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**RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING  
IN  
A CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN  
CONTEXT:  
A NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL  
APPROACH**

by

*Alrika Moore*

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of

**PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR**

in the

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Promoter: Prof. Dr L van Rooyen

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***DEDICATED TO***

***MY HUSBAND AND PARENTS***





## *WHO IS IGNORANT?*

*What kind of people are we?*

*We are poor, very poor, but we are not stupid,*

*That is why, despite our illiteracy we still exist.*

*But we have to know why we should become literate.*

*Why should teachers feel so superior?*

*They behave as if we were ignorant fools, as if we were little children.*

*Please, do understand that the teacher may know things which we don't.*

*But we know a lot of things which are beyond him...*

*Literacy should help us live better: at least we look at it that way.*

*They say that things are being planned for us – the poor.*

*Would literacy help us in knowing those government plans?*

*Would it help us to know how to raise our yield, and increase our income?*

*And from where to borrow money on easy terms,*

*And what benefits would we get from the cooperative?*

*Will this programme teach us how to think and work together?*

*Will “doing” be made a part of “learning”?*

*We want a straight answer.*

*Then we shall decide whether we should become literate or not.*

*But if we find out that we are being duped again with empty promises,*

*We will stay away from you.....*

*From the Journal, Adult Education and Development, no 43, 1994*

*Written by some illiterates of India*

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- My parents and family for their continued interest and support during my studies.*
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## **ABSTRACT**

# **RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN A CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT: A NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL APPROACH**

**BY**

**ALRIKA MOORE**

**PROMOTER:** Prof. Dr L van Rooyen

**DEPARTMENT:** Psycho- and Sociopedagogics

**DEGREE:** Philosophiae Doctor

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a systematic process to accredit learning gained outside formal educational institutions, by assessing relevant learning against the standards required by a specific field of learning or course. RPL recognises what individuals know or can do before undertaking a course of study, wherever or however they may have acquired their knowledge or skills. It includes testing, or various other techniques of assessment which may include compiling a profile or a portfolio of learning and/or experience. RPL in South Africa can be seen as a mechanism to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities. RPL can empower individuals, it can provide a skill focus for employers and can assist in economic and social development.

## **KEYWORDS**

**Learning**

**Recognition of Prior Learning**

**Reflection**

**Experiential learning**

**Lifelong Learning**

**Adult Basic Education and Training**

**Competence-based assessment**

**Competent**

**Non-formal education**

**Accreditation**



## **OPSOMMING**

# **ERKENNING VAN VORIGE LEER IN 'N KONTEMPORÊRE SUID-AFRIKAANSE KONTEKS: 'N NIE-FORMELE ONDERWYSBENADERING**

**DEUR**

**ALRIKA MOORE**

**PROMOTOR: Prof. Dr L van Rooyen**

**DEPARTEMENT: Psigo- en Sosiopedagogiek**

**GRAAD: Philosophiae Doktor**

Erkenning van Vorige Leer (EVL) is 'n sistematiese proses om geleerdheid wat bekom is buite formele onderwysinstellings te akkrediteer. Dit word gedoen deur die relevante geleerdheid te assesser teen die standaard wat deur 'n spesifieke leerveld of kursus vereis word. Erkenning van Vorige Leer gee erkenning aan wat 'n individu weet en kan doen voordat hy/sy enige kursus of studie onderneem, ongeag hoe en waar die kennis en bevoegdhede bekom is. Die erkenning kan verkry word deur die aflê van toetse of enige ander metode van assessering. Dit kan ook insluit die saamstel van 'n profiel of 'n portefeulje van 'n individu se kennis en/of ondervinding. EVL kan in Suid-Afrika beskou word as 'n meganisme wat die





# **SLEUTELWOORDE**

**Leer**

**Erkenning van Vorige Leer**

**Nadenke**

**Ervaringsleer**

**Lewenslange-leer**

**Basiese volwassene-onderrig en opleiding**

**Bevoegdheidsgebaseerde evaluering**

**Bevoegdheid**

**Nie-formele onderwys**

**Akkreditering**

# CONTENTS

	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	ix-xi
<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS</b>	xii-xiv
<b>CHAPTER 1: THEME ANALYSIS AND FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM</b>	<b>1</b>
Acronyms	2
1.1 Introduction	4
1.2 Theme analysis	7
1.2.1 Recognition of Prior Learning	7
1.2.1.1 Sources of Prior Learning	8
1.2.2 Experiential learning	17
1.2.3 Lifelong learning and education	24
1.2.3.1 Learning	24
1.2.3.2 Education	27
1.2.3.3 Lifelong learning	29
1.2.3.4 Lifelong education	32
1.2.4 Competence-based assessment	33
1.2.5 Adult Education	36
1.2.5.1 Adult Basic Education	41
1.2.5.2 Adult Basic Education and Training	43

	<b>PAGE</b>
1.2.6 The Reconstruction and Development Programme	44
1.2.6.1 The Principles of the Reconstruction and Development Programme	46
1.2.7 The South African Qualifications Authority and the National Qualifications Framework	49
1.2.7.1 The South African Qualifications Authority	49
1.2.7.2 The National Qualifications Framework	50
1.2.8 Educational modi	57
1.2.8.1 Formal education	58
1.2.8.2 Non-formal education	59
1.2.8.3 Informal education	60
1.3 Statement of the problem	61
1.4 Aim of the study	62
1.5 Research methodology	62
1.6 Programme of the study	66
1.7 Conclusion	68
 <b>CHAPTER 2: THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING             A LOGICAL ANALYSIS</b>	 <b>69</b>
Acronyms	70
2.1 Introduction	71



	<b>PAGE</b>
2.2 Approaches to the Recognition of Prior Learning	73
2.3 Philosophical foundations of the Recognition of Prior Learning	74
2.4 Recognition of Prior Learning as an integral component of competence-based assessment	77
2.5 The functions of the Recognition of Prior Learning	83
2.5.1 Findings of the First Nations Technical Institute's Project	83
2.5.2 Functions of the Recognition of Prior Learning in general	85
2.6 The benefits and beneficiaries of the Recognition of Prior Learning	86
2.6.1 Benefits of the Recognition of Prior Learning	87
2.6.2 Beneficiaries of the Recognition of Prior Learning	90
2.6.3 Financial benefits and implications	94
2.7 Implications of the Recognition of Prior Learning	96
2.8 Minimum standards required for an effective Recognition of Prior Learning system	97
2.9 Assessment practices and methods which could be utilised for the Recognition of Prior Learning	99
2.9.1 Assessing learning and assessing prior learning	99
2.9.2 The methods of assessment	100
2.9.2.1 The challenge process	105
2.9.2.2 Standardised examinations	106
2.9.2.3 Portfolio development	107

	<b>PAGE</b>
2.9.2.4 The assessment interview	118
2.9.2.5 Programme and course evaluation or credit transfer	119
2.10 The relationship between the Recognition of Prior Learning and placement assessment	120
2.10.1 What is placement assessment?	120
2.11 Financing of the Recognition of Prior Learning systems	122
2.11.1 Variables which affect the cost	122
2.12 Recognition of Prior Learning and Quality Assurance	123
2.13 Conclusion	127
<b>CHAPTER 3: INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING DEVELOPMENTS</b>	<b>129</b>
Acronyms	130
3.1 Introduction	132
3.2 Relevance of experiential and informal learning	134
3.2.1 Theoretical niche of the Recognition of Prior Learning within experiential learning	134
3.2.2 Three-stage model of reflection	135
3.3 International developments	136
3.3.1 United States of America	137

	<b>PAGE</b>
3.3.2 United Kingdom	144
3.3.3 Australia	150
3.3.4 Canada (Ontario)	153
3.3.5 Ireland	155
3.4 National developments (South Africa)	158
3.4.1 The Recognition of Prior Learning in the vocational sector	161
3.4.2 Workers' experience of the Recognition of Prior Learning in South Africa	165
3.4.3 The Recognition of Prior Learning in the education and training sector	168
3.4.3.1 Research projects undertaken in the education and training sector	170
3.5 Conclusion	177
 <b>CHAPTER 4: PRINCIPLES ESSENTIAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING MODEL</b>	 <b>179</b>
 Acronyms	 180
4.1 Introduction	181
4.2 Essential principles for the development of a Recognition of Prior Learning model	183
4.2.1 Quality assurance mechanisms	183
4.2.2 Efficiency of a Recognition of Prior Learning system	185



	<b>PAGE</b>
4.2.3 Equity and access	187
4.2.4 Validity and reliability of a Recognition of Prior Learning system	188
4.2.5 Transparency	191
4.2.6 Curriculum based on explicit learning outcomes to be utilised for the Recognition of Prior Learning assessment	192
4.2.7 Training of key players including their selection and monitoring	193
4.3 Barriers to the Recognition of Prior Learning assessment	199
4.3.1 Physical, personal and situational barriers	199
4.3.2 Institutional barriers	201
4.4 Conclusion	203
<b>CHAPTER 5: A MODEL FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING OF THE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA</b>	<b>204</b>
Acronyms	205
5.1 Introduction	206
5.2 Principles and systems of Recognition of Prior Learning	208
5.2.1 System 1: Access	210

	<b>PAGE</b>
5.2.2 System 2: Diagnostic	210
5.2.3 System 3: Assessment	210
5.2.4 System 4: Accreditation	210
5.2.5 System 5: Awards	211
5.2.6 System 6: Progress	211
5.3 Design of a Recognition of Prior Learning model for the Adult Basic Education and Training sector	211
5.3.1 Types of Recognition of Prior Learning	211
5.3.2 Purpose of a Recognition of Prior Learning model for the Adult Basic Education and Training sector	212
5.4 The Recognition of Prior Learning process	213
5.4.1 Application for the Recognition of Prior Learning	213
5.4.1.1 Application through an adult learning centre	215
5.4.1.2 Direct application to the education and training quality assurance body or appropriate assessor body	221
5.4.2 Support services for Recognition of Prior Learning candidates	222
5.4.3 Assessment of Recognition of Prior Learning candidates	236
5.5 Recognition of Prior Learning appeal procedure	243
5.6 Recognition of Prior Learning and Quality Assurance	244
5.7 Role-players at all levels in the Recognition of Prior Learning process	245

	<b>PAGE</b>
5.8 Costs of Recognition of Prior Learning to the candidate	253
5.9 Recognition of Prior Learning centres	254
5.10 Time factors	256
5.11 Advocacy	256
5.12 Conclusion	257
<b>CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>259</b>
Acronyms	260
6.1 Introduction	261
6.2 Findings	264
6.3 Recommendations	269
6.4 Shortcomings of the study	270
6.5 Further research	271
6.6 Conclusion	272
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>274</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY (ACTS)</b>	<b>295</b>
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	<b>296</b>



## LIST OF FIGURES

		PAGE
FIGURE 1.1	SOURCES OF PRIOR LEARNING	10
FIGURE 1.2	KOLB'S LEARNING CYCLE	21
FIGURE 1.3	EXPANSION OF KOLB'S LEARNING CYCLE	22
FIGURE 1.4	A COMPARISON OF THE ASSUMPTIONS OF PEDAGOGY AND ANDRAGOGY	39
FIGURE 1.5	THE NQF STRUCTURE	52
FIGURE 1.6	OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE NQF	56
FIGURE 2.1	FRAMEWORK FOR EXAMINING LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE	76
FIGURE 2.2	ASSESSMENT PROCESS: COMPETENCE-BASED ASSESSMENT	80
FIGURE 2.3	CONTINUUM OF ASSESSMENT	82
FIGURE 2.4	ASSESSMENT METHODS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING	102
FIGURE 2.5	TYPES OF EVIDENCE	112

		<b>PAGE</b>
<b>FIGURE 2.6</b>	<b>AN ASSESSMENT MODEL</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>FIGURE 2.7</b>	<b>TEN STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ASSESSING LEARNING FOR CREDIT</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>FIGURE 3.1</b>	<b>KEY ELEMENTS OF THE CAEL APPROACH TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>FIGURE 3.2</b>	<b>BARRIERS TO WORKFORCE LEARNING</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>FIGURE 3.3</b>	<b>COMPARISON OF SELF-ORIENTATED AND OUTCOMES-ORIENTATED PORTFOLIOS</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>FIGURE 3.4</b>	<b>FAS CERTIFICATION FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>FIGURE 3.5</b>	<b>THE RPL PROCESS</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>FIGURE 4.1</b>	<b>THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KEY PLAYERS IN THE RPL SYSTEM</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.1</b>	<b>SIX-POINT TYPOLOGY</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.2</b>	<b>APPLYING FOR RPL</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.3</b>	<b>AN INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE</b>	<b>216</b>

		<b>PAGE</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.4</b>	<b>A PLACEMENT PROFILE</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.5</b>	<b>SUPPORT MECHANISM FOR RPL CANDIDATES</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.6</b>	<b>COUNSELLING SESSION</b>	<b>225</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.7</b>	<b>RPL BRIEFING SESSION</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.8</b>	<b>RPL ACTION PLAN</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.9a</b>	<b>RPL EVIDENCE COLLECTION GRID</b>	<b>234</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.9b</b>	<b>EXAMPLE OF A COMPLETED RPL EVIDENCE COLLECTION GRID</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.10</b>	<b>ASSESSMENT OF RPL CANDIDATES</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.11a</b>	<b>AN ASSESSMENT GRID</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>FIGURE 5.11b</b>	<b>EXAMPLE OF A COMPLETED ASSESSMENT GRID</b>	<b>242</b>

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ABE</b>	Adult Basic Education
<b>ABET</b>	Adult Basic Education and Training
<b>ABT</b>	Adult Basic Training
<b>ALC</b>	Adult Learning Centre
<b>APA</b>	Accreditation of Prior Achievement
<b>APEL</b>	Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning
<b>APL/A</b>	Accreditation of Prior Learning/Achievement
<b>APL</b>	Accreditation of Prior Learning
<b>CAEL</b>	Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
<b>CCC</b>	Credit for Current Competencies
<b>COSATU</b>	Congress of South African Trade Unions
<b>CPL</b>	Credit for Prior Learning
<b>DOE</b>	Department of Education
<b>ETDP</b>	Education, Training and Development Practitioner
<b>ETQA</b>	Education and Training Quality Assurance Body
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training



<b>FNTI</b>	First Nations Technical Institute
<b>GEAR</b>	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
<b>GET</b>	General Education and Training
<b>GETC</b>	General Education and Training Certificate
<b>HET</b>	Higher Education and Training
<b>HSRC</b>	Human Sciences Research Council
<b>INDLELA</b>	Institute for the National Development of Learnerships, Employment-skills and Labour Assessments
<b>ITB</b>	Industry Training Board
<b>LET</b>	Learning from Experience Trust
<b>NCEA</b>	National Council for Educational Awards
<b>NCHE</b>	National Commission on Higher Education
<b>NCVQ</b>	National Council for Vocational Qualification
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>NSB</b>	National Standards Body
<b>NTB</b>	National Training Board
<b>NTSI</b>	National Training Strategy Initiative



**NUM**



**National Union of Mine Workers**

**NUMSA**

**National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa**

**NVQ**

**National Vocational Qualification**

**PLA**

**Prior Learning Assessment**

**RDP**

**Reconstruction and Development Programme**

**RPL**

**Recognition of Prior Learning**

**SAQA**

**South African Qualifications Authority**

**SCOTVEC**

**Scottish Vocational Education Council**

**SETA**

**Sector Education and Training Authority**

**SGB**

**Standards Generating Body**

**SMME**

**Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises**

**TAFE**

**Technical and Further Education College**

**UCT**

**University of Cape Town**

**UNESCO**

**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation**

**USA**

**United States of America**

**UTS**

**University of Technology, Sydney**

**VET**

**Vocational Education and Training**



# CHAPTER 1



## ACRONYMS USED IN CHAPTER 1

<b>ABE</b>	Adult Basic Education
<b>ABET</b>	Adult Basic Education and Training
<b>ABT</b>	Adult Basic Training
<b>APA</b>	Accreditation of Prior Achievement
<b>APEL</b>	Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning
<b>APL/A</b>	Accreditation of Prior Learning/Achievement
<b>APL</b>	Accreditation of Prior Learning
<b>CCC</b>	Credit for Current Competencies
<b>CPL</b>	Credit for Prior Learning
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training
<b>FNTI</b>	First Nations Technical Institute
<b>GEAR</b>	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
<b>GET</b>	General Education and Training
<b>HSRC</b>	Human Sciences Research Council
<b>INDLELA</b>	Institute for the National Development of Learnerships, Employment-skills and Labour Assessments



<b>NCVQ</b>	National Council for Vocational Qualification
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>NSB</b>	National Standards Body
<b>NTB</b>	National Training Board
<b>NTSI</b>	National Training Strategy Initiative
<b>NUM</b>	National Union of Mine Workers
<b>PLA</b>	Prior Learning Assessment
<b>RCC</b>	Recognition of Current Competencies
<b>RDP</b>	Reconstruction and Development Programme
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SAQA</b>	South African Qualifications Authority
<b>SGB</b>	Standards Generating Body
<b>TAFE</b>	Technical and Further Education College
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>UTS</b>	University of Technology, Sydney

# CHAPTER 1

## THEME ANALYSIS AND FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

At present there is a worldwide tendency to optimise existing resources. Simosko & Cook (1996: 1) emphasise the need to maximise available infrastructure and personal qualities:

*“Educators, trainers, employers and government policy makers, regardless of nation, seem to be saying much the same thing: that as nations we must put individuals first and provide opportunities whereby everyone can make maximum use of their potential. Educators, trainers and other human resource development specialists are concerned that too much valuable time and effort is lost teaching people what they already know and can do.”*

The concept of recognising and accrediting what people already know and can do, is having a significant impact on many of the education and training programmes being developed currently. This is irrespective of whether the knowledge and skills have been acquired through unstructured learning, performance development, off-the-job assessment or skills and knowledge that meet workplace needs but has been gained through previous employment, hobbies, etc. (Rutherford, 1995: 2). This is called *Recognition of Prior Learning* (RPL). In many contexts the concept, procedures and tools for RPL have become an integral part of flexible assessment or competence-based assessment systems. There is, therefore, no difference between the tools and procedures of competence-based assessment and those of RPL.



In South Africa, formal work on RPL began in June 1994 when the National Training Board (NTB) established a sub-committee to address assessment issues. Prior to this point there were various initiatives at national and local levels, although they often were not officially referred to as RPL. Comparative international research and an investigation into the current status of RPL in South Africa was undertaken. This culminated in the production of several documents. These documents are: the White Paper on the Reconstruction and Development Programme (African National Congress, 1994: 9), the National Training Strategy Initiative – Working Group 9 of the National Training Board (1994: 3), the White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education, 1995: 16) and the Policy Document on Adult Basic Education and Training (Department of Education, 1997a: 25).

The National Education Policy Act (Act no. 27 of 1996) stipulates that every person has a right to “...*basic education and equal access to education institutions*” regardless of age, gender, racial origin, religious persuasion, sexual orientation or disability. That means that everyone has access to programmes, examinations and assessment. The assessment system for the Education and Training sector (of which RPL is a sub-set) is “...*the cornerstone of transformation activities and programmes*” (Department of Education, 1997a: 117).

In the past many adults and out-of-school youths attended non-formal training programmes and acquired a great deal of informal knowledge and experience. Such knowledge and experience were not recognised or certificated and this often led to exclusion from certain jobs, promotion on the job, and from further education and training opportunities, for all of which some kind of “certificate” was a pre-requisite. These skills need to be certified in order to provide access to the labour market for these persons. Certification is also an integral part of a skills audit for purposes of planning major training programmes required in the future.

