Digital Participation and Risk Contexts in Journalism Education

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Article

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Abstract
High school journalism programs nurture student voice, information literacy, and collaboration. Journalism programs do not merely produce commodities; they help students constitute a public within a school community. When publishing online, student journalists navigate relationships behind the scenes with stakeholders, including peers, adults, and the institution. Publishing can be fraught with hesitation and fear of consequences for speaking out. Because of this implication, journalism programs can serve as "potentially valuable yet imperfect" settings for the amplification of student voice and civic development, but can also unduly limit students' self-expression, especially for girls (Bobkowski & Belmas, 2017). What might be the affordances and constraints of digital participation in a high school journalism program? How might youth journalists and other participants navigate exigencies of publishing online in this context? We, the head editors and adviser, use grounded theory to examine processes and develop pragmatic knowledge (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Through a mix of prompts, group interviews, and participant observation, we develop a case study that demonstrates implications for 'risk context,' or the total situation of an actor's vulnerability brought on by digital participation in publishing online. We describe what digital participation is good for, and for whom, thus further theorizing relationships between agency and co-production.

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Youth Digital Participation: Opportunities, Challenges, Contexts, and What's at Stake" edited by Neta Kligler-Vilenchik (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel) and Ioana Literat (Teachers College, Columbia University, USA).

1. Introduction

Schools should nurture environments for student media production that encourage free speech and civic development, especially to achieve their missions and help students "find their role in modern society and hear a call to serve others" (Salkin, 2020, p. 2). Journalism programs are often lauded for their academic and civic outcomes, and also show a correlation with job market success (Becker, Han, Wilcox, & Vlad, 2014).

However, youth participation with the news is risky, especially in digital contexts. Youth struggle online when confronting misinformation (Leeder, 2019), outrage language (Middaugh, 2019), and hyper-partisanship (Kahne

& Bowyer, 2017). Trust in media is low and polarized on a partisan basis (Jurkowitz, Mitchell, Shearer, & Walker, 2020) and youth tend to trust family over traditional news sources (Robb, 2017). While the field of media literacy education continues to grow, educators report gaps in training and funding (NAMLE, 2019).

Journalism education shows promise for media literacy and overcoming participation gaps in digital contexts. However, it is risky, too. As students navigate potential roles in society and look to become journalists, they not only learn a journalistic method to gather information, vet sources, and develop an engaging news product; they also learn to mitigate risk as they navigate relationships with their peers and adults who wield power in their lives

(Cybart-Persenaire & Literat, 2018). Journalism programs can serve as "potentially valuable yet imperfect" settings for the amplification of student voice and civic development, but can also unduly limit students' self-expression, especially for girls (Bobkowski & Belmas, 2017).

Literature suggests that youth participation in journalism leads to desirable academic outcomes; participants tend to score higher on standardized reading and writing assessments (Dvorak, Lain, & Dickson, 1994). While there are more complicated and desirable outcomes than standardized test performance, namely civic participation and democratic education, participation in journalism programs is often lauded for what it yields (Dvorak, Bowen, & Choi, 2009; Dvorak & Choi, 2009; Morgan & Dvorak, 1994). Bobkowski, Cavanah, and Miller (2017) cite this research in work that parses whether journalism produces stronger students or whether stronger students (especially English writers) opt into programs. They find that enrollment and participation are affected by factors such as English self-efficacy, English achievement, overall involvement in school, gender, and race and ethnicity, all before the students choose to join the newsroom. More specifically, they find that academically oriented and confident writers tend to choose to participate. Girls are often overrepresented in journalism programs, as well as white students (Bobkowski et al., 2017).

By creating avenues for voice (and thereby expression of affiliation and belonging), high school journalism programs can socialize into civic action and help develop a collective sensibility (Clark & Monserrate, 2011). Furthermore, 'digital engagement literacies' such as the ability to create, comment on, and distribute digital media can foster youth participatory political action online (Kahne & Bowyer, 2019). When student journalists publish online, they develop what the National Writing Project calls 'digital writing,' or, "compositions created with, and oftentimes for reading or viewing on, a computer or other device that is connected to the Internet" (DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl, & Hicks, 2010, p. 7). Digital writing is open to public scrutiny, encourages youth digital participation, and can facilitate 'participatory culture' (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006). Skills associated with participatory culture include: play, performance, simulation, appropriation, multitasking, distributed cognition, collective intelligence, judgment, transmedia navigation, networking, negotiation, and visualization (Jenkins et al., 2006).

While these skills seem valuable and the outcomes of digital writing may be celebrated, more attention needs to be paid to nuances and the quality of digital participation in these contexts. Here we ask: What are the affordances and constraints of digital participation in a high school journalism program? How might youth journalists and other participants navigate the exigencies of publishing online in this context?

By understanding youth digital participation in a private high school journalism program, we can develop a better understanding of youths' qualities of experience as they become newsmakers. This research can impact other settings that may be developing or considering developing online journalism programs. It can also inform approaches to collaborative, experiential and project-based learning, as well as digital engagement literacies and digital writing.

