

# Why Tute matters...

An Introduction to Tute by its Founder and CEO, Sean Gardner





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**“A child educated only at school is an uneducated child”.** *George Santayana*

Years of research into school effectiveness have shown that most explanations for the difference in student outcomes exist outside of the school <sup>1</sup>. Schools can and do make a significant difference but do not make all or even most of it. They cannot excel alone, and need parents and teachers to be able to engage properly to reinforce and complement the work that has gone on in the classroom.

Modern technology should allow this engagement by bridging the gap between schools and families. Technology should highlight how the effective use of the curriculum can not only help the learning experience to be more fun and engaging for learners, but also assist parents to better engage in their child's education, to keep up to date about what they are learning and how they are learning it.

After all, the internet has fundamentally revolutionised the way we work, yet so far how has it actually affected the way we learn? We used to have to 'go to work', but today we work from anywhere. So why is it that we can still only really learn at school?

We have access to unbounded resources in ways that we could a few years ago never have imagined, yet the core process of learning has not fundamentally changed. It seems that the wider world has moved on, but that the educational establishment hasn't. It's time for change.

Government recognised this a few years back and established an agency – Becta – to lead next generation learning, and to galvanise

progression. Becta was shut down last year as part of the wider cuts in education, so it has had little practical impact. It did though in its short life look specifically at parental engagement, and found significant systemic failings: 45% of children told them that their parents find it hard to understand how best to help them with school work and revision, with 37% sometimes being unable to complete work outside of the classroom as there is no one able to help.

In the older age groups (11 and above), the findings were even starker with 60% struggling at home and 67% saying that their parents can cause additional confusion when trying to help out. As a result children feel stressed, embarrassed and wanting to give up and walk away from assignments entirely. Children are clearly feeling let down, and have no obvious place to turn.

Yet parents are desperate to be the solution. Becta's research highlighted an overwhelming desire and demand from parents for more information and advice on how to extend their child's school-based learning in the home. 80% of parents want to provide their child with more help and support, with 81% asking for more guidance as to how to do this. 84% stated that their school provided them with 'little' or no resources to help support their child's learning at home, so there is a huge untapped potential to help improve parental engagement....but nobody to fill the void.

This deafening call for help is symptomatic of a base need in all parents to do the best for their children. Why else is there a scramble for places in the best schools, increased house pricing in the catchment areas of better performing schools, and continual growth in the home tutoring market to give a child that all important competitive advantage?

1: Harris et al, School effectiveness and school improvement

I'm no different and like most other parents, I'd never heard of Becta. I was, though, part of the problem they were trying to address in that whilst desperately wanting to help my children at home, to contribute positively to their development, I was struggling to understand what they were being taught, and how. Changes to numeracy and primary strategies, new learning tools and modern teaching methods to improve child engagement all combined to make how my child is taught by a teacher in the classroom today a completely unfamiliar process.

For me, dragging up memories of revision and swotting many years after leaving school is hard enough, a real struggle which makes me feel like I'm not properly supporting my children. And when I then try to explain, to the best of my ability, an answer in a way which is different to that used in the classroom, my daughters become more confused and frustrated. It becomes a vicious circle, and unhelpful to teachers too when their pupils return to school bemused.

It's fundamentally a broken system. Yet teachers want to be able help and engage, to support extended learning outside of the classroom, to start to show parents the way. They try to engage with parents to show them the new teaching methods, but are constrained by unnecessary, burdensome administration from being able to give the time that is really needed.

Parents also are time pressured, and unable to commit to attend sessions held at school aimed at showing them how to help better at home. Equally, the challenges of modern society – the rise in single parent families for example – add to the wider problem. When you then layer in the inequalities arising from lack of access to broadband at home (referred to as the 'Digital Divide') the problems become even harder to address, and systemic.

The answer has to be to do things differently, and to use new social technology to disrupt education. Which is why Tute was conceived:

*“Tute’s purpose is to make the best teaching available to all, irrespective of location or background”*

Tute will create the UK’s first social education platform and evolve four key pillars in support of its purpose:

1. Teachers as partners in change
2. Democratising learning
3. Sustained parental engagement
4. Lifelong, personalised learning

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**“Effective teaching may be the hardest job there is”**. *William Glasser*

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## Teachers as Partners in Change

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When undergraduates first arrive at Boston College, they attend an opening lecture that challenges them to engage with three questions that should animate their entire liberal arts education:

- Do you have a passion?
- Are you good at it, or can you become so?
- Does it serve a compelling social need?