Harris & Saddington (1995: 7) mention that “...*in terms of the current political, economic and social context in the country, RPL is seen to have the capacity to:*

- ❑ *contribute to redress and equity by opening up more inclusive ways for people to attain qualified status;*
- ❑ *enable more people to reach higher levels of qualification and expertise by beginning with an acknowledgement of existing skills and knowledge;*
- ❑ *contribute to enhancing international economic competitiveness by building on often invisible and unacknowledged workforce skills; and*
- ❑ *offer the first step in attaining the goal of developing a multi-skilled and flexible workforce by acting as an auditing tool to quantify existing competence.”*

RPL will avoid unnecessary duplication of learning, encourage self-assessment, assist learners to make judgements concerning their own knowledge and skills, reduce the time learners need to spend in training and help build learner confidence (McKay, Kotze, Vaccarino, Vaccarino & De Necker, 1998: 163).

According to Shaughnessy (1996: 6 – 8) education and training should be available to all, and the process of lifelong learning should be encouraged. People should continually be involved in acquiring new skills and should also gain reward for existing skills, experience and learning previously unrecognised.

According to Matthews (1997: 6) institutions involved in RPL activities in Canada found that RPL empowers individuals, it provides a skill focus for employers and it assists in economic and social development. Based on these findings an RPL system in South Africa could be a mechanism to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities. RPL could have the potential to be a powerful tool in the development of South Africa and the implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

Guidelines need to be developed to form a basis to enable the issues of the “practicability” of RPL to be addressed in different circumstances. This is one of the key issues if RPL is to form a stable part of a national approach to assessment and recognition. The following question needs to be asked: *“Why do we not put as much energy into assessing and recognising the learning of learners when*

*they come into our programs as we do into assessing learners when they exit?”*  
(Matthews, 1997: 6).

Much time has been spent on the theorisation of RPL. However, a practical elaboration of RPL policy and practice in the education sector is needed. Administered carefully and supported by explicitly anti-discriminatory policies, RPL can indeed contribute to movements for greater casual mobility.

Working Group 9 of the National Training Board (NTB) (1994: 100) emphasises the importance of a practical RPL process in South Africa by the following remark:

*“For the RPL process in South Africa to be credible and relevant, it must be transferred as soon as possible from a debate of ethos into a practical, workable and understandable process which is recognised as having real street value.”*

## **1.2 THEME ANALYSIS**

### **1.2.1 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

The concept of *Recognition of Prior Learning* is understood to refer to the measurement of learning gained through experiences other than formal courses. This type of learning may have been acquired through many avenues such as work experience, volunteering, community involvement, independent reading and self-help manuals. RPL also refers to learning gained under the sponsorship of business, industry, government or social agencies and may or may not be job specific (Bertrand, 1997: 11 and Blower, 1997: 12).

In its legislation and policy documents the Department of Education uses a number of definitions to clarify the concept of RPL. In the Report of the Ministerial Committee for the Development Work on the National Qualifications

Framework (NQF) (Department of Education, 1996: 22), *Recognition of Prior Learning* is defined as “...giving a credit through assessment to learning which has already been acquired in a non-formal way, for example, through life or work experience.”

According to the Policy document on Adult Basic Education and Training (Department of Education, 1997a: 25) RPL is defined as “...the acknowledgement of the skills and knowledge held as a result of formal training, work experience, and or life experience.”

Whereas the Report of the Ministerial Committee for the Development Work on the NQF (Department of Education, 1996: 22) refers to giving a credit through assessment, the Education White Paper 4 (Department of Education, 1998a: 21) goes a step further by saying that the credit is given for a unit of learning. In the Norms and Standards for Educators (Department of Education, 1998b: xxiii) a more or less similar definition is given. In this document RPL is defined as

“...granting credit for a unit on the basis of an assessment of formal or non-formal learning experience to establish whether the learner possesses the applied competence specified in an outcome statement.”

In some contexts *Prior Learning* is taken to include all formal, non-formal and informal learning undertaken to date. This would include learning from credentialed courses (i.e. university, technikon, professional courses, technical colleges courses, some industry training, vocational courses, community college courses, etc.), learning from non-credentialed courses (on-the-job training, some industry training, training with NGOs, training with private providers, etc.) and learning from experience (Lizotte, 1997: 13).

#### **1.2.1.1 SOURCES OF PRIOR LEARNING**

Cohen, Flowers, McDonald & Schaafsma (1994: 6) developed a framework to indicate the various sources of *Prior Learning* in Australia. According to them *Prior Learning* can be obtained through two main sources. These are:

□ ***Credit transfer (formal learning)***

Since 1992 there has been a growing emphasis on national articulation and the establishment of formal transcript credit transfer arrangements between universities and other tertiary providers. Learners can transfer their credits for learning outcomes achieved at a formal institution, e.g. university, college, Technical and Further Education College (TAFE College), overseas qualifications, professional courses etc. These credits already obtained will be acknowledged as prior learning (compare Simosko & Cook, 1996: 1 – 3).

□ ***Recognition of Prior Learning (non-formal and informal learning)***

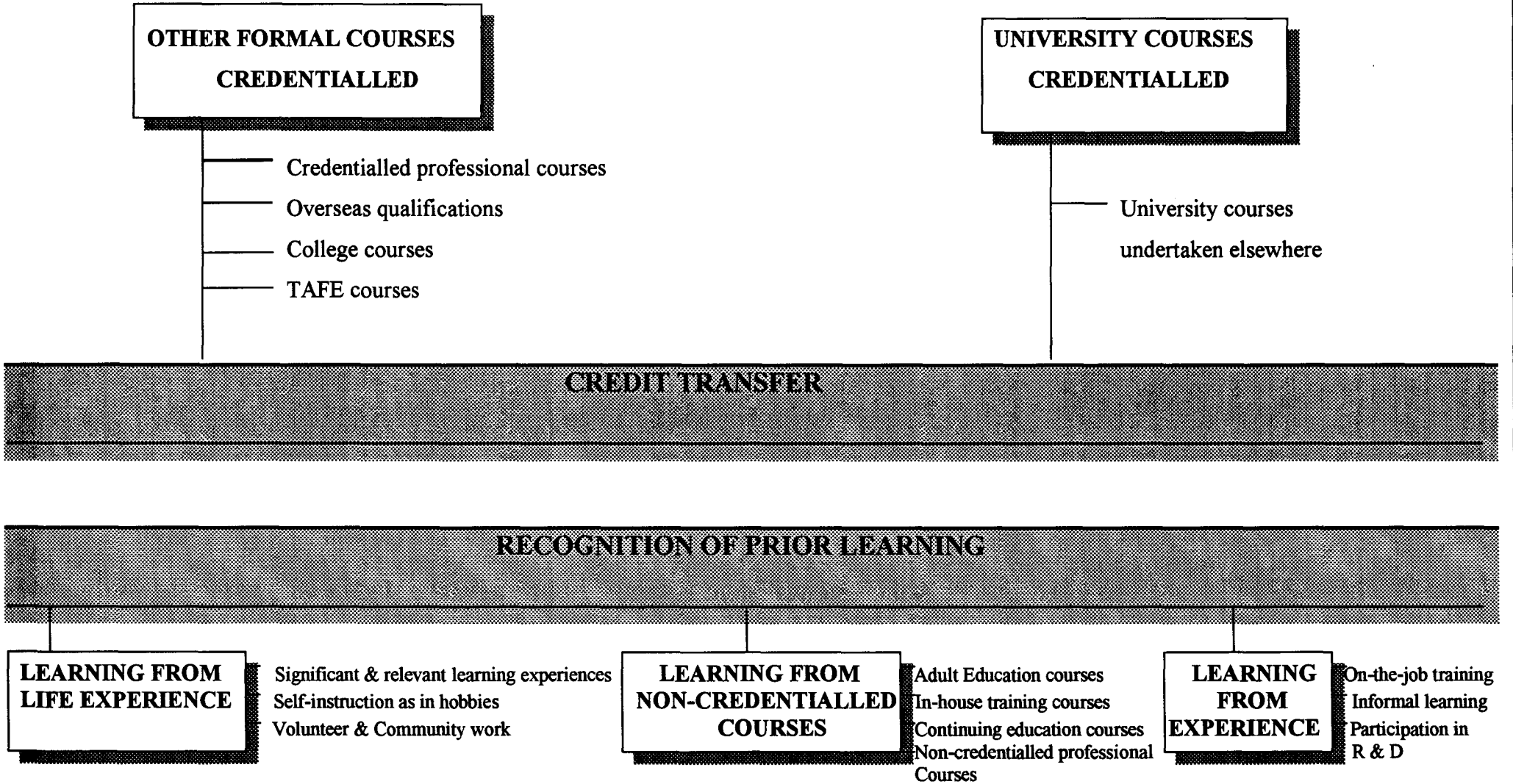
Credits can be granted by RPL for learning from work experience or other significant learning. Credits for subjects can be awarded to candidates on the basis of work experience which would have an educational value equivalent to the completion of that subject. The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) has the following policy regarding RPL of non-formal and informal learning (Cohen *et al*, 1994: 4):

*“With the written approval of the Subject Co-ordinator of the subject concerned, students may apply to a Faculty Board to challenge a subject of which they have knowledge by reason of experience or previous informal studies. If the applications are granted, the student will be able to undertake approved assessment requirements of the subject, as determined in each case by the Subject Co-ordinator and shall receive advanced standing on the basis of successful performance in such requirements.”*

Figure 1.1 on the next page explains the sources of *Prior Learning* diagrammatically.

FIGURE 1.1

SOURCES OF PRIOR LEARNING



Source: Cohen, Flowers, McDonald & Schaafsma, 1994: 8



In the United Kingdom, Ireland and America, RPL is enshrined in the policies of major national government departments and agencies. The United Kingdom National Council for Vocational Qualification (NCVQ) has a policy statement which states:

*“Evidence of past achievements, if properly authenticated, may be equally or more valid than evidence from a test or examination...Prior achievements are simply those which have occurred in the past...If a candidate has practised the required competencies, in work or outside, and can produce evidence...this could provide an alternative source that could be taken into account for the award of a qualification” (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 8).*

Different acronyms for RPL are used in other countries. In the United States of America where much of the early work originated, the process is usually called “*Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)*”. In Australia where the concept is just taking hold, the term most often used is the “*Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)*”. In the United Kingdom the words include not only “*Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)*”, but also “*Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA)*” and “*Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)*” (Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 276 and Rutherford, 1995: 18). RPL is often used synonymously with the following terms:

- Credit for Prior Learning (CPL);*
- Credit for Current Competencies (CCC); and*
- Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC).*

Much energy has been spent on trying to find words that will describe the RPL process within each nation and context, but regardless of what it is called, it seems that there is no basic difference in the underlying principles each process follows. (These principles will be described in Chapter 4.) The basic concept remains the same: that through a systematic and valid assessment process an individual’s skills and knowledge can be formally recognised and credited, regardless of how, when or why they were obtained.



There are many definitions for the concept *Recognition of Prior Learning*. The definition given by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) (1995: 3) states that the *Recognition of Prior Learning* is the process of

*“...granting credit for a unit on the basis of an assessment of formal and non-formal learning/experience to establish whether the learner possesses the capabilities specified in the outcome statement. Similarly, a person could gain recognition for prior learning in respect of an entire qualification, provided that such a person is able to demonstrate the full competence associated with the qualification.”*

The National Framework for Recognition of Training in Australia uses the following definition:

*“Recognition of Prior Learning refers to the acknowledgement of skills and knowledge held as a result of formal training, work experience and/or life experience”* (McDonald, 1995: 1).

According to Harris & Saddington (1995: 1) RPL can also be seen as

*“...a way of recognising what individuals know and can do, before undertaking a task, job, or course of study. It may include testing, or various other techniques of assessment including compiling a profile or portfolio of learning and/or experience.”*

In the Report of the PLA Advisory and Co-ordinating Group (1995: 58) the Ministry of Education and Training has the following definition for *Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)*:

*“Prior Learning Assessment is based on the premise that adults acquire skills and knowledge through many means of formal or informal study. It is a process which uses a variety of tools to help learners reflect on, identify, articulate, and demonstrate past learning which has been acquired through study, work, and other life experiences, and which is not*

*recognised through formal transfer-of-credit mechanisms. PLA allows the evaluation of past learning against established academic standards so that credit can be awarded by a credentialling body. An APL system evaluates this learning and relates it to programs and courses for the purpose of granting credit or exemptions.”*

According to the above-mentioned definition it seems that *Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition* is a process of identifying, assessing and recognising what a person knows and can do. The process can take various forms and the outcomes can be used for a large number of purposes relevant to the goals of individuals, the labour market partners and society at large. Institutions and employers can make better use of their resources by not making people learn and do what they already know and can do.

According to the South African College for Open Learning (1999: 2) the *Accreditation of Prior Learning* is a most acceptable method of certification or exemption:

*“APL is a process that enables people of all ages, backgrounds, and attitudes to receive credit for achievements they have acquired outside the classroom. The basic premise of APL is that individuals can and do learn through their lives in a variety of settings and that often the ensuing skills, knowledge and abilities are equal and frequently superior to those obtained by students following traditional routes through formal education.”*

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education in Leicester (Crossland, 1991: 1 - 4) defines *APL* as

*“...an educational process which recognises life-long learning for the purpose of giving credit, exemption or recognition for individuals’ achievement regardless of when, where or how competence was acquired.”*

According to Crossland (1991: 1 – 5) various definitions for the *Assessment of Prior Learning (APL)* are being used by institutions throughout the United Kingdom. Note that some of the institutions use the acronym APL/A which refers to the *Assessment of Prior Learning and Achievement*, although the other institutions only refer to the *Assessment of Prior Learning*. Although many definitions and acronyms exist, they all have the same key feature of RPL, namely that credit, exemption or recognition can be given for prior skills, knowledge, understanding and achievement. By looking at the following definitions this key feature will emanate clearly from all the different descriptions.

❑ **WIRRAL METROPOLITAN COLLEGE**

*“The Assessment of Prior Learning and Achievement (APL/A) (sometimes known otherwise as APA or APL) involves the identification of those parts of an individual’s previous experience and achievements which have led to the possession of current skills, knowledge and understanding (i.e. ‘competence’).*

*APL/A thus recognises that competence can be acquired in a variety of contexts outside of formal educational institutions. Such competence, whether acquired through paid or unpaid employment, can often be equal to the skills, knowledge and understanding acquired by more formal or traditional means.”*

❑ **BLACKPOOL AND THE FYLDE COLLEGE**

*“APL is a process which recognises life-long learning and gives credit for individual’s achievements regardless of when, where or how competence was acquired.”*

□ **CITY & GUILDS OF LONDON INSTITUTE**

*“Accreditation of Prior Learning/Achievement (APL/A) permits the award of credit towards a qualification on the basis of evidence drawn from an individual’s past achievements. In this way a person’s track record of relevant achievement can be taken into account when awarding such credit. Clearly, the evidence will often relate to previous learning experiences which were not undertaken to gain a qualification. It is the achievement gained from them which may be creditable, not the experiences themselves.”*

□ **BUSINESS & TECHNICIAN EDUCATION COUNCIL**

*“Accreditation of Prior Learning/Achievement (APL/A) is a process which enables the identification, assessment and certification of a person’s vocationally relevant past achievements.*

*APL/A is part of a general movement to improve access to vocational education and training. It is a process which*

- ◆ *recognises that learning is continuous – at work, at home and at leisure, as well as in the classroom;*
- ◆ *provides a route for the recognition of the achievements that result from this learning and allows them to contribute towards a qualification.”*

□ **LONDON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY**

*Prior Achievement is defined as*

*“...vocationally related learning achievements which have been acquired up to the point where an individual begins the process of assessment leading to an award, but which were not acquired in the context of a formal learning programme designed to lead to that award.”*

The South African Qualifications Authority's (SAQA) definition for *Recognition of Prior Learning* (Act No. 58 of 1995) states that

*“Recognition of Prior Learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements”.*

The National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) (1997: 6) views RPL as

*“...a process to give recognition to people for the skills and knowledge that they already have, but which they have not been given credit for. In South Africa, its purpose is to enable redress, equity, access and redistribution.”*

The concept of *Prior Learning Assessment* is understood by most in adult education to mean the measurement of learning gained through experiences other than formal courses. Therefore, according to Hill (1995: 51) *Prior Learning Assessment*

*“...is based on the premise that adults acquire skills and knowledge through many means of formal or informal study. A PLA system evaluates this learning and relates it to programs and courses for the purpose of granting credit or exemptions.”*

In this regard Simosko & Cook (1996: 4) emphasise that

*“...the accreditation of prior learning acknowledges that much of what people know and can do can be recognised in some formal way towards accredited qualifications. It is built on the premise that people can and do learn throughout their lives – formally and informally, systematically and unsystematically – and that this uncertificated learning can be*

*equated and measured against the same standards used to evaluate learners completing more traditional and formal learning programmes.”*

### **1.2.2 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

Keeton (1982: 623) mentions that if a person has achieved the learning and the competence objectives required for successful completion of a given course or curriculum,

*“...the person deserves recognition and appropriate placement in further education programs regardless of where that learning was acquired.”*

According to Working Group 9 of the National Training Board (1994: 28) **experiential learning** can be defined as

*“...learning that is gained through intentionally and systematically reflecting on experience. The learning may arise in formal or informal settings, or may be incidental.”*

McCormick (1994: 343) states that the *Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)* determines whether adult students have acquired knowledge on their own that equals knowledge ordinarily taught in college, and when appropriate, awards credit for that knowledge.

According to McCormick (1994: 343) colleges all over the United States of America use *Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning* to determine whether adult students (working on their own and *prior* to admission) have acquired college-level learning – conceptual and generalisable learning that equals learning gained in college. Where appropriate, the college awards credit for this learning. This award is sometimes mistakenly called “credit for life-experience”. In actual fact, students receive credit for demonstrated **learning**, not mere **experience**. *Prior experiential learning* is not about receiving “credit for life experience” or “credit for living”.

*Learning from experience* differs from *formal learning* in the following ways (UTS Training and Development Services, 1995: 9):

- ❑ *“Learning form experience may appear unstructured.*
- ❑ *It may be incidentally and unconsciously acquired.*
- ❑ *It may seem more relevant for personal self-development rather than for professional development.*
- ❑ *It is determined by social and emotional contexts.*
- ❑ *Past learning is always relevant.”*

From the above remarks the *Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning* can be regarded as the process of assessing and then credit rating learning which has its source in some experience prior to entry onto the course. This learning may have been gained as work, through voluntary activities, hobbies or other interests (Paul, 1996: 394).

#### **1.2.2.1 REFLECTING ON LEARNING**

David Kolb developed the process that explains how people learn from a particular experience. Kolb (1984)<sup>1</sup> sees reflection as the source of learning and development. He defines *learning* as the process

*“...whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it.”*

Kolb’s basic contention is that perception is not enough, experience must be transformed into learning and knowledge.

However, it has to be noted that Kolb’s definition for “*learning*” is a fairly high order self-aware reflection on what has been experienced and is not necessarily the same as the dominant theory of learning based on the traditional cognitive

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<sup>1</sup> Information obtained from the Internet. No page numbers were given.



theory. According to this theory (Luckett, 1999: 70) “...*learning happens inside the minds of individuals and most significant learning is assumed to take place within the formal education system. Learning is viewed as a process of accumulation and internalisation of knowledge which are deposited and stored, to be retrieved at a later date.*” This view has led to an assessment tradition based on a psychometric model of intelligence in which intelligence is “measured” *via* the “objective” testing of theoretical content knowledge mostly through the examination method.

