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Book Review: One to One

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One to One: Resources for Conference-Centered Writing by Charles Dawe and Edward Dornan (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1981, 354 pages).

Reviewed by Jim Dunn, University of Massachusetts

Dawe and Dornan's *One to One* is a book for teachers who have thrown away the book. In applying conference methods to teaching writing, the authors have written a text that will explain the writing process and provide information on writing conventions that they would otherwise have presented in class lectures. This is to devote conference time entirely to a student's work, uninterrupted by mini-lectures on writing principles. Dawe and Dornan assume that a writing teacher's time is best spent in giving immediate feedback to a writer's work-in-progress and that writing is best learned by writing. These assumptions give their book some application to the writing center.

Any text can be of limited use to a writing center, as the heart of its operation is the personal interview, not the book. For undergraduate tutor training though, certain books can be valuable in attacking the common sense of student writers. Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, for example, is effective in changing a tutor's attitude's toward error. Instead of joining the red-pen hunt for mistakes, a tutor can learn from Shaughnessy to see pattern in error and thereby develop diagnostic reading skills. Similarly, *One to One* can be used effectively in an introductory tutor-training course to change a writer's behavior and to help a tutor view writing as a process.

The first of the book's four sections has the greatest value in tutor training for its effective attack on the common sense of student writers that a first draft is unalterably sacred. In "Getting Started" the reader is led through a process of list-making, pre-writing, drafting, and revising by examples from a student work-in-progress. The examples illustrate how the writer of a short description essay begins with fragments, considers an audience, and takes a point-of-view. Facsimiles of example drafts are accompanied by marginal explanations of the writer's criteria for change in diction, shift in emphasis, deletions and additions. These examples are supplemented by writing tasks at each stage of composition, making this section a valuable manual on how a

writer behaves when s/he writes.

A writing teacher need not use the book sequentially. After introducing a student to the composing process as described in section one, an instructor can direct a writer to any part of the remaining three sections. In this way a student can develop strengths by completing specific writing tasks. Throughout, *One to One* is a task oriented text.

The authors describe the second section, "Writing Tasks", as their attempt to put the baby back in the tub, having dumped the bathwater of rhetoric texts and readers. Each of the section's eight units contains information the authors would otherwise have covered in traditional lectures on genre and structure. But, its emphasis on work methods saves this section from recourse to what Roger Garrison calls the cookie-cutter approach to teaching organization. Whether building a deductive argument or using patterns like comparison and contrast, each unit articulates a procedure to accomplish the writing task at hand.

A third section on keeping a journal maintains the book's emphasis on process. "Daily Writing" tells the student-writer what to do to keep a journal and introduces the reader to the benefits of a journal by giving examples of how student and professional writers use their journals to generate more writing. Section three is an eight-week series comprising twenty to thirty-minute daily writing exercises. Although students are asked to let their thoughts flow freely without regard to the niceties of convention, each unit focuses on a particular subject or pre-writing task. A student's past life, daily activities, dreams and fantasies are among subjects that lead the writer toward self-reflection, and perhaps toward continued daily writing. Like the rest of the book, "Daily Writing" gives the student experience in work methods and good writing habits.

An alphabetically arranged index of information on grammar and writing principles, the final section, as the authors indicate, may be the most familiar to teachers of composition. Extended entries with many examples explain concepts like revision, word choice, and unity, and shorter entries on matters like punctuation inform the student of basic writing convention. "Index for Writers" was intended by the authors as a place to refer a student as particular problems arise in the work at hand. Instead of giving a five-minute lecture on tone, for example, an instructor can tell a writer to read the six-page article on tone before revising a draft. In this way the student-writer learns by actually revising, rather than by memorizing concepts. This represents a basic pedagogical shift.

In his forward to the instructor's manual, Roger Garrison says that

One to One can help a teacher make the shift from traditional lecture-discussion format to conference-centered writing instruction. Although the book can be used in both settings, the instructor's manual offers basic advice on making the transition to conferencing. Dawe and Dornan give an account of issues they faced in making the transition and add a list for further reading that includes Garrison's seminal article, "One to One: Tutorial Instruction in Freshman Composition" (*New Directions for Community Colleges* 5). A teacher new to conferencing can use the manual to begin investigating the area, but neither the text nor the instructor's manual explore a ground for this pedagogy in theories of composition, psychology, or linguistics. To make Garrison's transition, an instructor must be willing to explore theory while doing the thing itself.

One to One is a book for the practitioner, for the student who learns to write by writing. It assumes that writing is a behavior best learned by practice and by the student writer's receiving immediate feedback from an interested audience. Problems are treated as they arise in the process of composition, as the writer makes adjustments in response to audience response. These principles are shared by most writing centers and give the book a place in tutor training.

One to One can be used to inform undergraduate tutors of writing as process. A tutor who understands a process of composition can recognize and indicate to a client at what stage of composing s/he may be. A tutor so informed is not limited to judging a piece of writing as a finished product measured against standards, but s/he is able to talk with clients about changing their writing behavior. Faced with a hastily written rough draft, such a tutor may perceive that the writer's next task is not to edit, but to discover something to write about. A tutor can learn from *One to One* how to help a writer with ways to proceed, with methods of going about the business of writing.

An introductory course in peer-tutoring that concentrates on writing, as perhaps it should, would find *One to One* useful for a review of writing convention. It could be used to develop good writing habits and to give tutors a helpful way of talking about writing as behavior and process. In addition, the task-oriented units on genre and structure give the book a place in a writing center library, where clients and tutors might turn for ways of proceeding with specific writing projects and for information on basic writing principles.