2. Methodology

We work with the *Webb Canyon Chronicle*, a student-led digital publication of The Webb Schools—a boarding high school in southern California serving students who live on campus and day students who commute to school. The Webb Schools employ a coordinate model, or two schools on one campus: Vivian Webb School for girls and Webb School of California for boys. While journalism includes participants from both schools, Vivian Webb School students have served as head editors more than their counterparts and constitute the majority of participants in the program.

The *Webb Canyon Chronicle* is produced as part of three for-credit electives in the humanities department: Journalism, Honors Journalism, and Advanced Studies Modern Media. Students can begin as sophomores and may join any time after. Journalism participants are staff writers and contribute content to the publication. Honors Journalism participants contribute content and serve as editors. Advanced Studies Modern Media participants contribute content, serve as editors, and develop a long-form piece of journalism. All courses meet in the middle of Fawcett Library. Currently 22 students are enrolled, which is more than the typical number of students in a class at Webb. The majority of students identify as Asian (n = 11), followed by Hispanic/Latin (n = 4), White (n = 3), Black (n = 3), and Middle Eastern (n = 1). The journalists' ages range between 15 and 18 years old. All 22 members of the journalism program were participants in our study, including four co-authors of this article. To protect privacy, we use pseudonyms for all participants.

During the semester, four senior journalists and their adviser ran a journalism program and simultaneously gathered data to consider the 'aims, actors, context, and intensities' of it (Literat, Kligler-Vilenchik, Brough, & Blum-Ross, 2018). We met during class time or during office hours to prep, plan, and strategize. It was difficult to meet consistently and run the publication at the same time; our entire class typically meets twice a week. Our meetings allowed us to check-in, consider next steps, and reflect on youth digital participation. We collected data through a mix of prompts, group interviews, and participant observation to develop a case study that demonstrates implications about what digital participation is good for, and for whom—further theorizing relationships between agency and co-production. The senior journalists completed prompts like the rest of the participants. The prompts were embedded as goal-setting elements or reflections during class instruction. The se-

nior journalists also led group interviews. They guided and were impacted by the dialogues, as interviews can be mutually constitutive (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009); their positionality as youth and their experience with the entirety of the program afforded them insights unavailable to novices and adults.

We collaborated to execute this research. We started in the summer before the fall semester by reading literature and developing research questions. Often, the adviser played a lead role in sharing academic literature, writing initial drafts, and coordinating the group's work, while the student journalists read literature, developed prompts, analyzed data, and edited drafts. Throughout the entire process, the adviser acted as a guide to bring the youth researchers into academic research practices while maintaining avenues for them to substantially contribute and shape the study.

Reflecting on our observations and experience led us to choose data-gathering strategies as we went along. For example, early in our collection, we noticed 'risk' emerging as a theme. Returning journalists noted in goal-setting exercises at the beginning of the year that they wanted to branch out and take risks with coverage, ideas, and tech skills. At the beginning of pitch-to-publication cycles during the semester, we filled out circles of risk (low, medium, and high) as suggested by Rachel Simmons (2018) to reflect and set goals. Participants often drew the circles; the adviser designed a risk-circle worksheet at the end of the semester (see Figure 1). To complete the exercise, journalists identified their 'wheelhouse' or something that is comfortable for them to do

and noted it in the innermost (low) circle. They chose something representing more of a 'stretch,' but not entirely uncomfortable and filled in the middle (medium) circle. Finally, they chose something in the program that represented a major, uncomfortable risk and wrote it in the outermost (high) circle.

We also noticed that 'affect' emerged as a theme. While the publication had much to celebrate in terms of achievement and growth, many participants felt upset. To consider the quality of experience in digital participation, our journalists mapped their feelings using an affect grid, noting arousal and pleasantness of feeling (Russell, Weiss, & Mendelsohn, 1989). At the beginning of each class in December, journalists took a few minutes to consider their overall feelings and feelings about their work in the course and graphed it on a handout provided by the adviser (see Figure 2).

The risk circles and affect grids were sources of data and were part of the data analysis. Once the semester ended, we transcribed interviews and combed through our data. To analyze it, we applied the Literat et al. (2018) 'aims, actors, context, and intensities' framework. The bulk of this work occurred during the winter break. As the adviser wrote, the co-authors contributed feedback. We reflected on some texts we read together, like *The Elements of Journalism*, strategized about writing, and ran our draft through a process like the one we use in class.

