

## **Reflective Statement on Teaching and Learning**

### **Tonya Strickland**

Last summer, one of my Learning Support English students, a woman who had just relocated to the United States from India and who had been intimidated by just about everything at college, wrote me a note at the end of class that said I was her “friend, teacher, and best wisher.”

I love that phrase, “best wisher.” It really describes what I want to be in my life—both inside and outside of the classroom. In fact, I believe that I can teach only as well as I can encourage my students. Because many of my students come to class not believing in themselves, sometimes I have to believe for them for a while—until they catch on, which they almost always do. That student from India is now in my English 1102 class—and it’s entirely online! I don’t know which one of us is more excited about her progress!

Watching students learn and grow and knowing that I’ve played a role in their lives—what profession other than teaching could ever offer me such fulfillment? I’m not content to simply see that my students have mastered the learning objectives—I want to know that their lives are better as a result of being part of our learning community.

Because I teach education classes as well as English and reading, I am constantly thinking about the act of teaching—its rewards, its strategies, its purposes. As a result, I’ve come to the conclusion that good teaching is above all dependent upon the teacher—who must genuinely care for her or his students as if they were the most important people in the world—because they are. Once that foundation is established, then the instructor can begin to implement strategies that will bring about critical reflection and true learning (not just passive memorization of facts). Although my strategies vary according to individual student needs and overall class objectives, I try to integrate these seven strategies concerning teaching and learning in all my teaching.

#### **1. I build on the familiar.**

An instructor must start with what students bring with them through the classroom door. In this way I value what the students value, and I have a context for teaching. For example, when I introduce essay writing to my English 0099 students, I begin with personal writing. Because they are able to write about themselves, they are interested and knowledgeable. This semester we began by making a “photo album” with captions, and I allowed them to include drawings or photographs to add interest to the assignment. When we turn these “moments” into essays, students will discover that they have something to write about as I teach them how to



organize and present their thinking. Likewise, when I teach grammar, I begin with common images. I show a cheeseburger, with the top-half of the bun representing the subject and the bottom-half of the bun representing the verb. Then I teach them to “hold the mayo” as we begin to look at subject-verb agreement.

## **2. I provide purpose for classroom activities.**

When students have authentic activities that are relevant and meaningful, their learning increases. Therefore, I allow some negotiation within assignments and assessment so that my students learn to evaluate and reflect upon what is purposeful and important to them. For example, in Learning Support English, students learned the structure of topic sentences, the mechanics of letter writing, and the method of Internet searches by creating an oversized postcard to mail to a person of their choice with an invitation to travel to a destination of their choice. Last spring in Writing for Teachers, my students teamed with an elementary school in Virginia to exchange descriptions and drawings of monsters. I also publish my students’ best work on my website, Land of Strick.

This last semester we began Writing for Teachers by making our own bookworms out of clay. I photographed each worm, and its photo became the cover for his or her maker’s class notebook. Each student then wrote a story about his or her bookworm—stories that took the shape of hand-painted books, printed tee-shirts and bookbags, sewn quilts, and painted wooden boards. I, too, had a worm with a story—Barnabus (see appendix), and he was trapped in a magic trunk until my students released him through their writing activities. By the end of the class, students were talking about our bookworms as if they were our own children.

## **3. I structure opportunities for active involvement.**

Many students come to English classes with a well-developed dislike for grammar, writing, and literature. For many, language learning has been boring and passive. Therefore, I incorporate many opportunities for active participation that provide motivation for language learning. For example, in my Learning Support classes, we play Grammar Bingo in which students identify sentence problems. We also play Cluster Wars to learn levels of generality of language and Regents’ Roulette to learn structure of essays. In Cluster Wars, students work in pairs to add either topic sentences or details for a given question, and in Regents’ Roulette, students work in groups of three to generate a thesis and three topic sentences for questions they draw at random. In World Literature I, to review details from Homer’s epic, we played The *Odyssey* Game, and to discuss the themes of *Oedipus Rex*, we formed drama troupes that presented varying viewpoints of man’s destiny. To review the roles of Greek gods, we played the Olympian Match Game. To discuss the importance of art in *Jane Eyre*,

students in English 1102 drew their own interpretations based on Brontë's description of Jane's paintings.

