Writing Center Tutoring: Implications for Deaf College Students, Their Tutors, and Interpreters


Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), American writer, philosopher, scientist-inventor, and publisher.

This book is born out of a qualitative research study conducted by Rebecca Day Babcock, in which she observed and interviewed deaf tutees, hearing tutees, hearing tutors, sign language interpreters, and college writing center administrators at a 4-year private university and at a suburban community college. Babcock’s goal is to show the important differences between deaf students and hearing students with hearing tutors. She effectively illustrates the diverse views of all study participants and how these various perspectives manifest as differences in the content and methods of each tutoring session. The author describes how to improve the tutoring of writing services for deaf college students. This includes specifics on how deaf students interact with common tutoring and writing instruction practices that are at times helpful and, at other times, a hindrance to progress in written English.

Babcock uses thick narrative descriptions and illustrative case studies of deaf students, hearing students, interpreters, and hearing tutors to detail and narrate observations of tutoring sessions. She adopts a cultural, rather than a medical, view of deafness. This perspective is a welcome change to the pervasive medical model view that people who are deaf are deficient and need to be remediated. Babcock holds that deaf people comprise a cultural and linguistic minority with exceptional cultural and linguistic characteristics and unique needs. All tutors and writing center administrators should have an understanding and appreciation of deaf people’s unique needs.

Although she proves herself to be a methodical researcher, Babcock’s thick descriptions, at times, diffuse the clarity and effectiveness of her reporting of the results in book format because she often provides long, repetitive examples and analyses of interactions between students and their tutors, which often become cumbersome and tedious to the reader.

The final portion of the book is the most valuable as Babcock provides recommendations for practice for tutors and highlights the importance of tutors’ having knowledge of Deaf culture and a deep understanding of the role of an interpreter. Babcock makes specific recommendations for tutors, such as emphasizing the importance of being patient and understanding with tutees and to focus tutoring sessions based on the needs and preferences of each individual deaf student.

With the push toward mainstreaming of deaf students within general education settings and the move toward having deaf students at predominantly hearing colleges and universities, this book is relevant and important to those in the fields of Deaf education, general education, and interpretation.

This book would be a meaningful supplement to the library of postsecondary education faculty, staff of writing centers and tutoring centers, and staff of disability resource centers at colleges and universities, as well as for sign language/educational interpreters.

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