To answer our research questions, we applied grounded theory, a qualitative research approach that aims to explain a process through a systematic analysis
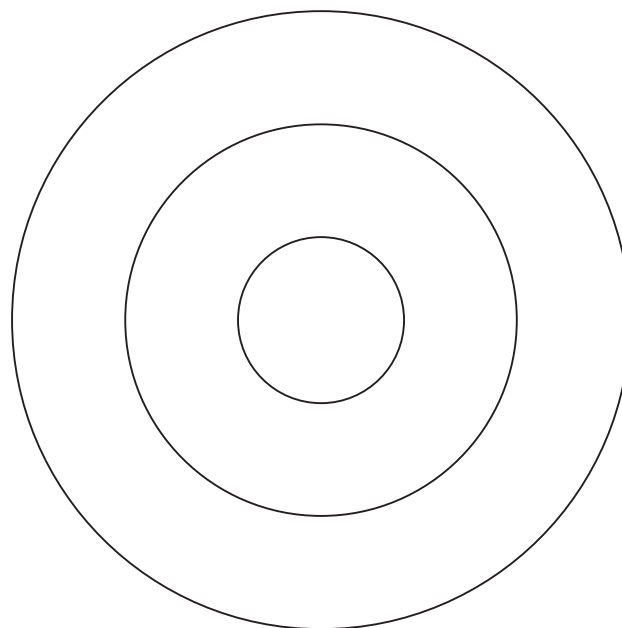
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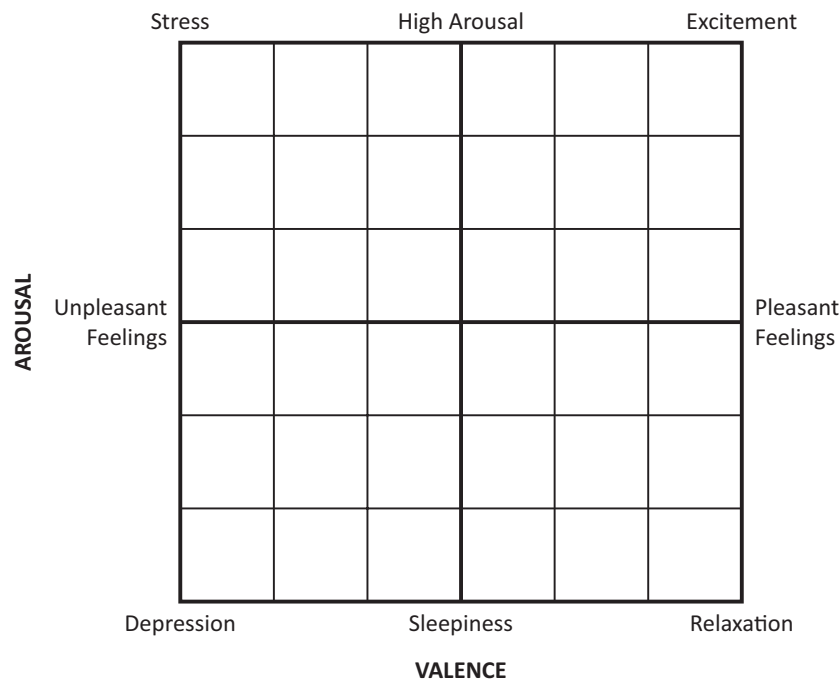
Figure 1. Risk-circle worksheet.

Figure 2. Affect grid worksheet.

of data (Lingard, Albert, & Levinson, 2008). Instead of proving a preconceived hypothesis, higher levels of understanding are developed only after careful analysis of data. Grounded theory has four key properties: It closely fits the field being studied; it can be readily understandable by lay practitioners in the field; it is general enough to apply to other contexts in the field; and it must allow the user some control over "the structure and process of daily situations as they change through time" (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). In this way, grounded theory is pragmatic. As a research team of one adult and four teens, grounded theory allowed us to work together, chart a course for our pedagogy, improve our journalism program, and work to develop a practical theory for others.

3. Findings

While grounded theory was our approach to data analysis, the Literat et al. (2018) framework provided a way to structure our data analysis process and organize our emergent findings. It was a useful tool as we pursued our research question because it is designed to elicit the nuances of digital participation. It helped us look frankly at our work in a systematic way and determine the potential significance of our data. It was only after performing this analysis that we clearly identified affordances and constraints of digital participation in our program.

Building a program that emphasizes digital participation takes time and intentionality. The publication has been produced and housed entirely online since 2018. The gradual move from print to digital took several years and was not immediately embraced. Students expressed a sense of loss when the publication moved online, especially when preparing for our special Senior Issue, our

only full-color edition. They missed the tangible product and asked, "Why won't we get what everyone else got?" The current group of head editors led the transition to digital and established new protocols, policies, and workflows.

Using the Literat et al. (2018) framework allowed us to step out of this work and systematically reflect on the journalists' quality of experience.

The information in Table 1 matters. If we pride ourselves in being a student-run publication, we need to know how students opt-in and develop maximalist intensities. We should understand barriers that may inhibit digital participation. We should understand our formal, institutional context and how to operate effectively within it to maximize the benefits of participation. We should consider the balance we strike between individual and collectivist aims, as well as how we might foster an inclusive and diverse program. Understanding our aims, actors, contexts, and intensities helped us identify the multiple affordances and challenges in digital participation.