#### **4. I model cognitive strategies within context.**

Many of my students have been denied access to "thinking" strategies. Therefore, I frequently use "think-alouds" and "talk-alouds" through shared and guided writing and reading. Students need to hear how "experts" make decisions about writing and reading. In order to model my cognitive strategies, I "think aloud" for my students as I make decisions about my writing and allow my students to see me cross out words and struggle—as I talk about what and why I'm revising. I also scaffold their writing by giving them essay assignments in which I've written some of the essay, such as the introduction and body topic sentences, and then they add details to the body paragraphs and a conclusion. I also give detailed directions and checklists for essays, as well as examples of student writing. As students progress in their learning, they need less of my scaffolding.

#### **5. I make the classroom a place of belonging.**

Learning is profoundly social. We learn as we share with one another and are comfortable in that sharing. I have tried to combat the teacher-talk/student-listen paradigm by forming a learning community in which everyone has a place. Beginning on the first day of class, we learn about one another and begin forming relationships that develop throughout the semester. That day I create desk placards with students' names so that not only I but also the students learn the names of those in the class. I also rearrange the classroom into small groups so that students can share more easily and learn from one another as well as from me. I extend this sense of belonging outside the classroom through WebCT. For example, my Introduction to Education class has a "Teachers' Lounge" discussion forum where students can talk about any topic.

Of course, for students to freely write and talk requires a classroom where they feel comfortable taking risks and making mistakes. Particularly in my Learning Support classes, "errors" have to be seen as a necessary part of learning. If I don't allow my students to feel okay about making mistakes, they won't risk significant learning. In order to create a nonthreatening classroom so that my students can learn in a state of what Caine & Caine call "relaxed alertness," I use lots of humor, and I participate—with great enthusiasm—in our classroom activities,

#### **6. I challenge students to do their best and provide them with the means and tools to be responsible for their learning.**

Research has shown that the most effective teachers are those with high expectations for their students, as opposed to ineffective teachers who focus on their students' weaknesses. While I set high standards for my students, I also enhance their opportunities for success in several ways. I

always provide multiple means of assessment, and I structure my grading system to allow evaluation of learning without severe penalty. For example, in Learning Support English, students take weekly grammar quizzes worth just 20 points each, and they may retake them as many times as they like, with their grade averaged from all the quizzes.

I also provide my students with tools to be successful. I teach all my students to be computer-literate—they all use word processing and WebCT, as well as other software appropriate for the lesson. My English 1101 classes have created a variety of websites, including a “Persuade Me” website in which students were required to persuade readers of a point of view on a topic of their choice. In Writing for Teachers, my students use the computer to make newspapers and hypertext presentations. They also learn to use KidPix, a software that is popular in elementary schools, to create multimedia poetry that they share during our “Share and Celebrate” evening on the large screen in the auditorium (with family and friends invited).

One of the most time-consuming ways for me to help my writing students succeed is to let them write and revise—and revise—and revise. In my Learning Support English classes, we write twelve original essays each semester—all of which are revised multiple times. However, I credit this amount of writing with the success I have in helping my students exit Learning Support. As indicated on the graph in the appendix, some of my students make amazing leaps in their scores on the Compass Writing Exam. Overall, the average placement score for this past summer and fall for my students was 42, and the average exit score was 86—more than double. This past fall, only one student from each of my Learning Support English classes received an “in progress” grade and is having to repeat the course.

### **7. I involve my students outside of the classroom.**

As advisor of our online multimedia magazine, I find few students who don't have something to contribute—we publish writing, art, photography, and music. I'm constantly recruiting students, and this semester we're working on photo essays, so I'm teaching digital photography workshops. I also started an online multimedia magazine for kids last summer so that we can extend our publishing vision. In years past, I also served as Drama Club advisor, and I directed two plays, *Computer Pals* and *Stark Drama*, as well as took students on yearly trips to the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. I've found that connected students stay in college—and take their education more seriously than those students who just show up for class. Therefore, I try to take part in as many extracurricular activities as my time permits.

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These seven strategies, while effective in my classroom, would be useless if I didn't realize the importance of my role in my students' lives, as suggested by educator Haim Ginott, who said, "I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom." It is my aim, both in the classroom and outside of it, to be that decisive element who will always be known as the "best wisher."

