

Book Review

Chin, T., Rabow, J., & Estrada, J. (2011). Tutoring matters: Everything you always wanted to know about how to tutor (3 ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. (213 pp., paperback \$29.95; e-copy \$17.99).

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Training new tutors is arguably one of the hardest parts of running a student support center. New tutors are often inundated with unfamiliar information, overwhelmed with new policies and procedures, and plagued by the many anxieties that accompany doing something they have never done before. Constantly looking for new resources, I picked up *Tutoring Matters: Everything you Always Wanted to Know About how to Tutor* as a possible training guide for my tutors (2011). While it did not make its way onto my required reading list for tutoring in a university communication center, it may be a good fit for classes that require tutoring as part of a service-learning agenda, or organizations who tutor students in grades K-12.

Tutoring Matters is the self-proclaimed “authoritative guide for both the aspiring and seasoned tutor” (back cover). *Tutoring Matters* is broken into six chapters that detail the tutor-tutee experience in a chronological way – from preparing to tutor through ending the tutoring relationship. In reviewing this text, I begin with a brief overview of the authors, then discuss the scholarly impact of the text, and finally render a recommendation for the ideal audience for *Tutoring Matters*.

Tutoring Authors

Chin is Executive Director and co-founder of EdBoost, a non-profit

organization dedicated to making educational services, such as one-on-one tutoring, college advising, and college test preparation accessible to all students (EdBoost, 2018). Previously, as a graduate student of sociology, Chin wanted to “study social issues and problems,” but became a tutor to “play a role in solving them” (Chin, Rabow, & Estrada, 2011, xix). Rabow is a professor emeritus at UCLA specializing in social psychology, race, diversity, and education. Rabow is also a co-founder of The Center for the Celebration Of Diversity in Education (CCODE), a company that provides diversity training and education to organizations and companies of the greater Los Angeles area (CCODE Diversity Training, 2018). Rabow has since spent over 30 years training and working with student-tutors. Estrada serves as regional Vice President of Innovate Public Schools, “a nonprofit organization whose mission is to build the parent and community demand for world-class public schools, and to accelerate the growth of these schools, particularly for low-income students and students of color” (Innovate, 2018). Estrada, who, like Chin, worked under Rabow as a graduate student at UCLA, participated in *Tutoring Matters* in hope that readers would understand the transformative power of tutoring.

Scholarly and Audience Impact

The title, *Tutoring Matters: Everything you Always Wanted to Know*

About how to Tutor, suggests that this book is a how-to guide to tutoring. However, the authors claimed, “it is impossible to tell someone ‘how to tutor’” (p. 3) because the tutoring process is highly individualized. The book, then, does not provide “how to” advice, nor does it offer any theoretical structure for its audience. Without these elements, the book fails to be a definitive guide. The suggestions and tips woven throughout the book are supported by tutor field notes but lack any theoretical underpinnings to support the advice. Understanding that theory informs praxis, this is the most glaring drawback to this text. The only citations used in the book are found in the “recommended reading” section at the end of each chapter.

The second drawback, which admittedly would not be a drawback to all readers, is that the text is focused solely on tutoring students in K-12. This is not explicitly stated in the introduction of the text, yet in many places tutees or students are referred to as “children.” Thus, audiences preparing tutors to work with college students (adults) may find the information less relevant or, at times, condescending. For instance, the authors stated, “Many children hate math,” and suggested “making up little songs or rhymes” to aid memory – “the sillier...the better” (p. 114). This type of advice is not as useful when training adults to tutor other adults.

However, for centers doing outreach work with K-12 students, this book provides a variety of tips and tricks that may make sessions with younger tutees more successful. The advice to create silly math songs can be found in one of the many tip boxes provided throughout the text. These bullet-point lists provide quickly accessible information on a range of topics that readers may refer back to as needed. While intended to serve as a quick source of information,

the usefulness of these tip boxes would be heightened if they were indexed somewhere for the reader to quickly access the information needed at any particular moment.

The strength of this book lies in its use of field notes from over 100 veteran tutors. While, necessarily, there are notes reflecting on teaching material, tutor field notes also discuss a range of topics including: establishing rapport with clients who are skeptical of or have had bad experiences with tutoring; setting boundaries with the over-dependent or jealous client; and developing empathy and practicing patience throughout the tutoring process. The authors successfully incorporated a breadth of personal experiences into a cohesive narrative that repeatedly reminds the audience that “most of us ‘tutor’ naturally and easily all the time” (p. 1). The underlying theme throughout the text is that tutoring is about one simple thing: “helping someone learn something that you already know” (p. 4) and that the practice of tutoring doesn’t have to be intimidating. Advice that I found particularly useful for myself and my tutors was, “allow your tutees to help teach you how to teach” (p. 17), “believe that your tutees are doing what they can to succeed” (p. 23), and remember that “tutoring is for [the] tutees, not for you” (p. 80).

Tutoring Matters would be ideal for new tutors who will be working with students in grades K-12. Because of the preponderance of field note data in this text, new tutors have a wealth of information from which to draw as they begin their own tutoring careers. The voices of experienced tutors in the text make it both authoritative and authentic, ensuring *Tutoring Matters* is a resource that new tutors will find themselves returning to time after time.

References

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