Boud, Keogh & Walker (1999)<sup>2</sup> attempt to examine the process of reflection itself. They propose a three-stage model of reflection:

- “*Firstly, the learner returns to the experience and rehearses what happened in as much detail as possible.*” During this stage the facilitator will help the learner to describe the experience as objectively as possible, avoiding premature analysis or judgements. Listening skills are important at this stage, as is an awareness of the way in which language is used.
- “*Secondly, they attempt to recognise and accept the feelings generated by this experience – both positive and negative.*” During this stage the facilitator is urged to give free and undivided attention to the learner and to be aware of non-verbal signals.
- “*Finally, the learner re-evaluates the experience by analysing its meaning and relationship with existing knowledge.*” During this stage the facilitator becomes a resource who has access to specialised techniques. They provide support, encouragement and a space to learn. They can sometimes helpfully clarify the learner’s intentions through the use of competencies or learning outcomes. Often they use repertory grids, free association, brainstorming, or concept mappings. The ultimate role of the facilitator is to alert the learner to the nature of reflection in the learning process.

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<sup>2</sup> Information obtained from the Internet. No page numbers were given.

However, these are not viewed as discrete stages but elements of a whole.

According to Luckett (1999: 72) Kolb's learning cycle is based on an "Enlightenment epistemology". Michelson (1996: 187) makes the following remark regarding this epistemology:

*"...experience is transformed into knowledge through the right exercise of reason, and proper procedures exist that enable that transformation to occur. While knowledge is grounded in experience, its construction requires that knowledge gradually be abstracted from experience."*

This is why Kolb's work appears so often in relation to APEL, as this is exactly what is requested from the potential candidates in order to demonstrate that they have learned from experience. Kolb's learning cycle and its expansion are represented in figures 1.2 and 1.3 on the following pages.



**CONCRETE EXPERIENCE**

GRASPING *via* APPREHENSION

ACCOMMODATIVE KNOWLEDGE

DIVERGENT KNOWLEDGE

**TESTING IMPLICATIONS OF CONCEPTS IN NEW SITUATIONS**

Transformation *via* Extension

Transformation *via* Intention

**OBSERVATION & REFLECTIONS**

CONVERGENT KNOWLEDGE

ASSIMILATIVE KNOWLEDGE

GRASPING *via* COMPREHENSION

**FORMAT OF ABSTRACT CONCEPTS & GENERALISATIONS**

**KOLB'S LEARNING CYCLE**  
**FIGURE 1.2**

Source: Kolb, 1984

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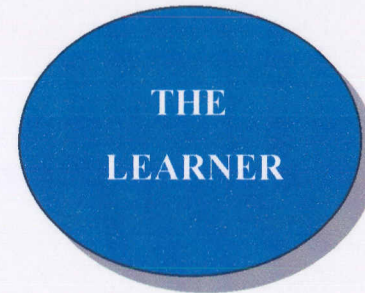


### CONCRETE EXPERIENCE

- \* *Name the experience*
- \* *Describe the experience*
- \* *What did I do?*
- \* *When did I do it?*
- \* *For how long?*

### OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

- \* *What did I notice?*
- \* *How did I feel?*
- \* *Were there patterns observable?*
- \* *Were there any differences and similarities?*
- \* *What worked for me?*
- \* *Did I change my behaviour as a result?*



THE  
LEARNER

### TESTING IDEAS IN OTHER SITUATIONS

- \* *What skills/knowledge have I developed?*
- \* *How do they apply in a new situation?*
- \* *Why might they not transfer?*

### IDEAS AND GENERALISATIONS

- \* *What did I infer as a result of the experience?*
- \* *What new concepts have I developed?*
- \* *How can I explain these outcomes?*
- \* *Would these ideas work in another situation?*
- \* *What skills did I learn?*
- \* *Why does it work?*

FIGURE 1.3

Usher, Bryant & Johnston (1997: 105) sum up the complex social position of experiential learning in a way that could equally apply to RPL:

*“...it is inherently neither emancipatory nor oppressive. Rather, its meaning is constantly shifting between and across these polarities. It is perhaps most usefully seen as having the potential for emancipation and oppression, domestication and transformation, where at any one time and according to context both tendencies can be present and in conflict with each other. Accordingly, it offers a contestable and ambiguous terrain where different socio-economic and cultural assumptions and strategies can be differently articulated. As a field of tension, it can be exploited by different groups, each emphasising certain dimensions over others.”*

By analysing the various definitions for RPL, it seems that RPL is an approach that embodies a number of the key elements relevant to our current economic, organisational and labour market realities. RPL recognises the increased importance of lifelong learning and upgrading. It values past learning and skills gained through life and work experience, as well as through formal education and training. It focuses upon each individual and builds confidence and self-esteem based upon systematic self-assessment of concrete performance and achievement.

From an organisational perspective, RPL can provide a solid base for long-term human resource development and improvements in morale, quality service and viability. RPL can address the urgent need to achieve a more highly skilled, flexible and productive workplace. RPL will strengthen articulation arrangements, and is, therefore, an important mechanism for improving flexibility in the delivery and accreditation of programmes. Therefore, RPL can be regarded as a positive social justice strategy that supports the economic challenges impacting on industry and education.

Finally, it can provide a practical means to utilise past learning in order to pursue future objectives in a variety of contexts.

### **1.2.3 LIFELONG LEARNING AND EDUCATION**

Hasan (1996: 33) makes the following statement regarding *lifelong learning*:

*“The concept of lifelong learning is rapidly gaining wide acceptance as a basis for reforming education and training systems. Its origins lie in related terms such as ‘lifelong education’, ‘recurrent education’ and ‘continuing education’.”*

However, the terms *lifelong education* and *lifelong learning* are often used interchangeably because there is a tendency to treat *education* and *learning* as synonymous concepts, which is imprecise.

In order to distinguish between the concepts *lifelong education* and *lifelong learning* it is important to conceptualise the terms *education* and *learning*.

#### **1.2.3.1 LEARNING**

Good (1959: 313) defines *learning* as

*“...change in response or behaviour (such as innovation, elimination or modification of responses, involving some degree of permanence), caused partly or wholly by experience, such ‘experience’ being in the main conscious, but sometimes including significant unconscious components.”*

Rowntree (1981: 153) defines *learning* without referring to the behaviour component. He regards *learning* as

*“...a long-lasting change in knowledge, attitude or skill, acquired through experience. This experience may take the form of conditioning, education, incidental learning, instruction training, etc.”*

Dejnozka & Kapel (1982: 293) agree with these two definitions by saying that *learning* is a change in attitude or behaviour as a result of experience. They go further by saying that this change need not necessarily be observed. They regard *learning* as an active process and mention that the learner has to interact with a stimulus or condition.

Jarvis (1990: 196) defines *learning* as

*“...any more or less permanent change in behaviour as a result of experience...A relatively permanent change in behaviour which occurs as a result of practice. It is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience into knowledge, skills and attitudes.”*

According to Husén & Postlethwaite (1994f: 3418) the *learning* presupposed in *lifelong learning* will

*“...allow each individual to continue to develop his or her physical, emotional and intellectual potential, and will reveal the inter-relatedness and the relativity of areas of knowledge and of human endeavours and perceptions.”*

However, according to Lockett (1999: 75) different methods of learning result in different kinds of knowledge and skill. By referring to literacy it is suggested that

*“...the attainment of competence is not just a matter of learning the techniques of reading and writing, but that it involves getting the whole social practice right, i.e. ways of saying and doing, holding particular values, beliefs and attitudes which are linked to particular roles and identities. This can only be done via acquisition, a process of apprenticeship in a community of practice in which the learner is exposed to models in natural, meaningful and functional settings.”*

Luckett (1999: 75) further mentions that the process of *acquisition* is a largely “...*subconscious process which occurs through exposure to models of practice and by participating in authentic, meaningful activities in natural settings*”.

However, *learning* is

“...*a conscious process which is gained through explicit teaching; it usually happens in decontextualised settings (e.g. schooling) and involves the analysis and explanation of the object of learning which in turn requires learning a meta-language to talk about a certain practice*”.

Gee (1990: 146) mentions that “...*learning can facilitate nothing unless the acquisition process has already begun.*”

However, Luckett (1999: 75) emphasises the fact that *acquisition* should precede *learning*.

#### (a) **PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING**

*Learning* is underpinned by the following principles (First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI), 1994: 21 – 22):

- Learning is an experience which occurs inside the learner and is activated by the learner.
- No one directly teaches anyone anything of significance.
- Learning is the discovery of the personal meaning and relevance of ideas.
- Learning (behavioural change) is a consequence of experience.
- Learning is a co-operative and collaborative process.
- Learning is an evolutionary process.
- Learning is sometimes a painful process.
- One of the richest resources for learning is the learner himself.
- The process of learning is emotional as well as intellectual.
- The process of problem solving and learning is highly unique and individual.



(b) ***FACILITATION OF LEARNING***

According to the FNTI (1994: 23 – 26) learning will be facilitated by an atmosphere in which

- people are encouraged to be active;
- the individual's discovery of the personal meaning of ideas is promoted and facilitated;
- the uniquely personal and subjective nature of learning is emphasised;
- difference is good and desirable;
- people's right to make mistakes is consistently recognised;
- ambiguity is tolerated;
- evaluation is a co-operative process with emphasis on self-evaluation;
- openness of self rather than concealment of self is encouraged;
- people are encouraged to trust in themselves as well as in external sources;
- people feel they are respected;
- people feel they are accepted; and
- confrontation is permitted.

***1.2.3.2 EDUCATION***

Good (1959: 191) defines *education* as the

*“...aggregate of all the processes by means of which a person develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour of positive value in the society in which he lives – it is the art of making available to each generation the organized knowledge of the past.”*

Dewey (1959: 31) has a similar definition:

*“Education... is a process of living and not a preparation for future living. All education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race. The process begins unconsciously*

*almost at birth, and is continually shaping the individual's powers, saturating his consciousness, forming his habits, training his ideas, and arousing his feelings and emotions. Through this unconscious education the individual gradually comes to share in the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together."*

Dewey goes further by adding that *education* is the "...*fundamental method of social progress and reform and may be defined as a process of continuous reconstruction of experience, with the purpose of widening and deepening its social content, while, at the same time, the individual gains control of the methods involved.*"

Rowntree (1981: 75) defines *education*

*"...as the process of successful learning of knowledge, skills and attitudes, where what is learned is worthwhile to the learners and usually where it is learned in such a way that the learner can express his own individuality through what he learns and can subsequently apply it, and adapt it flexibly, to situations and problems other than those he considered in learning it."* (Compare Jarvis, 1990: 105.)

According to Kwong (2000: 87) education is a private good because "...*it confers personal privileges on people who possess it*". She goes further by saying that in a meritocratic society those with high levels of education usually occupy important positions, and enjoy higher income, more social prestige and other rewards than the less educated. Although she agrees there may be exceptions to this rule she regards education as

*"..the channel of upward mobility legitimising privilege in both capitalist and socialist countries".*

By keeping the conceptualisation for *learning* and *education* in mind, the terms *lifelong learning* and *lifelong education* can now be defined.

### 1.2.3.3 LIFELONG LEARNING

The national Multi-Year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training (Department of Education, 1997b: 12 – 13) states that one of the oft-quoted goals of the new education system in South Africa is that of creating an environment that will encourage *lifelong learning*. Inherent in the rationale is the idea that the experience and learning of every individual – whether this learning has taken place through formal academic institutions, or in the form of in-service training courses, or indeed has come about through practical experience – can be evaluated and used to establish the individual’s suitability for embarking on further study and the level at which the individual should begin.

Jarvis (1990: 133) refers to *lifelong learning* as “...*the process of learning which occurs throughout life.*”

Hawes & Hawes (1982: 132) argue that *lifelong learning* is

*“... the process by which an individual acquires formal and informal education continually throughout adulthood for necessary career development and valuable personal enrichment...”*

Husén & Postlethwaite (1994a: 143) support this argument by stating that *lifelong education and learning*

*“...denotes an overall scheme aimed both at restructuring the existing education system and at developing the entire educational potential outside the education system; in such a scheme men and women are the agents of their own education, through continual interaction between their thoughts and actions; education and learning, far from being limited to the period of attendance at school, should extend throughout life, include all skills and branches of knowledge, use all possible means, and give the opportunity to all people for full development of the personality...”*

Husén & Postlethwaite (1994f: 3419) further mention that *lifelong learning* does not mean the spontaneous learning of everyday life, but can be seen as deliberate learning.

According to Fryer (1997: 6) *lifelong learning*, is not simply about helping to equip people with the ability to respond to, or even taking advantage of these changes, but also

*“...concerns resourcing them so that they can fashion those changes for themselves and contribute to the shape of the society. It is about employability and citizenship, achievement and pleasure, regeneration and renewal, autonomy and interdependence, creativity as well as practicality. Whilst it must always embrace opportunities for “second” or “third” chance learning, it must not be confined to a limiting notion of educational compensation or deficit. Nor can it only be concerned with the updating of particular skills or professional competence.”*

Fryer goes further by saying that *lifelong learning* must contribute a resource for people to make their own decisions,

*“...to be undaunted by the changes and circumstances they face and to feel sufficiently confident to handle the plethora of information, choices and opportunities they increasingly need to be able to handle.”*

The National Institute for Lifelong Learning Development (Department of Education, 1997c: 8) defines *lifelong learning* within the South African context as follows:

*“Lifelong learning is the development of human potential in all roles, circumstances and environments, through a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire and apply all the knowledge, values, skills and critical understanding required to confidently and creatively attain their goals, from cradle to grave.”*

Based upon the above definitions for *lifelong learning* one can assume that it will enhance career development, cure unemployment, encourage flexibility and change, raise personal and national competitiveness, help personal development etc.

*Lifelong learning* can be regarded as a continuous process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to realise their full potential. In making Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) the first stage in a process of *lifelong learning* for adults, the following two objectives need to be realised (Department of Education, 1997a: 16):

- “...to develop an interface between the ABET levels on the NQF and the General Education and Training (GET) band so as to provide a learning path into Further Education and Training (FET); and
- to make provision for the ongoing application of skills and knowledge acquired by those learners who do not choose or do not have access to continuing education pathways.”

According to the Annual Report of the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (University of the Western Cape, 1997: 2), in South Africa, as in many other parts of the world, *lifelong learning* has become part of the policy framework for education across the board. It has become a key concept in the thinking about education and training world-wide.

Titmus (1989: 5 – 9) and Payne (1999: 9 – 11) argue that there is an extraordinarily rapid pace of social, technological, cultural, economic, legal and educational changes throughout the world, combined with the increasing global connectedness of many societies and economies, which emphasise the need for people who are adaptable and responsive – in short, who are capable of continuing lifelong learning.

Based upon these observations it can be concluded that the imperatives for *lifelong learning* in South Africa are driven by its reinsertion into the global

economy and by the political and social necessities of equity and redress after the years of colonialism and apartheid.

A national approach to *Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition* would promote the development of a *lifelong learning* culture. This will entail

- Formal recognition that learning takes place in a variety of settings;
- Encouragement for individuals to continue learning in new areas; and
- More opportunities to bring learning and work together.

Since education increasingly becomes a *lifelong* activity, flexible and open learning systems become essential means of responding to the tremendous learning needs of the adult population.

#### 1.2.3.4 LIFELONG EDUCATION

Jarvis (1990: 77) emphasises that *lifelong learning* and *lifelong (continuing) education* are not the same concepts. He defines *lifelong (continuing) education* as

*“...either those learning opportunities that are taken up after full time schooling has finished or those learning opportunities that are taken up after completion of initial education. The German Education Council defined it as the ‘continuation or resumption of organized learning after the completion of an initial education phase of varying length’.”*

According to Husén & Postlethwaite (1994f: 3419) the most fundamental aspect of a *lifelong education* approach is

*“the realisation that each educational experience is one of a lifelong sequence of learning events (i.e. vertical articulation), and it is situated in a context of other events determined by the surrounding society. The other events (i.e. horizontal articulation) may have no formal relation to education but nonetheless influence its effects.”*

Hawes & Hawes (1982: 52) mention that *lifelong or continuing education*

*“... includes many varieties of degree programmes designed especially for adults, career-counselling and career change services and programmes and programmes of non-credit courses.”*

Husén & Postlethwaite (1994f: 3418) mention that the meaning of *lifelong education* will depend to a degree on the political and philosophical perceptions of the individual author. However, *lifelong education* is a concept that is open to selective interpretation. There is a core of common elements. These are, according to Husén & Postlethwaite (1994f: 3418):

*“the desire for universal access to education, which includes children and adults currently lacking opportunities of education; recognition of the role of settings of education outside formal institutions; diversity of learning materials; and, most importantly, the promotion in learners of the personal characteristics required for subsequent lifelong learning, including the motivation, cultural values and ability necessary for independent self-learning.”*

#### **1.2.4 COMPETENCE-BASED ASSESSMENT**

*Competence-based assessment* is a way to monitor and assess the competencies a person has, no matter where or how these competencies were gained. Rutherford (1995: 2) defines *competence-based assessment* as

*“...the assessment of evidence to determine a person’s current abilities against a given set of standards or competencies.”*

The definition emphasises the three major principles that differentiate competence-based assessment from any method previously used to assess and increase performance, i.e. the assessment of evidence, current abilities and standards or competencies.

According to Peddie (1992: 24) *competence-based assessment* is where

*“...a particular standard is set which candidates must reach if they are to be judged as ‘competent’, and therefore receive credit for the unit of learning. This is why competence-based assessment is also sometimes known as criterion-referenced assessment.”*

Rutherford (1995: 3) argues that RPL is an assessment approach which allows for evidence from past achievements to be included in the total of evidence collected during assessment. According to him, in competence-based systems, the individual is increasingly viewed as a partner.

Rutherford (1995: 10) further argues that competence-based assessment systems do not differentiate between competencies acquired as a result of any specific form of learning. According to him, competence-based assessment

*“...recognises that a person’s learning could come about through formal training and education, self-development programs, work and life experiences, hobbies and interests, and informal learning.”*

Simosko & Cook (1996: 2) argue that RPL is an integral part of *competence-based assessment*, not a separate process. They go further by saying that *competence-based assessment* practices that embrace the basic concepts of RPL can be used for a number of purposes. These are:

- “...as a diagnostic tool to identify an individual’s strengths or limitations at the beginning of an education and training programme;*
- to monitor progress against known standards or expectations; or*
- to grant credit towards a credential.”*

Masters & McCurry (1990: 20) remark that throughout Australia *competence-based assessment* is being promoted as



*“...an approach to establishing occupationally-relevant standards of competence.”*

Assessment, whether used as an indicator of achievement, for access, for placement and promotion, or for diagnostic purposes, always purports to measure prior learning – that is, what the student has already learned. Therefore, it could be argued that since all learning has occurred previously, ***any educational measurement is prior learning assessment.***

According to Fletcher (1997: 16) the purpose of assessment in a *competence-based assessment system* is to “...collect sufficient evidence that individuals can perform or behave to the specified standards in a specific role. If this assessment is also linked to an award system, a further purpose is formal recognition of successful performance”.

The Assessment Policy in the GET band for Grade Reception (R) to 9 and ABET (Department of Education, 1998c: 4) states that the overall purpose of any assessment, be it competence-based or otherwise, is to gather and interpret information about an individual’s achievement, as measured against agreed outcomes for a particular phase of learning. The evidence is needed so that an assessment of competence can be carried out against pre-determined standards.

According to Simosko & Cook (1996: 4) assessment reflects four basic activities:

- ❑ *“identifying what an individual knows and can do;*
- ❑ *equating those skills and knowledge with specific standards, course or qualification requirements;*
- ❑ *assessing the individual against those standards or requirements; and*
- ❑ *crediting the learner in the appropriate manner.”*

The systemic approach to each of the activities mentioned above will ensure a sound and equitable assessment programme that will recognise the different ways in which people learn and the various methods by which they can actually demonstrate what they know and can do.

