Situated Citizen Photojournalism and a Look at Dilemmatic Thinking

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Abstract: We present an approach to investigating the development of "dilemmatic thinking" in individuals and communities. To study this style of thinking we use a framework called Situated Citizen Journalism (SCJ) in which non-specialists ("citizens") work with professional photojournalists and learning technologists to create and critique images. The participants form a "community of journalistic practice." This paper describes the SCJ approach; the rationale for situating the investigation of dilemmatic thinking within the photojournalism practice; and a project currently in progress to investigate young people's dilemmatic thinking through photojournalism. We conclude with a number of research questions guiding the development of collaborative software to support SCJ.

Introduction

We are interested in dilemmas and how people think about them (Billig, 1988; Gilligan, 1982). That is, how do people create, share and revise opinions about everyday situations characterised by ambiguous and perhaps competing perspectives? We distinguish this kind of thinking from psychological investigations in which dilemmas or scenarios are presented as stimuli to evaluate problem-solving and decision-making strategies (Kahneman and Tversky, 2000). Our interest is in how these dilemmas arise, how individuals and communities think about and represent dilemmas and how contextual factors and learning environment designs affect the development of dilemmatic thinking.

Instead of creating controlled environments to simulate dilemmas and scenarios, we work with people to create tools and environments in which they can work with us to study their own dilemmatic thinking. We do this through the design and use of "objects to think with" (Papert, 1980). We work with people to create tools for capturing images and constructing opinions that they can then use in informal, everyday settings. Our objective is to study *in situ* dilemmatic thinking by letting people create, share, debate and revise opinions in ways that are personally and contextually meaningful.

As a guide for investigating this style of thinking and for designing these new technologies, we use an approach called Situated Citizen Journalism (SCJ). In this paper we present this approach and our early progress on a project to investigate children's dilemmatic thinking as they create photojournalistic images.

Situated Citizen Journalism

Situated Citizen Journalism (SCJ) is a kind of participatory journalism in which citizens, learning technologists and journalism practitioners collaborate to create technologies and stories. Our goal is to support non-specialists as they develop the tools and skills needed to uncover and share perspectives that we don't usually see in traditional, mainstream media. At the same time, we hope to learn how journalistic frameworks and digital technologies can combine to create new ways of constructing unique points of view. We do this in three ways: *collaborative tool design*, *skills sharing* and *broad dissemination*.

During *collaborative tool design*, citizens, learning technologists and journalism practitioners work together to create design specifications and early prototype of the technologies needed to support citizen journalism. During *skills sharing*, citizens conduct fieldwork (with the support of journalism practitioners and technologists) in which they use both traditional and custom tools to capture images they will use to create stories. During *broad*

dissemination, citizens, journalism practitioners and technologists work together to edit, produce and exhibit their stories, carefully choosing the representation and medium most appropriate to the perspective they wish to present and the audience they wish to engage.

Photojournalism: A Dilemmatic Profession

We choose to narrow our approach to photojournalism for two reasons. First, photojournalism is an inherently dilemmatic practice: the "whole story" can never be told with a single image or even an entire photo essay. Second, we believe photojournalism offers a different kind of accessibility (compared to text-based journalism) for letting communities of people of different ages, backgrounds and literacy skills create and critique dilemmas. People are familiar with taking snap-shots and viewing images in a variety of media but they rarely practice complex skills associated with visual analysis. Photojournalism is a "low-threshold, high-ceiling" domain in which to study dilemmatic thinking.

The good photojournalist uses a number of technical and rhetorical techniques to create literal and conceptual frames that tell stories. At a shoot, she simultaneously judges lighting conditions and camera angles, considering complex relationships among focal lengths, shutter speeds and film types as events unfold around her. She also makes split-second decisions about other more subjective issues: what is the most "important" aspect of an unfolding story? What aspects of the story best lend themselves to an image? Who is the audience for the image and in what medium (*e.g.* newspaper, magazine, Internet) will it be published? How can what's happening outside the frame be represented? As the photojournalist shoots a scene, she is simultaneously documenting a scene and presenting a personal perspective.

The framing continues even after the shooting is over. An editor may choose to crop, resize or even alter a photojournalist's image[1]. The layout designer may juxtapose the photojournalist's image against another image or text that influences the photojournalist's intended story. Furthermore, the publication's perceived bias (deserved or not), the timing of the story in relation to other events and the particular demographic of the target audience can all influence the image's voice. (See Kobré 2000 for a general introduction to photojournalism.)

Although such a process may seem flawed and confusing, there is evidence to suggest that people benefit from interpreting the ambiguity of mainstream media. Participating in conversations about the news is thought to cause deliberations that lead to more "informed" citizens with more concrete opinions and to contribute to a mutual awareness of public opinion and community attitudes (De Boer and Velthuijsen, 2001). De Boer and Velthuijsen acknowledge the limitations of evaluating relationships with mass media through surveys and knowledge tests. However, a consistent finding in their *dependency-exposure-conversation* model is that people seem to use news stories as bases for conversations and that deliberation about news items helps people develop individual opinions and determine how these opinions are received in a community. We are interested in further investigating this interplay between mainstream media, individual opinion-formation and community identity, but we adopt a different methodology.

