CALLING ALL WRITERS: USING CELL PHONES TO TEACH ARGUMENTATION AND OTHER GENRES

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with

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George Hillocks has had an impact on the field of writing instruction since the early 1970s. Hillocks developed one of the field's most distinctive approaches, one that begins with students analyzing and talking about materials, usually in small groups, with a specific intent in mind: arguing about their relative merits, describing them in detail, comparing and contrasting them, and engaging in other social modes of thinking through problems with others. These materials might include a sea shell that a student must describe in detail so that another student might find it in a pile of similar shells (*Observing and Writing*). This discussion-driven prewriting episode enables students to talk through their ideas initially, allowing them to express and refine their thinking before actually writing. Through their engagement with such materials and through talking about them initially, students inductively generate ways of thinking about the demands of what Hillocks calls a "task," which refers to any set of expectations accompanying writing for different purposes: writing a narrative, writing an argument, writing a fable; that is, producing texts that follow formal and social conventions that meet the

expectations of a discourse community such that writers and their readers are "in tune" with one another (Nystrand).

In Hillocks's conception, these preliminary explorations precede actual writing, not just as lubrication but as content generation. By talking through what they will write about prior to drafting their ideas on a page, student writers engaging with writing tasks for the first time have the opportunity to work through their ideas before they put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, giving them material so that a key part of their cognitive load is reduced when they begin to write. In other words, contrary to much writing process orthodoxy, students do not learn to write primarily by writing. Rather, they learn to write in specific types of situations by initially talking in relation to task demands and the specific content addressed, and then beginning to write with those ideas at the ready.

In this article we demonstrate what such writing instruction involves, adapting Hillocks's principles in a key way. We have heard teachers say that they don't use his approach because it requires a lot of work outside class to design activities: collecting, organizing, and labeling seashells; writing scenarios to generate discussion; assembling photographs for analysis; and in general, spending precious planning time preparing for classrooms in which the students actively engage with materials in order to learn how to think and write in particular ways. Although Hillocks and his students have published a number of books and articles in which they provide both materials and design methods, many teachers have reported that they don't have time to design their own as class sizes increase, bureaucratic demands pile up, and their opportunities for planning are compromised. The adaptation we make in this demonstration is that we suggest a way to use readily-at-hand materials—in particular, cell phones—to engage students in discussion prior to writing. This initial episode introduces a longer process of composition. Just as students have the opportunity to sort out their ideas prior to writing, the teacher is relieved of the chore of gathering and organizing materials outside class, relying instead on at-hand "data," to use Hillocks's term, that they already possess.

General Principles of Hillocks's Approach

Hillocks originally developed his approach to teaching writing as a junior high English teacher in Euclid, Ohio, in the 1950s. His approach viewed each writing task as having distinctive needs. Arguments require different forms of knowledge and rhetorical moves than do narratives, even as arguments often include narratives among their examples. At once, then, he believed that general knowledge is insufficient for specific tasks, and that specific tasks often take hybrid forms (see Smagorinsky and Smith, "Nature of Knowledge" for an elaboration of this assertion). In other approaches to teaching writing, he believed, these complexities are often not addressed directly.

A second trait of his pedagogy is that teachers design materials and activities that involve students in the inductive generation of processes and strategies for thinking in relation to these tasks. Each type of task involves unique ways of thinking. For instance, defining *loyalty* and writing a narrative about an instance of loyal action rely on different ways of thinking. As we have noted in reviewing the hybrid nature of much textuality, an extended definition of *loyalty* might include not only criteria, but stories of loyal and disloyal actions to illustrate its points. To help students learn how to think in terms of a task such as extended definition, a teacher would deliberately plan activities that, prior to writing, involve students in discussion and exploration of definitional problems. This activity helps to prepare them for the demands of tasks before they take on the more challenging demands of writing an extended definition themselves. To the greatest extent possible, these activities simulate problems and employ content that embody questions that students find compelling and worth pursuing.