Based on these remarks it can be concluded that *competence-based assessment* is not simply a tool for testing a person's competence. It can be regarded as a mechanism that helps the individual grow and achieve competence through feedback and positive support by the assessor and anyone else involved in the process.

### 1.2.5 ADULT EDUCATION

According to Hawes & Hawes (1982: 8) *adult education* can be defined as

*“...education for men and women of all ages provided by schools, learning centres or other agencies, which enables them to improve their general knowledge by either continuing their education or resuming incomplete education of previous years.”*

Page & Thomas (1979: 13) mention that due to the fact that human beings like to learn, they are naturally inclined to undertake organised, intentional learning, if the appropriate opportunity is offered in the right circumstances.

According to Lowe (1982: 214) the main purpose of adult education should be

*“...not to compensate for an inadequate legacy of initial education but to sustain the capacity of adults of all ages to learning. The education of adults must not be considered as an entity in itself, it is a sub-division and an integral part of a global scheme for lifelong education and learning.”*

Husén & Postlethwaite (1994a: 104) agree with this statement by saying that *adult education* is

*“...a process through which persons no longer attending school on a regular, full-time basis undertake activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, understanding, skills, appreciation and attitudes; or to identify and solve personal or community problems.”* (Compare Lowe, 1982: 21 - 22.)

This definition emphasises the intention of bringing about changes in information and solving personal and community problems. This suggests that *adult education* is not only a learning process, but also the exchange of knowledge to solve personal problems, including acquiring job skills.

Knowles (1970: 39) defined andragogy as “...*the art and science of helping adults learn.*” However, according to Husén & Postlethwaite (1994a: 104) this definition creates problems due to the fact that

- ❑ “‘andragogy’” *refers strictly speaking not to the art or the science of helping adults learn, but to the practice of teaching adults; and*
- ❑ *by using only one term, Knowles obscures the difference between a normative art and the science of adult education.*”

According to Knowles, andragogy was at first premised on a set of four assumptions about adult learning that were in his view very different from the assumptions about child learning on which pedagogy is based. Later Knowles conceded that andragogy and pedagogy were not antithetical models. In many circumstances the andragogical model could be applied to children and *vice versa*.

According to Husén & Postlethwaite (1994a: 277) “...*if the word “andragogy” has any future, it can only be in the form of a generic term for adult education and as a complement to pedagogy. A distinction between pedagogy and andragogy should not be derived from an identification of the first with tradition and content, and of the second with progress and process.*”

Andragogy (adult education) is simply another model of assumptions about learners which can be used alongside the pedagogical model and its assumptions. The models are probably most useful when seen not as dichotomous but rather as two ends of a spectrum.

According to the FNTI (1994: 13), both adults and children will experience times



*“...when they can be either self-directed (andragogical) or dependent (pedagogical) learners. The idea is to be able to discern and make the appropriate assumptions which fit the learning situation.”*

A comparison of the assumptions of pedagogy and andragogy is demonstrated in figure 1.4 on the following pages.

FIGURE 1.4

**A COMPARISON OF THE ASSUMPTIONS  
OF PEDAGOGY AND ANDRAGOGY**

REGARDING	PEDAGOGY	ANDRAGOGY
<b>CONCEPT OF LEARNER</b>	The role of the learner is by definition, a dependent one. The teacher is expected by society to take full responsibility for determining what is to be learned, and if it has been learned.	It is a normal aspect of the process of maturation for a person to move from dependency toward increasing self-directedness, but at different rates for different people and in different dimensions of life. Teachers have a responsibility to encourage and nurture this movement. Adults have a deep psychological need to be generally self-directing, although they may be dependant in particular temporary situations.
<b>ROLE OF LEARNERS' EXPERIENCE</b>	The experience learners bring to a learning situation is of little worth. It may be used as a starting point, but the experience from which learners will gain the most is that of the teacher, the textbook writer, the audiovisual aid producer, and other experts.  Accordingly, the primary techniques in education are transmittal techniques – lecture, assigned reading, presentations, etc.	As people grow and develop they accumulate an increasing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning – for themselves and for others. Furthermore, people attach more meaning to learning they gain from experience than those they acquire passively. Accordingly, the primary techniques in education are experiential techniques – laboratory experiments, discussion, problem-solving cases, simulation exercises, field experience and the like.
<b>READINESS TO LEARN</b>	People are ready to learn whatever society (especially the school) says they ought to learn, provided the pressures on them (like fear of failure) are great enough. Most people of the same age are ready to learn the same things. Therefore, learning should be organised into a fairly standardised curriculum, with a uniform step-by-step progression for all learners.	People become ready to learn something when they experience a need to learn it in order to cope more satisfyingly with real life tasks or problems. The educator has a responsibility to create conditions and provide tools and procedures for helping learners discover their “needs to know”. And learning programmes should be organised around life-application categories and sequenced according to learners’ readiness to learn.
<b>ORIENTATION TO LEARNING</b>	Learners see education as a process of acquiring subject-matter content, most of which they understand will be useful only at a later time in life. Accordingly, the curriculum should be organised into subject-matter units (e.g. courses) which follow the logic of the subject (e.g. from ancient to modern history, from simple to complex mathematics or science). People are subject-centered in their orientation to learning.	Learners see education as a process of developing increased competence to achieve their full potential in life. They want to be able to apply whatever knowledge and skill they gain today to living more effectively tomorrow. Accordingly, learning experiences should be organised around competency-development categories. People are performance-centered in their orientation to learning.

Source: *First Nations Technical Institute, 1994: 18 – 19*



The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) defines *adult education* as

*“...the entire body of organised educational processes, whatever the content, level or method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools or colleges, and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications, or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitude or behaviour in the two-fold perspective of full development and participation in balanced, independent, social, economic and cultural level”* (Jarvis, 1990: 6).

Lowe (1982: 29) states that

*“...adult education must not be regarded as a luxury for a few exceptional persons here and there, nor as a thing which concerns only a short span of early manhood, but that adult education is a permanent necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong.”*

In the Multi-Year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training (Department of Education, 1997b: 12 - 13) it is stated clearly that the belief exists that all adults can learn, that all persons need education periodically throughout life, that it is their right, and that it is the duty of society to make *lifelong education* possible for everyone.

According to Lowe (1982: 26), based on the assumption that adults are mature, free, responsible citizens, however, it is believed that it is also their right to decide whether or not to participate in education in adulthood. Paulo Freire (1972: 101) made the following remark in this regard:

*“At home, as husband and father, I cannot be the owner of my wife and children, nor at school, as father, can I be the owner of my students. I cannot enter into their beings in order to move them towards the ways which seem best to me. If I do so, I am their dominator and they are mere things which I possess; dialogue and true love are impossible.”*

The relationship between *Adult Basic Education (ABE)* and *Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)* is explained in the following paragraphs.

#### **1.2.5.1 ADULT BASIC EDUCATION**

*Adult Basic Education (ABE)* may be broadly defined as involving reading, writing and mathematical skills necessary for adults to be literate.

According to the *Reconstruction and Development Programme White Paper* (African National Congress, 1994: 4), the aim of ABE, is to

*“...provide adults with education and training programmes equivalent to exit level in the formal school system, with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills. The provision of ABE must be expanded by building a partnership of all employers, labour, local and provincial governments, community and funding agencies.”*

Page & Thomas (1979: 13) define *Adult Basic Education* as

*“...the instruction of adults in elementary, educational social skills and community responsibilities.”*

Participants in *ABE* include adults who have not completed secondary school and who are past the age of compulsory education, adults whose first language is different from the nation's first language, and adults who have completed their secondary education but do not possess sufficient basic education skills (Husén & Postlethwaite, 1994a: 100).

Torres (1993: 19) makes the following appropriate remark regarding the education of adults:

*“Many would say that we have to educate children because they are the future. If this is so, educating adults is both for the present and the future. It is us – we as adults who are shaping today’s world and shaping our children’s lives. Therefore, if they are the future, then we are shaping our own future.”*

In the Republic of South Africa’s *Interpellations, Questions and Replies of the National Assembly* (1999: 995 – 996) the Minister of Education, Professor Kadar Asmal, announced that there are 23 699 930 adults between the ages of 16 and 65 in South Africa. Of these, 3 283 290 have not accessed any schooling and 9 439 244 have not completed Grade 9. Thus, 12 722 (54%) of the total adult population have not completed a general level of education. In the National Multi-Year Implementation Plan of the Department of Education (1997b: 1), *Adult Basic Education* is referred to as a “transformational project”.

The provision of *Adult Basic Education* liberates individuals and communities to become active participants in the running of their own lives and in endeavours which ensure economic empowerment. ABE is the first building block in any development programme. Adult Basic Education is meant to help to improve the role, status and capacity of adults in the South African society. This means that ABE should help to equip people for full participation in their social, economic and political lives.

According to Jarvis (1990: 6) *Adult Basic Education* “...entails education that enables people to function in everyday life and to develop as a person”.

*Adult Basic Education* can be regarded as an integral part of the broader education and training system in the country which aspires to benefit the country and all its people.



### 1.2.5.2 ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING

It is essential to understand the relationship between *education* and *training* for adults which is placed in a developmental context and that this relationship is understood in respect of the further education and training system.

According to the Multi-year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training (Department of Education, 1997b: 13 – 14):

*Adult Basic Education (ABE)* refers to

*“...the educational base which individuals require for improving their life chances.”*

*Adult Basic Training (ABT)* refers to

*“...the foundational income-generating or occupational skills which individuals require for improving their living conditions.*

Together, *Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)* implies

*“...the foundational knowledge, skills, understanding, and abilities that are required for improved social and economic life.*

In South Africa *Adult Basic Education and Training* is a national initiative which, within the context of the National Qualifications Framework aims to provide access to general education and training for adults which will provide a good foundation to further education, training and specialised skills development.

This initiative intends to provide adults who have schooling, knowledge or ability below grade nine level in one or more subjects or learning areas with an opportunity to improve their skills and knowledge within the General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) band.

In bringing education and training together, individuals are enabled to integrate the full range of their knowledge, skills, understanding and abilities, providing them with a platform of further learning, should they so choose, and with the capacity to bring these integrated understandings to bear upon the improvement and development of their own lives and the lives of those around them (De Moura & De Oliveira, 1996: 18 – 19).

The Policy document on Adult Basic Education and Training in South Africa (Department of Education, 1997a: 5) defines *Adult Basic Education and Training* as:

*“...the general conceptual foundation towards lifelong learning and development, comprising of knowledge, skills and attitudes required for social, economic and political participation and transformation applicable to a range of contexts. ABET is flexible, developmental and targeted at the specific needs of particular audiences and, ideally, provides access to nationally recognised certificates.”*

According to the above definitions it can be argued that it is this foundation of fundamental skills, knowledge, understanding and abilities which assists people to learn along the further education and training continuum and thus provides the basis for progression along a chosen career path-way (Department of Education, 1997b: 14).

#### **1.2.6 THE RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

The *Reconstruction and Development Programme* had been conceptualised as “the policy instrument which will direct the progress of the transformation strategy” (RDP White Paper, African National Congress, 1994: 6). The RDP reflected a particular strategy of social and economic development and a particular model for social democracy. With the RDP it is envisaged that education and training would support the achievement of a participatory democracy and a growing economy. In the RDP it is stated that education and

training should be available to all, and the process of lifelong learning would be encouraged. People should be continually involved in acquiring new skills and should also gain reward for existing skills, experience and learning preciously unrecognised (Technikon Pretoria, 1996: 3).

Economic growth was to be achieved through a redistribution of the country's resources, infra-structural and human resource development programmes which aimed to meet basic needs, promote peace, security and nation-building; democratise the state and society and thereby build the capacity of ordinary South Africans to participate and “reconstructing and developing” South Africa. It is, therefore, not so much a policy as a policy framework, consisting of *six basic principles and five key programmes*. The *principles* are:

- a people-driven process
- integration and sustainability
- nation-building
- peace and security
- meeting basic needs and building the infrastructure
- democratisation

These *principles* are intended to shape and bring coherence to policies which emerge across diverse areas of government.

The *programmes* have been identified as follows:

- meeting basic needs
- building the economy
- democratising the state and society
- developing our human resources
- implementing the RDP

These *programmes* are areas of strategic priority around which Government intends to focus the development and implementation of policy.

### **1.2.6.1 THE PRINCIPLES OF THE RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) frames government policy for the transformation of the South African economy and society. The principles and programmes of the RDP provide the main reference point for evaluating government policies.

Many of the words used to refer to the RDP principles are widely used in general public discourse, often with very divergent meanings. This is one reason why the RDP has been accused of meaning “all things to all people”. However, the RDP itself originates in and represents a vision for socio-economic transformation in which the principles have a specific content (Gotz, 1996: 10).

#### **(a) Principle 1: Integration and sustainability**

The first principle on which the RDP is based is that of *“integration and sustainability”*.

Pieterse (1996: 3 - 4) explains that the thinking behind this principle is drawn from a dominant trend in development work and in governance internationally which recognises

*“...that the problems of policy and politics have become more and more complex...An element of the complexity is the high level of interrelationships between different aspects of social development. Housing, or drugs, or unemployment, or education can all be used as examples of how difficult it is to achieve a desired result by maintaining a singular focus. Poverty and its consequences are so intimately related that it is increasingly impossible to achieve sustained impact in one area if it is not considered in relation to other areas of work.”*

An integrated approach to development is therefore, seen as vital to sustainability which is its major purpose.

**(b) Principle 2: A people-driven process**

The second basic principle of the RDP is that the transformation of South African economy and society should be “*people-driven*”. In the RDP White Paper the discussion of this principle is started with an assertion that “*Our people, with their aspirations and collective determination, are our most important resource.*”

In discussing this principle, involvement is linked to transparency and empowerment, both of which are enabling conditions for involvement. This accords with Knowles’ (1990: 126) observation that

*“...merely having mechanisms for mutual planning will not suffice. People must be treated in good faith, with real delegation of responsibility and real influence in decision-making or they will backfire.”*

**(c) Principle 3: Peace and security**

Peace and security are positioned within the RDP as a social condition under which other RDP principles can be realised, and *vice versa*. On the one hand, injustice and violence destabilise people-driven processes, sustainability, investment, etc.. On the other hand, the latter are depicted as crucial to the achievement of peace and security.

**(d) Principle 4: Nation-building**

The formulation of this principle in the RDP White Paper (African National Congress, 1994: 8) is based on “*unity in diversity*”. The challenge is to link diverse needs and concerns in a coherent system without forcing them to be the same:

*“We are a single country, with a single economy, functioning within a constitutional framework that establishes provincial and local powers,*

*respect and protection for minorities, and a process to accommodate those wishing to retain their cultural identity.”*

**(e) Principle 5: Democratisation**

In the RDP White Paper it is suggested that the democratisation of society will require a process of transformation of both the state and civil society. According to Kooiman (1993: 6) the challenge set by this principle is far more complex than is generally recognised – it is essentially the challenge of modern governance:

*“...the growing complexity, dynamics and diversity of our societies, as caused by social, technological and scientific developments, put governing systems under such new challenges that new conceptions of governance are needed. So far these developments have been taken for granted, or just considered to be nasty and difficult. Why not take them seriously and put them in the centre of new ways of thinking about how to govern, steer, manage, control and use them?”*

**(f) Principle 6: Meeting basic needs and building the infrastructure**

This principle expresses the theme under which the RDP was popularised: *“growth through redistribution”*. Widely recognised as challenging economic models that position improved living conditions as a consequence of growth, the attempt to stimulate growth through infra-structural programmes which would *“...provide access to modern and effective services such as electricity, water, telecommunications, transport, health, education and training for all our people”*, is one of the key aspects of the RDP (RDP White Paper, African National Congress, 1994: 8).

However, the researcher has to mention that although the Reconstruction and Development Programme has been quite ambitious, it has never been implemented and is effectively “dead”. It has been replaced by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy. In the GEAR formulation, the

intended forms of growth deal with unemployment and equity issues. If GEAR is indeed a departure from the way in which the RDP was originally conceived, it also affects the achievement of the programme for meeting basic needs. Instead of significant state expenditure on infra-structural programmes, the policy would now require infra-structural spending to come out of increased efficiency of expenditure. Other RDP programmes, such as developing human resources, face similar challenges.

## ***1.2.7 THE SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY AND THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK***

### ***1.2.7.1 THE SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY***

The *South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)* is a

*“...national accreditation and certification authority, a statutory body with jurisdiction extending over all the sectors of education and training to enable them to set up a coherent, integrated system of assessment, accreditation and registration for all national qualifications offered in South Africa”* (Technikon Pretoria, 1996: 2).

SAQA is an independent statutory body consisting of representatives from six stakeholders: government, business, trade unions, education and training providers, critical interest groups (such as the disabled, women, youth or other groups whose presence is believed to be important) and community groups (who may represent learners). It has the authority to set the standards which learners will have to meet in order to earn a qualification, and to ensure that the standards are met. According to the SAQA Bulletin (1997: 4 - 5), SAQA will perform the following functions:

- (a) *First*, it must oversee the development of the *National Qualifications Framework (NQF)*. It has to formulate and publish policies and criteria

both for the registration of bodies responsible for establishing educational and training standards (*Standards Generating Bodies - SGBs*), and for the accreditation of bodies responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements (*National Standards Bodies - NSBs*).

- (b) *Second*, SAQA is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the NQF. It must ensure the registration, accreditation and assignment of functions to the bodies mentioned previously, as well as the registration of national standards and qualifications. It must also take steps to ensure that provisions for accreditation are complied with and that standards and registered qualifications are internationally comparable.
- (c) *Third*, SAQA must advise the Ministers of Education and Labour. The quality of education and training will be assured by SAQA (South African Institute for Distance Education, 1997: 10).
- (d) *Fourth*, SAQA will consult with all affected parties.

### 1.2.7.2 THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The South African Qualifications Authority provides enabling legislation that has brought about the creation of the National Qualifications Framework. The NQF is the “...*facilitating mechanism for achieving a coherent system of education and training and for publicly registering qualifications and unit standards* (HSRC, 1995: 23).

The NQF consists of the following (McKay *et al*, 1998: 158 – 159):

#### (a) BANDS

There are *three bands* on the NQF. These are

- (i) The *higher education band* that deals with all learning related to national diplomas, degrees and post-graduate learning.
- (ii) The *further education and training band* that deals with all post-compulsory (post grade 9) learning.



- (iii) The *general education and training band* includes all ABET levels, pre-school and schooling up to grade 9.

**(b) LEVELS**

There are *eight levels* for qualifications. At the end of each level a certificate is issued. The end of level 1 is the exit point of compulsory schooling (grade 9/ABET level 4).

*Level 1* is divided in *four overlapping phases or sub-levels*. These are

- (i) the first sub-level which is the reception or pre-school level;
- (ii) the four sub-levels for ABET; and
- (iii) the three sub-levels for schooling which overlap with the ABET levels.

These sub-levels for schooling are

- ◆ Foundation phase (grades 1 – 3)
- ◆ Intermediate phase (grades 4 – 6)
- ◆ Senior phase (grades 7 – 9)

**(c) KINDS OF QUALIFICATIONS**

Different kinds of *qualifications* are registered on the NQF according to the band that they belong to, i.e. Doctorates, Degrees, Certificates, Diplomas, etc.

**(d) CONTEXT OF LEARNING**

The *contexts of learning* indicate the different places where learning can take place. Not all learning is school, college or university based. In the range of levels 2 to 4 on the NQF, there are a large number of sectors that might provide various forms of education and training. The workplace, NGOs, etc. are regarded as places of learning in some of the bands.

Courses will be registered and accredited in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework as illustrated in figure 1.5.