If your answer to all three is 'yes' then, says Jesuit pedagogy, you will experience absolute joy. This is the essence of teaching, the heart and very core of what calls teachers to teaching, keeps them in it despite the overwhelming pressures of the job, and inspires their students to achieve far beyond levels anyone had thought possible.

Yet teachers are not celebrated, and the materials they produce – this inspirational learning – is almost 'a best kept secret'. Collectively, teachers already know most of what is needed to be known

to teach well. They now need an innovative platform from which this knowledge can be universally shared.

In the acclaimed book 'The Fourth Way', its authors argue that although teachers can be brilliant innovators, their collective record on sustainability is poor as innovations in themselves enjoy fleeting support from leaders and colleagues. In the face of apathy and bureaucracy, teachers 'withdraw into their classroom cocoons'. Standardisation has then made teachers more alienated and isolated still.

In Finland, in response to such pervasive problems, reformers have promoted more teacher collaboration. They have encouraged a culture of trust, cooperation and responsibility and are committed to the development of Professional Learning Communities, or PTCs. Teachers in the best PTCs do not just interpret spreadsheets, deliver measurable results or complete tasks in hastily convened teams. Instead they:

- **Transform the learning that is responsible for results**
- **Value each other as people in relationships of trust, respect and challenge, and**
- **Use shared experience to inquire into teaching and make judgements to improve them**

They develop curriculum and define their own educational purposes rather than delivering the purposes of others. They teach as well as talk together. The PTC includes students and parents as well as teachers. Members of the community care about each other as people in long term relationships as well as the outcomes of the short term projects.

Tute sees teachers as partners and has set about building a cooperative based upon the PLC model. Our community will be known as the Professional Teacher Cooperative (PCT) and aims to put teachers at the centre of our social vision.

That is not to say that we do not see value in the community, but more that we recognise that there has to be a sense of shared ownership if all of our interests are to become fully aligned, and our collective vision is to manifest.

So Tute is, as John Lewis and others have already done, establishing a teachers' cooperative. This puts teachers at the very heart of the changes Tute seeks to bring into the market. After all, it's obvious: the people who know most about educating our children are able to make decisions that are in their best interests. Tute intends to harness this understanding to work together with teachers to effect change, and to start to democratise learning by making the best teaching available to all.

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**"If you have knowledge, let others light their candles at it".** *Margaret Fuller*

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## Democratising Learning

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The society which forced teachers into their classroom cocoon is also one which has continually fostered competition between schools and stifled transformation. Unrelenting emphasis on short term achievement targets in basic subjects plunges the teaching world into "presentism"<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the 'Nanny State' of constant intervention is incompatible with the innovation of the net. Continuing competition amongst schools means that any teaching partnerships at best work at a distance where they are not in competition for the same 'clients'. There is no incentive to disclose ideas or give away the best resources – it might just assist their struggling neighbours!

The result is that professional trust is lost, and cooperation is rare. And yet amongst the greatest generation of teachers lies the finest generation of learning resources. Resources crafted and refined over many years, and tested and honed on thousands of students.

Our Professional Learning Cooperative will remove barriers and make sharing and collaboration a benefit for all of its partners. This social mission aims to make accessible the best in education via the web. Because the Tute Creed demands us to be daring and disruptive, it will be achieved by bringing together the finest learning resources from the best teachers into a single repository, and by allowing unfettered access to all.

**“What a child doesn’t receive he can seldom later give.”** *P.D. James*

## Sustained Parental Engagement

A fundament of the Tute PTC is that it involves parental engagement. This is because parental involvement in a child’s schooling is a more powerful force than other family background indicators such as social class, family size, or level of parental education, and contributes to no less than 10% of variation in achievement. It is the single most effective influencer on educational outcomes for children <sup>3</sup>

Using attainment in reading and maths research, the Department of Education and Skills discovered that the involvement of parents in secondary education has an effect on continued student development. Very high parental interest is associated with better exam results than for children whose parents show no interest: children with very interested parents progressed 15-17% more in mathematics and reading between ages 11-16.

Parents though cannot always help as they would wish. Aside the challenges of how to understand subjects which they were never themselves taught, parents have to overcome childcare concerns, work pressures, the demands of other children and a shortage of time in general. These issues are exacerbated in single parent families and in households where there is no employment.

Parents’ difficulties with basic skills are also a barrier to being involved in their children’s education. Research conducted by the Basic Skills Agency found that 34% of parents said they had difficulties reading from a children’s book, and that 18% found it difficult to understand and recognise numbers. Schools want to help more but cannot, and often their interventions (parent classes to help on maths etc) are ignored and not taken up.

