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Chapter 3

Learning, Interactive Social Media and Citizen Journalism. The Virtual Learning Bus as a methodology for Community Reporting

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The development of new ICTs and the free distribution of new through social networks (Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, Wordpress, Ning...) have promoted the growth of social movements such as citizen journalism and journalist community networks. The ISABEL (Interactive Social Media for Integration, Skills Bartering, Empowerment, Informal Learning) project gathers the educational strength of these new technological and social environments to promote new forms of citizen participation, community development and the reduction of social exclusion.

The digital revolution has widened the stages of communication, adding virtual social spaces (social networks) to the traditional areas (classroom, plaza, markets...); scenarios which are all susceptible to promoting communication, the sense of community (McInnerney & Roberts, 2004) and the possibility of sharing and cooperating (García Aretio, 2007).

These social networks are generating new spaces of expression and interaction in which the participants offer and share different personal and collective productions, while at the same time coming to an agreement on the cooperation and carrying out of common tasks.

The logic of Web 2.0 has strengthened the participation and social interaction in the Internet through the reticular organization of social communities or networks in which the cybernauts, in addition to receiving information, become the producers of content and the protagonists of the social interaction process that they promote. This leads to the gen-

eration of communities of informal learning, characterized by a large dose of interactivity and liberty for both the receiving and production of content.

These new opportunities for relations, communication and interaction are promoting genuine processes of cultural transformation that can facilitate the advancement towards more participative democratic models (Jenkins, 2009). To the point that a new culture is being born, with its practices, norms, values and new constructs, where the social dimension of construction and development is progressing with others (Hernandez-Serrano, 2011).

Nevertheless, one must consider that this new digital society also supposes a new barrier of social exclusion for a part of society that, due to various limitations, has not acquired the digital literacy (informational and technological) that enables them to access these technologies. In this sense, it is clear that promoting processes of literacy is the primary goal to achieve for contemporary educational systems (García de Madariaga, 2008; Gutiérrez Martín, 2003; Ortol, 2007).

And this is precisely one of the fundamental objectives of the ISABEL Project: contribute to the reduction of social exclusion and reinforce community development, providing users with the skills needed to access the information and communication society as both consumers and producers of information and knowledge.

Through the promotion of "community reporter" networks, the ISABEL Project aims to enable citizens to learn the necessary skills (social, technical, communication and business entrepreneurship) to analyze their personal and local reality, and to be capable of using words and images to construct, disseminate and share knowledge, thus contributing to the development of sustainable communities, avoiding social exclusion and promoting communal development.

These networks of community reporters present similarities with *communities of practice*, in that they end up becoming communities that share interests and experiences, and that feed off of the exchange of knowledge and resources, promoting joint processes of learning, and the social participation and construction of knowledge (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al. 2002).

Individuals who join a network of community reporters begin to meet and work together with others, becoming aware of the possibility of making their voice and their ideas heard; they feel enriched by being part of a community that is organized to present their points of view, concerns, needs, demands. They can even collaborate with public entities and civic and community organizations in a much more significant manner, in this

way learning and creating networks of citizen participation and prominence that will mark an important advance in their personal and communal development.

The aim of this chapter is to present a characterization of the community reporter movement, highlighting its main differences with citizen journalism. Likewise, it will attempt to provide greater detail about the conditions for success and continuity of the movement, providing the Virtual Learning Bus tool to increase the sustainability of the ISABEL Project. This tool offers a learning methodology that follows the training experience of community reporters, allowing them to share their opinions, experiences and best practices.

As opposed to citizen journalism, whose activity focuses on reporting news, community reporters tell stories about themselves, their neighbors and their community. Each has different motivations: citizen journalists are motivated by their interest for news, while community reporters are motivated by a desire to learn to tell and share stories about their lives. Community reporters join a network regulated by a code of proper conduct that exists to protect the rights of the community and reinforce the notion of forming part of a family that shares objectives, values, success and failures, learning from each other and helping each other to create and share stories. All of this contributes toward the acquisition of social and communication skills, the ability to use new technologies, and in the end, to even reinforce their prominence, their word and their ties with the community.

This chapter also analyzes the critical success and sustainability factors for the communities of community reporters, focusing the analysis on the experiences of rural community journalists with that of North Yorkshire (UK) within the ISABEL project. These groups are all focused on telling the stories that their community wants to tell and hear, using different means (press, video, audio) to achieve this in different ways, each person in their own way.

Among the most important factors for success in sustaining these communities are the following: i) learning how to tell stories that are interesting for the community; ii) understanding the needs and interests of the community in order to mobilize it; iii) obtaining the support of a team of sponsors, collaborators and volunteers that ensure continuity; iv) selecting the most appropriate content and media (websites, twitter, facebook, youtube, bulletins, brochures, collaboration with local newspapers...). Finally, we propose a model of sustainability for the ISABEL project that brings together the local activities of the community reporters with the national activity coordinated by the Institute of Community Reporters (ICR), and

the European activity through the European Network of Community Reporters (ENCR).¹

In this proposal of sustainability, one of the main tools used by the ISABEL project to orient the learning-teaching methodology is the Virtual Learning Bus (VLB). It is a sustainable online tool to promote the Community Reporting movement. The tool simulates the trajectory that community reporters may follow to carry out their projects, including passing through the 4 stations (Presentation, Training, Production and Destination) in which they can find a wide range of resources that have been tried and tested by other groups and that can provide assistance and encouragement for other groups of reporters to carry out their own project.

VLB offers a learning path and a variety of resources for best practices (documentation, videos, presentations, workshops, evaluation tools, podcasts, etc.) that can be reused and replicated by other groups that may wish to join the network, thus becoming a sustainable tool of communal development.

1. Community Reporting vs Citizen Journalism: A Venn Diagram

Citizen journalism and community reporting are terms that have grown up out of the social media developments over the last decade or so. *The ability of the 'ordinary person on the street' to create and distribute their own content has increased exponentially over the last decade.* Factors for this include *technological developments* that have reduced the price and increased the availability of user-friendly content capture devices, such as Flip cameras and mobile phones, alongside the absorption into popular consciousness of *free distribution* sites such as Youtube and Facebook.

The result of this production is certainly a lot of footage of sneezing animals and laughing babies but there is also more depth and heart to the application of these social media tools, and this is the ground held by citizen journalists and community reporters.

In this section, we want to explore how and when these terms might be used interchangeably and to explore the subtle but important differences that distinguish where in the Venn diagram these terms *don't* cross.

1. As confirmed at the inauguration of the Institute of Community Reporters (ICR) at the University of Salford (UK), the Institute currently has more than 1000 reporters throughout the United Kingdom, and another 600 throughout all of Europe, which proves the growth of the movement <<http://blog.peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk/2012/01/09/cityinterhacktives-feature-community-reporting/>>.