Our data analysis pointed to the following affordances of the digital journalism program:

- A sense of belonging to both a publishing team and to the institution;
- A sense of pride in seeing digital writing circulate and garner public attention;
- A sense of satisfaction in learning how to ethically use digital tools effectively;
- A sense of efficacy in mobilizing voice on meaningful platforms of communication;
- A sense of passion and purpose in developing civic identities and civic agency.

Table 1. Aims, actors, contexts, intensities.

	Dimensions		*Webb Canyon Chronicle*
Aims	Individualist	Collectivist	Hybrid of individual and collectivist aims, journalists pursue personal and publication goals.
	Voice	Instrumental	Mission aims to amplify student voice; some pieces aim to achieve instrumental changes.
	Process-focused	Product-focused	Both, journalists create news products in a collaborative, peer-editing process.
Actors	Individual	Group/Collectives	Emphasis on teamwork and collaboration, although students build individual publishing records and earn individual grades.
	Exclusive/Homogenous	Inclusive/Diverse	Staff is more diverse than literature suggests, although more girls participate and many journalists are high-achieving, academically oriented students.
Contexts	Formal/Institutional	Informal/Dispersed	Wholly formal and institutional, publication is created in electives taken for credit.
	Bottom-up	Top-down	Mix, while the publication exists within a hierarchy at the school and employs a hierarchy within the class structure, there are opportunities for all journalists to direct the publication.
Intensities	Executory participation	Structural participation	Mostly structural, journalists determine scope and goals of the publication with support from adviser. Some jobs are executory, especially for staff writers, but there is great latitude to define one's focus.
	Minimalist intensities	Maximalist intensities	Mostly maximalist, especially as students gain responsibility and shape the program. Some participants contribute to the program but do so minimally.

We also identified the following constraints:

- Greater vulnerability to attack, online trolling, and criticism;
- Stress when overwhelmed with work in and out of the journalism course;
- Interpersonal strife as student journalists adopt and adapt to their roles in collaboration;
- Risk of both censorship and self-censorship.

The affordances and constraints are detailed in the next section, including some examples from our data to emphasize our context and practice.

3.1. Affordances

3.1.1. A Sense of Belonging to Both a Publishing Team and to the Institution

Our publication operates in a formal/institutional context, as opposed to an informal/dispersed context. The courses are all for-credit and the budget is under the humanities department. The *Webb Canyon Chronicle* is listed on the school's website under potential leadership

opportunities for students and the adviser is a full-time faculty member. The *Webb Canyon Chronicle* is wholly a part of The Webb Schools. The close relationship can help students feel a sense of belonging at school and research shows that members of journalism programs are more likely to demonstrate an attachment to school than non-participants (Clark & Monserrate, 2011; Dvorak et al., 1994).

Editors noted this closeness in an Editorial against publishing anonymously online, entitled, "Why We Write Our Names Alongside Our Work":

As a student news site, we are supported by the community around us. We are in a position to encourage dialogue while maintaining the support of our adviser, administration, and other members of the Webb community. However, we still carry the responsibility to examine the issues faced among our students. The obligation of informing readers is always the top priority of the *Webb Canyon Chronicle*. By following these steps, we are not only presenting the community, but we are serving to create it. (Chen, Cook, Luna, & Wuu, 2018)

In risk-circle exercises, journalists identified provoking discussion and amplifying student voice as desirable 'medium' to 'high' risk. We sometimes receive criticism from students about whether or not the publication lives up to its mission to foster student voice. Online journalism involves uses of technology that are sanctioned by the school. In some ways, this status gives the journalists visibility and clout, but it also serves to make students suspicious of the program as a hub for youth culture. We are making incremental and purposeful progress at building trust, relationships, and esteem to operate effectively throughout the school's power structures.

As such, our journalists also feel attachment to their peers. A common theme in editors' goals this year was to build and maintain a cohesive team. For example:

> Julia: As Copy Editor, I want to ensure that our staff is reporting accurate information in the clearest way possible. I would like to stay on top of my own articles as well as be proactive in my editing responsibilities so that the publication process flows as smoothly as possible for everyone on the team.

Our teamwork encourages bonding between the two schools and grade levels. Senior members of the publication interact extensively with underclassmen and get to know them well. One infrequently finds sophomores and seniors in class together at our school; identity by grade level is prevalent throughout Webb. While students feel a strong bond with their graduating class, sometimes journalists also refer to the publication as a 'family.' Past head editors talked about the benefits of developing working relationships with "people you don't hang out with on the daily."

3.1.2. A Sense of Pride in Seeing Digital Writing Circulate and Garner Public Attention

Across the board, journalists reported enjoying the circulation of their work. Attention from an audience is one of risk's rewards. Students consider their publishing record as an indicator of success. That is, they care about how often they are able to complete the publishing cycle; they like to see their work 'out there.' The publishing records on staff pages indicate depth and breadth of digital participation and allow the audience to seek out particular journalists' digital writing.

> Sonni: I feel most like a journalist when my article is published and I can see other people reading it and actually making an impact on their lives, whether it be telling them something they didn't know before or inspiring them to try something new.