NQF LEVEL	BAND	TYPES OF QUALIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATES	LOCATIONS OF LEARNING FOR UNITS AND QUALIFICATIONS			
8	<b>Higher Education and Training Band</b>	Doctorates Further Research Degrees	Tertiary/Research/Professional institutions			
7		Higher Degrees Professional Qualifications	Tertiary/Research/Professional institutions			
6		First Degrees Higher Diplomas	Universities/Technikons/Colleges/Private Professional institutions			
5		Diplomas, Occupational Certificates	Universities/Technikons/Colleges/Private Professional institutions			
<b>FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING CERTIFICATES</b>						
4	<b>Further Education And Training Band</b>	School/College/Trade Certificates Mix of units from all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal high schools</li> <li>• Private</li> <li>• State schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Nursing</li> <li>• Private colleges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RDP and labour market scheme</li> <li>• Industry training boards</li> <li>• Unions</li> <li>• Workplace, etc.</li> </ul>	
3		School/College/Trade Certificates Mix of units from all				
2		School/College/Trade Certificates Mix of units from all				
<b>1 GENERAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING CERTIFICATE</b>						
	<b>General Education And Training Band</b>	Senior Phase	ABET Level 4	Formal Schools  (Urban, Rural, Farm or Special)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupation</li> <li>• Work-based training</li> <li>• RDP</li> <li>• Labour Market schemes</li> <li>• Upliftment programmes</li> <li>• Community programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NGOs</li> <li>• Churches</li> <li>• Night schools</li> <li>• ABET programmes</li> <li>• Private providers</li> <li>• Industry Training Boards</li> <li>• Unions</li> <li>• Workplace, etc.</li> </ul>
		Intermediate Phase	ABET Level 3			
		Foundation Phase	ABET Level 2			
		Pre-school	ABET Level 1			

The NQF has been designed to (Technikon Pretoria, 1996: 1 and SAQA, 1999a: 5):

- ❑ *“...create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;*
- ❑ *introduce a fair assessment system which measures achievement against clearly stated standards;*
- ❑ *accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby*
- ❑ *contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large;*
- ❑ *establish a dynamic and flexible system able to adapt quickly to new developments in the labour market, workplace, education and training;*
- ❑ *facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths therefore encourage more people to participate in further education and training;*
- ❑ *provide a variety of routes to qualifications and therefore simplifying the structure of qualifications; and*
- ❑ *enhance the quality of education and training.”*

A national qualification recognises learning which has met specific competence criteria and which has been demonstrated through an appropriate combination of capabilities, knowledge and skill at a particular level. These qualifications might be achieved by full-time, part-time or distance learning, by work-based learning or by a combination of these, together with the assessment of prior learning and experience (Department of Education, 1996: 30 – 31 and HSRC, 1995: 14 – 15).

According to *Edutech*, the newsletter of the Technikon Pretoria (Technikon Pretoria, 1996: 1), the NQF would

- ❑ apply to all qualifications;
- ❑ be based on accredited units of learning in agreed clusters of learning outcomes defined according to national criteria established for the different levels;

- ❑ recognise, through assessment against national standards, on-the-job learning and prior learning on an equal basis to skills and knowledge acquired in formal courses through national certification;
- ❑ have tailored packages of modules developed by the various stakeholders;
- ❑ establish a logical and consistent sequence of names for South African qualifications and their certificates; and
- ❑ have all national certificates issued, regardless of level, endorsed by a South African Qualification Authority.

Therefore, by summing up the above-mentioned it can be deduced that the essential functions of the NQF are in essence the following:

- ◆ Development of overall policy and procedures.
- ◆ Setting of standards for units and qualifications.
- ◆ Ensuring that the assessed outcomes meet the required standards.

The integrated approach to education and training, linked to the development of a National Qualifications Framework is based on a system of credits for attaining learning outcomes, irrespective of where or when they were attained. The development of the NQF hinges on an outcomes-based approach to education and training which has as its starting point the intended outputs. Due to this approach, it offers adults the opportunity to gain recognition for the skills and knowledge that they already have through RPL processes against the new standards registered on the NQF. The Core strategy of the National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI) is that “...*education and training must empower the individual, improve the quality of life and contribute towards development targets in the national economic plan through a National Qualification Framework*” (Technikon Pretoria, 1996: 3).

RPL, which is part of this strategy, is particularly relevant in South Africa for the large sections of the population who have no formal qualifications but who have learned skills informally. It is important to certify these skills to provide

access for these people to the labour market and also as part of a skills audit to plan the major training programmes required over the coming years.

The NQF is underpinned by the principles displayed in figure 1.6 (HSRC, 1995: 11 and SAQA, 1999b: 5) on the following page.



**FIGURE 1.6**



<b>PRINCIPLE</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
<b>INTEGRATION</b>	... form part of a system of human resources development which provides for the establishment of a unifying approach to education and training
<b>RELEVANCE</b>	... be and remain responsive to national development needs
<b>CREDIBILITY</b>	... have national and international value and acceptance
<b>COHERENCE</b>	... work within a consistent framework of principles and certification
<b>FLEXIBILITY</b>	... allow for multiple pathways to the same learning ends
<b>STANDARDS</b>	... be expressed in terms of a nationally agreed framework and internationally acceptable outcomes
<b>LEGITIMACY</b>	... provide for the participation of all national stakeholders in the planning and co-ordination of standards and qualifications
<b>ACCESS</b>	... provide ease of entry to appropriate levels of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression
<b>ARTICULATION</b>	... provide for learners, on successful completion of accredited prerequisites, to move between components of the delivery system
<b>PROGRESSION</b>	... ensure that the framework of qualifications permits individuals to move through the levels of national qualifications <i>via</i> different appropriate combinations of the components of the delivery system
<b>PORTABILITY</b>	... enable learners to transfer their credits or qualifications from one learning institution and/or employer to another
<b>RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING</b>	... through assessment, give credit to learning which has already been acquired in different ways, e.g. through life experience
<b>GUIDANCE OF LEARNERS</b>	... provide for the counselling of learners by specially trained individuals who meet nationally recognised standards for educators and trainers

*Source: HSRC, 1995: 11*

The NQF is a social construct with three key components necessary for achieving its vision and mission (SAQA presentation, 1998: 7). These are:

- Democratic participation
- Intellectual scrutiny
- Resources (all inputs, financial, human and organisational)

These essential functions are all linked to the monitoring and accreditation in a direct or at least indirect way.

According to the White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education, 1995: 26), the NQF is being implemented in South Africa as a key element in the government's human resource development strategy.

### **1.2.8 EDUCATIONAL MODI**

According to Lowe (1982: 25), *education* can be defined as “*organised communication designed to bring about learning*”. In this broader definition of *education* it is important to emphasise the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal education (compare this definition with the conceptualisation of *education* in section 1.2.3.2 of this study).

Dewey (1959: 32) defines *education* as

*“...a process of continuous reconstruction of experience with the purpose of widening and deepening its social content, while, at the same time, the individual gains control of the method involved.”*

Formal, informal and non-formal education are structurally unique; the components of each may be distinguished in terms of content, medium and methodology that develop the potentialities of human beings, including their knowledge, capabilities, behaviour patterns and values (compare Hawes & Hawes, 1982: 73).

### 1.2.8.1 FORMAL EDUCATION

Formal education can be defined as “...*education for which learners are enrolled or registered*” (Lowe, 1982: 24 - 25). Informal methods or activities are increasingly used in formal education programmes. Husén & Postlethwaite (1994d: 2185) define *formal education* as “...*conscious attempts to learn*”. They characterise *formal education*

*“...as intentionally organised full-time learning events with regular fixed duration and schedule, structured hierarchically with chronological succession of levels and grades, admission requirements, and formal registration, catering mainly to the population that is enrolled in established educational institutions, and using pre-determined pedagogical organisation, contents, methods and teaching/learning materials.”* (Compare Husén & Postlethwaite, 1994a: 96.)

It can also be argued that *formal education* for adults serves as a mechanism of cultural reproduction.

Benjamin (1959: 235) defines *formal education* as

*“...any training or education that is conventional, given in an orderly, logical, planned and systematic manner, thus formal education is said to end with school attendance: in a derogatory sense, formal education is any educational program that is confined to the experiences of the students within the classroom itself, failing to make use of the student’s incidental and varied experiences outside the classroom”.*

Hawes & Hawes (1982: 92) argue that *formal education* is education in recognised educational institutions (compare Page & Thomas, 1979: 138).

Jarvis (1990: 133) agrees with this statement by saying that *formal education*



*“...is the hierarchically structured education system which extends from primary schools to graduate programmes at university.”*

*Formal education* is therefore the deliberated and systematic transmission of knowledge, skills and attitudes within an explicit, defined, and structured format.

### **1.2.8.2 NON-FORMAL EDUCATION**

According to Lowe (1982: 25) *non-formal education* can be defined as

*“...education for which learners are not enrolled or registered.”*

In a study that was done by the Research Institute for Education Planning of the University of the Free State (1988: 1 - 2), it was found that *non-formal education* plays a key role in the provision of sufficient education opportunities in any country. The researchers found that it is particularly true in the case of developing countries where the formal education systems cannot cope with the general educational demand, as well as the needs of those who have never attended school or who have dropped out at an early stage.

Jarvis (1990: 244) makes the following statement regarding *non-formal education*:

*“...it is an educational activity which occurs outside the established formal system and is organized to serve the identifiable learning needs of certain groups. The learning context has to be improvised for each of these groups.”*

One weakness of *non-formal learning* is that it is not easy to define *vis-à-vis* regular education or formal adult education. To those who question the functional value of formal systems of education the attractions of *non-formal learning* are self-evident; to those steeped in the methods of the formal system, *non-formal learning* appears inchoate and unimportant.

Lowe (1982: 24 - 25), however, attempts to define *non-formal education* as

*“...any organized educational activity outside the established formal system – whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity – that is intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and learning objectives.”*

Page & Thomas (1979: 254) go further by saying that *non-formal education* can also be referred to as *out-of-school education*. This type of education is received outside school or outside the statutorily laid down school years, e.g. adult education. This education takes place for example through the influence of family background, peer groups and living environment.

### **1.2.8.3 INFORMAL EDUCATION**

*Informal Education*, according to Lowe (1982: 24), can be described as

*“...the truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment – from family and neighbours, from work and play, from the market-place, the library and the mass media.”*

According to Page & Thomas (1979: 174) distinct parties (e.g. teachers and learners) cannot be distinguished during *informal education*. This is the type of education that is acquired by oneself through reading, real-life experience, etc.

Jarvis (1990: 165) elaborates on this statement by saying that *informal education*

*“...often refers to the form of education that occurs when people learn informally from their environment or when groups of people learn through planned activities in an informal manner, e.g. where there is not*

*overt status role difference between learners, or where the providers of education are voluntary organizations, such as the churches.”*

Jarvis (1990: 165), however, makes a clear distinction between *informal education* and *informal learning*. He defines *informal learning* as

*“...the type of learning that occurs when a person acquires knowledge, skill, or attitudes through interaction in an informal situation, even if that situation is a network situation. It is often self-directed learning, although it can occur reactively as well as proactively on the part of the learner.”*

Husén & Postlethwaite (1994d: 2364) define *informal education* as

*“ the informal transmission of attitudes, knowledge and skills (with the stress on attitudes).”*

The growth of the affective adult education (which often regards itself as experiential education) is one major development in *non-formal education*. Peer group participation and daily experience provide *informal education* situations which are the basis of *informal learning*.

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In the past many adults and out of school youth attended non-formal training programmes and had acquired a great deal of informal knowledge and experience. Such knowledge and experience was not recognised or certificated and this often led to exclusion from certain jobs, promotion on the job, and from further education and training opportunities, for all of which some kind of “certificate” was a pre-requisite. It is important to certify these skills in order to provide access for these people to the labour market and also as part of a skills audit to plan the major training programmes required over the coming years.

A practical RPL process needs to be developed to form a basis to enable the issues of the “practicability” of RPL in different circumstances to be addressed. The focus of this study will be on the development of a Recognition of Prior Learning model for the *Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)* sector in South Africa.

The statement of the problem can be formulated as follows:

## **HOW CAN THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING BE ADDRESSED IN A CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT?**

### **1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of the study is to develop a model for the Recognition of Prior Learning in a contemporary South African context. The focus of the study will be on the Adult Basic Education and Training sector. At the end of the study guidelines will be developed and recommendations will be made regarding the implementation of such a model.

### **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study is based on *a literature review* by consulting relevant, historical as well as contemporary sources as well as *personal interviews*.

#### **1.5.1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Background information and documentary analysis relies on the records and materials of the past and the present (Hopkins, 1980: 291). According to Gay (1981: 29) the review of related literature involves the systematic identification, location and analysis of documents containing information related to the research problem.

Gay (1981: 30) views the technique of literature review as being an important method of determining what has already been done in relation to the stated

problem. A literature review also provides information on research strategies and procedures. Measuring instruments have been found to be unsuccessful in investigating related problems.

Due to the fact that this study will have a theoretical approach, the **literature study** will be **explorative and descriptive**. Data and information will be collected which will form the basis for investigation and analysis of the RPL situation in South Africa. In order to gather adequate and relevant information, primary and secondary sources will be studied and consulted.

#### **1.5.1.1           EXPLORATIVE STUDIES**

Exploratory research is best used in the investigation of problems where measurement techniques are not explicit or where no precedents exist, and where information that would ordinarily aid in the specification of a theoretical framework is not available (Babbie, 1992: 42 – 43). Hartman & Hedblom (1979: 80) mention that an exploratory study examines new areas of inquiry, including new or previously unintegrated social phenomena as well as techniques of data collection or measurement. The design should be employed in areas in which theory is lacking or disputed (mixed results), or when concepts, variables, measurement instruments and techniques are poorly defined.

According to Guy, Edgley, Arafat & Allen (1987: 103) exploration, as a research purpose, is concerned with uncovering the way things are. According to these researchers exploratory studies are undertaken for four reasons. These are:

- ❑ *“To satisfy the researcher’s curiosity and desire for a better understanding.*
- ❑ *To test the feasibility of undertaking a more comprehensive study.*
- ❑ *To develop methods to be used in a more comprehensive study.*
- ❑ *To formulate a problem for more precise investigation or for developing hypotheses.”*

Hartman & Hedblom (1979: 80) have the following comprehensive definition for the *exploratory design*:

*“The main purpose of an exploratory study is an examination of a given field in order to ascertain the most fruitful avenues of research. The study may, for example, simply attempt to ascertain the kind (variety) and number (quantity) of elements present in the field of inquiry. It may, on the other hand, seek tentative answers to general questions in order to suggest fruitful hypotheses for research. Or it may investigate the practicability of various techniques to be employed in a given set of study circumstances. In any event, its main emphasis is upon discovery of problems of subjects, of techniques or of areas for more intensive study; and its major attributes are adaptability and flexibility – i.e., it is designed purposely to permit examination of various alternative views of the phenomena under considerations.”*

#### **1.5.1.2 DESCRIPTIVE STUDIES**

Description, as a research purpose, is concerned with delineating the way things are. Descriptive studies are limited to accurate description of the circumstances, situations, events, persons involved, interactions and so forth, without necessarily trying to relate the events or interpret them (Mouton & Marais, 1991: 46). Studies whose primary purpose is one of description have the following goals (Guy *et al*, 1987: 103):

- To portray accurately the characteristics of a particular individual, group, organisation or institution.
- To determine the frequency with which something occurs or is associated with something else.

According to Hartman & Hedblom (1979: 81) it is important to sufficiently describe relevant interactions, conditions of occurrence and the units (persons, groups, etc.) involved in maintaining the integrity of all things described when engaged in exploratory studies.

Babbie (1973: 51) gives the following definition of a *descriptive study*:

*The United States Census is an excellent example of a descriptive social scientific research project. The goal of the census is to describe, accurately and precisely, a wide variety of characteristics of the United States population, as well as the populations of smaller areas such as states and counties. Other examples of descriptive studies are the computation of age-sex profiles of population done by demographers and computation of crime rates of different cities.”*

Hartman & Hedblom (1979: 81) define a *descriptive study* as follows:

*“The descriptive study basically tries to answer the question of who, what, when, where or how much; and its essential function is largely reportorial”.*

In this study an accurate description will be given of the concept *Recognition of Prior Learning*.

### **1.5.2 PERSONAL INTERVIEWS**

The personal interview is certainly one of the most important methods/ techniques used in research. Through this method the researcher in education establishes a confidential relationship with the respondent and is enabled, as not by any other method, to obtain information from and provide help to his respondent (Kamil, Langer & Shanahan, 1985: 48). The use of interviews guarantees that more in-depth information can be obtained, because the interviewer is able to ask follow-up questions or to probe the necessary clarification when the respondent does not answer a particular question (Best, 1981: 165 and Balain, 1982: 44).

In this research no questionnaires were sent to respondents. The researcher used the **questionnaire-type interview** technique for stakeholders in the ABET sector. These stakeholders were from various *Industries and Training Boards* (e.g. Building Industry Training Board, Mining Industry, Metal Engineering Industry and Education Training Board, Engineering Council of South Africa, etc.),



*ESKOM*, *NGOs* (e.g. Project Literacy, Open Learning Group, SACHED/ASECA, Continuing Education Programme, etc.), *Tertiary and Research Institutions* (technikons, colleges, universities and the HSRC) and *Governmental Organisations* (e.g. Department of Education, Department of Labour - INDLELA, Department of Agriculture, etc.). The aim of these interviews was to obtain information pertaining to the current developments in these sectors regarding an RPL model for ABET learners.

In this study the following working plan has been followed:

- ❑ An extensive literature study regarding the *Recognition of Prior Learning*, including all its benefits, functions and underlying principles has been conducted.
- ❑ Interviews were conducted with persons at various institutions to determine the current status of *Recognition of Prior Learning* in South Africa.
- ❑ Based upon the information gathered, a *Recognition of Prior Learning* model has been developed for the Adult Basic Education and Training sector.
- ❑ Guidelines have been developed for the implementation of such a model.

## 1.6 PROGRAMME OF THE STUDY

The programme of the study has been:

- ❑ **CHAPTER 1**  
**THEME ANALYSIS AND FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM**

In **Chapter 1** a conceptualisation of all the Recognition of Prior Learning-related terminologies has been done. The problem statement, as well as the aim of the study, has been formulated.

□ **CHAPTER 2**

**THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING PHENOMENON**

In **Chapter 2** the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) phenomenon has been analysed in detail. This chapter has provided the theoretical foundation for the proposal regarding the development of an RPL model for the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) sector.

□ **CHAPTER 3**

**INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING DEVELOPMENTS**

In **Chapter 3** RPL in terms of policy and developmental initiatives nationally as well as internationally, has been studied.

□ **CHAPTER 4**

**PRINCIPLES ESSENTIAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING MODEL**

In **Chapter 4** the essential principles that need to be adhered to when developing an RPL model, have been discussed.

□ **CHAPTER 5**

**A MODEL FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING OF THE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In **Chapter 5** the proposal for an RPL model specifically developed for the ABET sector in South Africa, has been presented and discussed. All role-players at the different levels have been identified and their functions spelled out.

□ **CHAPTER 6**

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In **Chapter 6** a summary, based on the findings and recommendations which emanated from the study, has been submitted.

## **1.7 CONCLUSION**

Based on the conceptualisation of all the terminologies and structures in relation to RPL, it is clear that RPL will enable people of all ages, backgrounds and attitudes to receive formal recognition for the skills and knowledge (i.e. equal value to learning and skills) held as a result of formal training, work experience and/or life experience. It is a process which attempts to put a value on all learning, i.e. what people know and can do, irrespective of how achieved, for example through study, community work, on-the-job training, or other life experiences and which have not been formally recognised through transfer of credit mechanisms. It allows an individual to get some form of recognition for the skills and knowledge he or she has as well as the evaluation of past learning against established academic standards through an open and transparent approach to assessment.

