



# WITHIN TUITION

Australian Tutoring Association (ATA) Inc.

Volume 1, Issue 1

March 1, 2006

## The first ATA Newsletter

Welcome to the first edition of the Australian Tutoring Association (ATA) newsletter. It is my great pleasure to formally launch this issue. The ATA exists to unify the tutoring sectors nationally, to lobby on behalf of members and to benchmark the highest standards for the industry (through application of the ATA Code of Conduct). The ATA already has a national profile and its membership base is growing weekly. The website will be reconfigured and redesigned soon for the benefit of both members and the public.

The new ATA Committee was elected at the AGM on September 24th, 2005. The Committee members and office bearers are listed in the column which follows. Readers will notice that six out of seven members are based in New South Wales while one is based in Queensland. Tutors in other States and Territories are encouraged to contribute to the Association and its development so that we may have strong representation from tutors and tutoring organisations from around Australia.

### ATA Committee 2006

#### Office Bearers

##### President

Mary O'Brien, NSW (Clever Kids Educational Centres)

**Public Officer**

Mohan Dhall, NSW (PLC Extension Centre and independent tutor)

##### A/g Treasurer

Robert Keeping, NSW (Smartmoves Coaching)

#### Committee Members

##### Emmy Dobosi

NSW (Kip McGrath Education Centre, Turrumurra)

##### Allan Matheson

Qld (Aldon Tutoring Centres)

##### Chris Druett

NSW (Tutoring for Excellence)

##### Angela Hiscutt

NSW (Hiscutt's Home Tutoring)

These Committee members represent the full range of business structures which characterise the industry.

From franchised and non-franchised business structures, agencies to independent tutors. The Committee is therefore well placed to guide the Association in ways that meet the needs of the wide membership base.



Mary O'Brien (above) and Mohan Dhall (below) at the launch of the Association in May 2005.



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### How much is a Tutor Worth... The unanswerable question

This is a common question that we receive from callers to our office. Both tutors and parents want to know a tutor's value. The pay rate of tutors is contingent on many factors:

- The experience, reputation and qualifications of the tutor
- The location
- The level of expertise required
- The type of tutoring: one-to-one or group
- The length of a session

How tutors and organisations decide rates will also depend on level of demand and amount of supply. Sometimes some trial and error is involved. Whatever amount is charged, the ATA expects all members to provide receipts and declare all cash income.

## President's Message

Welcome to the first edition of the Australian Tutoring Association's (ATA) newsletter. It is with great pride that I welcome all members of the ATA and note that the Association is becoming a real force in the tutoring industry.

The issue of national self-regulation is enormously challenging and a very interesting one confronting the tutoring sector. At times this issue has raised some challenges. I view my role as an opportunity to

represent the industry in a fair and equitable manner.

As we go about our work we will take care to fulfil our obligations with respect to the ATA Code of Conduct. This will ensure that the standards we ascribe to are being maintained.

The growth in ATA membership reflects the positive impact the Association has had in the educational sector to date. This is a mark of respect to the goals we are trying to

achieve. The Committee that has been elected is representative of the wide range of businesses in the industry, and the collaborative focus between the sectors help us to achieve our common goals.

2006 will see our focus on membership continue - thus providing choice to parents so that they can confidently answer the question: **"Exactly WHO is tutoring your child?"**

- Mary O'Brien, President

## Letters to the Editor and great tutoring stories

In the next newsletter we'd like to have a series of letters from members. It would be great to hear some tutoring success stories that can act to inspire other members.

To Whom It May Concern,

I recently applied for a tutoring job with a company called \_\_\_\_\_ in Queensland and I am a little concerned at some of their practices. I applied over the internet, and they called me for a phone interview. At the end of that phone interview I was congratulated and told that I was now a tutor. "Is this all it takes?" I thought because at this stage they had none of my records. They had not sighted my

blue card, no record of my education or qualifications, (had) not asked me for references, and they had never met me face to face. I was asked to supply a copy of my blue card and academic records later, but they still have never met me face-to-face, or asked for photo ID.

It concerns me because I expected it to be a much stricter process, considering the line of work. Is this sort of process the normal way to employ tutors? Personally, I wouldn't let my own children be tutored by this company if I knew they didn't go through a strict screening process. I am not sure whether to take the job. I feel as though I'm risking my own reputation being associated

with such an unprofessional agency. I am also concerned about the safety of the students being tutored, because getting a job here is just so easy. May I ask your thoughts on this? Have you heard of this company?