Learning to write from this perspective, then, first involves learning how to think, using discussions that require students to explore and test out their ideas as a form of prewriting. As described by Hillocks and his students (e.g., Johannessen et al., *Writing about Literature*; McCann, *Teaching Argument Writing*; Smagorinsky, *Teaching English by Design*; Smagorinsky et al., *Dynamics of Writing Instruction*; Smith, *Reducing Writing Apprehension*; Smith et al., *Oh Yeah?*),

teachers work outside class to design appropriate task-based activities, but turn the class into a workshop in which students engage with those activities. The teacher presides over the activities that are designed to promote thinking toward a particular procedural end, yet never intercedes and tells them what or how to think.

Established Basis in Research and Practice

The approach we are describing has had extensive field-testing in public secondary school classrooms. In comparative research aggregated by Hillocks (*Research on Written Composition*), what he called an "environmental" mode coupled with an "inquiry" focus produced significantly greater effects in students' writing than did any other teaching approach available at that time. His nomenclature has not caught on, given the ambiguity of "environmental" and the many definitions accorded the notion of "inquiry," leading Arthur N. Applebee to refer to his approach as one involving a "structured process," a term later taken up by Hillocks's students to communicate the method more appealingly to teachers (e.g., Smagorinsky et al., *Dynamics of Writing Instruction*).

In research following Hillocks's (*Research on Written Composition*) research review, using protocol analysis to understand the thinking processes of students who had been taught using different ways of writing extended definition essays, Smagorinsky ("The Writer's Knowledge") found that students who were taught according to Hillocks's principles engaged in thinking that allowed them not only to produce the elements of an extended definition—criteria, examples, warrants that rendered the examples into evidence for the claim, counter examples and accompanying warrants excluding them from meeting the criteria—but to produce them more clearly in relation to one another such that each definitional criterion was substantiated and clarified persuasively.

This research base, all from classrooms, has been outlined in a number of publications that have led to widespread classroom application, although not as widely as other, less time-intensive teaching approaches that perhaps better meet the needs of teachers' preparation time. Yet the diversity of the sites of application suggest

the flexibility of his approach. Much of Hillocks's own research, for instance, came in public high schools on Chicago's South Side in the impoverished neighborhoods surrounding Hyde Park, and the scores of students he taught in his certification program did their initial teaching based on these methods in what are considered "urban" contexts. McCann et al. (*Literacy and History in Action*) adapted Hillocks's principles to the discipline of social studies and to students in upper primary grade levels, creating compelling scenarios that provide the roles and dilemmas for the activities that allow history to be understood as a dynamic set of social processes more than a set of facts to be memorized. The broad adaptation of his instructional ideas has thus been successful in a variety of contexts in which young people are learning how to write texts according to conventions that may be new to them.

This work has earned considerable recognition in the field of composition. Hillocks himself, for instance, was awarded the NCTE David H. Russell Research Award for Distinguished Research in the Teaching of English for *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice* and the NCTE/CEE Richard Meade Award for *Narrative Writing: Learning a New Model for Teaching*; and his book on teaching argument, *Teaching Argument Writing, Grades 6-12*, was a best-seller for the teacher-friendly Heinemann press.

Following Hillocks's (Hillocks et al., *Dynamics of English Instruction*) own pedagogical writing, his students have published extensively on how to implement his ideas. Beginning in the early 1980s (e.g., Smagorinsky et al., *Introductory Activities*; Johannessen et al., *Designing and Sequencing*; Smith, *Reducing Writing Apprehension*), writing as practitioners, they began publishing their classroom instruction as exemplars and design-process guides for other teachers to follow, producing widely-read pedagogical books for other teachers to use in their own classrooms. Although it's difficult to say exactly where each book has been used in which classroom settings without sales data and personal testimonials, the authorial worksites themselves were often quite diverse. In Smagorinsky et al. (*Explorations*), for instance, Smagorinsky had used the activities in one high-SES suburban school (Barrington HS, IL) and one in which roughly half

his students were people of color from widely-ranging income brackets (Oak Park and River Forest HS, IL); Kern taught in the exclusive, largely White and affluent New Trier HS (IL); and McCann taught in decidedly blue collar, White working-class Cicero, IL, once home to Al Capone, at Morton East HS, adjacent to Oak Park but worlds apart in culture, color, and economic diversity. As these settings suggest, most of the application was generated in high school settings, albeit in schools of diverse demographics; but as McCann et al. (*Literacy and History in Action*) later demonstrated, they are easily adaptable to other disciplines and age groups. As these various sites suggest, the approach has both distinctive qualities and a high degree of flexibility in application, relying on teachers' judgment to understand local conditions and the traits of the students to make informed decisions about how to adapt procedures to circumstances.

