

BOOK REVIEW

Babcock, Rebecca Day. *Tell Me How it Reads: Tutoring Deaf and Hearing Students in the Writing Center*. Washington: Gallaudet UP, 2012. (\$39.95, 224 pp. paperback)

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Rebecca Day Babcock's book, *Tell Me How it Reads (TMHIR)*, is a useful text for writing centers because it not only offer insights about how to assist writers who are d/Deaf (a term I'll clarify later), but it also reminds us that working with a specific "different" group of writers can exemplify ways writing centers may work with all writers.

Babcock prefaces *TMHIR* with a "come clean" statement about her own "biased, human, and fallible" position as a researcher and writing center director (viii). She addresses assumptions about working with d/Deaf students she brought to her study and details, throughout the book, how the work challenged and changed her. As I review *TMHIR*, I must also "come clean" about my background: I worked for 25 years as a certified interpreter and taught American Sign Language in a public high school for four years before moving to directing a writing center. Having sat on both sides of the tutorial table—as an interpreter for and tutor with d/Deaf writers—I initially doubted the book would respect the intellect and ability of those considered "different" because of deafness. However, I was happily wrong, as the book offers much to help those new to working with d/Deaf writers. It also confirms the reality of d/Deaf knowledge-making for those of us who have worked in that field for years.

Babcock explains her use of "d/Deaf" (which she borrows from Deaf culture) in a footnote on page 2. Written with a capital letter, "Deaf" indicates the customs and social behaviors that form the culture of individuals who share the audiological difference of deafness, indicated by lower case "d." The term "d/Deaf" thus includes both auditory ("deaf") and cultural ("Deaf") aspects.

Babcock began her study "to raise awareness about providing quality tutoring services to all students who come to the writing center" (vii) and selected issues related to the tutoring of d/Deaf students to encourage those in writing centers to reconsider their tutoring practices with all clients. Researchers of all levels will connect with her description of her research process. Those new to such projects can learn about how messy and informative such projects can be, while experienced researchers may nod their heads in agreement with her choices. As her research goal, Babcock wanted to discover what happened in tutorials with d/Deaf students, to ascertain how such tutorials might differ from those with hearing students, and to determine factors which influenced differences in the tutorials. As the research progressed, she allowed her methods to evolve as needed, especially when she recognized the need to gather data appropriately from a widening variety of sources. For example, a d/Deaf tutee recommended Babcock videotape interviews rather than just audiotape them so d/Deaf tutees' expressions and movements could be captured to more fully represent their voices. Babcock also involved all stakeholders—tutors, tutees, interpreters, and directors—in her research. Plus, she used tutorial observations, interviews, and analysis of taped transcripts and related paperwork, which resulted in the development of a helpful resource for those interested in working with d/Deaf writers or with writers who process language differently from their tutors.

To explore similarities and differences in the tutoring of writers who are d/Deaf and writers who can hear, Babcock included three d/Deaf students and three hearing students in her study. Although she started by studying a range of tutorial activities, only one of the six tutees (who is d/Deaf) engaged in planning activities during tutorials, while the others all focused on revising drafts. The writer who planned also took charge of her tutorials and sometimes composed on a computer during tutorials before switching to pen and paper for reflective notes. One observation Babcock notes is that d/Deaf writers responded positively to directness and grew frustrated with non-directive questions. Perhaps because language for the d/Deaf exists through visual means such as signing or drawing, non-directive communication in tutorials can seem confusing and possibly rude to writers expecting the directness of the Deaf culture when seeking help with their work. Babcock hopes this insight can be extrapolated to tutorials with any individuals who do not share the same cultural expectation of communication strategies as their tutors, including those who are English Language Learners. She encourages tutors to trust students in such situations and to listen when writers articulate their needs.

Such an approach is better than continuing to use tutoring strategies developed for hearing or native speaker writers or for students who value learning via indirectness.

Babcock also addresses tutors' concerns about working with d/Deaf writers, such as confidentiality issues when working through interpreters. Tutors in her study became more comfortable with the three-person tutorials when they learned interpreter training involves a certification process and adherence to an ethical code that requires interpreters not to violate client confidentiality. Despite tutors' concerns for their clients, Babcock notes that one d/Deaf tutee became upset when her tutor attempted to learn about Deaf culture from her—making her, in essence, the representative of all who are Deaf and making her uncomfortable with the tutor's apparent curiosity when she had expected insights to help her improve as a writer. Babcock also suggests that tutors maintain eye contact with their tutees rather than converse only with interpreters during tutorial, something I also want to reinforce.

Babcock's understanding of an interpreter's role involved a learning curve, which she shares with readers and which I view as reasonable for a "non-insider" to Deaf culture. She learned that while interpreters facilitate communication with/for their clients, they can also help educate others (like tutors) about how to work effectively with their clients and how to add a third person into the interpersonal dynamic of a tutorial. Interpreters balance serving simply as a "communication device" (my term) and needing to ensure that their clients receive accurate information and that they share their clients' communication accurately. Interpreters often bridge communication gaps that can be challenging and easily mishandled, a point Babcock emphasizes for readers when she explains how interpreters in the study discussed potential misunderstanding when thoughts are translated through someone else's voice or hands. Writing center tutors value clarity because we always want to ensure that students understand what we are trying to communicate and accomplish. Similarly, we also need to understand what they want to communicate and accomplish. These interpreters' insights remind us both of the importance of clear communication with d/Deaf writers as well as how complicated that process can be with many writers.

Insights from the writing center directors in the study proved less compelling as Babcock spent less time with them, but those in the study did try to assign d/Deaf students to consultants specializing in helping students who are ESL or have learning disabilities. However, a survey of other writing center directors Babcock conducted before she started the study indicated not all directors feel their centers should serve d/Deaf writers.

TMHIR's final chapter emphasizes that writers who are d/Deaf and those who are hearing want the same thing: improvement in "writing, reading, and research skills" (165). But differences between students exist in terms of communication directness and the d/Deaf students' likely need for more time practicing and gaining grammar knowledge and "gathering and understanding information" (166). Babcock had read that those who are deaf could struggle with reading, but she "had to see it" (168) to realize how important reading is in d/Deaf student learning. Witnessing the time most d/Deaf students needed to spend on reading led Babcock to recommend that tutors provide time for reading comprehension when working with such writers.

Babcock's point is that those of us in writing centers, and maybe our students, must recognize how language barriers and cultural difference can shape how tutoring happens with any tutor and writer and especially with tutors and writers who engage in language differently and come from different cultures. Babcock's conclusions required her to follow not-so-simple paths, but her book can save readers from frustration and mistakes as they learn from her study and its results. *TMHIR* is a resource well worth using in all writing centers. It will serve a tutor training program/class or writing center administration course well, and it can be a guide for individuals designing their own research-based projects and practices. As one final suggestion Babcock recommends all tutors in centers that serve writers who are deaf "learn . . . fingerspelling," which she sees as "the only way to precisely represent written English on the hands" (178). I also offer one final recommendation: because all writing centers need, as Babcock suggests, "to open their doors to everyone," all writing centers should include this book in their professional library. The insights it offers will help centers better serve d/Deaf writers as well as other writers. ♦