*Name and address withheld, Qld*

### Editor's Response

I 'phoned the company in question and confirm that the details as written are correct. I had not heard of the company, but their poor recruitment practices are characteristic of many agencies. The ATA listed agencies MUST screen with face-to-face interviews and check references. See page 5 for more on Agencies.

## The new Standards Australia Handbook HB 201 Tutoring Code of Practice - What it means for tutoring and the ATA

On Tuesday 31st January Standards Australia launched the Tutoring Code of Practice. This Code of Practice was developed by tutors and tutoring organisations in conjunction with other interested stakeholders. As the Chairman of the Committee, Mohan Dhall oversaw the process of the Handbook's development and summarises what it means for the ATA and the industry more generally. The Handbook has five sections which are in order:

- Scope and definitions
- Ethical principles
- Qualification, experience and competence of tutors
- Operations management
- Appendices

Each section will now be examined in some detail. The scope and definitions section states that the Handbook is for "practitioners and clients" and outlines the different kinds of tutoring, whilst providing a small number of definitions relevant to the Handbook and the context in which the words are used.

The section titled "Ethical Principles" lists and briefly explains the eleven ethical principles thought to be of most relevance to tutors and tutoring organisations. The Principles listed are:

- Integrity

- Students' best interests
- Conflict of interest
- Provision of relevant information to clients
- Competence
- Good character
- Professional relationships
- Professional conduct
- Plagiarism
- Reporting
- Advertising and marketing

The third section attempts to clarify and explain the general terminology relating to tutor qualifications and experience and provide some guidance to reduce the use of misleading terms such as 'qualified tutor'. It suggests that the qualifications and experience of tutoring staff should be disclosed to clients up front.

The fourth section addresses operational issues concerning:

- Child protection
- Recruitment and orientation
- Contracts
- Curriculum and programming
- Complaints handling
- Refunds
- Plagiarism
- Conflicts of interest

There are two Appendices, the first covering Legislative obligations and the second a series of questions that clients could ask of

tutors and tutoring organisations.

The obvious question that arises is how this Handbook compares to the ATA Code of Conduct. Whilst the Handbook is an attempt to codify minimum acceptable practice in the tutoring industry it would not be comparable to the ATA Code of Conduct. This is because it does not have a mechanism for calling to account breaches of the Code. Moreover, several key areas would need to be amended and tightened. For example, rather than rely on inconsistent, and in some cases weak, Child Protection legislation, the Code could have insisted that ALL tutors be screened or (in the absence of such screening) sign a Statutory Declaration to the effect that they have no prior or pending convictions or charges relating to child protection. Another key area relates to recruitment of tutors. The Code states that face-to-face interviews of tutors is 'preferable' but not mandatory. Thus, the Code in its present form is unlikely to have much of an impact on the industry, and far less of an impact on consumer protection.

*The Handbook (15 pages) can be purchased from Standards Australia International (SAI) at [www.saiglobal.com/shop](http://www.saiglobal.com/shop). A hard copy is \$45.76 and a downloadable copy (in PDF format) can be purchased for \$41.18*

# Triangulation:

## One way to work successfully with schools and families

Triangulation is an approach to tutoring that involves recognition and the inclusion of all relevant factors affecting a child's educational performance. Thus, the model (shown in visual form below) values the child's school and family, working with both in order to maximise the effectiveness of the tutoring undertaken.

Developed by the PLC Extension Centre tutoring programme, the model can easily be applied to any tutor or tutoring organisation wishing to work in partnership with schools.

It works as follows: when a student enrolls for a period of tuition the family are asked whether they would like the child's teacher (primary school) or subject teacher (high school) to be informed of the tutoring and therefore whether they would like triangulation to be implemented. If the family agrees then a triangulation book (an A4 or exercise book) is issued to the child's family. After an initial discussion in which the parents and child can express and needs or concerns regarding the nature of intervention, the tutor then writes a series of negotiated goals or an action plan in the book.

An undertaking is made by the student and the family that they will support the movement of the triangulation book between the child, the child's class teacher and the tutor. The book becomes the vehicle for communication between the parties which is inclusive of the teacher's thoughts and input. Occasionally a teacher and the tutor may increase the dialogue via email, providing a broadly and mutually supportive environment with the school. Thus the tutoring complements and values the school education and vice versa. This partnership arrangement has been shown to work extremely effectively for the student. The child is, of course, free to engage in the dialogue.