Their work, alongside that of Hillocks through his death in 2014, has continued to provide classroom resources into the twenty-first century (e.g., Johannessen et al., *Writing about Literature*, Smagorinsky et al., *Dynamics of Writing Instruction*; Smith et al., *Oh Yeah?*), suggesting the ongoing value of his approach in classrooms, regardless of the many changes in national policies, student demographics, teaching force composition, and other factors that have affected schools and shifted the contexts for instruction surrounding the teaching of English in secondary schools (Pasternak et al.).

In this article, we present a teaching activity conducted with preservice English teachers at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire as part of their teacher education program. Although the setting for our demonstration is thus not precisely that of the secondary school, we would argue that the processes we report would not depart dramatically from those of many high school classrooms, based on our own teaching experiences in a variety of settings with these methods. Indeed, one hallmark, we argue, of a well-designed activity is that it works equally well with adults and youth, given that it provides open-ended challenges through which participants inductively develop procedures and strategies for subsequent thinking in relation to similar tasks. In one activity designed for his

own English classes, for instance, Smagorinsky ("Bring the Courtroom") used his experience as jury foreman for a gang-related murder trial in Chicago and developed a court-case activity in which students acted as jurors to evaluate various testimonies and write arguments justifying a verdict of manslaughter, self-defense, or first-degree murder. He used this activity with both low-track and high-track sophomore English students and published the article in *The Social Studies*, where the editors also found it applicable to history classes. When he began teaching at the University of Oklahoma in 1990, this activity, by then on its way to publication, was used in first-year composition courses, creating arguments among students that teaching assistants said produced the greatest intensity and passion of the semester.

These principles are adaptable in that *procedures*, rather than strict rules, guide the action, providing a flexibility that matters when adapting practices to specific settings and groups of students. Although youth and adults might work in different manners (or might not) and come to different conclusions, the activities accommodate multiple ways of thinking and interacting that enable the needs of a task—in this case, to compare and contrast a set of common and familiar devices, participants' cell phones—to be possible to meet for most people regardless of differences in age, experience, knowledge, or other factors.

Cell Phone Activity

The second author, a former student of Hillocks in both his M.A.T. and Ph.D. programs of study, has long been a devotee and advocate of Hillocks's teaching methods (Smagorinsky, "Apology for Structured," *Teaching English through Principled Practice, Teaching English by Design, Teaching Dilemmas and Solutions*), with occasional disagreements about whether or not they constitute the field's principal "best practice" (Hillocks, "A Response"; Smagorinsky, "Is it Time"). In an effort to help make these methods more accessible to teachers who have little time to develop activities and prepare sets of materials outside class, he has tried to use "found" materials,

i.e., those that are handy in the classroom and do not require work at home to assemble.

The cell phone activity was developed by the second author spontaneously during a conference workshop for teachers of writing. Knowing that virtually everyone carries a cell phone in this era, he asked those in attendance to get into small groups and talk about their phones, arguing on behalf of one of the phones (usually, each person's own) as the best one. The groups *described* the features of their phones; *compared* their phones with one another's and *contrasted* them according to criteria they generated; used these criteria to construct *definitions* of what makes for a great cell phone; *argued* on behalf of their phones as the one they preferred to use; told *narratives* about occasions when their phones had come to their rescue at crucial times; and used their phones to *research* aspects of cell phone performance as a way to investigate their own beliefs and verify the claims of others.

In other words, although this activity was originally designed as a means of generating strategies for argumentation, it evolved into an activity that conceivably could prepare students for a variety of writing genres. Further, it demonstrated the hybridity of much thinking, rather than the strict division of thinking within the presumed constraints of genre. Informally, then, this activity had proven to be very effective in demonstrating to groups of teachers the elegance of a Hillocksian approach to teaching writing through task-based, strategy-promoting activities in which a teacher presides over learners as they engage with the demands of an appropriately-planned activity. In this article, we provide a demonstration of how the activity worked under more formal conditions, which we describe next.