In risk-circle exercises, journalists regularly cite breadth in publishing as a significant risk. For example, writing a sports article may seem risky because journalists may feel like they do not understand a sport well enough to write about it. Journalists strive to build authority and hope to use their writing to build our audience.

> Cass: I want to release articles that grasp people's attention, which for me is more politically based. I think if the Webb Canyon Chronicle can spread its base, as in the audience, and draw to what a lot of people want to hear/or read about then it can be a successful year.

Our online platform affords access to analytics, which reveal our audience size, when users access the site, which articles they access, and how they access it. We can see how our digital writing circulates as head editors have access to the analytics and want to grow our audience. One head editor switched our Instagram to a business account, allowing her access to analytics, and she was impressed by the number of people that accessed the website from Instagram. Head editors notice spikes in readership, often during campus-focused special coverage.

Finally, our team has begun to incorporate annual feedback and critiques from professional organizations. The critiques mainly focus on our execution, output, and appearance. Instrumental aims include getting better adjudications each year. This past year we earned a 'First Class' rating from the National Scholastic Press Association and moved from a 'Silver' to 'Gold' rating with the Columbia Scholastic Press Association. The honorifics are motivating and help us to vouch for the value of our publication around school, like participating on a championship athletic team. The critiques rate our products and motivate our process. Getting professional advice from career experts allows the editorial team to focus goals and priorities. Head editors review the feedback and care about the points we earn, as well as the comments the judges leave for the publication.

3.1.3. A Sense of Satisfaction in Learning How to Ethically Use Digital Tools Effectively

Digital participation allows modal diversity and increased interactivity compared to print. Technology also offers channels to connect journalists with their audience. That is, technology is not an aim in itself; it serves to extend journalists' reach. In risk-circle exercises, students often identify new modes of communication (like podcasts and video) as opportunities to branch out and take risks. For example, Sonni encouraged our team's use of hyperlinks, a feature that helps emphasize what she calls 'diversity in format.' Hyperlinks distinguish our web platform from the previous 'flat narratives' that we used to produce in print (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 116). Hyperlinks afford journalists attribution tools that allow the audience to explore and learn more and, more importantly, they help weave the website onto itself and show what we have covered in the past.

Sometimes, novice students use technology to extend their capabilities:

Sasha: Sometimes, I feel kind of bad just walking up to especially like a senior when they're very busy, and interviewing them because they seem kind of like, [sucks teeth] hard-to-talk-to, so I've realized that emailing people is the way to go, because it kind of puts this, not a barrier, but a protective barrier between you and them and then they kind of have to respond to your emails.

In this example, technology acts as a bridge and a shield. That is, email not only provides a safe distance from an interviewee but also serves to truncate a social barrier. A potentially intimidating senior does not seem as daunting through a screen. While we prefer face-to-face interviews, email and even texting can be a valuable tool when gathering information; they truncate barriers and extend one's reach.

Technology permeates all aspects of the publication process and successful digital participation in the program requires access to a laptop, cellphone, and internet. The school provides internet access, some laptops, as well as individual access to the Adobe Creative Cloud. The library provides access to microphones, camera, green screen and other tools for publishing. The website serves as a public-facing artifact documenting the outcome of each year's digital participation. Each year's folder on the Google Drive represents a sandbox of activity. Each are testaments to the continuity and change brought by structural digital participation.

3.1.4. A Sense of Efficacy in Mobilizing Voice on Meaningful Platforms of Communication

Connection with the Webb community is a core priority for our publication. Last year, the head editors developed a mission: "The *Webb Canyon Chronicle* strives to foster student voice. We investigate and report to impact the reader personally and provoke discussion. Our publication promotes the diversity of backgrounds, interests, and goals of the Webb community."

Journalists feel proud of work that amplifies their own voice. In the first semester, international political protests inspired several pieces that sparked dialogue and developed an exchange of several articles with different points of view:

Luke: I like the [international political protests] article I did because, yeah, there was a lot of controversy in it, and it took a while to get through, and it was really long-

Student: HA!

Luke: [inaudible] finally got it done. It was something that I kind of stepped out of my comfort zone to do, because I'm not usually into politics but I just wanted to write about it.

Luke's opinion piece described the international situation from a local resident's point of view to inform our audience about perspectives they might not have considered, challenging the lens of western media coverage. National identity was a major motivator and point of contention during the competing international political protests opinion pieces. By creating avenues for voice (and thereby expression of affiliation and belonging), high school journalism programs can socialize into civic action and help develop a collective sensibility (Clark & Monserrate, 2011).

Fostering student voice can also mean amplifying others' points of view:

Eva: I feel most like a journalist when I'm out there interviewing people for my pieces because when we're doing field research you actually feel like you're doing stuff, with your press pass and stuff like that. It's like very formal and I feel like I'm an adult journalist interviewing people for like the *New York Times*....We're actually doing something that's useful and not just for my personal purposes and also for the purpose of other people, as well, because I'm actually projecting the voice of other people.