1.1. Building the Venn Diagram – News and Stories

Citizen Journalism is defined in We Media as, “public citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and information.”²

Popular examples of citizen journalism breaching the mainstream media on an international and national field include the Arab spring uprising, the Occupy movement or the commentary in the blogosphere that tracked the summer riots in the UK. The influence can also be felt at a local level, where there are numerous examples of community blogging sites reporting on causes and campaigns, a role formerly championed by a local press now heavily in decline.³

From both the formal and informal interpretations of Citizen Journalism, one message seems to come through more clearly than others: the relationship to news. The term seems to relate to ordinary people creating, reporting from or commenting on key newsworthy events. It is this close relationship to traditional journalism that has led to some professional journalists criticising, “the unregulated nature of citizen journalism... for being too subjective, amateurish, and haphazard in quality and coverage.”⁴ By sharing the term ‘journalism’, there seems to be an in-built expectation from the mainstream that citizen journalists should be maintaining the standards and mimicking the guidelines by which professional trained journalists tell their ‘news’. In reality though, individual citizen journalists can enjoy the freedoms of telling their stories in their own ways using social media to do so – and the results can therefore be wide-ranging in efficacy, effect and form.

And how does all of this relate to our definition of Community Reporting? Well, the principal starting point for Community Reporting as we define it is story. And why story rather than news? Well, as Owen Flanagan puts it, “Evidence strongly suggests that humans in all cultures come to cast their own identity in some sort of narrative form. We are inveterate storytellers.”⁵

Story can be the means by which we work out our thoughts and ideas about who we are and how we connect to those around us. It can be an exploration, a search for meaning or an offering up to others. From a com-

2. Bowman, S. and Willis, C. “We Media: How Audiences are Shaping the Future of News and Information.” 2003, *The Media Center at the American Press Institute*.

3. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/voluntary-sector-network/community-action-blog/2012/mar/09/citizen-journalism-local-media-communities>>

4. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizen_journalism>

5. Owen Flanagan *Consciousness Reconsidered* 1992.

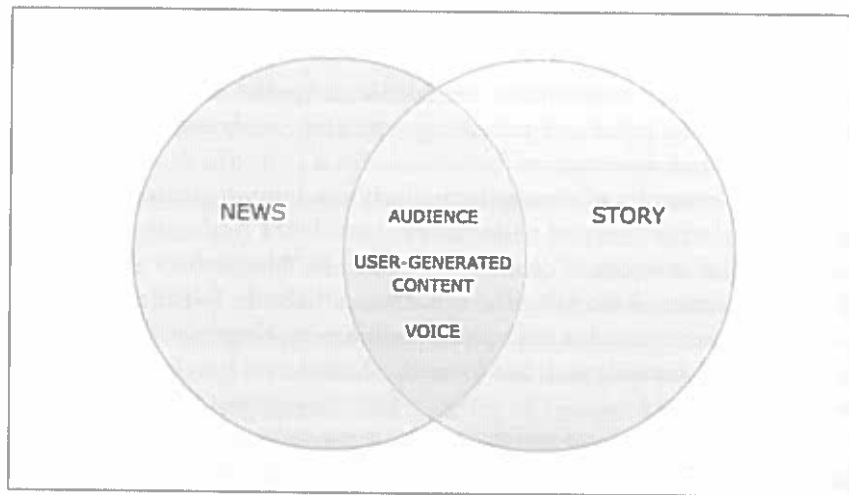


Figure 1. The Venn Diagram on news and story.

munity development point of view, story is an extremely useful tool for helping people to locate themselves in their own lives and their communities. And more importantly, it is universal and there are no prerequisites required in order to tell a story. We all have something to say and stories to tell about our lives and this is our starting point for Community Reporting. From here, we support people through a process of refining communication, developing new skills, thinking more about the audience for their stories and the impact they want those stories to have. Some of the stories that Community Reporters tell might be considered 'newsworthy', but the heart of Community Reporting is in individuals telling stories about their own lives rather than reporting on news, an approach that serves to benefit both the individual and the community. As Simon Safari, Chair of the Tenants' Association in Botkyrka, Stockholm says, "I believe that we need more thinking to create sustainable communities, and [giving people] the right to describe their own reality is one of them."⁶

To finish this section, let's consider an example. An asylum seeker fighting for their right to stay in a country, challenging a court decision or arguing injustice, is a news story. There is human interest and a clear trajectory of beginning, middle and end; they arrived, there was a ruling, there will be a final outcome. The news story will end when they are either deported or gain leave to remain. Community Reporting however is more interested

6. <<http://blog.peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk/2011/02/24/breaking-the-silence-community-reporting-in-stockholm-sweden/>>

in all the other stories that make up the person at the centre of the news... and to give *them* the tools and the platform to share those stories. So we might learn about the foods that remind them of home, or their bemusement at how we shop in large supermarkets, or even better, they might just want to tell a story about the sports day at their children's local school. This is true integration and true empowerment and our hope is that it can contribute to the vision of 'sustainable communities' for all.

And so we start to build the Venn diagram: news on one side, story on the other.

1.2. Populating the Venn Diagram – Motivation

Everyone has their own unique set of reasons for getting involved – and then remaining or otherwise involved – in the production of user-generated content, whether they classify themselves as a Citizen Journalist, Community Reporter, neither or both. For some, it is the cause that drives them, for others it is a passion for words or media. The stimulus may be politics or creativity, fun or fury. We are all unique. But for the sake of clarification around the term 'Community Reporting' as we understand it, it is necessary to draw some broad generalisations to illustrate the point of difference.

The key difference for us is that many people who are classed or class themselves as being Citizen Journalists are 'self-referrers'. By this we mean that they are self-motivated to create and promote their own content, often setting up their own blog sites⁷ or contributing to established sites such as the Indymedia movement⁸. They are likely to already have the technical and communication skills required for effective reporting and have access to equipment with which to create their content. They often have a passionate grasp of their field and can be eloquent and intelligent in the presentation of their arguments. Motivation can be the desire to influence change, draw attention to a cause, hold individuals or bodies to account or inform people of a situation. People contribute because they care.

This is all well and good where people have confidence in their own opinions and access to basic equipment but where either of these elements is missing it can take an outside stimulus to plug the gap. And this is where Community Reporting comes in.

7. For one good example see: <<http://www.pitsnpots.co.uk/about-pits-n-pots/>>.

8. <<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/>>

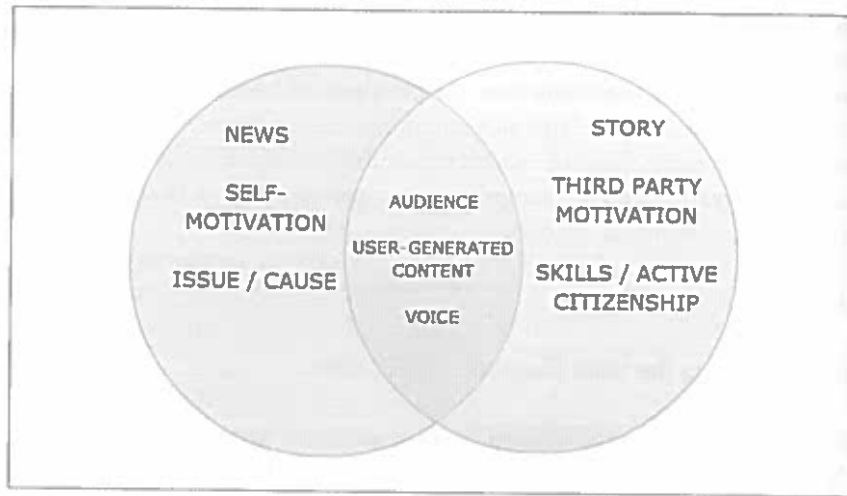


Figure 2. The Venn Diagram on new-story and motivation

Community Reporting, as we define it, is a model that was born out of wanting to 'plug the gap' between people's desire and ability to have a voice in the world. Developed through many years working in community development, it supports community empowerment through informal learning and can put people on the first rung of active citizenship and participation.