We should note that this activity may not be practical in each and every classroom in the world. On the other hand, it might work in many. According to the Pew Research Center ("73% of Teens"), 73% of teens have a smartphone, and 15% have another sort of cell phone. Nearly 90% of youth thus are probably carrying a phone, although school rules vary considerably over students' access to them. If using cell phones invites the exposure of status differences

among students, then another item might be used instead. Smagorinsky et al. (*Dynamics of Writing Instruction*), for instance, describe an activity in which students remove their left shoes and place them in a pile from which another student must select a specific shoe, based on students' written descriptions of their own shoes. Such familiar items could conceivably be recruited for the sort of activity we next describe, although when personal belongings are involved, teachers always run the risk of exposing status differentials based on the students' access to merchandise. We illustrate this activity with cell phones because we have used them effectively ourselves, and because they have possibilities in many if not all classrooms.

Context

In the spring of 2016, first author Christina Berchini invited Smagorinsky to be a video conference visitor to her class at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire for elementary school teacher candidates [TCs]. The class focused on the teaching of writing and enrolled 11 TCs, 9 of whom were present the evening of the video conference. To make the visit more interactive and provide a concrete basis for discussion, Berchini ran the cell phone activity in the first portion of class, after which Smagorinsky arrived via video.

Berchini instructed the TCs to retrieve their cell phones and, in groups of three, to take notes on a single question: "Who has the best cell phone?" TCs examined each group member's cell phone in order to determine who had the "best" device, arguing their reasons for their nominations. Each group also assigned a note taker who recorded details of their conversations.

While TCs worked on the activity, Berchini took notes on her own observations. She recorded their questions and general notes on their attitude toward the activity (e.g., *"a lot of laughter and excited conversation"*). She also observed that the students did more than argue in their groups. For example, when she overheard a TC say, *"I feel like we're interviewing you!"* to one of her peers, Berchini recorded this statement and recognized the "interview" as a possible

genre and/or research tool to contribute to the post-activity discussion as part of the hybrid dimensions of generating an argument essay.

After approximately fifteen minutes, Berchini initiated a whole-class discussion about the experience of the activity and a review of what the TCs had recorded. They spent about fifteen minutes deconstructing the activity before the video conference visit in which they discussed the activity further with Smagorinsky. Although the purpose was to demonstrate the activity without necessarily producing writing based on their thinking, two students took advantage of an invitation to compose a paper based on their discussions, one argument and one narrative, the former of which we present shortly.

Small Group Discussions

First, we present the notes taken by one of the groups in the class that evening, provided to Berchini following the activity.

Emily, Rachel, Taylor

Rachel: *Well it's not mine, because I don't have an iPhone.*
Taylor: *Emily, what type of iPhone do you have?*
Emily: *I have an iPhone 5s.*
Taylor: *Well I have an iPhone 6, so I have the newest model of all three of us.*
We all have the same amount of GB.
Emily: *I have more GB available.*
Taylor: *I have had my phone for 10 months.*
Rachel: *I have had my phone for 2 years.*
Emily: *I have had mine for about 4 months.*
Taylor: *I have the carrier Sprint.*
Emily and Rachel: *Our carrier is Verizon.*
Emily: *I have 35 apps!*
Taylor: *I have 36 apps, and a life proof case.*
Rachel: *Too many apps to count.*
Our cameras are all good.
Conclusion: Taylor's phone is the best because she has the latest iPhone.

These cryptic notes cannot possibly account for the overall richness of the group's discussions, but do indicate the criteria that the TCs invoked to decide which phone was the best of the three for the purposes of generating material for an argument essay. They also reported engaging in a comparison and contrast of the three phones' features, told stories that illustrated the value of these features, described the features of the phones to provide material for their arguments and comparisons, worked to define the features of good phones, looked up information on the Internet via their phones to substantiate their points, and beyond our anticipation, interviewed one another about their phones. Even with the task of engaging in argument, then, the TCs went through processes germane to other common writing modes required in classrooms and on high-stakes writing assessments.