In risk-circle exercises, journalists cite expanding outside of their immediate social group and representing voices they might not recognize otherwise as 'medium' to 'high' risk.

3.1.5. A Sense of Passion and Purpose in Developing Civic Identities and Civic Agency

Our publishing process is open, and the experiential nature of the newsroom challenges journalists to make their path to publishing. While many articles stem from aims of self-expression and critique, Zuckerman (2014) suggests voice can lead to instrumental forms of civics. He states that voice can foster affiliation, make it easier to talk about controversial issues, set an agenda, and build rallying points around a common narrative. Many journalists advocate for change:

Cass: I think my best piece was the [worldwide student activism] article, the first one I did by myself. Because it came out during the time that everything was going on, and I was also very passionate about it. It is a topic I really like to talk about and learn about. And so, a lot of people actually were active about it. I don't know. It was very fun to interview those students that took place in the [worldwide student activism].

Outside of class, Cass cultivates an activist identity. He attended the Student Diversity Leadership Conference, organized a club called Empowering Student Voices Initiative, and helped the library organize events for the Black Student Union. In risk-circle exercises, Cass identifies writing about school events as 'low-risk,' tackling so-

cial issues in media and entertainment as 'medium-risk,' and addressing activism issues as 'high-risk'.

Journalists regularly cite open-ended fieldwork as exciting, but as Autumn noted, once one gets to writing an article, it can feel like "just another assignment." In interviews, journalists feel proud when they accomplish work they feel passionate about. The ability to pitch and choose the path, the satisfaction of experiencing power in interviews and information gathering, and the pride in seeing work out in public having an impact: These all help stoke journalists' intensity of participation.

3.2. Constraints

3.2.1. Greater Vulnerability to Attack, Online Trolling, and Criticism

For some journalists, digital participation can be fraught. For example, women journalists frequently get attacked on Twitter (Amnesty International, 2018). Last year, a rash of anonymous Instagram accounts popped up around our school, and one specifically targeted *Webb Canyon Chronicle*, criticizing its work, relevance, and ability to speak out at school. It led the editorial team to produce an editorial, "Why We Write Our Names Alongside Our Work":

> As journalists, we accept that our words and opinions have consequences. If a writer is ethical, then they are presenting information that is honest, accurate, and fair. Once these ethical criteria are met, then that individual should have the moral courage to challenge pre-existing ideas. (Chen et al., 2018)

Some fear the impact of their writing. In risk circle exercises, journalists regularly cite opinion pieces and critical stories as having 'medium' to 'high' risk. The focus on impact emphasizes the reciprocal, hybrid relationship between product and process. While pitching, drafting, revising, and publishing are important processes for our course, the articles' impacts also affect the quality of digital participation. While some students welcome criticism, journalists also express fear of negative consequences:

> Eva: My best piece this semester is definitely the [popular rom-com blockbuster] opinion article that I wrote….But I was really scared to project it because people really like this movie, right, so I was like I shouldn't criticize it. So, then I finally got the courage to voice my opinion about how it's actually not doing what it's supposed to do, like the diversity and stuff like that so I feel really proud sharing my opinion. I'm also really happy that people agreed with my view, too, because basically I'm not alone in my opinions.

Anticipating challenges and mitigating vulnerability were common themes in interviews. When we encounter challenges, our mission has been helpful to remind us of our common aim. For example, when an opinion piece about the international political protests received considerable blow-back from students and even inflamed tensions within our staff, we had to pause and invoke our mission, and consider how we could build discussion after provoking angry responses. Since digital participation extends journalists' reach, it also opens them up to new vulnerabilities. In this case, our mission helped journalists stand their ground and mitigate the impact of peer criticism and, as such, the head editors sifted through the article's comments and approved those that met our policies for publication.

3.2.2. Stress When Overwhelmed with Work in and Out of the Journalism Course

A digital workflow has allowed us to significantly increase the pace of reporting and the rate of publishing. Moving to online publication allows much more frequent publishing than in print: multiple times per week compared to once every two months. Managing the overall workload can be challenging. In this way, digital participation can overwhelm emergent journalists as they develop skills to cope successfully. Advisers and editors need to be aware of the amount of rolling demands put on all participants as the program is an elective in the midst of a rigorous, college preparatory program. Not only do all of our journalists have many other academic commitments, they also strive to balance multiple roles in the campus community (leadership, athletics, etc.):

> Ben: I think the teamwork aspect can be complicated because you need to rely on other people to get your stuff published. And sometimes you get caught up in other work, so sometimes you know, your thing won't get published or you can't help someone else because you have other work. I'd say that's the most challenging aspect.

The school is a resource-rich environment, although some students cite computer issues and cell phone glitches for loss of data and incomplete work. This can cause significant stress for students, especially when workflows are tightly interconnected and there is pressure not to 'drop the ball.'