## **Condensed Curriculum Vitae**

Tonya T. Strickland  
Waycross College  
Waycross, Georgia 31501  
912.285.6140

### **Education**

Ed.D. in English Education from Baylor University (1996); M.A. in Journalism and Telecommunications (1985) and B.S. in Journalism (1978) with highest honors from the University of Wyoming. Named Outstanding Graduating Senior in Journalism.

### **Teaching Experience**

Associate Professor of English and Reading at Waycross College, Waycross, Georgia (1998-present); University System of Georgia Faculty Associate, Advanced Learning Technologies (2001-2002, one-half release time from Waycross College); previous full-time experience at Arkansas State University (1996-98), Baylor University (1995-96); experience as teaching assistant at Baylor University (1994-95) and University of Wyoming (1974-77).

### **Courses Taught**

Writing for Teachers; Introduction to Education; Learning Support English I and II; English Composition I and II; World Literature I; Journalism; Learning Support Reading; USG courses—eCore English 1102, Online Teaching and Learning, and Regents' eCore Essay

### **Curriculum Development**

Member of the team that created English 1102 as one of the first set of eCore courses for USG (and served as the course's editor); also developed Regents' eCore Essay; served as course editor for USG's Online Teaching and Learning; created and implemented two online courses for Waycross College (English 1102 and Regents' Essay) and one classroom course (Writing for Teachers); developed workshops for Central Texas Writing Project (Waco)

## Selected Presentations

- *Tips for Online Teaching*. Advanced Learning Technologies Orientation for New Faculty (Athens, GA) • *Socks and Blocks*. Presentation at Georgia National Association for Developmental Education (Jekyll Island, GA)
- *Seven Strategies for Creating Community*. Presentation at Teaching and Learning with Advanced Technologies Conference. (Athens, GA) • *Now That I've Got It, What Do I Do with It?* Invited speaker for South Carolina Association for Developmental Education. (Hilton Head, SC) • *Becoming an (On)-Linebacker: Why I've Tackled Online Education*. Presentation for the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (Austin, TX)
- *Shared Pens: How Collaboration Can Improve Writing*. Presentation for GA National Association for Developmental Education (Jekyll Island, GA) • *Not a Beacon, Just a Nightlight: Educational Technology Basics*. Pre-session Presentation for the National Association for Developmental Education. (Biloxi, MS) • *Defeating General Vague*. Presentation at Annual Student Success in First Year Composition. Georgia Southern (Statesboro, GA)
- *Teaching Essay Writing Through ESSAY*. Presentation at the University System of Georgia's Learning Support 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference. (Augusta, GA) • *Building Background Knowledge for Writing*. Lilly Conference on College & University Teaching/South (Athens, GA) • *Moving Forward: Child-Centered Activities in Math, Science, and Technology*. Presentation at 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Arkansas Early Childhood Association Conference (Little Rock AR)
- *Authentic Writing*. Presentation at the Baylor Reading Conference (Waco, TX) • *Reason to Write*. Presentation at the conference of the Texas Association for Reading Improvement (Waco, TX)

## Selected Professional Activities

- Webmaster, Waycross College Center for Teacher Education and Technology • Editor, Self-Study Report to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools • Advisor, *FoxPrints* Online Multimedia Magazine • Advisor, Drama Club • Advisory Member, USG's Teaching and Learning with Advanced Technologies Conference • Designer/Creator of recruiting brochures, website, and presentations for Waycross College • Editor, *FoxPaws* Online Multimedia Magazine for Kids and by Kids • Judge, One-Act Play Literary Competition • Advisor, *Crossties* Waycross College Newspaper • Judge, Junior Board of Directors for Waycross Bank and Trust • Judge, Pierce County High School Honors Study Topic Project • Judge, Phi Theta Kappa Essay Contest, Waycross College • Chair, Day at College • Chair, Committee for Promotion and Tenure • Chair, Faculty Policies Committee • Chair, Academic Policies Committee

## **Professional Development**

Element K Certificates in • Web Development with CSS Web Design and Usability Techniques • Creating a Web Site Using Dreamweaver 4 (Sparks Model) • Dreamweaver 4: Level 1 • Dreamweaver 4: Level 2 • Fireworks 4: Level 1 • Fireworks 4: Level 2 • Flash 4: Level 1 • Flash 4: Level 2