Tute empowers parents to become more involved in their children’s education. We make available the very best teaching resources for use at home by both students and parents. Uniquely, we add to this resource by creating videos and downloads to help parents understand the common methods used to teach children at school.

These resources are drawn together by our team of in-house educators. All are highly experienced classroom teachers, and all have direct experience of helping parents to teach their children better at home. Their courses are short and to the point, but are there to help parents to pre-prepare on a subject, or if they so choose to actively participate with their children.

Free access to high quality Tute learning resources delivers a step change in education equity. Tute is partnering with the charity The eLearning Foundation to establish new programmes and initiatives to help close the digital divide, and to make available its resources to support children in need. Research by the Sutton Trust has shown that ten sessions of tutoring improves a child’s development by five months. Equally, parental involvement in homework support and peer-to-peer mentoring are equally if not more beneficial.

Our social education platform lets students take responsibility for their learning, and allows them to engage with their parents, peers and communities to further their education. Tute gives meaningful feedback about what is right and what is wrong, and provides personalised

3: Williams, B Williams, J & Ullman, A (2002)

learning resources as and when they are needed, anytime and anywhere. Here, the theme of personalisation echoes the long standing emphasis on what educators call 'lifelong learning', the highest realisation of human potential<sup>4</sup>.

**They must often change, who would be constant in happiness and wisdom.**

*Confucius*

## Lifelong, personalised learning

Lifelong learning is not about learning beyond school (ie throughout your life) but more learning about life and for life. Lifelong learning helps develop lives and to shape the world. Lifelong learners demonstrate initiative, are problem-solvers, are creative and flexible and focused on getting the most out of life, and for making change for the greater good.

As we enter the 21st Century we must nurture skills in our children which are different to those which we were taught, and recognise also that their central values will be different too. Teamwork, creativity, innovation, intellectual agility, problem solving flexibility and adaptability will be essential to the new economy. Our children will constantly have to re-invent themselves, to 'shape-shift' with the macro-environment around them.

Teaching in the 21st Century must embrace this, and recognise values such as compassion, sacrifice and perseverance. But equally it must use and engage with the tools which are at the very centre of a student's life – learning must become peripatetic.

Yet schools mostly repel technology. How many schools embrace the smartphone as an example, preferring that phones were barred or switched off as against recognising their power in a social context, and what they can bring to teaching? Over 90% of children have mobile phones,

75% of students are members of Facebook with 7-14 year olds spending 7+ hours per week online. These are all driving new behaviours in every single aspect of our lives, except it seems in education.

Teamwork in the modern world is about sharing, social networking and crowdsourcing. Through its social education platform Tute will seek to create a community – an environment where the best tools and resources are celebrated and recognised, and where teaching excellence is rewarded and shared. Our role is to engage with students, to provide them with the tools to set out their goals and to measure their achievement and progress against them.

Today's learners expect technology to make a difference to their learning. So Tute's social platform empowers students to take responsibility for their learning, and to engage with peers and communities to further their education on their own terms.

*So to summarise, the Tute Creed mandates us to work in partnership with teachers to effect a step change in education which in turn supports parents and students in embracing learning as a lifetool. Our passion and willingness to be daring forces Tute to seek higher standards, to empower the community to increase educational equity, and to make the very best teaching available to all.*

## That's why Tute matters.

4: European Commission, 2001 - A memorandum on lifelong learning

# The Tute Creed

*“Tute’s purpose is to make the best teaching available to all, irrespective of location or background”*

## Our Parameters

### **We focus our efforts only upon:**

- Our passion for learning as a lifetool
- Delivering meaningful step changes in education equity
- Daring and disruptive changes - not incremental adjustments - but without abandoning all that has been achieved in the past

## Our Principles

### **We empower parents to become more involved in their children’s education**

We assist parents to become more involved in the daily activities of their children’s education so that they are engaged in determining the purposes of education together.

### **We see teachers as our partners**

High quality learning depends on high quality teaching. High quality teachers are committed to and capable of creating deep and broad teaching and learning. We help teachers define and pursue rigorous standards, and to improve by learning continuously through networks and from each other.

### **We let students take responsibility for their learning**

We empower students to take responsibility for their learning, and to engage with peers and communities to further their education. We give meaningful feedback about what is right and what is wrong, and provide learning resources as and when they are needed, anytime and anywhere.