Finally, other aspects of life are not left behind when journalists enter the newsroom. For example, most seniors reported high levels of stress throughout the semester. In reflections afterwards, they explained that early decisions were due in from colleges; based on results, affect tended to shift negatively after a rejection and positively after getting accepted.

3.2.3. Interpersonal Strife as Student Journalists Adopt and Adapt to Their Roles in Collaboration

Online interactions can increase the amplitude of interpersonal conflict within the journalism team and the

school community. Students reported high levels of stress during interpersonal conflict with other journalists. While digital participation may allow speedy communication on the internet, the tools themselves do not guarantee successful exchanges:

> Sonni: I think one challenge that I have faced over the past three years was realizing that journalism is all about working as a team….I remember when I was a sophomore, I would get annoyed when my editors wouldn't edit them in time. Then I learned to-
>
> Group: [laughter].
>
> Sonni: I learned to be patient and I learned to respect people. I learned to do my work but then if people weren't able to finish it then I wouldn't blame myself, I wouldn't blame them, I would just be like, "Oh. It's out of my control." And just realizing that is the key to success, because your best work happens when you work as a team.
>
> Group: [laughter].

We give feedback and edit in Google Docs and manage our workflow in a shared folder on Google Drive. Journalists take time to adapt to these platforms and use them according to publication policies, but problems in collaboration online always arise. For example, sometimes journalists resolve comments without making the required edits, a common problem we noted. However, during face-to-face sessions, advice is more likely to be taken.

For example, a staff writer and an editor reported very negative feelings and high arousal during problems with editing online. The editor did not edit the staff writer's work for eight days (our policy is 48 hours) and the staff writer did not accept the copy editor's corrections. While each member reported high stress during the process, both reported increasingly positive feelings and lower arousal once the publishing process was completed. Afterwards, more intentionality was put into having journalists conference in class and talk about edits face-to-face more often, which seemed to help alleviate issues.

Students reported high levels of stress during interpersonal conflict with other students outside of our program, in both online and face-to-face contexts. The competing international political protests pieces tested our ability to maintain collegiality; we were reminded that digital participation alone is not a panacea. In response to our first opinion piece about the conflict, some students became livid and blasted vitriolic reactions beyond the official channels of our program, into direct messages to personal social media accounts and on a school-wide online message board in Outlook (STAS, or 'Students To All Students'). Our policies and procedures helped guide responses to comments and critiques within our official channels, as well as how to go about working with students and adults around the school. Much of the most effective follow-up occurred in face-to-face settings to help redirect and address the anger online.

Sonni cites a maxim in *The Elements of Journalism*, "The ultimate goal of newsroom diversity is to create an intellectually mixed environment where everyone holds firm to the idea of journalistic independence" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 164). Our mission, protocols, and policies help us maintain this environment, online and offline, especially as we strive to promote digital civility. To this end, we are adapting a staff manual from the Archer School for Girls' journalism program to delineate responsibility and provide best practices. In our hierarchical structure, there are opportunities to speak up, speak out, and shape the program. Much of this work happens in collaboration, sometimes students 'geek out' (Ito, 2010) and radically impact the program. The online dimension of our work complicates maintaining collaboration and managing conflict as students opt-in and become journalists.

3.2.4. Risk of Both Censorship and Self-Censorship

Starting conversations requires courage, especially online. While it may be hard to control audience responses, journalists should be given space to hone their journalistic skills and feel confident as they step into the public arena:

> Sonni: I want to challenge myself this year to take more risks in my work. I realize that I've spent much of the past two years covering school-wide events and reporting how impactful they can be to the Webb community. While this is great and I genuinely enjoy showing up/documenting people's experiences, I want to try my best this year to write more articles that provoke discussion amongst students—not only ones that help the school market itself. I want to be a conversation starter.

Students might step away from taking risks and starting conversations online because of their own anticipation of the institution's response; they may fear that they will lose face with peers and/or adults. Journalism challenges students to assert agency with authorities, thereby fostering belonging and civic identities (Clark & Monserrate, 2011). Care needs to be taken by advisers and administrators to encourage journalists' participation and avoid censorship (Bobkowski & Belmas, 2017; Taylor, 2019). While students negotiate hierarchies and relationships with peers and adults, journalism should promote a platform for free speech and agency.

As noted in the affordances, participation in journalism can help students feel a sense of belonging at school. However, closeness to school can also inhibit participation:

Autumn: What is the biggest challenge of being a journalist? I think for me, is the rules and regulations we have to abide by, because we're Webb students and we're high school students first and foremost. Because last year, I wanted to write a piece about HCs [Honor Cabinet/Committee, the deliberative student bodies that hear Honor Code violation cases] and maybe write about my own personal experience…but I wasn't allowed to do that.

While student publications show restraint about publishing details of a disciplinary case (Taylor, 2019), prior review, prior restraint, and self-censorship are serious issues for student publications. By connecting to the institution's mission, exercising ethical care, and knowing their rights, programs can build trust and advocate for covering controversial topics (K. Taylor, personal communication, August, 2019). Due to the public nature of online platforms, which are significantly more accessible than print editions that circulate in a more limited capacity, digital participation requires significant institutional trust in emergent journalists.