## **Grant and Contract Activities**

• "Of Kumquats and Kangaroos: What Every Teacher Needs to Know about Classroom Writing" (2004). \$14,841 Georgia's Teacher Quality Higher Education Program • "Moving Forward: Integrating Math, Science, and Technology" (1996). \$155,488 Dwight D. Eisenhower Professional Development Grant, U.S. Department of Education (team-written grant) • "Partners as Researchers and Technologists Negotiating Educational Reform Strategies" (1995). \$925,402 Texas Education Agency Grant (team-written grant) • "Writing Institute for Year-Round Schools" (1994). \$14,000 National Writing Project Grant (team-written grant)

## **Selected Honors and Professional Memberships**

• 2004 David R. Pierce Faculty Technology Award (sponsored by Microsoft Corporation), American Association of Community Colleges • Who's Who Among America's Teachers • Distinguished Leadership Award of the Arkansas Academy for Leadership Training and School-Based Management • Membership in National Association for Developmental Education/Georgia, International Alliance of Teacher Scholars, Inc.; Association for Advancement of Computing in Education; Association for Educational Communications & Technology; Phi Delta Kappa; Society for Professional Journalists; Phi Beta Kappa; Phi Kappa Phi; National Council of Teachers of English

## **Selected Workshops**

• Online Teaching with WebCT • Webpage Development Workshop • Regents' Prep Workshop • Advanced Techniques with PowerPoint • Teaching with PowerPoint and Microsoft Word • Internet for Educators • Integrating Technology with Content Areas • Effective Writing • Effective Strategies for Teaching Writing • Writing Across the Curriculum: When

Writing Should Not End with a Period • Central Texas Writing Institute for  
Waco ISD Year-Round Schools • Reading/Writing Across the Curriculum

**Selected Comments from Students, Faculty, and Staff  
from Tonya Strickland's (2003) Tenure Portfolio**

My advisor, Dr. Strickland, was my only source of guidance, information, and encouragement during this time [first semester of college]. The English instructor for my class spent a significant amount of time telling me what to do, but Dr. Strickland was the instructor who helped me learn what I needed to do. She reminded me that I had the ability to write and helped me remember the reasons I enjoy writing. The help Dr. Strickland gave me with English was invaluable, but her skill in encouraging me to believe and try again allowed me to feel comfortable about returning and continuing with my college education.—Lynn Scherer-Robinson, student

Dr. Strickland is a captivating instructor. She brings excitement, interest, and lots of encouragement to the classroom. Her desire is for every student to succeed. There is no reason for an individual to do poorly in her class, for she makes herself readily available to provide assistance to students who need extra help. One would think English to be a boring subject, but Dr. Strickland has ways to make learning about fragments and comma splices fun.—Lisa Fales, student

Dr. Strickland always has a positive attitude and a bright and warm smile on her face. I have been with Dr. Strickland for four semesters. She is a wonderful teacher. I want to become a teacher because of how she made me feel as a student.—Heidi Blount, student

I had the privilege of working with Dr. Strickland to help keep a student from dropping out of college for financial reasons. Without her intervention, the student would no longer be attending Waycross College. Tonya's reaction to the student's plight demonstrated her compassion and concern for the individuals who are fortunate enough to be her students and advisees.—John Vanchella, Director, Development and Community Services

Added to the fact that Tonya is an innovative instructor, a valuable colleague, and a wonderful employee is that Tonya is consistently a pleasure to be around. I don't believe I've ever heard her complain, and she has a great smile. —Roberta Lacefield, Assistant Professor of Mathematics

Dr. Strickland is committed to excellence in teaching. I have often stood at the door and watched her interactions with students, or listened to her teaching while in my office next door to the English computer lab. She uses her voice, motions, and demeanor to engage students in the learning process. One reason I stop to listen is because I find that her PowerPoint

slides and choices of examples are always interesting and entertaining.—  
Dr. Chris Wozny, Associate Professor of Chemistry and Physics

## **Selection of Comments from Tonya Strickland's Recent Student Evaluations and Student Notes**

### **Introduction to Education**

"You are the most effective teacher I have ever had the pleasure of learning from. I feel as if you truly helped me to search out what it means to be a teacher."