Student Writing

We next present an argument voluntarily written by Taylor to illustrate how the TCs built on their initial small-group discussion and the ensuing whole-class discussion to generate writing (Figure 1). Her argument begins with a narrative, includes definitional criteria on which she grounds her argument, describes features of the phone, reports on research that supports her views, and compares and contrasts her phone with other brands in order to address counter-arguments. She was not specifically instructed to include these elements, but drew on the content and process of her small-group discussion in order to make the best argument possible. In Hillocks's conception, this facet of small group work is central to his instructional approach, in which students learn to write by first talking about what they will write about as a way to generate content and a way to think about how to organize and represent their understanding of that content by employing procedures developed inductively through discussion.

My Cell Phone Is The Best Phone
By Taylor Draak

Every day after school I come home, have a snack, work on my homework, eat some dinner, and then watch some television before bed. During the commercial breaks of my favorite show all I hear is, "Introducing the new IPhone 6! Introducing the new Samsung Galaxy S7!" About every other commercial is introducing the new upgraded phone that everyone should get. There are a million different types of cell phones out there, different brands, different styles, and different functions and new ones are being announced every day. However, I think my cell phone is the best because it is the newest version available, it has lots of available storage for all my favorite games, contacts, music, and pictures, and it is an Iphone.

To begin, I have the new Iphone 6. It is the newest available version of the Iphone right now. That means that it has a ton of features that other phones don't have. There is also the Iphone 6 plus, but that phone is too big. It doesn't even fit in your pocket. My phone, the Iphone 6, is bigger than the previous Iphone, but still able to fit in my pocket. It is the perfect size, I can read all my texts, I can read books on it, I can easily view my pictures, and I can look at all my social media. All the other versions of the Iphone's are smaller and it can be difficult to read everything on your phone, but not with my phone. Since it is the newest version available, it has a lot of great features that the other phones don't have. For example, the camera is better, it has Itunes Radio, and the best part is it has night shift. After research, people found that the light your phone emits actually makes you more awake and makes it more difficult to fall asleep. I know that when I am laying in bed that is my time to catch up on all my social media and games. The Iphone 6 recognized this research and added a button that allows you to change the light your phone emits. The night shift light will not make you more awake, so this allows you to get a better night sleep. Having the newest version available has its perks. You get all the great features that the other phones do not have.

Secondly, I have a lot of storage on my phone. This enables me to have all my favorite games, contacts, pictures, music and apps. I have over three hundred contacts and I have 1,293 pictures. Along with that, I have forty two apps. I have all of that on my phone and still have over a gigabyte free. That means if there is something I want to add to my phone I will have no problem doing it. With all the available storage, I also am able to have music on my phone. It is so easy to put music onto an Iphone. Since Apple began with Ipods and using Itunes, many people have all their music already on Itunes. With an Iphone, it is so simple to transfer all your favorite music onto it. All you have to do is plug your phone into the computer and all your music will go onto your phone. That means you can listen to your music any time and any where, you especially can do this because with every Iphone you get a free pair of Apple headphones. It is so convenient to have everything you need on one device. I have my music, my pictures, my contacts, my social media, my books, my games, and my workouts all on my phone.

Lastly, my phone is an Iphone. Now you are probably thinking that is what everyone says. Everyone just says Iphones are the best because they are the current trend. However, the first phone I had was an Android. I had it for two years before I got my first Iphone. I strongly disliked my Android. It was confusing to operate and difficult to navigate around. It didn't have half of the features an Iphone has. I also did not like the size or shape of my Android. It was an odd shape and was awkward to hold up to my ear to talk or to conveniently slip into my pocket. I didn't realize how much I disliked my Android until I got my Iphone. The Iphone is extremely user friendly. It is so simple to use and all

> *of Apple products are set up the same. My mom, who is technology challenged, got an Iphone and even she can operate it with ease. It is so simple but yet can do so many great things.*
>
> *As you can see, there are so many reasons why my phone is the best. It is the newest version which means it has a ton of great features that other phones do not have. It also has a lot of storage which allows me to have everything I need on one device and lastly, since it is an Iphone, it is easy to use. After switching to the Iphone, I will never get another type of phone again. The Iphone 6 is the best phone and everytime I hear a commercial for it while I am watching my favorite shows, I just think about how lucky I am that I am able to have the best phone out there.*

Figure 1: Student Argument Essay Based on Cell Phone Activity

Interestingly, Taylor presented her argument in five paragraphs, perhaps drawing on prior knowledge from her own schooling. We assume that Taylor brought writing experience to the task from school and perhaps elsewhere. We are not claiming that the TCs had never written an argument before, and that this activity taught them everything they knew about how to argue, although they had never participated in a formal activity requiring this specific comparison before. It's hard, however, to disassociate the content of her essay from the discussion that preceded it, suggesting that the prewriting discussion had considerable influence on how she composed her essay and how she populated it with ideas.