The model has the flexibility to work with diverse groups, such as refugees and asylum seekers, adults with mental health problems, young people with learning difficulties, isolated older people, University students or school educators.⁹

For our Community Reporters, the first stimulus for involvement is often not so much about a cause or an issue but more the desire to learn new skills, to feel more connected to their local community or to give something back. As one Reporter puts it, "It's given me a routine, confidence, something to talk about when I'm out with my friends which I didn't have when I wasn't doing much. It is sort of opening up my life very quickly, that's what's been good."¹⁰

People's motivations for engaging with Community Reporting are only part of the process however. The ultimate goal, and the reflection of true

9. <<http://ISABELproject.eu>>

10. <<http://blog.peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk/2010/03/18/kevin-found-being-a-community-reporters-helped-him-socially-boosted-his-confidence-reconnected-him-with-his-local-area-and-improved-his-job-prospects/>>

participation, is when Community Reporters have the confidence and ability to keep on telling and sharing stories about their lives and communities, long after the initial engagement. And this takes us on to a sense of belonging.

1.3. Populating the Venn Diagram – Belonging

As we mentioned previously, people have very different start and end points when it comes to producing user-generated content. It might be a one-off or part of a professional vocation. A hobby can sometimes become the job, or a campaign can succeed in its aim and the need to create content diminishes. For citizen journalists who are aligned to a particular cause or community, chasing and reporting key news and events will be the driver for content production.

In the case of Community Reporters though, we have said that the motivation and start point is generally neither news nor a cause. So what keeps our Community Reporters motivated and engaged? The answer is a sense of belonging.

Because our ultimate goal is to create a network of Community Reporters who can all produce their own content, share it with others, learn from others and feel part of something, it is vitally important that we support people throughout the process. This support ideally comes from a variety of different routes; at a network level it comes from the Institute of Community Reporters, at a local level there should be support from a local provider, and reporters are also supported in running their own self-managed meet-ups, so they can come together to collaborate, share and champion each other's involvement.

The Institute of Community Reporters was established as the quality assurance arm of the network. All Community Reporters receive a badge as part of the network and this badge reflects that they have studied a range of Best Practice guidelines, including adherence to Editorial Guidelines, an understanding of consent, Health and Safety, copyright etc. This badge plays an important role in welcoming people into the wider network and it denotes a status that many of our reporters enjoy! The Institute also provides opportunities for reporters to get involved in projects, provides ongoing training support via web tutorials and brings all reporters together at an annual Award Ceremony. This all continues to help people feel valued and supported in the work they do and is a wonderful way for people to create new networks and friendships, and learn from the activity happening in other communities.

At a local level, support can often be more hands on – lending equipment to reporters who don't have their own kit, supporting them with access to computers for edit and upload, troubleshooting, or providing ideas for local events that reporters can attend. We know from our experience that many of the Community Reporters we work with often have quite complex needs so this local presence is important to 'be there' and respond as required. Often this is about simple reassurance and encouragement – a small but important factor in our model of Community Reporting.

Whilst we recognise that people may often have complex needs, we are committed to supporting people to become more confident through their Community Reporting activity than they were at the start. We therefore structure our training around a peer learning and peer review system that takes an asset based community development approach. We positively celebrate the diverse range of personal and technical skills that people need to be reporters and encourage self-assessment of these skills at the outset. Our trainers do not claim to be experts and encourage learners to contribute their thoughts and ideas. Finally, all content produced by reporters throughout their training is peer reviewed within the group which allows them to develop a visual and spoken vocabulary to help them feel more confident in their reporting. We adopt this approach as peer support is more effective in the long term than a tutor support mechanism – the tutor may leave after the preliminary sessions but the reporters will remain to be their own support network. We therefore discuss with the group roles and responsibilities required for them to continue to meet on a monthly basis, creating ownership and belonging at a hyper local level.



Figure 3. The People's Voice Media Identification

Whilst we recognise that there are some invaluable support networks for Citizen Journalists, these often tend to be online resources, virtual Twitter networks or groups that gather around thematic interests. Again, by understanding that our Community Reporters tend not to self-refer to

these groups, we feel that we have created an alternative model that best fills the support needs for our reporters.

And so we reach the final stop on the development of our Venn diagram; regulation.

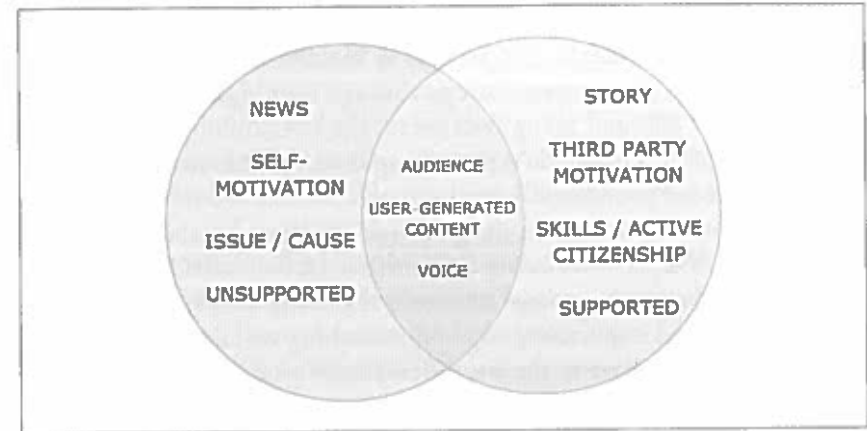


Figure 4. The Venn Diagram on new-story and belonging

1.4. Populating the Venn Diagram – Regulation

Developments in social media seem to happen with gazelle like speed. One day no-one has heard of Twitter, the next, mainstream journalists are using it to source major news events and we're all comfortable in the parlance of tweeting. Sites come and go, adapt, change, disappear. Smart phones are crammed with apps that allow us to engage with the world with lightning speed.

And now imagine the speed with which the legislature can change, make or adapt laws to keep up. Gazelle like? Certainly not.

So we have a perceived gap between what we can *technically* do and what we can *legally* do. And in this gap, many ordinary people have been blithely carrying on, blogging and tweeting, sharing stories, commenting on things of interest on the web. And whilst this may have felt like an unregulated wild west, it appears that the sheriff is fighting back and the law is starting to challenge the sense of untouchability that has informed the way many people seem to interact with social media sites.¹¹

11. See <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2121003/Liam-Stacey-jail-tweeting-abuse-Fabrice-Muamba.html>> or <<http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2012-04/16/convicted-after-saying-c-word>>.