### **Writing for Teachers**

"I used to become frustrated writing. Now I write freely, enjoy writing, and have fun with my writing. I also have ideas to use now and in future classrooms."

"Because we created impressive products, I have become more willing to let others read what I write. I carry my portfolio around all the time and want to show off whatever product I am working on."

### **World Literature I**

"I did work very hard in this class. I wanted to do well. I felt energized by your teaching methods. I also feel that this class gives you many opportunities to bring up your grades. You seem to always have your door open if anyone needs help. That is really important.

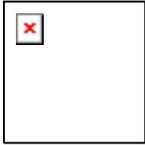
"I worked hard in your class because the class felt important to me. I respect you as a teacher and a person; therefore, I would think that putting my all into my work would be a matter of showing that respect."

If you had not been teaching the class I think that I would have never had such a positive attitude going into the class nor as strong of a motivation. I knew you were not easy by any means but that you were a very good professor and that you helped everyone learn in a way that was not boring but fun and interesting.

### **English 1102**

Dr. Strickland has been very helpful. She has helped to stimulate my mind, and she has helped me see things from different perspectives. Dr. Strickland made me feel good about my writing even when I made mistakes. She has helped me to value writing and make it better. Dr. Strickland is an excellent teacher. She cares about her students and wants them to learn. I am majoring in education, and I hope that one day I will be able to teach as good as Dr. Strickland.

**The Adventures of Barnabus Bookworm**      **by Tonya Strickland**  
(This is my first page describing writing assignments for Writing for Teachers)



Once upon a time there lived in Waycross, Georgia, a green, bespeckled bookworm by the name of Barnabus. Barnabus simply showed up one day at my door and asked if I might allow him to peruse the books in my home. As a book lover myself, I decided he'd come to the right house. However, within two weeks, Barnabus had read every book in my house: the books on my shelf-lined walls in the study, the books on my ceiling-high shelves in the hallway, the books stacked neatly in my rolltop desk, and even the books shoved under my bathroom sink. However, when Barnabus crawled into my bedroom looking for more books, I warned him to steer clear of my trunk at the foot of my bed, because though I had been told that it was filled with books, it was also filled with magic. It had been in the house when I first moved in, and the previous owner had warned me never to open it or move it. Somewhat sulkily, Barnabus inched his way back into the study.

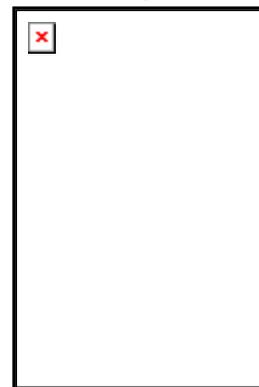
When I went to bed that night, however, I surmised from the gaseous green glow emanating from my trunk that Barnabus had not heeded my words. As I pondered what to do, I saw words slowly burning into the maple wood from the inside of its lid: "Barnabus needs your help. You may open the lid in three minutes if you determine to be his helper. After three minutes, the trunk will be forever locked."

Even though I am somewhat timid and have had no experience with magic except for wishing upon an occasional star, I decided that only the worst type of coward would leave a bookworm to perish in a magic trunk. I grabbed a thick towel (in case the trunk was hot) and heaved open the lid. To my surprise, it was empty save for one book, *Hailstones and Halibut Bones: Adventures in Color*, which had a bookmark in the last page of the book. The bookmark repeated the book's last line, "And you and you and I know well / Each has a taste / And each has a smell / And each has a wonderful / Story to tell" and a message written in magenta:

**To help Barnabus worm his way out,  
Read this book and know what it's about.**

**Next, you must write exactly what I say,  
Or in the trunk Barnabus will stay.**

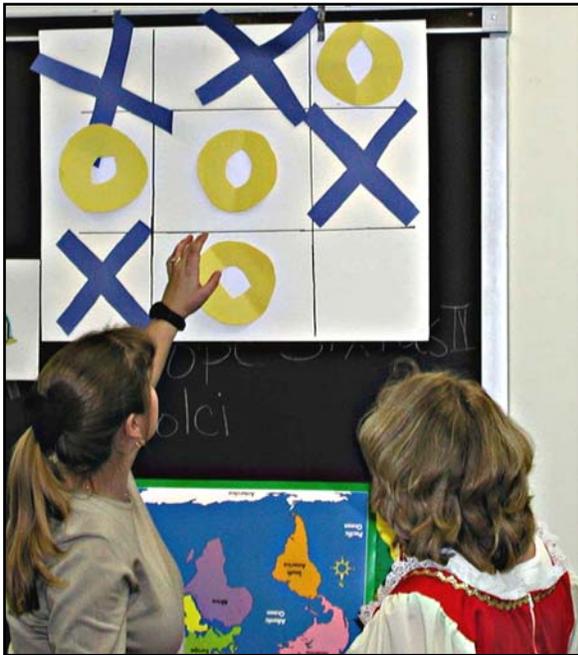
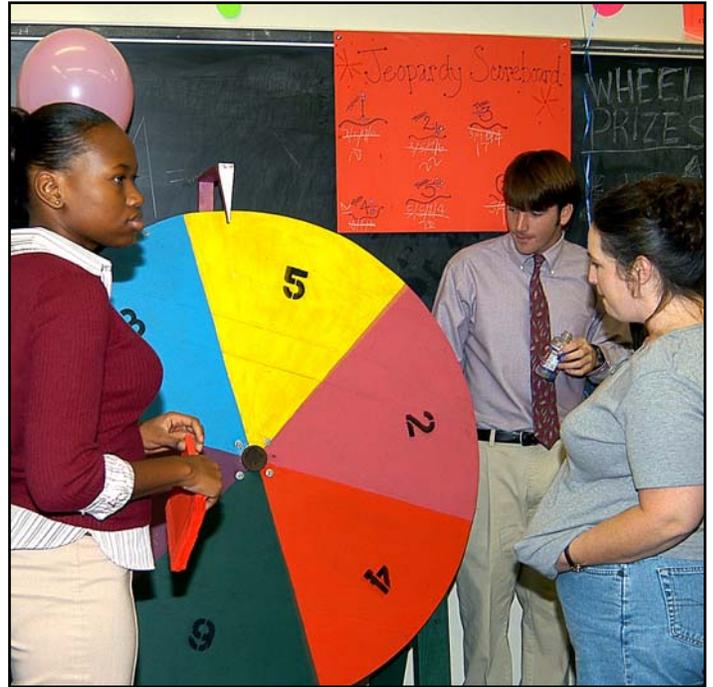
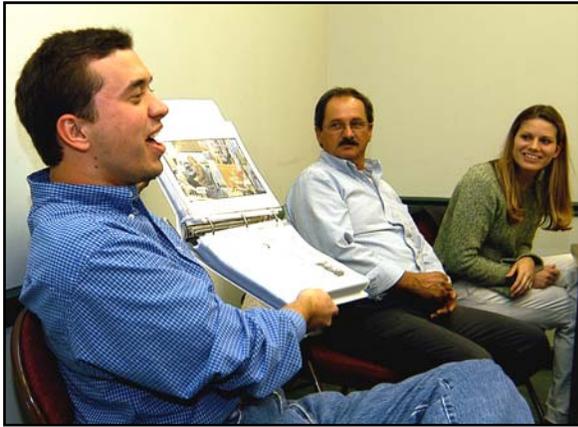
**Now take the book and these directions, too;  
When you return, the trunk will open for you.**



The directions that followed told me to write a poem about a color that described how that color tastes, smells, feels, sounds, and looks.

I had never written much poetry, and I was feeling rather depressed about Barnabus, so I went to my study and penned a poem about the color gray. Within the hour I returned to the trunk; it was once again open, but this time *Hailstones and Halibut Bones: Adventures in Color* was missing and a new book was in its place: *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. On it was a yellow sticky note with a new message in vermilion: **TO BE CONTINUED**

Photos from Tonya Strickland's Introduction to Education and Writing for Teachers Classes Demonstrating Student Interaction and Classroom Projects



**Direct Documentation of Student Learning  
Comparison of Placement and Exit Scores for Tonya Strickland's  
Learning Support English Students, Summer and Fall 2003**