The system of triangulation places an onus on the student to be well organised as they take the triangulation book between the parties. Thus it encourages student accountability.

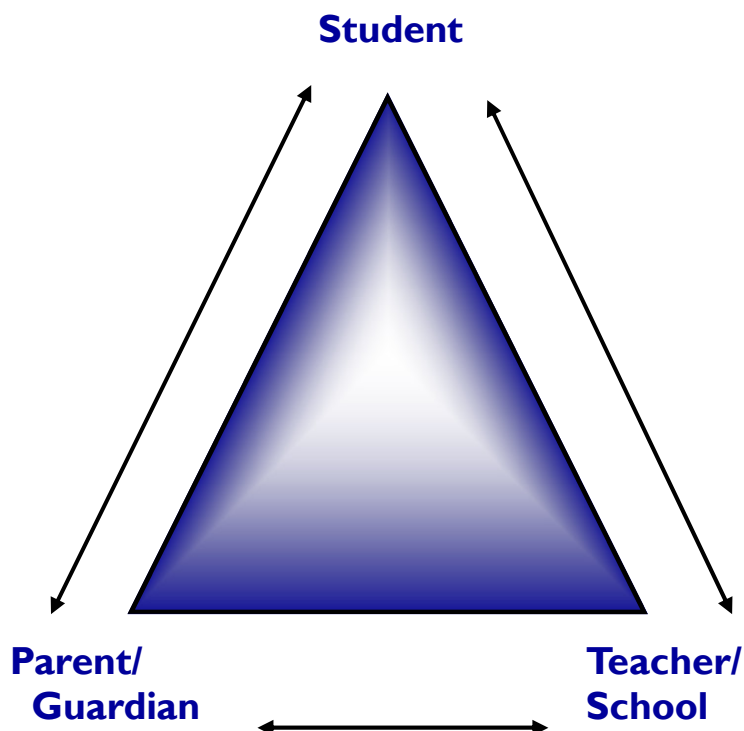
In my experience, the book system works most effectively when each party recognises and understands the specific needs of the student. Moreover, when limitations are openly expressed. An example

may be: "I have noticed that Ferris is having difficulty with factorising, however, there was no time in today's class to revisit that. Could you (the tutor) help with this?" Equally, the tutor who picks up on areas of concern can relay them back to the class teacher for support.

The parent is essential to the success of this process in several ways: they must ensure that the book is taken to the various parties via the child. They should also contribute to the book through commentary and supporting both the tutor and the teacher.

Whilst it has not happened yet that I have seen, a theoretical limitation to the triangulation system is that a class teacher may, knowing that a child is being tutored, not take it upon themselves to address problem areas - rather leaving it to the tutor. It is therefore crucial from the outset that each of the key parties make a commitment to the process by outlining how they will assist the child and how the communication process will be followed.

Triangulation is an option that can be adopted by tutors in order to better assist the students they are working with.



## Counting ourselves in - Statistics and the tutoring sector

One of the issues that needs to be discussed within the tutoring industry, and which has raised great interest from outside of the sector, is that of the statistics. I am often asked to quote a number which may take the form of any of the questions posed here:

- How many students are tutored in Australia every year?
- What is the size of the tutoring industry nationally and by State/Territory jurisdiction?
- What is the growth rate, in terms of numbers of students tutored, annually?
- How many subjects does the average student being tutored get tutored for?
- What is the annual amount spent on the sector annually, both in gross and net terms?
- What proportion of all Australian students get tutoring and for what proportion of their school lives?
- How many businesses engage in tutoring or academic coaching?
- What is the effect of tutoring or academic coaching on student performance, and can it be quantified?

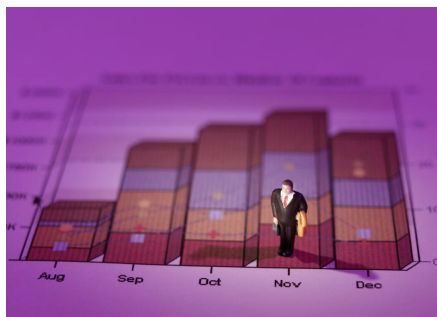
These are serious and interesting questions and the fact that they can be posed raises interesting implications for the tutoring sector. Fundamentally, the formal educational system in Australia may be divided into two broad sectors: public and private. The private sector may be further subdivided into Catholic schools (both systemic and non-systemic) and the independent schools sector. Alongside this sits the tutoring sector, complementing each of the others but going along relatively unrecognised, yet at least in part essential to the academic success of a very large pool of students. Indeed tutoring seems so much a part of the Australian child's way of life that many adults in their 40s and 50s remember having some form of academic coaching at some stage of their schooling.