For some campaigners, there is an important issue here about the freedoms we *should* have the right to exercise without being policed by 'Big Brother'. And whilst that is an interesting arena for all who create and share user-generated content, we take a different stance when it comes to our Community Reporters.

As part of the standards monitored by the Institute of Community Reporters we issue badges to reporters, as mentioned above. In order to receive the badge, all reporters must go through training around Best Practice guidelines. Without going into detail, the over-arching tone of these guidelines is: If in doubt, don't. If challenged, cooperate. Just because you can, doesn't mean you should.

The important point is that the guidelines are there to protect the wider community rather than focussing on the rights of the individual. And this is something that we encourage our reporters not to simply adhere to but to celebrate. It's an important point and something we take very seriously.

And so there we have it, the last differentiator on the Venn diagram.

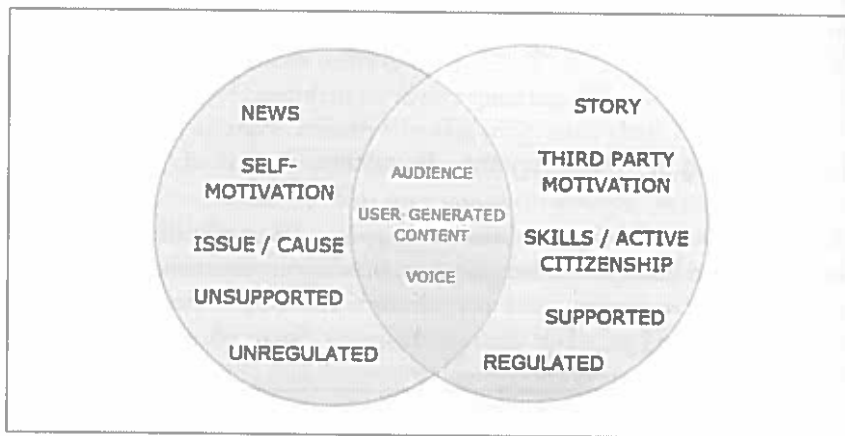


Figure 5. The Venn Diagram on new-story and regulation

1.5. Conclusion – analysing the circles

In conclusion, we hope that we have explained what we feel to be some of the major differences between Citizen Journalism and Community Reporters. Reclaiming the term is really important to us because for us it means family. It's a network of people joined together by a common set of goals and values, sharing their successes and frustrations and learning from each other in the process. We hope to see the network grow and the model

continue to support more of the kind of people who wouldn't traditionally create content for the web into the wonderful world of content creation, where their stories and views count, and where they feel ultimately more connected to the world around them.

2. Community Reporting – “Passing Fancy” or the “Real Thing”?

Community reporting and citizen journalism are hot topics for community groups, the traditional media, educators, charities, businesses and even national government. Their role has been the subject of a UK House of Commons Media Committee¹², an Ofcom (Government media regulator) Review of Local and Regional Media¹³ and debates rage throughout the media as to what they are, who is doing it, their worth, questions about sustainability etc. The arguments can be heated: “*when I hear the term citizen journalism I reach for my pistol*”.¹⁴

In this section we want to look at what drives community reporting and what it takes to sustain these activities. In doing so we will reflect the experiences and ambitions of a range of rural communities in North Yorkshire (UK) with diverse backgrounds and needs, who have been introduced to community reporting through the ISABEL project:

- *Lower Wensleydale Partnership (LWP)*:¹⁵ a structured public/private sector partnership operating in a defined geographical area of small towns and villages. Partners include local government, community groups, charities, social enterprises, educators and commercial businesses. LWP aims to promote the area by galvanising the individuals and communities to use a mix of media and marketing primarily through the LWP web site for both the indigenous population and to attract visitors. It has a management structure and some public funding but relies on volunteer efforts to generate activity and to sustain interest and involvement.
- *Boroughbridge Reporters*:¹⁶ a voluntary group led by a “Champion” who has gathered a group of volunteers from Boroughbridge and the surrounding villages to learn to be community reporters and to create a

12. House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee: Future for local and regional media.

13. Ofcom Regional and Local Media Review (2009).

14. forum <<http://pressthink.org>>.

15. <www.lower-wensleydale.com>

16. Not live yet but registered as <www.boroughbridgereporter.co.uk>.

platform for distributing their stories. The impetus for their activities has been a “lack of local news that is for local people” (Jane Barber their “Champion”). They have registered a web site and will go live in the summer of 2012. However, they are equally keen to have a newsletter or newspaper as they believe that most of their audiences are tuned into that medium.

- *Jennyruth*¹⁷ is a centre for people with learning disabilities based between the market towns of Ripon and Boroughbridge. It is a not for profit limited company that operates as a commercial business but also supports its staff with learning. Jennyruth has undertaken community reporting, which complements the communications course that the Workers Educational Association provides for its staff, because:
 - The confidence and communication skills it teaches empowers the learners in their everyday life.
 - It enables the people with learning disabilities in their presentations to outside organisations when they demonstrate what they “can do” not what they cannot.
 - It can provide marketing content and platforms for the commercial operation.

2.1. It is the right time and place

Is community reporting is just a media fad or if it could be a new form of mainstream media? There is no homogeneity: as Martin Moore of the Media Standards Trust observes; “*The future of local media is likely to be messy... in the sense that different communities will do things differently*”.¹⁸

Damian Radcliffe in his recently published review of local (Here and Now: UK Hyperlocal Media Today March 2012),¹⁹ has identified some key

17. <www.jennyruth.co.uk>

18. <<http://www.mediastandardstrust.org/blog/how-does-local-fit-into-the-big-society>>

19. Download the review from <http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/assets/features/here_and_now_uk_hyperlocal_media_today>. The list of drivers are:

1. “*The historic role that traditional media has played in supporting local communities is under increasing threat from reduced services, staff and revenues.*”
2. *Gaps in geographic coverage and content, particularly local reporting, has created a vacuum for new entrants, and concerned citizens, who are now responding to this challenge.*
3. *New online services such as Wordpress, Audioboo and Youtube have enabled anyone to create and distribute local content.*
4. *Social media is changing audience behaviours and expectations in terms of the information we consume and how we define the world around us.*
5. *Opportunities for audiences to share and distribute relevant content to their own networks and communities makes local distribution easier too.*

drivers. Not all of these are relevant to all the forms of community reporting that have emerged. But our groups in North Yorkshire tick the crucial boxes;

- Traditional media is increasingly unable to address their very local needs.
- Public and private sector community support services are being reduced as budgets under pressure.
- Communities and businesses need to generate revenue to maintain community activities.
- Technology is no longer the barrier but the gateway giving everyone the “right to roam”.

North Yorkshire is not untypical of communities everywhere with their diversity of backgrounds and needs. However, there are some key skills, resources and approaches that can help community reporting to become established and to be sustained.

