

Tutoring, Remediation, Academic Coaching, Educational Therapy – Which Support is the Best Fit?

When your child is having trouble at school it is important to get involved and get help so that your child can learn more effectively. It can be difficult to decide what the best place is for your child to receive academic help. These days there are so many options that it can be overwhelming, especially since almost every agency markets itself as providing individual attention. This however is not always the case. Tutoring agencies have become so commonplace that it can be hard to figure out what sets each agency apart and whether a tutor is actually what your child needs. As well, some students do not need after-school tutoring, as they are able to meet the learning demands of their educational curriculum and institution. However, sometimes parents of such students want their child to have a competitive edge and therefore enroll them in tutoring so that they can stay ahead of the class (Bray 2006). Apart from tutors there are other options for academic assistance such as remedial instructors, academic coaches and educational therapists. It all depends on what your child's learning needs are and with the right match your child will show long-term success.

Understanding the Different Options

There is a significant issue within intervention terminology where students, parents and even counsellors often employ several terms used to describe specific recommended supports interchangeably even though each term refers to a very distinct academic support. The terms tutoring, remediation, and academic coaching are three distinct recommendations associated with supporting a student's academic learning experience. For a student to receive the help they need, they should be engaging in the appropriate intervention and for that to occur one must understand the meaning of each term. As well, there is a fourth term called educational therapy, which specializes in understanding a child's learning challenges and emotional needs (Patino 2014).

Tutoring focuses on reviewing and clarifying specific academic content. Tutors help students better understand key concepts and gain practice in a more individualized environment where students can ask more questions. Tutoring does not necessarily take a student's individual learning style into account and tutoring often occurs within group settings (Chi et al. 2004; Bray 2006). Therefore, if a student has issues with their learning strategies a tutor may not be the best choice as they may not be able to change their teaching style to accommodate the student's learning style (Chi et al. 2004; Lambert & Spinath 2014). As well, tutors are not always trained to monitor student's comprehension issues and may overlook subtle indications that the student does not fully understand concepts being explained (Chi et al. 2004). Many tutoring agencies market themselves as utilizing an approach that is "beyond tutoring" which is meant to imply that their method is more individually focused on the child or specific to a child's learning needs. In reality though tutoring agencies are not built to address individual learning needs in great depth (Bray 2006). At the most, these agencies will only be responsive to individual needs in minimal ways. However, with the proliferation of tutoring agencies in the last few decades, which form a "shadow education system", it is understandable why many parents think that tutoring is the best step (Bray 2006).

The term '**remedial instruction**' is widely used in clinical terminology to refer to specific instruction on learning strategies (Morin 2014). Remediation aims to enable the student to develop different strategies and then find which is most effective for them. In contrast, private tutoring usually focuses on repetition of school content, explanations, and assistance with essential concepts or facts (Lambert & Spinath 2014). Children with learning disabilities often need specialized training, which cannot be attained through the traditional approach of tutoring and for these students remedial instruction may be the ideal option. When a student needs

assistance with building effective learning strategies that are catered to his or her learning strengths and aid in comprehending the information taught in class, they should receive remedial instruction (Morin 2014). Remedial instructors can work at different types of specialized learning centres or sometimes tutors may utilize remedial instruction (Morin 2014). This intervention approach is distinctive because greater attention is paid to student learning processes and teaching strategies that correspond to learning strengths, while compensating for weaknesses.

Furthermore, another intervention approach to consider is coaching, which emphasizes a collaborative and egalitarian relationship between the coach and client (Grant & Kemp 2005). **Academic coaching** involves a partnership where the coach and the student work to enable the student to evaluate how they are studying, reflect on how they can improve and change their habits to study more effectively (Glenn 2010). Principles of academic coaching are also being integrated into higher education teaching strategies to improve student outcomes (Glenn 2010; Barkley 2010). Academic coaching employs collaborative learning in order to increase students' enthusiasm, application of skills learned and retention (Barkley 2010). As well, academic coaching has been shown to be helpful for students with learning disabilities (Boutelle & Parker 2009). When a student is trained to reflect on his or her learning style, organizational skills and study habits, they can gradually improve their study approach and develop a more strategic method towards learning. Generally, academic coaches cater to students who require greater individualized support such as students with organizational issues (Boutelle & Parker 2009). This intervention approach encourages students to be more self-aware of their learning process so that they can take more responsibility for their actions and self-regulate their behavior.

What About Educational Therapy?

Educational therapy refers to a very specific intervention that is not as commonly used as the others mentioned. It is a specialized intervention that combines different approaches to achieve a comprehensive treatment strategy. Educational therapists have had special training to work with students with learning disabilities and receive certification from an accredited institution (Patino 2014). The goal of educational therapy is to treat underlying causes of learning issues, not just symptoms (NILD Canada). This intervention approach can require a long-term commitment in order to address underlying issues affecting learning such as social/emotional functioning (Association of Educational Therapists 2014). An educational therapist would first conduct an assessment on the student to identify the type of problem the student is facing and possibly gain insight into potential causes of this problem (Association of Educational Therapists 2014). The therapist would speak with the student and their family, and any professionals the family may suggest in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the student's needs. After the assessment the educational therapist would form a treatment plan to address the student's learning needs in whatever areas of concern might be present such as oral and written language, processing, memory, attention or confidence (Patino 2014; NILD Canada). Educational therapists look at the bigger picture and try to address other issues indirectly impacting students' academic life. They can also coordinate additional services the student may need such as counseling, physical therapy or speech therapy to name a few (Association of Educational Therapists 2014).

Identifying What is Best For Your Child

Each of the intervention options presented have different features, however they are often all described as tutoring. Although there is overlap, such as tutors using remedial instruction and academic coaching strategies, each of these intervention approaches is distinct and they should not be confused. If your child needs more detailed explanations of material covered in class, then a tutor would be most helpful. However, if your child has a learning disability and experiences difficulty with reading comprehension for example then a remedial instructor would be the best option. Whereas if your child is able to understand material but not studying effectively, they may

need the help of an academic coach to reflect on their study habits and improve. Lastly if your child is experiencing learning issues along with social/ emotional issues, then visiting an educational therapist might be effective. There are plenty of options out there to support children struggling in school and now that you understand your options, you can figure out what your child's learning needs are and choose what intervention will be the best fit.

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