According to the working document of the National Training Board (1994: 3), the development of an RPL system in South Africa has become an urgent necessity. Such a system will support the transition from the present emphasis in our education and training system only on clearly defined and demarcated opportunities for formal learning to an approach of lifelong learning which includes learning experiences outside of the formal education and training systems.



# CHAPTER 2

## ACRONYMS USED IN CHAPTER 2

<b>COSATU</b>	Congress of South African Trade Unions
<b>ETQA</b>	Education and Training Quality Assurance Body
<b>FNTI</b>	First Nations Technical Institute
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SETA</b>	Sector Education and Training Authority
<b>UTS</b>	University of Technology, Sydney

## CHAPTER 2

# THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING A LOGICAL ANALYSIS

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

As described in Chapter 1, paragraphs 1.2.1 and 1.2.2, RPL is a process of assessing relevant competencies gained by adults through work and life experiences which can then be counted towards qualifications or for promotion in the workplace by using a systematic set of procedures. RPL is concerned with identifying and assessing the substance and currency of the competencies (skills, knowledge, attitudes, attributes), rather than when, where, how or why the learning was acquired (University of Technology, Training and Development Services, 1995: 5. Hereafter referred to as UTS Training and Development Services).

The basic premise underpinning RPL is the importance of experiential learning; that is, a belief that people learn by doing and from reflecting on that experience. It is important to remember that RPL is *not* recognition of experience, but of learning (also see Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2.2). Using the RPL procedure is not an easy way to get a qualification (UTS Training and Development Services, 1995: 6).

RPL recognises the increased importance of continuous learning and upgrading. It acknowledges the importance of non-formal, workplace and other experiential learning and seeks to match these acquired learnings to the formal requirements of the workplace and of tertiary education providers. RPL is a process which recognises that there are different ways of learning and that knowledge and skills can be gained in different ways (COSATU, 1997: 6). It values past learning and skills gained through life and work experience, as well as through formal education and training (Department of Education, 1997b: 27). The RPL process

gives equal credit to the knowledge and skills gained through experience and those gained through formal education and training, by assessing people against the same standards and recognising that different kinds of knowledge can be used for similar purposes.

RPL is located in the movement for social and economic justice; it relates to national training agendas and concerns about skill levels in the population; it responds to debates about access and pathways to learning, particularly for groups of people who have previously been excluded and is concerned with valuing learning, no matter where or how it has occurred (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 3). It recognises that there is not just one way to acquire knowledge.

According to the RPL policy of COSATU (1997: 6)

*“...different forms of knowledge and skill should be given equal value by society. Since RPL respects and values different kinds of knowledge, it is a strategy to undermine bias in society.”*

Due to the fact that the National Qualifications Framework in South Africa is an outcomes-based assessment framework, it offers learners the opportunity to gain recognition for the skills and knowledge that they already have through RPL assessment processes against the new standards registered on the NQF. RPL will allow recognition that learners have been denied in the past. With such recognition would come *“...respect, greater equity, and access to opportunities to progress”* (Lugg, Mabitla, Louw & Angelis, 1998: 4).

The UTS Training and Development Services (1995: 5) states that in the workplace, RPL assessment procedures

*“...may be applied to assessing skills for recruitment, determining appropriate workplace classifications established through industrial awards, acknowledging relevant formal or non-formal educational programs, or in conjunction with training provision and assessment, recognising competency standards achieved in the workplace for*



*application towards tertiary educational qualifications. RPL into the workplace also provides a mechanism through which non-qualified but skilled operators can have their competencies recognised for multi-skilled award payments, as part of the promotion process or to fulfil the licensing requirements in a particular industry.”*

## **2.2 APPROACHES TO THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

According to the *Norms and Standards for Educators* drafted by the Department of Education (1998b: 36) there is a range of approaches to RPL. At the one end of the range are

*“...ways of recognising prior learning that do very little to challenge or modify the dominant patterns of power and privilege in society, but allow access and acknowledgement to selected individuals.”*

At the other end of the range are *“...more radical systems of RPL that seek to eradicate systems that entrench social dominance and privilege.*

RPL provides a practical means to utilise past learning in order to pursue future objectives in a variety of contexts (Department of Education, 1999a: 6 - 8). (Compare Chapter 1, section 1.2.2.1).

From an organisational perspective, RPL provides a solid base for long-term human resource development and improvements in morale, quality service and viability. For individual employees, RPL directly addresses the “self confidence” factor that has been so badly undermined by previous economic and employment trends. At the level of policy, RPL is a key principle of the NQF to be pursued across all education and training sectors (Musker, Host, Botha, King, Nkondo, Shalem & Slonimsky, 1998: 5).

RPL is an approach that seems to embody a number of the key elements relevant to our current economic, organisational and labour market realities.

RPL focuses upon each individual and builds confidence and self-esteem based upon systematic self-assessment of concrete performance and achievement. The RPL process can give dignity to people by valuing what they know and can do and this can be personally empowering for people.

### **2.3 PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

The philosophical roots of RPL are found in the educational philosophy of John Dewey, the social psychology of Kurt Lewin and the cognitive developmental theory of Piaget (Simosko & Cook, 1996: 10). In these theories, learning is seen as a lifelong developmental process which is personal and holistic: new learning is integrated into the experience and cognitive sets of the learner to form new and creative outcomes. Learning is manifested in complex and integrated performances which reflect an application of knowledge, understanding, skills and values (Shaughnessy, 1996: 7 – 8).

The central premise of RPL is that theoretical, high level and quality learning can be gained through experience (Keeton, 1982: 21 – 25) and informal means (Marsick & Watkins, 1991: 12 – 18).

The idea of reflection on experience as a key idea in learning can be traced back as far as the Ancient Greeks and continues to form the basis of the work of people such as John Dewey (1938), Kurt Lewin (1952) and more recently Donald Schon (1983), David Kolb (1984), Stephen Brookfield (1985), David Boud and David Walker (1990) (Cohen *et al*, 1994: 12 and UTS Training and Development Services, 1995: 10).

Based on these philosophical underpinnings, Harris & Saddington (1995: 3) make the statement that RPL is based on

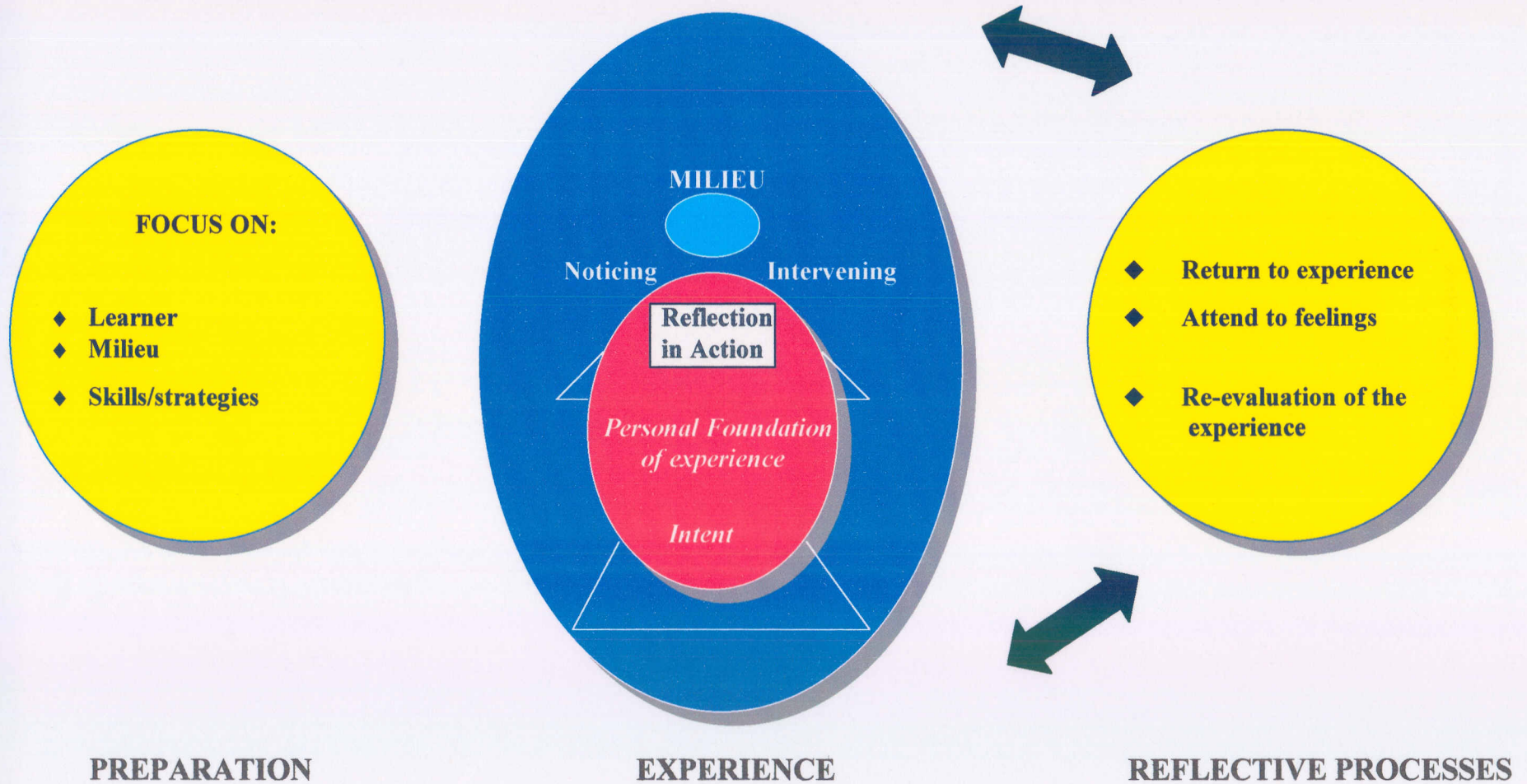
*“... commonly accepted adult learning principles, for example the notion of a life-long learning continuum; learning occurring through a wide variety of styles, methods and contexts; learning as individual and unique; and that new learning can be integrated into the experience of the learner to form new creative outcomes.”*

RPL places prominent emphasis on learning achievement. It recognises and celebrates experiential learning, opportunities for learning through activities which take place in the real world, in authentic contexts in a wide range of environments (Masters & McCurry, 1990: 4).

Figure 2.1 on the following page displays a framework for examining learning from experience.

FIGURE 2.1

# EXAMINING LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE



Source: Boud & Walker, 1990: 67

Thus, whilst a particular experience might generate the learning impetus, it is only after engaging in a process of observation and reflection, creating ideas and generalisations, and applying ideas to new situations that recognisable levels of learning and understanding emerge. Experiences lead to learning and learning leads to understanding (see Kolb's learning cycle in Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2.2.1). From understanding comes the ability to generalise and from that comes insight (compare Cohen *et al*, 1994: 12 and Harris & Saddington, 1995: 3).

A learning outcomes-approach entails much more than merely converting old objectives into a new format. It reflects a philosophical shift, which, if authentically embraced, will require change in aspect of educational delivery. However, if the essential root values associated with RPL are not operationalised into basic programme and curriculum change, RPL will not be anything more than a marginalised student service, providing a few course credits for a limited number of advanced students (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 3).

## **2.4 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF COMPETENCE - BASED ASSESSMENT**

According to Tait & Godfrey (1999: 247) the word "assessment" is derived from

*"...ad sedere, meaning to sit down beside, and consequently carries with it notions of its primary function being that of providing guidance and feedback to the learner."*

The overall purpose of any assessment activity, be it competence-based or otherwise, is to gather as much information as needed on which to base sound decisions. Assessing must be recognised as being no more and no less than a process of sampling a student's work, making inferences from it, and subsequently estimating worth (Tait & Godfrey, 1999: 247).

The basic premises underlying RPL is that people, especially mature adults, learn many things outside the formal structures of education and training and that, irrespective of where, how and when learning was acquired, subject to assessment, this learning is worthy of recognition. According to the UTS Training and Development Services (1995: 5), RPL is

*“...a method of assessing relevant competencies gained by adults through work and life experiences which can then be counted towards qualifications or for promotion in the workplace by using a systematic set of procedures.”*

RPL is an “...integral part of competency-based assessment, not a separate process” (Fletcher, 1997: 34). It is one which allows for evidence from past achievements to be included in the total of evidence collected during assessment. RPL is also a useful tool for motivating staff and for introducing competence assessment.

The concept of RPL, regardless of the terminology used to describe it, is based on long-accepted theories and principles of experiential learning. Simosko & Cook (1996: 20) argue that the concept

*“...is intrinsic to the notions of competence-based assessment and flexible assessment. It recognises that what people know and can do is of value, regardless of how, why or when they learned it. Competence-based or flexible assessment systems actively encourage people to identify what they know and can do and become more active, focused learners. These systems are of significant benefit to both individuals and organisations.”*

Competence-based assessment adopts the same principles. Because it is all about the collection of evidence, the first step in the process is to determine why the evidence is needed. Diverse evidence, once viewed as relevant only to RPL,

*“...is now considered a natural aspect of most competence-based assessment systems. As part of these systems, learners are expected to*



*generate evidence in their ongoing effort to learn, develop and undergo assessment. The continuum of learning includes assessment and the continuum of assessment includes learning” (Simosko & Cook, 1996: vi).*

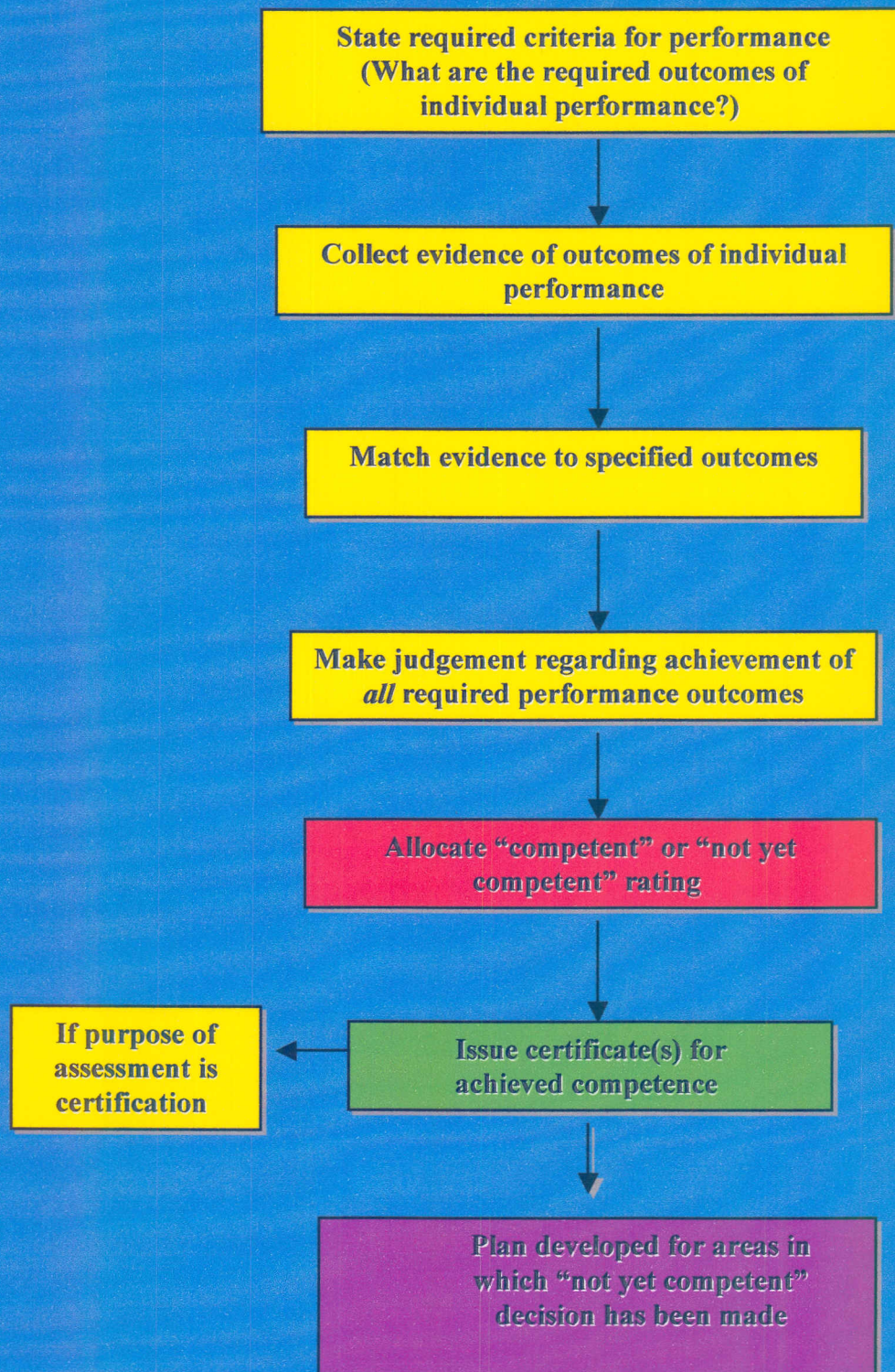
Once the reason for collecting the evidence has been determined, the *way* in which this information will be gathered, is decided (assessment methods). The data is obtained and finally it is assessed (using assessment instruments) to see how and if it matches the competency level that is required (Rutherford, 1995: 3 - 4). The flow diagram on the following page (figure 2.2) demonstrates the step-by-step process of competence-based assessment.





FIGURE 2.2

## ASSESSMENT PROCESS COMPETENCE-BASED ASSESSMENT





During the RPL process exactly the same procedures are followed.

