



At School Is Easy in Vancouver, immigrants drive tutoring demand

PRIVATE EDUCATION

An apple for the tutor

AS TUTORING GOES MAINSTREAM, NEW NICHE OFFERINGS ARE CASHING IN ON FIERCE COMPETITION AMONG STUDENTS

Sixteen-year-old Brittany Gee-Moore is busier than most people twice her age. She's a student at the prestigious Stratford Hall, a Vancouver private school, and her evenings and weekends are packed with extracurriculars ranging from music lessons to circus classes. The school's International Baccalaureate program is challenging, and to ensure Brittany graduates and goes to a U.S. university, as she hopes, she has three sessions a week with different tutors from School Is Easy, a B.C. tutoring chain. "I don't doubt the [Stratford] teachers' abilities," says Brittany's mother, Doris Gee, "but when you have a class full of kids and there are a lot of distractions, the kids don't always learn properly."

Students like Brittany represent a growing slice of tutors' clientele. Once aimed at slow learners, tutoring services have been expanding their markets to adults looking to upgrade their job skills, foreign students seeking language education and, especially, parents who want to give their kids an academic edge. The web, meanwhile, is diversifying the range of tutoring

services, from online sessions and specialized programs to matchmaking sites linking tutors with students.

Janice Aurini, a University of Waterloo professor who studies private education, says the industry has grown significantly—tutoring businesses in Ontario more than doubled in number between 1996 and 2012—in part because of a cultural shift. "Kids do sports and music lessons, and now they go to tutoring as well," she says. "It's become normalized as just part of what you do for your kids."

Susan Cumberland, founder of Burnaby, B.C.-based School Is Easy, which provides in-home tutoring across the province, has seen demand for traditional remedial tutoring rise because of factors such as increased efforts to diagnose and help children with ADD/ADHD. But many of her new clients are parents like Doris Gee, who want to ensure their high-achieving kids stay competitive. "Chinese-, Korean- and Indo-Canadians and other Asian families are pushing their kids to excel," says Cumberland. "They're getting the spots in university, so people who were born here, who



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do not have the same academic ethic as they do in those countries, need to raise the bar." Statistics seem to bear out her observation: a 2009 StatsCan study shows that 40% of people aged 25 to 39 with at least one parent born outside Canada were university graduates, compared with 29% of those with two Canadian-born parents.

Tutoring's surge in Canada follows a global trend. In some countries, more than three-quarters of kids get supplemental sessions with tutors. In South Korea, says Aurini, school is seen as secondary in importance to private tutoring: "It's quite normal for students to attend tutoring late into the night, every night of the week. It consumes a tremendous amount of the average family's resources." With ever more people in emerging economies able to afford higher education for their kids, the global tutoring market is set to grow by 88% by 2016, according to U.S. research firm Global Industry Analysts.

All this creates plenty of opportunities for entrepreneurs to target new, sometimes niche markets with novel offerings and extra amenities. Cumberland's company, for example, specializes in in-home tutoring to appeal to busy parents. She also tries to provide the assurance of quality. While Craigslist is awash in ads for ESL teachers fresh from a 48-hour course, School Is Easy's tutors all have university degrees as well as certificates from TESL Canada, the ESL teachers' federation. The formula is working: the company has grown to 600 tutors and two franchises since its founding in 2002, and Cumberland is planning to expand into the U.S., a US\$4-billion tutoring market.

Christopher Ide, co-founder of Pax Learning, is looking south as well. Ide's company currently offers both in-home and online tutoring throughout the Greater Toronto Area, but his big selling point is interactive engagement. "I don't think we need a white paper to tell us that kids' lives are totally immersed in technology these days," he says. Having a background in the educational-technology sector, Ide knew that tablets, computers and smartphones could make learning much more enjoyable for kids.

Technology has been a boon for the industry as a whole. Today, online tutors can reach students in locations that wouldn't be profitable for bricks-and-mortar

centres. The web also enables Canadians to offer tutoring services abroad. Brazil, India and Korea are hungry for English-language education, a demand that exceeds the local supply and which foreign companies can tap with online offerings.

To compete, traditional tutoring centres such as Sylvan Learning and Kumon are souping up their offerings. Last year, Sylvan equipped 100 franchisees with iPads and education software to enable tutors to teach anywhere with Wi-Fi connectivity. Even as new business models emerge, the chains continue to expand. According to the Canadian Franchise Association, the number of tutoring franchisors has doubled since 2007.

All this speaks to lively demand. While classic tutoring subjects such as math, sciences and reading remain top draws, enterprising tutors increasingly are reaching out to non-traditional clients. Aside from kids, Pax Learning, for example, also hosts seminars for teachers to train them in the use of educational software and devices.

Aaron Harris, co-founder of New York-based Tutorspree, an online platform for tutors and students, says his company's initial focus was on K-12 kids but, recently, his fastest-growing segment has been C-suite professionals looking to learn new software. "We have everyone

from nine-year-olds to 35- to 50-year-olds," says Harris.

For all the recent expansion in the industry, Harris believes that tutoring remains ripe for innovation. Tutorspree, for one, was born two years ago, when Harris realized that his graduate-student friends moonlighting as tutors found most of their clients by word of mouth—the same way he found his high-school SAT tutor a decade ago. He saw an opportunity for a specialty service that would connect tutors and students based on learning needs and schedules, tutor fees and client budgets. "There are so many highly qualified tutors out there who just can't get the right exposure," says Harris.

Other online startups have targeted different niches: Magoosh, for example, prepares students for standardized tests, while StudyEdge offers videos of top teachers delivering university courses. "What we're seeing is a boom for tutoring overall," says Harris. "It's part of the future of education." —KIM HART MACNEILL

"Tutoring has become normalized as just part of what you do for your kids"

PULSE

HOT WHEELS

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CHARLIE REID
President
Charlie Reid & Associates
Kingston, Ont.

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MARC BRAZEAU
President & CEO
Automotive Industries
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"Telematics represents a big opportunity, and there's lots of room in the market for new entrants—particularly on the aftermarket side. People want tools that keep them connected while in their vehicle and that allow them to monitor how their vehicles are being used; think of parents who want to track how their kids drive or fleet managers who want more efficient usage. There's a need for companies to create these technologies, to install and maintain them, and to manage the information gathered."



RICHARD COOPER
Senior Vice President
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