We believe, then, that the activity gave her material to base her essay on that would not have been as accessible as it was without the activity, and made her thinking strategies overt and thus easily transferable from talking to writing. Even if a follow-up argumentative assignment might shift from the specific cell phone material to argumentation in relation to different material—and to Hillocks, this re-application of knowledge to new settings represents the degree to which students have learned procedural knowledge—the explication of the ways of thinking would be available, reducing the cognitive load and emotional duress of generating both material and strategies at the point of composition.

Reflections

Following the activity and video conference visit, Berchini asked the TCs to write reflections about what they had learned about teaching writing through the activity.

Familiarity with Materials

One benefit reported was that the familiar medium of the cell phone provided an accessible way of generating strategies for argumentation. Alyssa, for instance, wrote, *"I thought that this activity was clever in the way that it took a topic that most college students think of as a second nature, and almost tricked us into using various skills in order to decipher which phone was 'better.'"* The activity promoted learning writing procedures by beginning with familiar materials, allowing the discussion to focus more on the process of argumentation than the learning about the topic.

Generating Ideas Prior to Writing through Open-Ended, Free-Flowing Discussion

The opportunity to generate ideas prior to writing was appreciated in the reflections. Note that the approach of talking prior to writing is quite different from the orthodox view in composition that writing should begin with writing, as in Elbow's (*Writing without Teachers*) popular freewriting approach. Taylor wrote, *"Most of the time the hardest part is to come up with an idea, or sometimes even knowing you have to write about something can make it intimidating and difficult to come up with ideas. However, with this activity I was able to just get all my thoughts out without having the worry about having to write about it. This makes the writing process much less intimidating."* By lowering anxiety through the prewriting generation of ideas, the TCs were relieved of the typical problem student writers face of learning genre features and finding content while writing with only minimal preparation.

Detailed Exploration of Topic

The detailed interrogation of phone quality was evident in other comments from the reflections. Anna wrote, *"This activity made us*

use many descriptive terms/details with knowing how many GBs, storage space, apps, carriers, etc. In writing this helped us dig further into the idea rather than just scratching the surface. This activity also made it seem like an interview, because we would ask our fellow classmates questions about their phone and they would ask us questions, so this had led to lots of discussion and group collaboration. We had gotten more ideas through asking various questions that we might not have thought of by ourselves." This attention to detail contributed to the wealth of material that would become available to them in their subsequent writing.

Multiple Genres of Writing

TCs synthesized multiple genres in their discussion. Mercedes wrote that *"one of our group members brought up interviewing as a genre idea that came out of this activity due to us asking each other questions about each other's phones. Descriptive writing and realistic fiction come to mind also because the object in our activity is a real item, and some groups went into great detail to figure out whose was the best. Another genre that comes to mind is persuasive writing, to try to convince others that your phone is the best. Informative writing could also apply to this in regards to talking about one's phone and describing it and its features to an audience."* Her comments reinforce the idea that writing in a genre is almost always a multi-genre experience, with social genres such as interviewing very useful in generating ideas.

Inspiration for Future Teaching

As is common in teacher education classes, the TCs often had an eye toward how their participation in this activity would affect their teaching. Bailey wrote, *"As a future [elementary education] teacher, I immediately thought of ways that you could do this with younger students to inspire creative writing. For example, one way that students could look at this activity would be to pretend that they are the phones themselves. This would generate many ideas for a potential short story written by each of the students. Using the first-person point of view, students would be more apt to use detailed, descriptive, argumentative words in order to highlight and persuade others that they were the best version."* The TCs' reflections in general demonstrate how the activity both taught them strategies

for writing their own pieces, and taught them a good deal about how to teach writing to others.