So what's in a number and why should the sector consider contributing to a study or compilation of the industry figures?

At present no clear and cogent industry figures exist. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) does not have a classifica-

tion for academic tutoring. Thus only estimates can be gleaned from a reading of ABS figures in several different categories, including 'other educational'. According to such an analysis, there were about 76,000 businesses in Australia in 2001 engaged in some form of education.

Other industry based sources estimate that the annual turnover of the sector nationally would be in the order of \$1bn AUD. Moreover, the same sources suggest that one in four or 25% of all Australian school tutoring will get some form of tutoring during their school years.



### Why collect such information?

It may be pertinent to ask why the provision and compilation of such data may be useful to the industry. The arguments in favour of the collection of key industry statistics include:

- Industry-wide data will provide information which will place the sector prominently in terms of the national discourse on education
- Tracking growth trends will provide crucial data to government regarding educational trends and thus assist with resource allocation in the quest to better meet the needs of students nationally
- The ATA will be better placed as a lobbying body for tutors and tutoring organisations once we can effectively quantify the trends and thus raise issues relevant to those trends
- Moreover, the ATA can lobby for cheaper insurance for practitioners thus benefiting the industry nationally
- The ATA will be better placed to initiate positive changes such as the push for uniform national child-protection legislation, improved funding for education nationally and a recognition of the value of tutoring (when it meets best practice standards)

### Concerns as raised by organisations within the industry regarding the collection of data

Some practitioners have expressed reservations about the collection of data. These reservations centre around the following:

- Who would be collecting the data and can it be done anonymously?
- Why should any tutoring organisation disclose profit figures and student enrolment numbers - surely this is giving away information that is "commercial-in-confidence"?
- Some businesses earn a lot of cash income and do not want the taxation office to find out. They may be reluctant to disclose accurate revenue figures even if anonymous
- Some businesses may publicly overstate the numbers of children that they tutor and may double count. The actual numbers may be somewhat less than that stated.

Whilst all of these concerns are very real I think it preferable that the industry count itself in. I encourage debate on the relative merits of compiling such data which would, were it deemed important enough, probably be outsourced to an academic (thus accounting for privacy issues and bringing independence to the task). I believe that the industry should embrace this challenge for the benefits it is likely to provide for tutors and the students they assist.

### The use of statistics within the industry

Quite a few businesses like to use statistics in order to inform consumers about the supposed success of their programmes. Typically, such businesses will make claims like: "50 of our students scored a UAI (University Admissions Index) of 99+" or "200 of our students got Selective Schools Admission" or even naming and photographing students with their UAIs listed beside them.

The use of such statistics is, in my view both misleading and unnecessary. To subtly take ownership of a student's achievement in such a way undermines the student and overstates the effect of the tutoring. A further problem with such use of statistics is that they cannot be independently verified. I believe that any such use of statistics should carry a disclaimer which could take the form of: "XYZ business acknowledges that tutoring is not wholly responsible for these results. The students' ability, school, family and tutoring have all contributed to these results for which we congratulate (the students)"

## What's with the technology?

The use of technology in education generally and for tutoring purposes specifically raises some interesting issues for the industry.

Computer programmes have been used for at least 30 years. They generally follow a mastery learning based approach to the attaining and consolidation of concepts. Such programmes can be very useful for independent learners, particularly mature students of above average intelligence.

The issues arising in tutoring occur when businesses sell educational software to families in place of any face-to-face tutoring. Generally the sale of such software follows an in-house 'assessment' of the child by an 'educational consultant'. Following the assessment, a programme of study is recommended which includes the purchase, in many cases, of several thousands of dollars of software. The families purchasing

the software may be told to pay it off over three years and the company selling the software might even 'assist' the purchase by offering finance. The finance offered may attract a very high interest rate (eg \$2500 for a \$6000 software purchase, an interest component of over 40%).

Once a family have made the commitment of such a purchase the issue then become two fold - that of structure and that of support. The family now need to structure regular time so that the software can be utilised effectively.