2.2. Making it Work

There are 4 Critical Success Factors that will contribute to and sustain community reporting.²⁰

2.2.1. Knowhow

To be technically “savvy” is essential when developing social media and, as has been observed earlier in this chapter, it moves “with gazelle like speed”. But digital literacy is only one piece of the jigsaw.

Know what community reporting means – it is about telling stories that the community wants to tell and wants to hear in different media and in different ways. They will be in diverse forms and be told by a range of individuals. They will not always be news and not always bad news. But the stories will be the core of community reporting.

6. *The web is creating new funding models and new revenue streams for nich, specialist businesses.*

7. *Big business recognises the value of local content and is moving into the hyperlocal space alongside citizen-led efforts.*

8. *Local issues, and locally-relevant content, continue to matter to audiences, perhaps more than ever in these turbulent times*”

20. A more detailed view of the “Ingredients for Success” of local media are in the excellent review “Here and Now:UK hyperlocal media today (March 2012) by Damain Radcliffe.

All our groups in North Yorkshire took part in the ISABEL Community Reporter training sessions covering storytelling and reporting using print, video and audio. They were provided with the basic frameworks but continue to have support networks for help and guidance.

Know your market – Who are the audiences? What is the community interested in? Who are the key players? What are the key events?

A key feature for LWP and the Boroughbridge Reporter is “What’s On?” Both had strong feedback from potential visitors/readers and from contributing organisations and customers that content was king and listings of local events were a “must have”. Jennyruth has a regular “Meet the team” feature in its newsletter and on its web site introducing staff and what they are doing. It builds a sense of community for both those in and outside the organization.

Know your team – the champion cannot sustain everything. She/he needs to build and support a team of contributors to develop services and ensure continuity.

LWP is continuously recruiting volunteers, including interns, as the site lives by changing content. Jennyruth has a waiting list of volunteers with a range of skills that will support its staff. At Boroughbridge Reporter the “Champion” recognises that she has limited resources and needs to attract regular and skilled volunteers to take up critical functions, particularly on content development and management.

Know how to sell – it is essential to build revenues as every “not for profit”, charitable and volunteer organization knows. It is not simply about sales income but a mix of revenues involving bidding for grants, donations, in kind contributions and of course advertising and sponsorship. Communities will need to build networks and partnerships to help them and those skills need to be acquired.

Jennyruth has a well-established sales and marketing operation that accesses a mix of public and private sector funding. The provision of additional content from its staff should be seamlessly accommodated in the offer. The other organisations are less structured and focused – not surprising given their backgrounds and not unusual for community organisations. Both are knowledgeable and skilled in accessing public funds but this is a reducing pot and other options need to be pursued. There is a pressing need to build an effective sales operation based on content and audience – we look at this below in the *ISABEL Sustainability Model*.

Know how to promote – your community, your reporting and what you do. Develop relationships with individuals and organisations that will deliver content, stories, and, of course, income. The use of Public Relations tools such as tailored content, events and sponsorship can generate these levels of interest.

All the groups in North Yorkshire have excellent access to their communities and support organisations. They make excellent contacts and have “open doors” to many supporters. However, all equally require more structured “on the ground” gathering of content for their stories linked to potential income generation – who would be prepared to sponsor a story and/or place an advert. These are functions that need to be planned, developed and managed and again we suggest an *ISABEL Sustainability Model* that can be used below.

2.2.2. Localness

Localness, which is often geographic but also applies to communities of interest, is a key factor in community reporting reflecting the interests and the cultural language (not just linguistic) of its inhabitants. Local media is not simply a soapbox for activism but as Mandeep Hohi notes; “*a brilliant way for people to connect, produce and consume information about their neighbourhood... the fabric of community life*”.²¹

Gaps in provision – Community reporting is often a response to the breakdown of connections as local news and stories for locals are lost with traditional media such as newspapers and radio being obliged to rationalize hyper local activities under severe business pressure.

The Boroughbridge Reporter is being launched to plug such a gap for the town and its surrounding villages. The two local newspapers have closed local offices with Boroughbridge suffering in particular as it is at the periphery for both of them. In their initial training audit all the reporters identified this loss and the need to “share knowledge locally” as a key factor in attending the course.

Making the agenda – As veteran American blogger Mark Potts observes: “*Hyperlocal content is really mundane... if you are an outsider looking in... (but) To members of the community who actually live with these local issues, it’s vitally important*”.²²

21. Quoted by Damian Radcliffe “Here and Now” (March 2012).

22. <<http://recoveringjournalist.typepad.com/recoveringjournalist/2007/07/backfence-lesso.html>>

The reporters in Wensleydale and Boroughbridge are already producing stories that engage with their communities. The topics are as diverse as the individuals in any group – video stories on speeding cars in market towns, North Yorkshire swings to the Big Bands of 1940s, podcast of old Yorkshire folk singers, blogs on a Food & Drink Festival, walking in the Dales, a knitting circle, work of Credit Union in deprived village of Colburn and local artists banding together to start a gallery. Jennyruth is making videos of its gifts to schoolchildren in Ghana and making Olympic Torches for shops in neighbouring Ripon.

Mobilising the community – through community reporting does not necessarily mean controversial community campaigns. As David Wilcox noted in the distinction between journalism and local media the focus of community reporting is about “collaboration, conservation” not “conflict, crisis”.²³

Campaigns are a feature of reporting activity but these can often be in celebration of community: encouraging learning, raising funds for the village hall, establishing a walking group, creating the village web site. It can also campaign on controversial issues. In Boroughbridge they have produced video stories and press releases on a planned waste incineration facility, speeding traffic on the High Street and a new retail park.

To make a community active needs:

- The community agenda to be central
- Defined targets
- Readers/viewers to know what to do and why – clear action plans
- Concerted support/action across all the community.

2.2.3. “One size does not fit all” – a mix of media platforms

Community reporting is emerging primarily because of the explosion of social media. Inevitably much of that noise is concentrated on the technology platform be it Facebook, Twitter, Wordpress, Ning etc etc. The choice of platform for audience and publishers and reporters is important but for community reporting the most crucial component is not the media but the content.

23. <<http://livingwithrats.blogspot.com/search/label/hyperlocal%20media#!/2009/10/beware-of-geeks-bearing-gifts.html>>

The ISABEL Community Training Packages (for the range of courses see the Virtual Learning Bus) are focused on developing the right content for the community audience no matter what the delivery mechanism. *The mediums need to be appropriate for the targeted community and not the community for the target medium.*

Community audience profile is a key determinant. Ofcom’s Communications Market Report 2010 demonstrates the proportion of media time spent on each medium:

Age of adults	Medium used – TV	Medium used Print	Media used – internet & text messaging
55+	51%	10%	10%
45-54	35%	5%	20%
16-24	26%	3%	35%

Table 1. The Communications Market Report: United Kingdom (2010)

Findings such as these call for a mix of media that allows for stories to be accessed and developed in different ways; a strategy that can include traditional media in the mix.

The multiple mediums approach was adopted by the North Yorkshire groups with strong regard to their communities, other potential audiences, available technologies and other resources and, not least, their reporters abilities and capacity.

