

Homework time – and help is at hand

Bill Minnis reports Tutoring Australasia expects to help students 150,000 times this year

During 2009, students from Year 4 through 12 completed 100,000 one-to-one online learning sessions with yourtutor (www.yourtutor.com.au). And Tutoring Australasia founder and CEO Jack Goodman confidently predicts that 150,000 sessions will be completed this year.

Identifying a need for homework help, especially for children in non-English speaking families, Goodman developed an online system that would link students with a qualified tutor, signing up Fairfield City Library in Sydney's western suburbs as his first network partner in 2003.

In 2004, four more local libraries signed on; in 2005 the number increased to 25 and currently more than 400 libraries, schools and TAFEs are network partners.

"My basic thinking was that every child should have access to one-to-one tutoring – not just children in families that could afford to have a tutor come to the home."

For local councils, Goodman says, yourtutor is a valuable service for residents, especially those in lower socio-economic areas, or in small remote communities, where face-to-face tutoring is not available at any price.

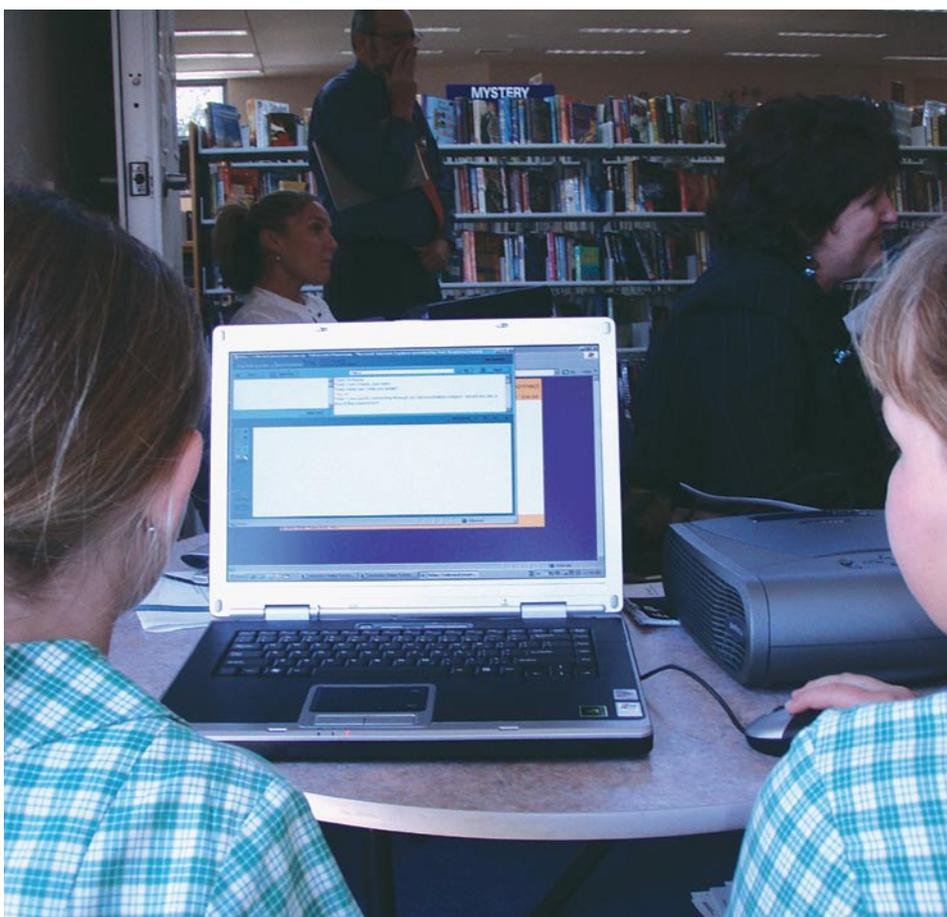
By partnering with libraries and schools, Tutoring Australasia offers a sophisticated service that doesn't cost student users anything. Access is free to students with a library card, or for school network partners, through the schools' websites.