By situating the SCJ approach within photojournalism, we hope to extend the analytic thinking skills exercised as a media consumer to the dilemmatic thinking skills practised as a media creator. We are more interested in *how* people think about issues, instead of simply *what* people think about issues. Constructing and critiquing seemingly ambiguous opinions and dilemmas through images may reveal new learning processes and new ways of supporting personal expression.

The Situated Citizen Journalism Learning Community

The community within which the citizen journalist develops cannot be separated from the skills associated with "good" photojournalism. Indeed, the professional photojournalist struggling to capture a scene or perspective

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[1] Altering news images is controversial but not without precedent. See Jacobson (2002) for a pictorial review of the relationship between photojournalism, censorship and image ambiguity.

likely learned her craft through a combination of formal instruction, apprenticeship, quiet observation, reflection, experimentation with tools and techniques and many, many mistakes.

Our goal is to create an environment in which citizens and photojournalists can engage in professionally situated, apprenticeship-like learning relationships (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1991). The learning environment is not a formal pedagogical space but an informal environment where individuals of different ages, socio-cultural backgrounds and technical expertise collaborate to create and critique personally meaningful images.

Since it is often not possible to have such diversity within a single co-located physical community, a central goal of Situated Citizen Journalism is to facilitate diverse learning relationships through collaborative technologies. The exact nature of such an on-line group's collaboration requirements is a function of the individual learning and dilemmatic thinking styles of those who comprise the learning community.

Our current work (and the project described below) centres on identifying these on-line SCJ community requirements by studying how individuals learn and work together in a physical SCJ setting.

Situated Citizen Journalism and Children's Dilemmatic Thinking

Our first Situated Citizen Journalism project is a work-in-progress with two phases. In the first phase (beginning mid-August 2002), two groups of children from Dublin, Ireland aged 11 to 14 complete one-week workshops in which they work with learning researchers and photojournalism professionals to capture, edit, critique and exhibit images using a variety of traditional and digital photographic tools. In the second phase (beginning October 2002), adult students at Loyalist College's photojournalism school in Canada and Irish children collaborate using custom-designed web software to critique and edit the images.

Phase One: Workshops
The workshop participants were recruited through The Ark, a Dublin-based arts and cultural centre for children. The participants for the first workshop are members of the general public who registered with The Ark's summer programme and the participants for the second workshop were selected from a Dublin neighbourhood labelled "disadvantaged" by the Irish government. Both workshops have the same general design.

At the beginning of the week, children build their own pinhole cameras and use them to shoot images. They then develop the images using traditional darkroom processes as a first introduction to photographic principals of optics and light. As the week progresses, children work with a Loyalist College photojournalism professor and two Loyalist college photojournalism students to design their own photojournalism assignments. They then shoot two assignments using more advanced traditional and digital cameras and critique their images and stories as a group. After iterating on different themes and photographic techniques, they edit the images using both traditional cropping techniques and digital image editing tools. They then prepare a final public exhibition consisting of both a traditional, physical show and an on-line presentation.

Phase Two: On-Line Collaboration
The on-line portion of the exhibit will be shown using custom web software and will serve as the basis for the extended collaboration throughout Fall 2002. During this phase of the project, the Canadian photojournalism students work with the Irish children using the web software. Together they critique and edit images with each individual bringing a variety of photojournalistic and editorial expertise. The goal for this phase is to support children's further exposure to the photojournalism editing process as they converse with students of a different age and from another culture who are themselves learning what it means to be a photojournalism editor.

The software is designed using the open-source Open Architecture Community System (OpenACS, 2002) on the Linux operating system. The OpenACS system is a tool-kit for building community-oriented web applications. It is composed entirely of open-source components: an AOL web server, a PostgreSQL database and a set of tcl scripts that offer customisable functions such as user authentication, discussion forums and chat spaces.

Research Questions

There are several research goals behind the design of the workshop and the structure of the web-based collaboration. They are categorized as: *tool development*, *collaborative critique* and *community of practice*:

Tool Development
How do children use and talk about different photojournalism tools (*e.g.* pinhole cameras, fixed focal length cameras, digital cameras, image scanners, digital editing tools, *etc.*)? What features might future digital image capture tools have? How can aspects of the photojournalist profession be modelled in these technologies?

Collaborative Critique
How do children represent and critique dilemmatic and ambiguous aspects of visual scenes? How does the design of their assignments and the images they shoot change in response to critique? How are critiques given differently before, during and after a shoot and how are they *received* and *interpreted* differently?

Community of Practice
How do photojournalism professionals introduce photojournalism to non-specialists and mentor their development? How is this relationship like an apprenticeship learning model? What collaborative tools are needed to support this learning relationship remotely? As the photojournalism students work with the Irish young people, how do they learn from one another and in what contexts do these "learning moves" happen?

Conclusion

In this paper we presented an approach for investigating dilemmatic thinking and our current research project on how children's dilemmatic thinking can be practiced with the support of a situated learning community and, eventually, collaborative software. Our interest is in using the inherently subjective and dilemmatic practice of journalism in general – and photojournalism specifically – to investigate how people create, share and revise opinions about everyday dilemmas by capturing and critiquing personally meaningful images.

Acknowledgements

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