In Wensleydale and Boroughbridge, with their older, rural audiences, the community reporters use a mix of web site, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, brochures and a monthly newsletter. Jennyruth cross-promotes its web site and newsletter, with explicit references to finding more information or different media. Face-to-face presentations to its community are crucial ingredients of the marketing and media mix for Jennyruth. The people with learning disabilities present the organization at meetings and use the videos, photographs and stories that they have produced.

And don’t forget traditional media – This sector has been fearful of local and community media – “breezy, hapless, condescension” as one stalwart journalist remarked.²⁴ However, the traditional business models are crumbling and publishers and journalists alike need to address the emerging

24. <<http://archive.presslink.org/2008/07/14.html>>

technologies and the freedom that has given to both online and offline communities. Jeff Jarvis claims journalists “no longer reside at the center gathering everyone’s attention but at the edge serving their needs”.²⁵

Some recognize the changing landscape. The Lancashire Evening Post has recently (July 2011) published stories from community journalists and looks to recruit a pool of talent.²⁶ This publically funded project, Bespoke, is also being run elsewhere in the UK. In North Yorkshire the local newspaper is supporting the LWP and both sides hope to build a mutually beneficial relationship.

2.2.4. “It’s the economy stupid” – sustaining the business

We have argued that sustainability is about more than the money but funding does represent the recurring challenge for community reporting and its local media distribution networks.

The attraction of web based projects is their relatively small start up and running costs but have we have seen effective community reporting and media needs more delivery and distribution mechanisms and a diversity of content. The sector and community reporting needs a mixed funding model that offers communities and their reporters a menu of revenue options from which they can select as appropriate to their context, needs and resources. But as Ofcom notes there is a cocktail of funding streams in the UK: “advertising, subscriptions, grants from public and private bodies and in kind funding from volunteers”.²⁷ To this we would add the potential for partnership with traditional media publishers and networks that are possible as these organisations re-engineer their business models.²⁸

The US experience shows that there are a number of other ways also to generate funding, including, larger regional advertising and sponsorship networks, social media consultancy but as Damian Radcliffe comments: “it is a very different financial market”²⁹ to which we would add that those differences are also apparent in their advertising and philanthropic practices.³⁰

25. <<http://buzzmachines.com/2012/05/23.html>>

26. <<http://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2011/news/citizen-journalists-stories-published-in-regional-daily/>>

27. Ofcom Regional and Local Media Review (2009).

28. Northcliffe offers franchising through its Local People network of 160 sites in UK. <<http://franchise.localpeople.co.uk/>>.

29. <http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/assets/features/here_and_now_uk_hyperlocal_media_today>

30. The authors of this section, The MRS Consultancy were involved for many years in advertising and sponsorship revenue generation for both traditional and new media both UK and USA.

2.3. A Way Forward – The ISABEL Sustainability Model (ISM)

The ISM methodology uses the methodologies and experiences of the ISABEL project and its piloting with communities across Europe to provide a working template that community media and reporters can use to develop sustainable structures and activities. To illustrate the process we will use the model which is proposed to sustain the Lower Wensleydale Partnerships community reporting activities.



Figure 6. The ISABEL Sustainability Model (ISM)

The Process

It works by focusing on the local needs of the community and of the reporters. The community reporters are individually enrolled with the Institute of Community Reporters (IoCR). The local media community becomes a member of the European Network of Community Reporters

(ENCR). This constitutes a network of support across all the elements of sustainability that we have identified in this section.

Local activity

Community reporters are at the centre of the process.

- They are provided with the ISABEL training supported by materials, best practices and case studies from the Virtual Learning Bus.
- Personalised training for management of their specific media platforms
- The Learning Champions training package addresses the other skills we have identified:³¹
 - Market analysis
 - Marketing & promotion
 - Team management
 - Revenue generation
 - Networking and PR

National activity

This would be coordinated by Peoples Voice Media (PVM)³² in the UK who would provide the central management and administration for the scheme.

European activity

PVM would act for the ISABEL project as the ENCR. All partners in ISABEL are *de facto* members. Each local media centre would be invited to join but not individual reporters.

In conclusion

Community reporting is without doubt one of the most exciting developments in community activity and in media in recent years. There will be false dawns and projects and initiatives will fail but as Pablo Picasso remarked: *"I am always doing what I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it"*.

It does help, however, if you are aware of the sector, the player and the dynamics. In this section we have identified the Critical Success Factors of know-how, localness, flexible media and business acumen. Community reporters and

31. MRS, <www.mrsconsultancy.com> who would run the LWP scheme, has developed Learning Champions training packages for various projects under LLP, Equal and ESF. It is also a member of NIACE (National Institute for Adult and Community Learning) and registered as a member of their Community Learning Champions scheme.

32. <<http://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk>>

local media should consider these and plan accordingly. It will not always go to plan but community reporting is worth it – try it and try it again.

3. The Virtual Learning Bus as a methodology for Community Reporting

The Virtual Learning Bus (VLB) uses the metaphor of “a bus ride” to describe the learning path that the community reporters follow to tell and share their personal stories. Using an online platform, the VLB becomes a sustainable learning tool that can reuse the methodology, activities and results of the ISABEL project.

The proposed journey passes through 4 stations (conceived of as learning modules) that indicate the steps that need to be followed in order to become a community reporter. The length of the journey varies according to the needs and possibilities of each group.

As illustrated in *figure 7*, the travel itinerary makes the following stops:

- First Station: PRESENTATION
- Second Station: TRAINING
- Third Station: PRODUCTION
- Fourth Station: DESTINATION

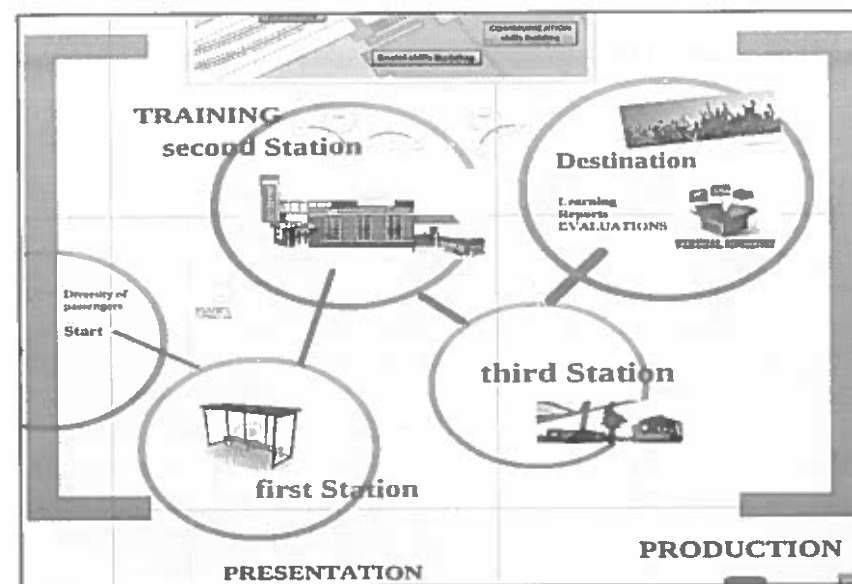


Figure 7. VLB stations and itinerary

Each station stores a wide range of resources that have been developed and tested by other groups of community reporters. They can provide assistance and encouragement for new groups of reporters to carry out their own projects. Resources include lesson plans used by the guides to teach other groups how to use different tools, material about the world of Community Reporters, videos of the projects carried out by groups in different countries, various graphical materials, etc. Let us now travel through each of the stations.