A Shift from Objects to People and Social Issues

We have described activities involving cell phones and left shoes, which may inspire certain passions (at least, the phones) without inspiring social change. Hillocks's approach, however, is easily adaptable to writing arguments and writing in other genres to address people and their social milieux as well. Indeed, as Johannessen et al. (*Designing and Sequencing*) demonstrate, often writing about objects can teach procedural knowledge that can in turn be applied to the social world. The cell phone activity, in other words, can be a gateway or introduction to related writing that involves argumentation about social issues.

The jury trial activity (Smagorinsky, "Bring the Courtroom"), for instance, concerns the innocence or guilt of a murder suspect, albeit one constructed from a real situation and adapted for the fiction of the activity. We have used activities such as these to teach high school students procedures to engage them in substantive explorations of their worlds and examinations of their beliefs and identities as members of society. In Smagorinsky's own high school teaching, for instance, he adapted activities from Johannessen et al. (*Designing and Sequencing*) that require definitional thinking. This pedagogical book recommends beginning with relatively simple definitional tasks—defining "blizzard" and "middle age," categorizing groups of books and classifying groups of animals, and so on—and then moving into more complex definitional work such as classifying UFO sightings as being of the first, second, or third kind.

After using these activities to teach definitional procedures, Smagorinsky adapted the tasks to his thematic literature curriculum, for which students read a series of texts concerned with the notion of "success," with Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* the central reading. Using the procedural knowledge learned through the initial activities, each student composed an extended definition of success, with examples and counter-examples coming from both literature and the students' own life experiences. These essays

tended to be both very personal and indebted to the class's study of Miller's play as the students engaged with the notion of what sort of person might be considered successful: the winning coach who cheats? the unknown homemaker whose life is devoted to nurturing children? the high earners who hate their jobs? the low-wage earners who are happily employed? and many other complex sorts of lives. With no clear answer to the success of each type of person considered, students construct their own vision of a successful life, in turn creating a template to guide their own goal-setting and anticipated life trajectories.

Other adaptations to social issues are possible with other genres. After learning argumentation via the cell phone activity, for instance, students could re-apply the procedures to argumentative occasions looking at school life: the fairness of various rules, the relative power that some groups hold over others, the manner in which school dances are held, different ways in which the school's appearance might be improved, the decision-making that affects cafeteria choices for student dining, and all manner of other concerns. As with the cell phone activity, the students' investigations could involve comparing and contrasting, argumentation, definitional work, narrative illustration, interviewing and other forms of research, and any other form of inquiry that would strengthen their arguments.

These activities could work well in conjunction with other social forms of learning. Students could work in peer groups to critique one another's arguments for soundness and persuasiveness, engage in multiple rounds of drafting, and find publication opportunities for their final products, which themselves might become the source for further discussion, feedback, and response. Beginning with objects, then, helps students to learn procedural knowledge with relatively unambiguous materials before applying them to the more complex world of people, simplifying the task initially and giving students the means through which to express their ideas in, first, relatively stable tasks, and ultimately in the increasingly sophisticated demands of writing about the protean social worlds they occupy.

Conclusion

This article has provided a demonstration of how George Hillocks's principles of writing practice may be reduced in complexity and labor intensiveness through the use of the cell phone. This ubiquitous device can, in many school contexts, make Hillocks's labor-intensive approach relatively easy to implement by using everyday materials. This type of writing instruction has been carried out by people influenced by Hillocks for about a half-century now, mostly with public school students from a wide range of demographic groups, and quite recently adapted by brand-new teachers with little background in writing to such tasks as writing realistic fiction (e.g., Parenti, "Writing Realistic Fiction"). We hope that this demonstration encourages more teachers to attempt teaching through a method that we believe has great potential for helping student writers generate and refine their ideas and express them clearly in their writing. Although we have demonstrated it here with college students in an elementary school teacher education program, there is considerable evidence from both the publications about the method and teachers' testimonials from using them to suggest that this activity could easily be adapted to classroom settings to give students what Hillocks (*Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*) called the "gateway" knowledge they need to take on less familiar material using similar procedures of inquiry and composition.

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