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Handbook for Training Peer Tutors and Mentors

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Book Review

**Agee, K., & Hodges, R. (Eds.). (2012). *Handbook for Training Peer Tutors and Mentors*.
Mason, OH: College Reading and Learning Association. (448 pp., \$75.00-\$80.00).**

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Each semester, we spend considerable time making sure our communication center consultants are trained to meet the specific needs of our students. With an ever-growing body of research and literature on best practices in tutoring students working on communication-related projects (Atkins-Sayre & Yook, 2015, Smithberger, 2016, Turner & Sheckels, 2015, Yook & Atkins-Sayre, 2015), it is important to have guides that help us plan activities designed to improve our services. A recent addition to this greater collection is *Handbook for Training Peer Tutors and Mentors* by Karen Agee and Russ Hodges (editors). At 448 pages, *Handbook* provides a comprehensive overview of tutoring that communication center professionals will find beneficial to their staff education and training programs.

Published by the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), *Handbook for Training Peer Tutors and Mentors* is divided into six chapters, each containing more than ten brief essays that cover topics significant to tutoring staff development. The breadth of information covered is impressive, and we believe readers will find the short essays easy to read and navigate. While not all articles apply directly to communication centers, there is ample information that is applicable to our daily work, such as chapters on theories of tutoring (at the college level), different styles of tutoring, and tutor training topics.

Chapters one and two provide readers with foundational information that can benefit any communication-based tutor. Chapter one offers historical, epistemological, and developmental perspectives on tutoring, with articles such as “Modeling Self-Regulation: Vygotsky and Bloom” and “The Brain’s Natural Learning Process.” Of particular note is “Strategic Learning: Helping Students Become More Active Participants in Their Learning,” by Claire Ellen Weinstein, et. al. This article introduces readers to Weinstein’s Model of Strategic Learning, which focuses on an individual learner’s skill, will, and self-regulation, and how they are impacted by the academic environment surrounding them. This can be helpful for staff education, as it invites consultants to consider how each individual learner they work with is situated within the larger academic context of their institution and how that understanding might help them motivate their students through the use of various tutoring strategies.

As a solid follow-up to chapter one’s theoretical foundations, chapter two offers practical strategies for professionals looking to develop or refine their staff training programs with articles such as “Tutor Training Day Camp and Beyond” and “A Three-Credit-Hour Tutor Training Course.” Considering recent calls to improve technology use in communication centers (Martin, Strawser, Apostel, & Martin, 2017, McIntyre & Hall, 2017), tutors should read

“Virtual Environments: Have You Met My Avatar?” and “The Tutor Revolution will not be Televised: It will be Podcast.” In “Virtual Environments,” Thomas C. Stewart presents an overview of how online platforms can be used for tutoring and mentoring, which is especially critical for centers that support institutions that actively utilize online instruction. Stewart offers examples for both blended delivery (combinations of onsite and online) and online-only delivery, and provides specific questions that ought to be answered before delving into these formats.

Chapter three focuses primarily on general tutoring concerns, such as communication and relationships, developing rapport, understanding the rights and responsibilities of being a tutor, and working with a variety of student populations. While much of this content is not focused specifically on communication center tutors, it is still germane to communication center work. For example, in “Reaching a Consensus on Ethics,” Eric Dunker highlights the importance of developing “a working definition of ethics and ethical frameworks among tutoring or mentoring staff” (p. 178), especially if staff members and students represent diverse backgrounds. Dunker provides a training activity directors can use to help staff members achieve (or get close to) such a consensus and a method for assessing that work. This can be critical for ensuring that students are receiving assistance that is consistent across an entire communication center staff.

Agee and Hodges use chapter four to highlight training topics and activities designed specifically for tutors and those who train them (2012). Articles contain brief overviews followed by helpful activities and assessment plans. New tutors will certainly learn from discussing “Tutoring Dos and Dont’s” and “Setting Goals for the Tutoring

Session: Evaluating Tutees’ Needs,” which provide foundational information and practice experiences tutors need to know before holding their first consultation. Communication centers that offer online support can review “Training for Online Tutoring,” while centers that connect tutors to classes may use “Embedded Tutoring” as a resource.

While the majority of the Handbook can help communication center professional develop new staff education and training materials and practices, some of its content may prove to be inaccessible to the field. For example, chapter four contains essays on tutoring for exams and math, while chapter five focuses on broader academic mentoring, including time management, goal setting, and career choice. Handbook’s short essays may also not provide the in-depth coverage communication center professionals seek on consulting oral or visual presentations when developing staff education programs. These factors should not be a deterrent, though, as Handbook is designed for a broader learning center audience and many of the essays can be used as springboards for further research and considerations.

Overall, Handbook for Training Peer Tutors and Mentors is a collection of useful essays that offer theoretical approaches and practical guides for communication center professionals interested in creating, re-designing, and even researching or assessing their own staff education programs. Handbook presents strategies for working with students face-to-face and online, offers advice for working with different populations of students, and even presents ways to hire and develop staff. In short, it is a comprehensive guide that provides a bit of something for just about everyone. It is a solid addition to the resources we should be using to prepare our consultants.

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