4. Discussion: Managing Risk Contexts in Youth Digital Journalism

Throughout our analysis, the theme of 'risk' kept recurring. It led us to consider the 'risk context' of digital participation in a high school journalism program that publishes solely online. That is, our risk context is the total situation of an actor's vulnerability brought on by digital participation. Focusing on risk allows us to address the fact that not all digital participation is inherently positive and it also allows us to encourage healthy risk-taking. By knowing more about risk context, journalists, editors, advisers, and administrators can work to maximize the affordances of digital participation and mitigate the constraints.

Writing coaches and humanities educators may encourage students to take risks with their writing, perhaps encouraging intellectual risks or adventurous leaps in thought to achieve incisive commentary. Insofar, as students do digital writing and open themselves to public scrutiny, the concept of risk grows even broader. As in our case, students might fear blowback from expression that contradicts conventional wisdom or popular opinion. Students might actually incur criticism, even contempt, from speaking up in public. Students may even find themselves on the receiving end of anonymous online attacks, through no fault of their own, simply because of their digital participation in public on a student news platform.

Understanding risk context does not mean being risk-averse or eliminating risk from the newsroom. In fact, it could help all actors manage and take healthy risks. In the case of the *Webb Canyon Chronicle*, we note three areas where we can work to manage risk context: reputation, time and space, and responsive relationships.

4.1. Reputation

Often, novice journalists fear consequences of speaking out in public, even as they report facts. Online platforms open new avenues for journalists to connect with audiences as well as new vulnerabilities. A great deal of high school is oriented towards identity development; everyone cares about reputation. Appearance in the news confers importance to subjects of the stories and can either elevate or tarnish news subjects' reputations, which then affects how they think of themselves (Palmer, 2018). We argue that beyond the people featured in the news, student journalists (and the adults in their lives) are also highly attuned to risks in reputation, too. Experienced editors and advisers should nurture students into sound journalistic practices that will allow novices pursue stories more fearlessly. To this end, they should seek to understand technology's relationship to the development of identity and social connectedness.

We experience a mutually reinforcing relationship between reputation and trust with the *Webb Canyon Chronicle*. The more that we invest in our professionalism, the more we see our esteem go up around the Webb community. Our online platform makes us more relevant to students' lives than we were in print. Like we noted above, honors that we earn from professional organizations are motivating and help us to vouch for the value of our publication around school, not unlike participating on a championship athletic team. Reputation has currency; it can help attract participants and create novel spaces for participation. While awareness of reputation and investment in reputation are important, not every action should be done to save face. Moral courage for justice and bravery in the face of adversity can help build esteem, as well.

4.2. Time/Space

Educators have a finite amount of time with their students and students have a finite amount of energy and attention. Care should be taken to apportion time and space (both technological and physical) wisely. Technology may afford new spaces for expression, but care needs to be taken in order to maximize the benefits of digital participation. Besides mission, policies, and protocols, head editors and advisers should be careful and responsive in planning for class meetings. They should set healthy expectations for the amount of work that emergent journalists are expected to complete online. Digital platforms may facilitate workflow, but we need to take advantage of time together in class. Our classroom is open, in the middle of the library, and so we use a lot of face-to-face 'studio time' dedicated to peer editing. This process is especially important because it grants journalists a 'preview' audience before their work is published online. Not all digital writing goes through this process; it is important for burgeoning journalists to understand the care put into ethical and reliable online publishing.

4.3. Responsive Relationships

Collaboration is messy. While online platforms may facilitate internal communication and external circulation, ethical and effective use of these tools requires intentionality. While we have a hierarchical structure and clear policies to guide publishing, they do not always work as planned. Each year, we initiate new members into the fold and say goodbye to valuable members of our team. Negotiating responsibilities in the newsroom is compounded by the fact that we are a for-credit elective in the midst of a challenging academic program. Understanding where feelings are coming from can help orient work and relationships with others that promotes digital civility, especially in online educational contexts. Unfortunately, affect does not always have a home in the classroom. In order to manage risk context, educators and journalists should develop opportunities to check in, reflect, and work to understand their feelings as they go through the publishing process.

All actors in contexts like ours including journalists, editors, advisers, administrators and audience would be wise to consider their impacts on each other. It is easy to get siloed and isolated and not consider others' experiences when doing a job. In online environments, this can be painfully true. Part of the impetus of involving teens in research like ours is to open avenues for scholarship and expression in an effort to understand each other better as we live online. We end by invoking the second pillar of the Society of Professional Journalists code of ethics: "Minimize Harm: Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect" (2014). Demonstrating awareness and care for others in the midst of challenging work will help to control risk context, helping to challenge young journalists to fill an important role in modern society and heed a call to serve others.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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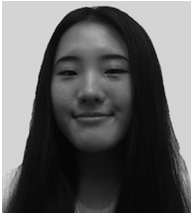
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