3.1. Presentation station

This is the first stop, the place where the work group meets and is presented. The work group is composed of the journey facilitators and the travelers. The facilitators can be trainers or volunteers from the organization, or they can be a trained student who initiates a cascade training process, training other colleagues from the group of future community reporters.

This station aims to achieve the following objectives: i) Understand what the ISABEL Project consists of. ii) Introduce the group and the travel companions. iii) Get to know the Virtual Learning Bus platform. iv) Establish the objectives for the group. v) Be aware of learning needs. vi) Organize activities. vii) Schedule time...

As illustrated in *figure 8*, the travel guide should be aware that in this station is relevant to ensure a welcoming environment of acceptance and

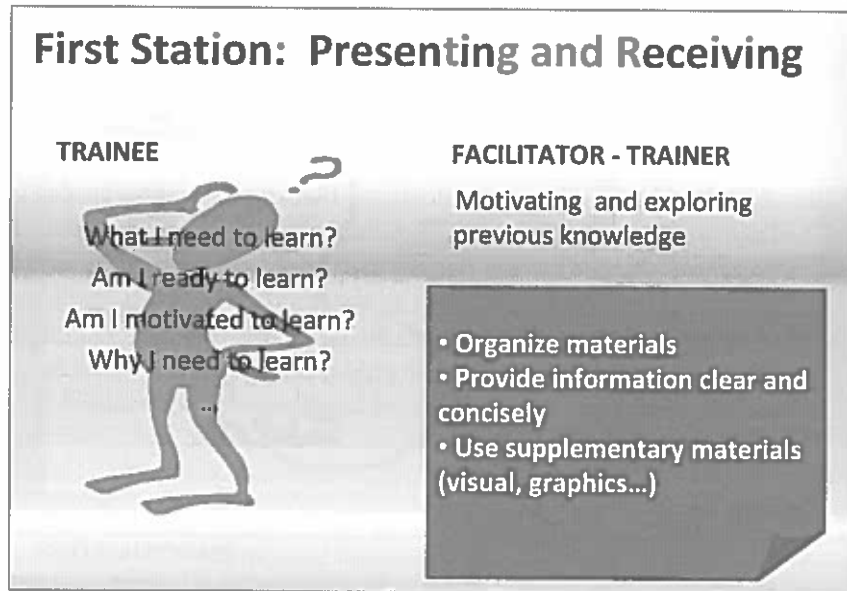


Figure 8. First VLB Station: PRESENTATION

appreciation of all the group members so that they feel comfortable and able to express themselves freely. Furthermore, to promote an interest for the ISABEL Project is also important, highlighting its relevance, exploring their prior knowledge and abilities, and specify the objectives that they can and should achieve. Exploring the group's prior knowledge serves to customize the training strategies that the facilitator or guide will use, thus generating the significant potential needed to learn the required contents and abilities (Ausubel, Novak & Hanesian, 1978).

Travelers can use the virtual repository available in this stop (<<http://virtualearningbuses.wordpress.com/>>) to find materials that can help them to better understand the world of Community Reporters, the ISABEL project, and the use of the Virtual Learning Bus.

3.2. Training station

In this station, travelers will find the core skills training elements (communication, editing, using new technologies, etc.) that have been deemed necessary for the development of their projects as Citizen Reporters. According to the needs of the group, this station will, of course, contain a changing number of stops through which the travelers must pass.

The stops for this station contain many resources that have been deposited by previous travel groups. These materials include tools for oral and

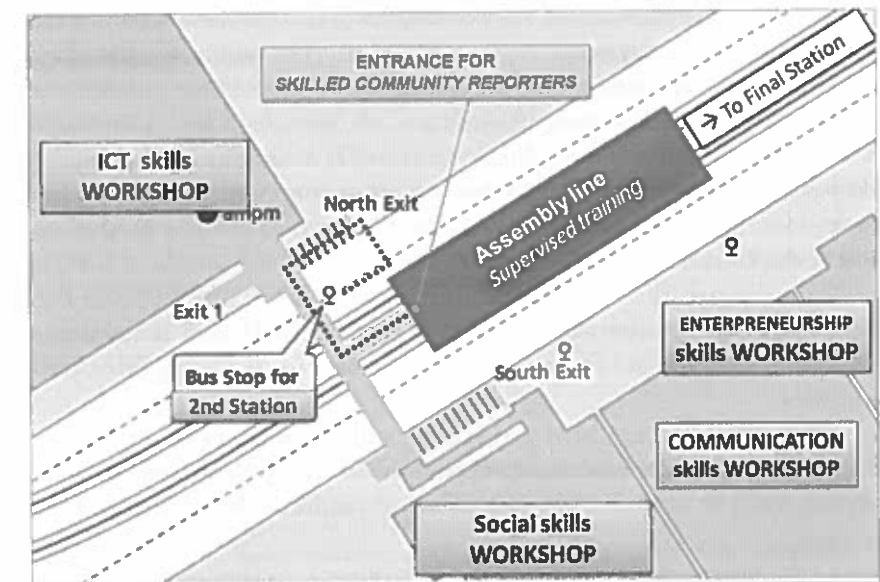


Figure 9. Second VLB Station: TRAINING

written communication, the use of photography, audio, video and other audiovisual and computer resources.

Different types of workshops may be found, such as: introduction to journalism and different types of articles, searching for information, photography and video, audio and video software, how to prepare an article or an interview, radio, filming, editing and disseminating videos, etc.

To this end, this second station is organized into various spaces that are identified by thematic workshops according to the competencies being worked on: ICT skills, communication skills, social skills...

¡New travelers visiting these workshops can select the resources that are best suited to their training needs and adjust them accordingly. The travel guide facilitates the required learning process at every moment. It is possible to remain in this station until all training needs have been covered, or to focus on one workshop and continue the journey to the next stations, Production and Destination, to obtain specific results prior to returning again to the Training station and ensure that each type of skills have been mastered.

¡The learning processes that are found in these stations, through workshops are theoretically founded on the sociocultural learning process of the Vygotskian school (Vygotsky, 1977, 1979), as well as on Bandura's social learning theories (Bandura, 1987). These theories underscore the important role of social interaction processes, modeling, and cultural and technological tools to scaffold the communicative and cognitive activity of the subjects.

This instrumental learning uses a social model to follow a sequence of steps similar to those proposed below.

Firstly, it is essential to motivate the travelers to acquire the knowledge they need to carry out an interesting project as community reporters, and to explore the previous knowledge and abilities they have and need to arrive at the Destination station.

According to the identified training needs, it will be necessary to determine which training workshops are required, and to organize them in a manner and format most appropriate for their cognitive possibilities.