Cost to network partners varies depending on the level of service required. For example, a library may pay in the order of \$25,000 yearly for service between 4.00 pm and 8.00 pm Monday through Friday, while a school that subscribes for extended access between 3.00 pm and 10.00 pm Sunday through Friday may pay a fee per child per term.

Whichever level of service is provided, Goodman emphasises that all children receive one-to-one tutoring from the same pool.

For schools signing up as network partners, the chore of recruiting and managing a list of tutors... and matching students with tutors, is replaced with a popular service that requires no administration and at an affordable cost.

Each school receives a monthly report that details how many learning sessions were completed, the students' year levels and the subjects covered. This, Goodman emphasises,



Jack Goodman

is a valuable guide to progress in classroom learning.

"The worst question a class teacher can ask is 'Does everyone understand?'" Goodman says. "What child wants to put up their hand and admit that they don't? On the other hand, because yourtutor sessions are anonymous, students are not afraid to ask for help when they are stuck."

Which leads to the questions – how good are the tutors and how useful are the learning sessions? Goodman emphasises that the pool of tutors is carefully selected and constantly monitored.

The subjects offered are:

Mathematics

- ◆ Year 4–6 maths
- ◆ Year 7–10 maths
- ◆ Year 11–12 General maths
- ◆ Year 11–12 Intermediate maths
- ◆ Year 11–12 Specialist/Extension maths

Above; the NAPLAN Quik Quiz is a new service this year. Below; interactive whiteboard enables students and tutors to work through a problem together

Science

- ◆ Year 4–6 science
- ◆ Year 7–10 science
- ◆ Year 11–12 General Science
- ◆ Year 11–12 Biology
- ◆ Year 11–12 Chemistry
- ◆ Year 11–12 Physics

English

- ◆ General English
- ◆ Essay and report writing

Assignments and Projects

- ◆ (Finding information, organising reports/ assignments, etc.)

Study Skills

- ◆ (Time management, note taking skills, revision techniques, etc.)

Each applicant must be formally qualified; have a minimum of three years of tutoring experience; and must get through a rigorous application, assessment and online training and mentoring programme. Accurate typing at 60 wpm or higher is a key requirement.

It takes all sorts to keep the tutors' pool topped up, Goodman says. There are full-time teachers, part-timers, teachers on maternity leave, professionals who enjoy helping young people, postgraduate students, undergraduates... and the list goes on.

For its tutors, Tutoring Australasia offers a competitive pay scale, flexible hours – some put in 35 to 40 hours each week, others as few as five hours – and predictable income. Working from home is an attractive alternative to finding students, and the time and expense of travelling to tutor children at home.

Learning sessions may be as short as 10 minutes, or take up to an hour, whatever it takes to help the student reach the "I get it!" moment. The next available tutor in the subject requested conducts each learning session. And though it's possible that a student returning to yourtutor for further help on the same subject may find that he/she is working with a tutor that has helped before, this doesn't happen often and there is no way that a student can make contact with a previous tutor, or vice versa.

At the end of each session, the student completes a brief satisfaction survey. The survey results are closely monitored and each learning session is recorded for review by a tutor monitor, each of whom oversees the work of 15 tutors.

For Jack Goodman, online tutoring is clearly both a labour of love as well as a business proposition. "From the outset, we engineered the system so that it would work quickly, even when the student is in a remote location where internet speed is low.

"We have students in places as remote as Norfolk Island and they receive the same level of tutoring as a child attending an expensive private school.

"ITC allows us to help every student that needs help, whenever they need it and wherever they are."

