAT is based on the US system and this is particularly clear in the math section – the US kids learn concepts the UK kids don't because the maths curriculum is a three to four year program, not ending at GCSE'.

In case you're in any doubt as to how much tuition can help your child, whether for British exams or applying to a US college, listen to Scarlett: 'It's a specialist process and it helps a lot to have someone who knows the system you are aiming for, to guide your revision and approach... I know most of the concepts but the way they test them [in the US] is really different. The interviews and essays, as well as the amount of information you need to absorb, means that you do most of the work on your own – a tutor can only take you so far. The rest is up to you.' ■



CHRIS AJEMIAN, CEO and Founder of CATES, has the following five tips for parents and students approaching the US Admissions Process

KNOW THE NATURE OF THE PROCESS

The US admissions offices look at the 'big picture' of each application profile and the criteria (in rough order of importance) are as follows: school grades, SAT/ACT test scores, extracurricular activities, teacher recommendations, application essays and the interview. UK students are often discouraged from pursuing extra-curricular activities in order to focus on getting top grades but if you're going to pursue the US education system seriously, you need to find ways of pursuing your passions both in and out of school in a way that demonstrates you're serious about them.

KNOW THE COMPETITION

You are evaluated in relation to your peers. At many universities, the admissions office expects international students to make up about 10 per cent of its incoming freshmen class. At Princeton, international students made up 10.3 per cent of the 2,282 students admitted to the Class of 2015, which equates to just 235 students from 66 different countries.

So the chances of students from the same country and same school getting into the same college is very slim.

KNOW HOW THE TESTS WORK

Your SAT score is *not* dependent on how well you do in relation to the actual questions, but rather how well you do in relation to other students on the same test; because the tests are curved, the exams reward those who are the most prepared. If you prepare the right way for the exam, your chances of scoring higher than your friend who decides to just 'roll out of bed and take the test' are astronomically higher.

KNOW WHEN TO START

Start looking into the US process at the end of your GCSE year. When will you visit US universities? What schools do you want to see? What are their SAT score ranges? Start preparing for the SAT (or ACT) no later than the following autumn. Most US students – particularly ones applying to the top schools – begin their test prep around this time and understand that they will take the SAT at least twice, if not three times, over the course of the next year. Coming from the UK system, you also want to make sure you allow yourself enough time to transition to the American multiple choice method of testing successfully.

KNOW THE SCHOOLS

Finding the right school for you is like dating – it's all about getting the right match. Each American school has its own unique personality and you need to do your research to identify their specific characteristics. Two of the most popular schools among international students are Brown and Georgetown, both excellent but completely different.

Visit www.catestutoring.com for more detailed information



Illustration: *Mai Osawa*