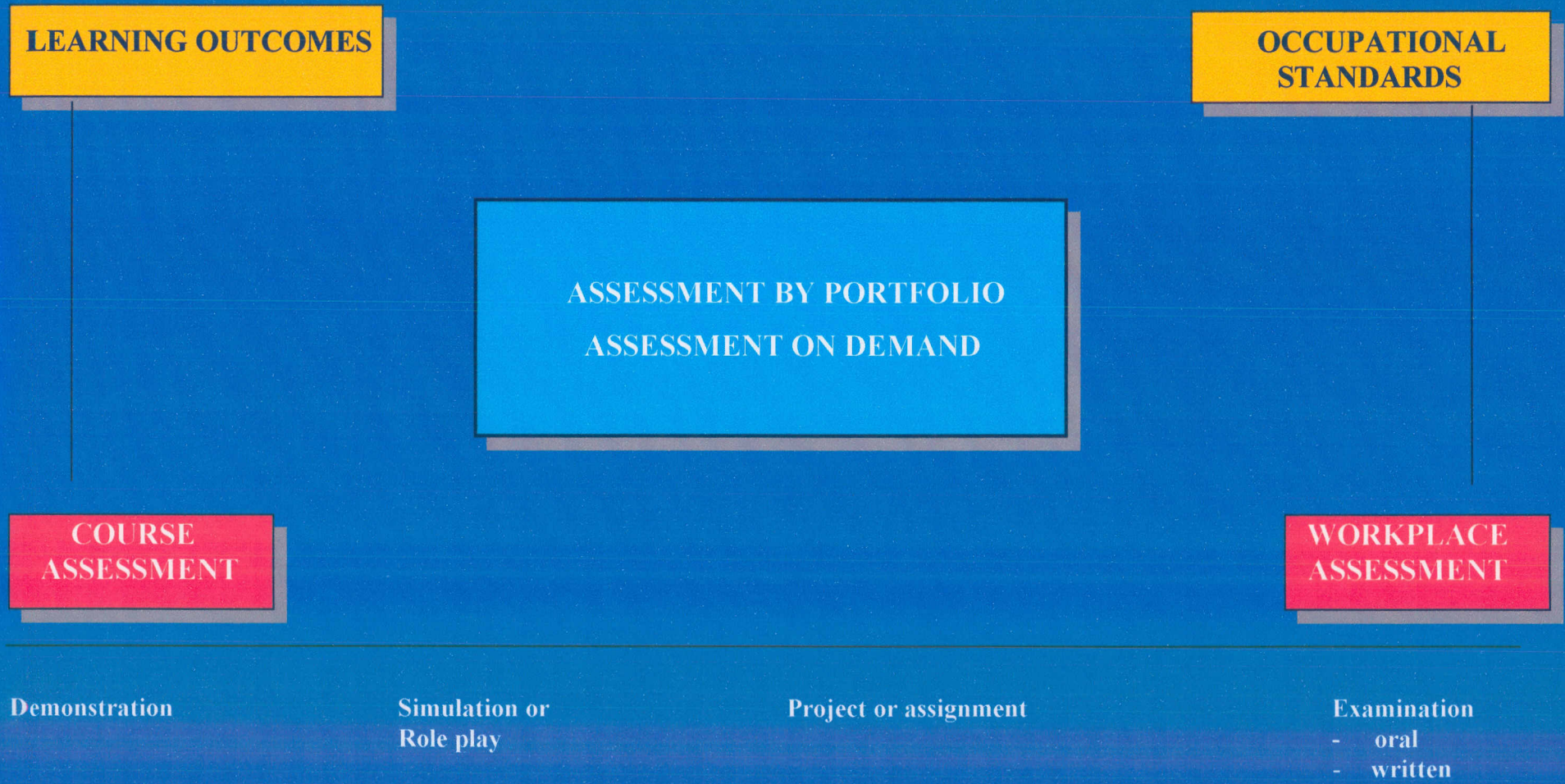
In competence-based assessment and during RPL the individual, not the assessor, has responsibility for proving competence. This means that he or she must collect and present any or all evidence required in a format acceptable to the assessor. The portfolio is usually used for the collection of materials assembled by students to demonstrate achievement (Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 271).

No longer is assessment seen as something that is “done” to an individual. Rather, in competence-based systems, the individual is increasingly viewed as a key partner in the assessment process (Simosko & Cook, 1996: vi).

The individual is guided in the learning and assessment process by occupational standards or learning outcomes as illustrated in figure 2.3.

FIGURE 2.3

**CONTINUUM OF ASSESSMENT**



Source: Simosko & Cook, 1996: vii



## **2.5 THE FUNCTIONS OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

The purpose of assessing prior learning and prior achievement “...is to enable people to obtain credit for competencies they already have” (Walklin, 1991: 108). Achievement that has been recognised and accredited can be used to enhance career progression. It can assist people to gain access to continuing education and training.

In 1985 a study was conducted by the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) in Ontario, Canada, to develop a social service worker programme for Aboriginal adult learners (FNTI, 1994: 51 - 52). They particularly focused on the barriers to accessing post-secondary education specifically related to adult learners. They found that adult learners in general have a number of barriers to overcome when accessing the post-secondary educational system. These barriers may be personal, situational and institutional (these barriers will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, section 4.3). With these barriers in mind, research into the methods for meeting the needs of the adult learner was launched. As awareness of adult learner needs, and about learning in general increased, research findings relating to the concept of prior learning assessment were uncovered. When examining the concept, development and use of prior learning assessment in the United States, Ontario educational researchers revealed several important findings which they grouped under the “functions of RPL” category (FNTI, 1994: 53 – 54).

### **2.5.1 FINDINGS OF THE FIRST NATIONS TECHNICAL INSTITUTE’S PROJECT**

2.5.1.1 *The initial function of prior learning assessment was to give credit to the individual for what that person knew (knowledge) and could do (skills).* Once knowledge and skills were established, then the person would be placed in an appropriate course of study where he or she

would advance without waste of time and yet with a full qualification for the next steps in a learning sequence.

- 2.5.1.2 ***Prior learning assessment provided a framework for the learner to record his or her previous experiences.*** Once the experiences were recorded, then meaning and significance could be attached. In fact, the process of documenting and recording experience was in itself a learning process which provided learners with a new understanding of their experiences and the opportunity to become consciously aware of the learning outcomes derived from these experiences.
- 2.5.1.3 As individuals discovered things about themselves, they came to see that as individual people, they knew and could do things that had not been previously recognised by either themselves or anyone else, at least not by any socially sanctioned authority. ***The consequence of gaining a new picture of the self resulted in the enhancement of self-esteem.***
- 2.5.1.4 In modern times, many people undergo many changes in work roles, marital relationships, and family roles. A large number of adults were motivated by some significant transition in their lives to return to learning. ***Hence, the need to get an inventory of what a person already knew and could do, and also, to use prior learning assessment as a foundation for career-planning.***
- 2.5.1.5 Society today needs a more competent populace than in the past. Existing education is no longer sufficient for judging the actions of legislators and government. ***Therefore, prior learning assessment would help people to build on what they already know to increase their understanding of legislation, policy and social issues, and to effectively improve their productivity and competence as workers.***
- 2.5.1.6 ***The use and availability of prior learning assessment provided a large number of people with the opportunity to return to formal education.*** Many individuals would not return because they believed that they

would have to begin from the beginning and repeat what they already knew and had achieved. In such situations, prior learning assessment functioned as a motivator for people who wished to continue with their learning.

Although these findings did not surmount all of the barriers identified, they did nevertheless, “...provide a basis from which a PLA initiative would be launched in Ontario” (FNTI, 1994: 54).

Taken the above findings into consideration the functions of RPL in general can be summarised as followed:

### ***2.5.2 FUNCTIONS OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN GENERAL***

RPL needs to be understood as a mechanism for (FNTI, 1994: 55 and Geysler, 1999: 195):

- 2.5.2.1 Individualisation of the assessment process as opposed to standardised testing.
- 2.5.2.2 Access to education programmes. Learners who do not meet the entrance requirements could get access through RPL.
- 2.5.2.3 Advanced placing within an institution, e.g. a learner with a Bachelor’s degree could be allowed to register for a Master’s programme if he/she was assessed and found to be competent on the relevant Honours level.
- 2.5.2.4 Reliance upon the collective judgement of subject-matter experts to establish some basis for reliable and valid assessment.
- 2.5.2.5 Comprehensiveness in dealing with what the individual claims to know and is able to do. This is to say that the whole or entirety of the learner’s claim must be examined in relationship to the next learning

purpose of the individual. Assessment should not be dependent upon piece meal tests.

- 2.5.2.6 Recognition of prior learning in terms of credits allocated, which in turn means that the learner does not have to complete all the modules in the relevant programme.
- 2.5.2.7 Awarding qualifications to learners who meet all the criteria for a particular programme leading to a qualification.
- 2.5.2.8 Developing new and relevant programmes that meet learner needs, while utilising more effective learning, teaching and assessment strategies.
- 2.5.2.9 Advocacy for the learner. Any good educator begins by finding out why the learner has come to him or her, and on the basis of what the learner already knows and can do, discerns in partnership with the learner what the learner might best learn next.

It is important to note that in the interests of transparency, RPL candidates should participate actively in the identification of the RPL assessment instrument and method as well as in the development of the curriculum. This implies that adult learners will explore the ways in which they assess themselves as well as how they value their own experiential learning. They will have to identify the ways in which the current curriculum does or does not effectively address gaps in their prior learning.

## **2.6 THE BENEFITS AND BENEFICIARIES OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

According to McDonald (1995: 3) RPL can be applied to skills and knowledge acquired as a result of hobbies or outside interests equally as well as to



competencies gained through a recently completed formal training course. Such skills and knowledge could have been gained through a lifetime of experiences. However, these skills and knowledge can be just as relevant when being judged for applicability against competency standards to which the candidate is being assessed.

The key concept is that, regardless of where and how the skills and knowledge were obtained, these acquired skills can be assessed in terms of the requirements of relevant competency standards. This means that RPL draws on the candidates' full range of skills and knowledge, no matter where and how they were gained. It serves as "*...a powerful motivator for individuals to seek new learning opportunities and complete recognised qualifications*" (Simosko & Cook, 1996: 5).

### ***2.6.1 BENEFITS OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING***

During the RPL process, learners will be assessed against national standards that are registered on the NQF. This will ensure that consistency is promoted and a common language is spoken across all education and training sectors (Simosko & Cook, 1996: 189).

However, a national approach to RPL can ensure the following benefits as a result of RPL (Cohen & Whitaker, 1990: 39 –41; COSATU, 1997: 7 – 10 and Geysers, 1999: 194):

#### ***2.6.1.1 Efficient use of resources***

RPL can result in resources be utilised more efficiently due to the fact that

- ◆ less repetition of learning will occur as learners will move faster through the system by receiving credits for their prior learning;
- ◆ individuals and institutions will make better use of time and resources;

- ◆ there will be an increased ability to identify and focus on skills and areas of knowledge; and
- ◆ employers can match available jobs and potential employees more adequately.

#### ***2.6.1.2 Development of a lifelong learning culture***

RPL will enhance and develop a culture of lifelong learning due to the fact that

- ◆ learners will receive formal recognition for learning that takes place in a variety of settings;
- ◆ learners will be encouraged to explore new fields of learning; and
- ◆ more opportunities will arise for bringing learning and work together.

#### ***2.6.1.3 Greater social justice***

RPL will promote greater social justice due to the fact that

- ◆ redressing of past imbalances will take place by recognising skills gained in working life and by assisting to develop a culture of learning;
- ◆ capacity will be built so that learners can feel part of and can contribute to the broader economic and community set-up;
- ◆ people will be “fast-tracked” at an individual level, which is affirming and motivating;
- ◆ learners will have fair access to education and training opportunities for all South Africans;
- ◆ learners will be ensured of a bias-free judgement of education and non-formal learning;
- ◆ individuals and groups who are most disadvantaged will experience greater equality; and
- ◆ learners will have improved access to work and better accommodation of their special needs.

#### **2.6.1.4 *Co-ordinated and consistent labour force development***

RPL will ensure a co-ordinated and consistent labour force development due to the fact that

- ◆ consistent standards for skills needed in specific occupations will be developed and registered on the NQF and will be available for utilisation;
- ◆ better information regarding career and employment counselling, learning pathways, learnerships and skills and training programmes will be available to learners; and
- ◆ once learners have received recognition and credits for their prior learning, more opportunities regarding the changing of jobs or work in all parts of South Africa will be available to them.

#### **2.6.1.5 *Reform of education and training systems***

The implementation of an RPL system will ensure that education and training systems are reformed due to the fact that

- ◆ learners will receive recognition of credits that will be applicable in all provinces and education/training systems throughout the country;
- ◆ outcomes (skills and knowledge) from all training and educational programmes will be clearly stated as these programmes will be developed from the standards registered on the NQF; and
- ◆ the education and training systems will allow for more flexibility regarding individual learning goals and styles as well as for meeting labour market needs.

#### **2.6.1.6 *Improved curriculum development***

RPL will improve curriculum development due to the fact that

- ◆ programmes based on learner needs will be developed;
- ◆ new fields of study or programmes can be identified; and

- ◆ the alternative methods of assessment in RPL can also be used in regular programmes.

#### **2.6.1.7 *Effective management of change***

The implementation of an RPL system in South Africa will result in effective management of change due to the fact that

- ◆ opportunities will be available for government, institutions and organisations across South Africa to work towards a common goal; and
- ◆ potential will exist to use resources better by developing new approaches.

RPL can offer major incentives for experienced adults to upgrade their qualifications. Although candidates incur some costs, they ultimately save money on tuition fees for any exemptions they earn. Therefore, all the benefits mentioned above will have a direct impact on the learners, employers, organisations and the nation.

#### **2.6.2 *BENEFICIARIES OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING***

RPL is no cheap and quick alternative to formal assessment or extensive training, yet it does have a number of financial and non-financial benefits for various stakeholders in the RPL process (compare Rutherford, 1995: 2; McDonald, 1995: 4 – 7; Cohen *et al*, 1994: 47; LEARN, 1995: 390 and Crossland, 1991: 9 - 11). These beneficiaries are:

##### **2.6.2.1 *Individuals***

RPL can have major benefits for the learners due to the fact that

- ◆ RPL processes should be fair and bias-free for assessing each person's

learning and abilities;

- ◆ continuous learning as an integral part of a candidate's work life can also be clearly demonstrated;
- ◆ it reduces duplication of learning;
- ◆ it opens access to formal recognition of knowledge, skills and attributes;
- ◆ it ensures better use of time and resources - the time taken to gain formal accreditation or certification is shortened (no repeated courses required);
- ◆ credit can be given for part-time, voluntary or other unpaid work;
- ◆ candidates' motivation and self-esteem are increased through having past accomplishments recognised and rewarded, thus providing a foundation for further development;
- ◆ it can be carried out anywhere and at any time;
- ◆ it enhances increased job mobility and prospects for employment improve with appropriately targeted training;
- ◆ it encourages self-assessment and enables an individual to gain a better understanding of him-/herself which can be empowering;
- ◆ it provides equal access for members of groups who are currently disadvantaged;
- ◆ it increases opportunities for returning to learning. Entry into formal training becomes more attractive as skills and knowledge recognised do not have to be relearned;
- ◆ it provides greater flexibility of learning options – it also results in an increase in innovation and pride which produces high levels of motivation in the workplace;
- ◆ it creates pathways between work, life experiences and formal training/education;
- ◆ it can ultimately result in financial benefits for the learner. These benefits are lower costs associated with tuition (e.g. administrative fees, books and materials) and attendance (transport and child care); and
- ◆ it results in the possibility of increased earnings more quickly because

of hastened course completion.

**2.6.2.2 *Employers*** (also compare Fletcher, 1997: 31 - 36)

Not only the learners, but also the employers can benefit from RPL due to the fact that RPL

- ◆ results in a reliable means of assessing and matching skills to workplace needs;
- ◆ assists in upgrading skills of staff;
- ◆ provides a framework for setting career goals and training needs;
- ◆ will lead to in-house training designed for the needs of each workforce or for specific workers - reduced costs of employee release for training;
- ◆ will promote access to a more diverse workforce;
- ◆ will result in potential savings on training costs. Training resources can be maximised;
- ◆ promotes portability of competencies; and
- ◆ has the potential for building positive partnerships with higher education providers.

**2.6.2.3 *Educational and training institutions***

RPL can result in benefits for the education and training institutions due to the fact that it

- ◆ results in better use of limited resources;
- ◆ can attract new and experienced learners to the institution. Standards actually increase rather than decrease;
- ◆ gives the assurance that students can transfer from one place to another;
- ◆ results in working with employers to develop courses that meet workplace needs, i.e. education institutions can more closely link with industry through a better focusing of learning resources. This can be useful for curriculum and pedagogy;



- ◆ can result in staff gaining valuable insights into different and non-dominant cultures of knowledge, which can and should form a useful adjunct to traditionally academic ways of thinking about knowledge;
- ◆ provides access to a wider range of potential learners;
- ◆ can build meaningful links with the communities the institutions seek to serve when engaging with RPL;
- ◆ when implemented, forces staff to understand what their curriculum actually requires of learners and to clarify issues such as the meaning of particular levels, notions of academic coherence and equivalence;
- ◆ allows other training or learning programmes to integrate RPL easily;
- ◆ is a most cost effective method of assessment available to both user and provider;
- ◆ ensures higher student completion rate, student recruitment and retention rates tend to increase;
- ◆ results in a higher level of student motivation and satisfaction, as students do not need to repeat material which they already feel they have mastered;
- ◆ creates a more homogeneous class;
- ◆ retains control over quality by formally assessing applicants' prior learning; and
- ◆ is financially beneficial as it depends on funding arrangements within each system.

#### **2.6.2.4 *The nation***

Ultimately RPL will have benefits for the nation due to the fact that it can

- ◆ save costs of unnecessarily enrolling a student in a particular segment of a course;
- ◆ result in an earlier contribution of trained people to the workforce;
- ◆ result in an increased workforce mobility; and
- ◆ motivate applicants who are granted RPL credits to undertake further study.

The main beneficiary is the candidate. Savings can be achieved financially as well as regarding the learning time. The candidate can also benefit from a process which helps him/her to make sound judgements about the quality of his/her own learning. This tends to enhance motivation and the successful completion of studies.

At face value, the institution seems to bear most of the burden in terms of financial expenditure and devotion of time and energy to advising, administering and supporting RPL candidates.

However, it is important that any RPL process should be underpinned by the standards and principles essential for an RPL system (see section 2.8 and Chapter 4, section 4.2) to ensure that all the benefits as described above will be obtained.

### **2.6.3 FINANCIAL BENEFITS AND IMPLICATIONS**

RPL does not only entail financial implications, but also results in financial benefits for all parties involved (McDonald, 1996: 3 – 7).

#### **2.6.3.1 Candidates**

##### **(a) Financial benefits**

- ◆ RPL will result in lower costs associated with tuition (e.g. administrative fees, books and materials) and attendance (transport, childcare).
- ◆ RPL can result in the possibility of increased earnings more quickly because of hastened course completion.

##### **(b) Financial implications**

- ◆ Learners will have to pay an application fee.
- ◆ Costs will be incurred regarding the preparation for assessment.

### **2.6.3.2 Employers**

#### **(a) Financial benefits**

- ◆ RPL can result in more effective use of the skills of its workforce.
- ◆ RPL will reduce training costs.
- ◆ RPL will reduce costs in that employees will not need to be released for training.

#### **(b) Financial implications**

- ◆ Funds will be required for developing and maintaining an RPL system
- ◆ Carrying out the assessments (unless the applicant contributes) will result in costs for the employer.

### **2.6.3.3 Educational and training institutions**

#### **(a) Financial benefits**

- ◆ Financial benefits depend on funding arrangements within each education and training system.

#### **(b) Financial implications**

- ◆ The cost of advertising and assessing students.
- ◆ The cost of training of staff, establishment of administrative systems and publicity.
- ◆ Re-drafting course descriptions so that the required outcomes can be interpreted by applicants.
- ◆ Possible, but not necessary, reduction of income.

### **2.6.3.4 The nation**

#### **(a) Financial implications**

- ◆ RPL will result in costs due to the fact that the industry and employees have to be informed of RPL.

The variables which can affect the costs of the RPL process will be discussed in section 2.11. Obviously the costs of any assessment process depend on *how*

(assessment method) it is carried out. The assessment methods and practices will be discussed in section 2.9.

## **2.7 IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

Although only a few implications regarding RPL exist, they have to be mentioned (Crossland, 1991: 18 and McDonald, 1995: 3 – 7). These implications exist for the following stakeholders in the RPL process:

### **2.7.1 RPL CANDIDATES**

- ◆ Candidates are deprived of the benefits of education which go beyond what is normally assessed.

### **2.7.2 EMPLOYERS**

- ◆ Employers can possibly experience frustration if workers are unable to fulfil their increased expectations.

### **2.7.3 EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS**

- ◆ RPL can have a potential effect on the course structure.
- ◆ The more experienced students or “bright sparks” can be absent from a class if they have obtained credits for their prior learning.

### **2.7.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR ADULT LEARNING CENTRES**

- ◆ RPL will have to accommodate modularisation and flexible provision of programmes.
- ◆ RPL will result in changing roles of staff.
- ◆ RPL will entail initial and on-going staff development.
- ◆ If offering RPL the learning centre will have to adopt a team approach to both instruction and assessment alternatives.
- ◆ Admission procedures will have to include thorough profiling of each potential candidate.

- ◆ Alternative evidence by trained assessors needs to be used extensively.
- ◆ The academic year will be extended to allow candidates for RPL assessment.
- ◆ Co-operation has to exist between assessor bodies, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) as well as Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs).
- ◆ RPL provision can result in high costs.
- ◆ Resources will have to be re-allocated.