Print End session Welcome to the online classroom!

yourtutor

Tutor: Quinn
Subject: English skills and concepts
Grade Level: TAFE

File Sharing Web Browser Whiteboard

The boy hit the ball with the bat

The VERB PHRASE

These are NOUN PHRASES

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

Grammar and essay writing learning sessions

Print End session

Kelly (Tutor): Sure, I'll look over it now and get back to you in a moment.
You: Eric Shared a Stolen Generation.doc
Kelly (Tutor): Thanks, I'll just take a look and see if there are points to
You: Cool thanks.
Kelly (Tutor): Ok, here is it back again.
Kelly (Tutor): Eric Shared a Stolen Generation.doc
Kelly (Tutor): Take a look at some of my comments, I saw a comment
You: Thank you, I'll read it in my own time and come back bit later.
You: Oh
Kelly (Tutor): I'm in again with any questions, from

File Sharing Web Browser

connection with them. Most Indigenous families were very close and dependent on each other to fill day to day roles and jobs. To the authorities, **taken** (Wrong tense) children from their families and teaching them English and English ways of living, seemed to be the way of **achieve** (Should be: achieving) their goals. These goals were to breed the Indigenous race out. But they weren't able to, so they took the children to the missions and they taught them to be like the **whit** European settlers. Once the children had been taken away, some of the parents who came back to see their children again, did not want them any more, because they thought that they had too much white culture in them. **This is seen in 'Peeping Through the Louver'** (What is "Peeping Through the Louver"? You need to explain what it is and how "this" was seen).

To the Indigenous people their land was their life. The Indigenous people found and used nearly everything from the land around them including food, tools, toys and weapons. Their land was sacred to them and when they were taken away, everything that was special to them was out of touch, as seen in 'Peeping Through the Louvers'. **Phyllis was a Stolen Generation victim.** (You are trying to provide a human example of the Stolen Generation, but you haven't linked it very well. Try saying who Phyllis is and what her significance is.) She was taken when she was only three-years old and **then** (Don't need this word) it was only at the age of 56 she was able to return to her land and birthplace.

Tradition and culture **plays** ("plays" is used for single things, for example "John plays with the ball". "Play" is used for plural, for example, "John and Mary play with the ball". Which do you think should be used in this sentence?) a major part of being Indigenous. They have many traditions that **makes** (Same issue as with "plays" in the previous sentence.) them who they are. One of the **Aboriginal's** (You need to use the plural of Aborigine's because you are talking about all of them, not just one) most widely known traditions is oral story telling. Stories of the Dreamtime were told and passed down from generation to generation. Some other traditions **are** (Be consistent with your tense. In your whole essay you use past tense, but now you suddenly use present tense) respecting elders, finding your spiritual totem and Aboriginal art. Since the Stolen Generation **has finished** (Poor wording - try reading this sentence out loud and see if you can say it a different

YOUR TUTOR WEBSITE

www.yourtutor.com.au

For educators interested in better ways to help students with their homework, the yourtutor website is worth an extended visit. It's simple, uncluttered and fast. *Education Today* connected on an ADSL2+ line, but Tutoring Australasia states that it has been engineered to work satisfactorily at dial-up modem speeds.

There are two options on the home page. "I would like to know more about yourtutor" and "I am a student logging into yourtutor."

The former opens a list of seven drop down menus, of which "Our service" is the one that educators will want to look at closely. Here, Subjects, Schools, Libraries, Parents, Our Tutors, Real Results and Student Feedback are all informative.

Use "Click here" to see how yourtutor works on the bottom of the home page, and repeated on the Schools and Libraries pages, to watch three Flash demonstrations:

- ◆ I am a student and my school offers yourtutor
 - ◆ I am a student and my school offers yourtutor with the NAPLAN Quick Quiz
 - ◆ My local library offers access to yourtutor
- All three are informative and explain clearly what the yourtutor does and how to use it.

The NAPLAN Quick Quiz is a new offering. Tutoring Australasia emphasises that this isn't a 'teach the test' facility, but is designed to show students what to expect when they sit down to do a NAPLAN test and the sorts of questions they are likely to encounter in the paper.

There are three buttons behind "I am a student logging into yourtutor": "Schools," "Libraries" and "Individuals".

The Schools button lists the schools that are current learning partners, with links to their respective home pages where students can sign in using their school email account and password. Tutoring Australasia says that the list, which is broken down by state, is updated whenever new schools join.

The majority of students will log in through the Libraries button, but students in Tasmania will have to be patient as yourtutor isn't available through any of the state's libraries as yet.

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