### Structuring time

However, the promise of the software is that the child can log on and help themselves. It is highly doubtful that a child, almost of any age, will structure an effective programme using the software by themselves. Thus there is onus on the family to assist with creating the time for the software to be used. Moreover, in my experience, those families which like to utilise such

technologies tend to be time poor - hence the attractiveness of the software in the first place.

### Appropriate academic support

So, what is the appropriate academic support for students using such software? Face to face tutoring should accompany the use of such software. On-line or telephone support is fraught with difficulties and places the onus on the child to initiate contact. A person experienced in the use of the software, its limitations, strengths and relationship with relevant State based curriculum is essential. How can a person on-line, possibly in another State or even offshore be of help?

### A final issue

Moreover, a purchase of software can give the family a set of disks neither relevant, nor useful. How? Typically, the software is said to cover the primary and secondary school years. This means that some of the software will not be useful for many (older) students. That's a lot of money for non-relevant material.

## Agencies and the ATA

There are two different kinds of agencies that currently operate in the tutoring sector in Australia. There are those which employ the teachers and tutors who are then matched to students. Then there are those which match tutors to families, collecting an agency fee for so doing, but who do not actually employ the tutors.

The ATA has some agency members. In order for an agency to become a member it must screen all tutors and interview ALL of them face-to-face. Moreover, they must sign a Statutory Declaration to the effect that they agree to meet the requirement of the ATA Code of Conduct. As a result of these requirements many agencies cannot join the ATA. Such agencies are of serious concern to both parents and former employees. I have heard concerns raised about some agencies by former employees, parents seeking a tutor, other tutoring businesses and other concerned educational stakeholders.

A serious question that needs to be asked is whether there is a place for the

'matching' agencies in the Association. That is, if an agency is not a direct employer should it be considered as a part of the tutoring sector or should it be considered outside of it?

After all, very few clauses, if any, in the Code of Conduct can be directly applied to businesses that do not actually employ any tutors. It therefore means that such business structures are very hard to call to account. Furthermore, a solely matching service obviously places commercial returns ahead of educational concerns, as the onus is on matching (ie placement) rather than meeting the needs of students over the long term. As a consequence, the turnover of tutors experienced by the matching agencies is very high.

There is a place for high integrity agencies which screen employees and interview them face-to-face. Parents will always want tutors who can come to the home and ethical agencies, such as the ATA members, can confidently place tutors into the homes of students.



**To become a Member of the Australian Tutoring Association or to view Members in your area and the ATA Code of Conduct please visit [www.ata.edu.au](http://www.ata.edu.au)**

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### **A Note of Appreciation**

The ATA Committee would like to thank Shirley Dalton of Kip McGrath Education Centres (KMEC) for all her hard work as the first President of the ATA. Shirley's contribution to the Association was substantial in the formative stages and her clear thinking, strength and commitment very much appreciated.

### **A call for help**

We are seeking member help and calling for Member contributions. Specifically, could members consider contributing newsworthy articles and interesting discussions points relevant to the education of students.

Editor: Mohan Dhall

[mdhall@ata.edu.au](mailto:mdhall@ata.edu.au); Ph (02) 9704 5724 or (0408) 619 714

### **Contacting Us**

For contributions and comments please email Kelly O'Hara the ATA administrator on [ko'hara@ata.edu.au](mailto:ko'hara@ata.edu.au) or mail us at: Australian Tutoring Association (ATA) Inc.  
6 College Street  
Croydon, NSW, 2132

### **STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS**

#### **ATA Updates**

##### **Publicity**

The ATA is always looking for opportunities to promote our aims of raising consumer protection issues and raising consumer awareness on the need for accountable, open and honest tutoring. If you have an issue you feel needs to be brought to the attention of the public please contact the Public Officer of the ATA

##### **Website**

The ATA is currently getting tenders in order to update our website and provide a better service for members and the general public who view the site. We expect that by mid- to late April all changes will have been completed.

##### **Structure**

By resolution of the ATA Committee the ATA structure will be altered slightly in order to better reflect the national character of the organisation. To this end we will become a registered Australian body and thus fall under Federal Corporations Law rather than NSW legislation. The practical effects on the running and structure of the organisation should not be different.

##### **Sticker availability**

ATA bumper and window stickers are now available. There are two different versions available (see insert in newsletter). If you wish to purchase additional stickers they may be bought for \$1 each. Please contact the ATA office at the number , address or email on this page.