Once the model has been provided, it will be necessary to provide future reporters with the necessary opportunities to reproduce and practice the sequence of actions they must follow to reinforce the studied competencies.

At the beginning facilitator leads the sequence, so that the trainee can then advance to being guided by their own verbal instruction, at first ex-

METODOLOGY

Second Station: Provide opportunities of Practice

TRAINEE

What can I do with the information provided?

FACILITATOR - TRAINER

Providing enough opportunities for practicing
MONITORING until ensuring consolidation

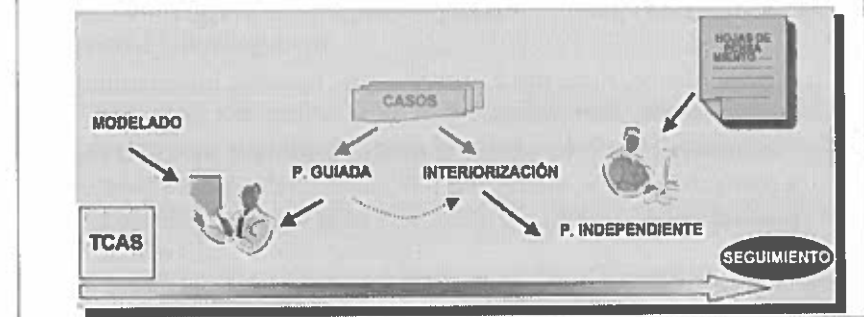


Figure 10. Skills Acquisition process based on Social modeling.

PLICIT and then implicit, once the process has been fully internalized (Cole, 1985; Lave, 1988). As Vygotsky suggested, this internalization process can be defined as *the internal reconstruction of an external operation*.³³

Finally, it is necessary to establish more opportunities for independent training to obtain a greater consolidation of the core skills; along with monitoring and evaluating the learning progress in order to verify their acquisition. The number of practices will depend on the difficulty of the skill, as well as the cognitive possibilities of the receiver. In the virtual repository at this stop (<<http://virtualllearningbuses.wordpress.com/>>), travelers will be able to find various materials to facilitate their training, practice and internalization of different skills, adapted to the different collectives and levels of instruction, and in accordance with the target protagonist of the ISABEL project.

33. Vygotsky, L.S. (1979) *The development of higher psychological processes*. Barcelona: Grijalbo, pp.92. According to the Vygotskian School, this process of internalization tends to follow a general genetic sequence. At the first moment, external actions are usually carried under external guidance or through modeling. At the second moment, and after the required qualitative transformations, the verbalized action is transferred to a mental plane, thus becoming an internal action of thought that enables independent behavior.

3.3. Third station: Production

Once the skills needed to operate with communicational media have been acquired, it is time to put them into practice by developing an original project as community reporters.

In the Production station, the group of reporters must negotiate the project that they wish to carry out, for which they will have to come to an agreement on various issues: the theme, the interviewees, the places, times and tools to use, the tasks to develop, their distribution, etc.

As illustrated in *figure 11*, this stop requires various stages.

1. Design (theme, time, place, interviewees, required information)
2. Action (do the interviews)
3. Production (select the obtained material, edit the material, produce a result that can be shared and published on the web of the ISABEL project).

In order to facilitate this phase of production, the repository of this station stores different examples of projects developed by other groups of reporters from other countries.

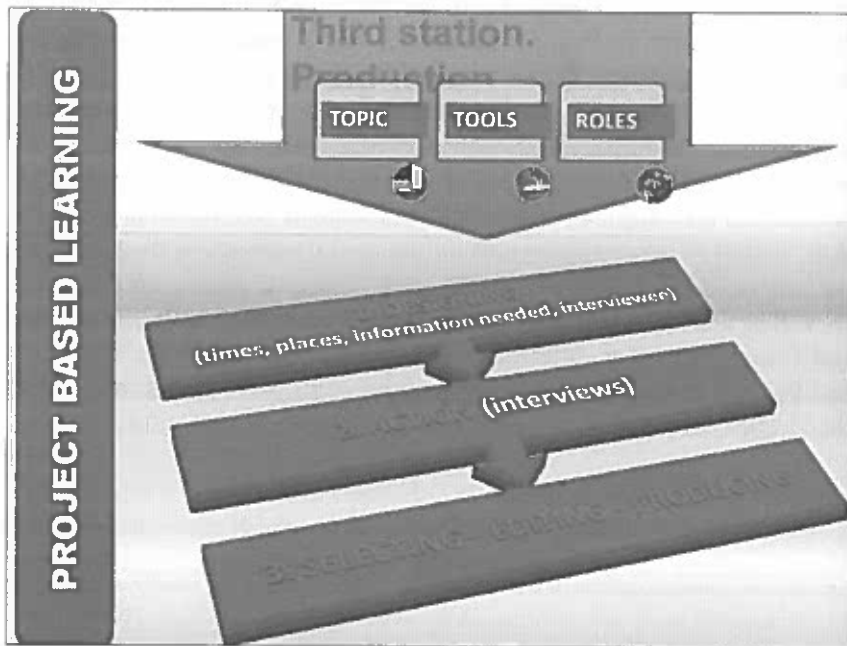


Figure 11. Third VLB Station: PRODUCTION

The groups can also count on the support of their guide or facilitator, who is in charge of supporting the group to ensure that this journey is interesting and adapted to their interests and needs, with the purpose of ensuring that the groups arrives at the final station with a result that is really satisfactory, and with the desire to continue learning and developing new initiatives.

The learning journey in this station follows in line with *project based learning* (Atkinson, 2001; Barron, 1997; Capraro & Slough, 2009; Rodriguez Illera, 2008) in which the work group must negotiate the way to confront the different aspects involving the design and development of the project, counting on the support of the facilitators. This journey usually involves the following steps:

- Defining the project and forming the work groups. One of the most used modalities is peer learning, but the group should be able to self-regulate as they see fit.
- Defining the work plan to develop the project: individual activities, pair work... dates, meetings.
- Searching for and organizing information, conducting interviews, solving unanticipated problems.
- Gathering and reviewing all the material and the interviews completed in order to make a selection.
- Establishing a sequence to organize, assemble and disseminate the project
- Reviewing and concluding the project
- Uploading the work to the ISABEL project platform to publish it and share it with the community.

With this information, the travelers are at the brink of arriving at the final station of the journey where they will become aware of what they have learned throughout the process.

3.4. Fourth Station: Destination

The journey concludes at this station, the moment of awareness of the learning that has taken place throughout the journey, all decisions both good and bad. For this they can use different evaluation tools (initial test, interviews, discussion groups...).

It is also a moment to look forward and reflect on the new initiatives to develop, counting on the participation and feedback of the group.

It is very important to reinforce confidence in one's own skills and to encourage the group to continue forward with new projects.

At this stop we can find the evaluations and critical assessments that other groups of reporters have wanted to make public. You can also leave your own. A common place to leave our results and provide new ideas and projects helps us to enrich the Community Reporter network. This is, after all, the ultimate goal of the Virtual Learning Bus virtual tool (<<http://virtuallearningbuses.wordpress.com/>>).

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