## **2.8 MINIMUM STANDARDS REQUIRED FOR AN EFFECTIVE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING SYSTEM**

The first step towards an effective national approach to RPL is to reach consensus regarding a minimum set of standards. National standards for RPL will provide a framework to ensure that RPL is developed in a way that caters effectively for all users (compare National Union of Mine Workers, 1997: 8; Rutherford, 1995: 123 - 135; Fletcher, 1997: 80 - 91 and South African College for Open Learning, 1999: 3 - 7).

The following minimum standards for RPL are recommended:

- 2.8.1 RPL must be accessible and relevant to people as individuals. It must focus on the unique needs and abilities of the individual.
- 2.8.2 Assessment and recognition must be of learning (knowledge, skills and judgement acquired through study) and not of experience.
- 2.8.3 The RPL process must be fair and equitable. It must be barrier-free and bias-free.
- 2.8.4 The RPL process must be efficient. It must make the best use of resources for the individual.
- 2.8.5 The RPL process must be effective. It must provide the opportunity for

RPL, but it must not promote false promises.

- 2.8.6 The RPL process must be transparent. The individual must know the criteria and standards used to assess his or her skills and knowledge.
- 2.8.7 The assessment must be reliable. Criteria and standards must be recognised and respected by all the labour market partners. This principle applies to occupational and skill standards, the learning outcomes stated for a specific course or training programme, and the credentials required for a specific job or occupational group.
- 2.8.8 The assessment tools and their RPL application must be valid. They need to be recognisable and acceptable by all the labour market partners.
- 2.8.9 The assessing organisation must provide a number of ways to carry out an assessment. Individuals should have the opportunity to choose how their assessment will be done. If necessary, they should get help to make their choice.
- 2.8.10 Recognition awarded through RPL should be transferable between organisations, provinces and territories.
- 2.8.11 RPL must be an option or opportunity, not a mandatory process.
- 2.8.12 Recognition awarded through RPL should be considered equal to recognition awarded in the traditional manner.
- 2.8.13 If a person is not satisfied with RPL assessment, an appeal procedure must be available.
- 2.8.14 Assessment methods should be appropriate for the level and the context of the assessment.
- 2.8.15 Assessment methods should be cost-effective.

There is one point that is not immediately apparent from the previously mentioned issues, and that should be emphasised. RPL does not result directly in a better trained workforce: it merely results in better recognition of the skills and knowledge that people already possess. This may lead, indirectly to a better trained workforce by allowing people to progress more quickly in their training, but not necessarily.

## **2.9 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND METHODS WHICH COULD BE UTILISED FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

All assessment requires human judgement. Even the most "objective" standardised examination is a product of human judgement. According to Cohen *et al* (1994: 21), to one degree or another,

*"...the content and format of all assessment and grading practices reflect the opinions and judgements of the test maker who must decide, either alone or with others, what is being tested and what is the best answer or the range of acceptable answers."*

Prior Learning Achievement refers to the totality of what someone knows, understands and can do at the time of assessment for a qualification. This covers achievements both from formal study and those acquired through experience. In order to obtain credit for achievements the evidence must be matched to the assessment requirements for the applicable qualification or unit of credit.

The assessment of prior learning is not different from traditional classroom-based assessment practices in that it involves making valid and reliable judgements about what students know and can do. RPL is rather a specialised sub-set of assessment (Department of Education, 1997b: 117).

However, the key issue for RPL is how to equate informal and experiential learning with the standards of the specific NQF-level learning expected.

### **2.9.1 ASSESSING LEARNING AND ASSESSING PRIOR LEARNING**

In examining the relevance of the context in which learning takes place (differences between learning in a formal educational context and learning from work and life experience), academic staff need to address fundamental issues



about learning – in particular adult learning – and identify the assessment principles which guide their practice.

According to Cohen *et al* (1994: 17) RPL has an epistemological value due to the fact that

*“...it indirectly forces assessors to re-examine what forms of knowledge are of most worth in their specific settings. If this process does occur, it will be sound educational practice for academic staff to identify and critique the interests that maintain the education status quo in a changing education system.”*

RPL implies that the outcomes of learning, irrespective of their source from non-credentialled courses, from workplace and life experience or from other formal courses are all available to be assessed. The RPL process can be developmental as it provides opportunities for learners to consciously reflect on the nature of their practical ways of learning from their work and life experiences, and review them according to accepted standards.

### **2.9.2 THE METHODS OF ASSESSMENT**

Defining learning outcomes and recognising effective learning are specialist curriculum skills which are an integral part of the RPL process. Training of staff to advise students on RPL and training of assessors should be included as part of the normal staff development process.

According to Dochy, Moerkerke & Segers (1999: 117) there are two broad methods for the assessment of prior knowledge: learners can be asked to estimate their own mastery level or prior learning can be assessed by utilising the various number of different assessment methods. However, in a review of research on informal estimation of the level of prior knowledge, Falchikov & Boud (1989: 395 – 430) indicate that learners are not capable of giving as accurate and reliable estimates of their own level of prior knowledge as prior knowledge state tests do

(compare Dochy, 1992: 18, Portier & Wagemans, 1995: 65 – 87 and Docy & Moerkerke, 1997: 415 - 432).

The range of assessment methods used in RPL are often more diverse than those usually operating in a particular course, as the assessment may be more individualistic, and the range of assessment methods and the purposes for which they are set up is only limited by the skill, imagination and resources of the assessors. The selection of the method should be guided by the set of criteria or principles as discussed previously. However, the main educational issue that is raised is that of fitness-for-purpose. There is a danger of people becoming locked into particular approaches, and not ensuring that the mechanisms used were most appropriate for the subject and applicants. Further, candidates should have access to support for each RPL assessment method. This support may be different and also be specific so that the support is best suited to the particular RPL assessment method (Simosko & Cook, 1996: vi).

There are a number of different ways of assessing and recognising a learner's prior learning.

In figure 2.4 a list is provided which indicates some of the possible types of assessment and why they are used. It also provides some examples applicable to university level assessment.



FIGURE 2.4

**ASSESSMENT METHODS FOR THE  
RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

<b>ASSESSMENT METHODS</b>	<b>PURPOSES AND EXAMPLES</b>
<b>INTERVIEWS</b>	<p>To clarify issues raised in documentary evidence presented and/or to review scope and depth of learning. Maybe particularly useful in areas where judgement and values are important. (Maybe structured, with applicants given questions prior to interview, or relatively unstructured, with no specific preparation required.)</p> <p><i>e.g. Qualified draftsman who has performed duties requiring additional skills, and is seeking advanced standing in Architecture degree, is asked to explain the legal basis for certain building codes.</i></p>
<b>DEBATE</b>	<p>To confirm capacity to sustain a considered argument demonstrating adequate knowledge of the subject.</p> <p><i>e.g. Union representative on national union seeking recognition for negotiation skills in Law degree is asked to prepare a topic for formal debate or take part in a mock trial.</i></p>
<b>PRESENTATION</b>	<p>To check ability to present information in a way appropriate to subject and audience.</p> <p><i>e.g. Law clerk seeking advanced standing for contracts in law degree is asked to explain precedents existing in case law on a particular issue.</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Laboratory assistant with six years' experience with ICI and seeking RPL for a laboratory component in first year chemistry, explains the theoretical basis for an experiment.</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Part-time technical teacher for eight years in business has provided videotapes of an introductory lecture and evaluation reports on workshop conducted in last six months seeks credit for the practicum in Bachelor of Teaching. Applicant to write/present a lecture for novices on specific complex subject matter.</i></p>

<p><b>SPECIAL PROJECTS</b></p>	<p>Maybe used to meet a variety of purposes - to add greater current to knowledge or skills, to top up learning, to extend scope of prior learning.</p> <p><i>e.g. Experienced computer programmer is familiar with two of the three components in the course curriculum. Applicant agrees to cover third method in current work project and provide evidence in two weeks.</i></p>
<p><b>BOOK REVIEW</b></p>	<p>To ensure currency and analysis of appropriate literature is at a satisfactory level.</p> <p>(This is often used where the applicant has creditable learning but appears to have missed a major specific reference or viewpoint which has been a pre-requisite for enrolled students and is basic to future studies in the area.)</p> <p><i>e.g. Nurse of many years' experience in both nursing and health administration seeks credit towards Health Science degree. Through RPL, all clinical and most of the introductory theory subjects are credited at high levels. A current major text is required reading and needs to be read and critically reviewed.</i></p>
<p><b>ANNOTATED LITERATURE REVIEW</b></p>	<p>To illustrate the range of reading done by applicant and ensure appropriate coverage to fulfil subject requirements.</p> <p>(This is particularly suitable for post-graduate assessment.)</p> <p><i>e.g. Applicant seeking credit for several Agricultural Science subjects worked in the field with a Research and Development team for three years and has been keeping a record of reading in this area for a number of years in relation to problems emerging during agricultural field visits. Mainly a summary of content, but occasional comments compare different approaches and indicate reflection about the way the subject is presented and its usefulness to the agricultural problem under consideration. Applicant is asked to add to this using a more formal approach.</i></p>
<p><b>PERFORMANCE TESTING</b></p>	<p>To test applications of theory in a structured context in correct/safe manner (in a simulated environment or in the workshop or laboratory or in the workplace)</p> <p><i>e.g. Applicant to use specific laboratory equipment to conduct an experiment and explain the findings in writing.</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Applicant is asked to explain the rationale for a sequence of tasks undertaken using a range of complex equipment.</i></p>





<b>ORAL EXAMINATION</b>	<p>To check deep understanding of complex issues and ability to explain in simple terms.</p> <p><i>e.g. Multilingual teacher seeks credit in a language degree by means of oral examination.</i></p>
<b>ESSAY</b>	<p>To check quality and standard of academic writing and use of references, ability to develop a coherent argument, and to confirm extent, understanding and transferability of knowledge and critical evaluation of the ideas. (Essays may be similar in scope or format to formal academic essays set for enrolled students.)</p> <p><i>e.g. Applicant has read widely and done three Continuing Education Units in European History and seeks RPL for part of an Arts course.</i></p>
<b>EXAMPLES OF WORK DONE OR PERFORMED OR DESIGNED</b>	<p>To check quality of work, relevance to credit sought and authenticity of production. (Often combined with interview or oral test.)</p> <p><i>e.g. Applicant has worked in video production and has many examples of videos produced. Seeks credit towards video design and production units in visual Communications degree.</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Applicant has developed design for a prototype of an energy-efficient machine, and seeks non-specific credit in an unrelated course.</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Applicant seeks credit towards writing subjects in communications degree on basis of published works and experience as editor of technical journal and other freelance work.</i></p>
<b>REPORTS, CRITIQUES, ARTICLES</b>	<p>To indicate level of knowledge and assess analytical and writing skills and issues involved in current debate.</p> <p><i>e.g. Applicant from the public sector presents a range of reports written about the subject over the past few years. Applicant may be given a current government report and asked to critique from a lobby group's particular viewpoint.</i></p> <p><i>e.g. Animal carer who has been recognised for researching a specific malady in native animals seeks credit for an introductory subject in Veterinary Science.</i></p>



**PORTFOLIO**

To validate applicant's learning by providing a collection of materials which reflect prior learning and achievements. Will include own work, reflections on own practice and indirect evidence from others who are qualified to comment. The portfolio will identify relevant connections between learning and specified or unspecified credit sought.

*e.g. Applicant has worked in voluntary capacity as president of local community child care group, secretary of local parents' committee for the high school and music director for musical productions of two local high schools. Seeks to have this credited towards Degree in Teacher Education. Applicant also has private music students learning piano, clarinet and flute achieving well in the Conservatorium examinations. Applicant seeks advice on what might be credited.*

*Source: Cohen, Flowers, McDonald & Schaafsma, 1994: 22 - 24*

These methods can all be combined into five major sets of practices (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 9 – 16):

- ❑ **THE CHALLENGE PROCESS**
- ❑ **STANDARDISED EXAMINATIONS**
- ❑ **PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT**
- ❑ **THE ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW**
- ❑ **PROGRAMME AND COURSE EVALUATION OR CREDIT TRANSFER**

These methods will be described in the following sections.

### **2.9.2.1 THE CHALLENGE PROCESS**

*Challenge testing* is one of the simplest and most cost-effective methods to use in the development of an RPL assessment system. They are also useful in situations where individuals have a wealth of experience and learning but little *documentary evidence for it*. The challenge process is a method of assessment by a subject-expert. “It refers to special tests, projects, demonstrations, oral exams/interviews, competence tests and assignments undertaken with a view to earning credit for or towards a specific course without enrolling on it” (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 9 – 10).

*“Candidates are given copies of the outcomes and performance criteria for the learning area and level they seek recognition in as well as sample assessment activities. When they feel sufficiently prepared, candidates will present themselves for assessment and the actual assessment tools and activities are the same as for those persons registered in learning programmes”* (Department of Education, 1997b: 117).

This process measures demonstrated learning through a variety of evaluation methods, including both written and non-written, for the purpose of awarding credit without the participant having to enrol in a course. Credits achieved



through RPL assessments will be recorded on the candidate's Record of Learning, without distinction as to how the standard was achieved

In addition to the *challenge method* all adult learning centres and providers will be required to have accredited placement tests that are used for learners wishing to enrol in new courses. Should the results of the placement tests indicate that learners should be enrolled at a higher level, exemption certificates will be issued for the levels in that area of learning below the level at which the learner has been placed. Such exemptions will count towards the RPL Records of Learning (Department of Education, 1997a: 26).

Potential disadvantages include the tendency for *challenge examinations* to contain cultural and linguistic bias. They may differ due to the fact that they are not standardised, even within the same institution, in terms of content, format, scoring standards and conditions of administration.

#### **2.9.2.2 STANDARDISED EXAMINATIONS**

Nationally *standardised examinations* attempt to keep content, format, scoring, standards and conditions of administration as comparable as possible from one test candidate to another. *Examinations* have come to determine the curriculum and assessment of the majority of pupils. *External examinations* are associated with the maintenance of curricular and pedagogical standards. They are widely and favourably regarded as an objective, convenient and credible yardstick of proven worth. Assessment in this instance is, therefore, primarily norm-referenced (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 10).

There is, however, a growing awareness among both educators and society at large that traditional-type *examinations* may be a poor indicator of a learner's skills and abilities. Fundamentally the structuring of any *examination* should be based on the principles that underpin all assessment. Is the *examination* valid and is it reliable? Simosko & Cook (1996: 110) argue that

*“...unless the assessor is assessing the candidate’s writing performance, written examinations may not be appropriate or relevant to the standards or learning outcomes.”*

When *examinations* are considered, the following issues must also be kept in mind (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 11):

- (a) “the definition of the learning area to be addressed;*
- (b) the development of detailed content specifications;*
- (c) the development of a pool of test/exam questions;*
- (d) pre-testing or piloting with learners on existing taught courses; and*
- (e) a scoring scale has to be developed on the basis of learners’ performance.”*

Even though there is some doubt as to the validity and reliability of traditional *standardised examinations*, steps can be taken to ensure that they are as valid and reliable as possible. If *examinations* are carefully drawn up, carefully marked and the results presented in a meaningful way to all concerned, then *examinations* will serve their purpose. Such *examinations* are also more transferable between centres than *challenge examinations*.

It may, however, be useful to analyse the course objectives and decide which parts of the course are examinable, and which parts are better assessed using other means such as profiling.

### **2.9.2.3 PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT**

A comprehensive *portfolio* is a dossier or collection of material or evidence which the participant has accumulated about his/her past experiential learning and accomplishments. Davis (1993: 247) sees the *portfolio* as “...not a specific form of assessment, nor a unitary one, but is instead a cumulative collection of a student’s work.” The development of a *portfolio* of evidence is a technique widely used by institutions involved in the recognition of prior learning (UTS Training and Development Services, 1995: 50).

Woodward (1992: 529) claims that

*“...one of the main reasons for introducing portfolios are because we believe that students know more about their own abilities and progress than do ‘outsiders’. Tapping into this knowledge, and facilitating students in becoming aware of their competencies can be achieved, we believe, through portfolios and personal reflective journals.”*

A *portfolio* can identify a relevant connection between learning and the specific credit being sought. It is normally presented in a folder, containing the following (Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 277):

- courses for which certification is available stating what was achieved;
- those credits the participant is seeking;
- résumé, including education, employment and unpaid voluntary work;
- essay identifying participant’s learning outcomes;
- independent study, e.g. correspondence courses, distance learning or in-company training;
- supporting evidence which may include some or all of the following
  - ◆ performance evaluations/appraisals
  - ◆ job description
  - ◆ academic transcripts, certificates
  - ◆ letters of reference related to learning experiences
  - ◆ examples of related work; and
- life experiences.

#### **(a) BENEFITS OF THE PORTFOLIO**

*Portfolios* are seen to have major benefits and advantages over other assessment methods. These benefits are applicable to the individual as well as the employer

(Harris & Saddington, 1995: 14; Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 277 – 278 and UTS Training and Development Services, 1995: 50).

**(i) *Benefits of portfolios for individuals***

- ❑ They allow for the full range of learning (particularly experiential learning) to be recorded.
- ❑ They open up opportunities to assess qualities, attitudes and values as well as cognitive and behavioural capacities; as such assessment by portfolio is viewed as being a more precise predictor of learning than traditional measures of aptitude.
- ❑ They allow for learner self-assessment as well as formal assessment and acts as a development process in itself.
- ❑ They are learner-focused; the process is individualised - no two portfolios will be the same.
- ❑ The process is flexible, versatile and efficient to allow for individual learning styles and approaches.
- ❑ It draws together naturally occurring evidence prior to assessment.
- ❑ The process can be located in the community or workplace.
- ❑ They allow for progression development, being a potential technique for development as well as a retrospective of past achievements. The RPL process itself provides a primary opportunity for learners how to learn.
- ❑ The process helps adults discover the fit between their past learning and college programmes or qualifications and can be an essential step in planning future learning.
- ❑ Portfolio development adds an important critical reflective dimension to assessment and allows an individual to make a more objective self-assessment of the likely success of an RPL application.
- ❑ The process requires the interaction of experts from a variety of fields, for example, assessing the prior learning of a personnel manager may bring together assessors from business, psychology and labour relations departments in an institution.
- ❑ The focus is on competence rather than knowledge (as in standardised tests for example).

- The process does not have to rely solely on written evidence.
- Portfolios have forced educators to be clearer about course objectives and evaluation criteria.
- The process is seen to be an empowering one, particularly for adults who have a wealth of experience and strong documentation of learning. As a syntheses of a learner's individual history and goals, it can, therefore, be invaluable in terms of personal development. Its development instils self-reliance and ownership of learning and development.
- Portfolios can also be invaluable tools in applying for jobs.

**(ii) *Benefits of portfolios for employers***

An employer benefits from the development of a portfolio as:

- the employee gains increased understanding of his/her capabilities and value in the organisation;
- individual performance improves with measurable results;
- it is cost-effective;
- it focuses on on-the job learning; and
- it assists in identifying development opportunities and deficits.

**(b) WHAT IS NORMALLY INCLUDED IN A PORTFOLIO?**

One of the most difficult tasks for an individual when developing a portfolio and submitting an application for RPL is differentiating between learning and experience. It is often misleading to equate the amount of time spent in a position with the learning gained from undertaking the position. Experience should be taken to be an input while learning should be regarded as an outcome. Experience by itself, therefore, does not promote learning. It is through reflection upon that experience that learning occurs (see Kolb's learning cycle in Chapter 1, section 1.2.2.1).

*Portfolios per se “...are not necessarily an assessment method: a portfolio is just a collection of examples of the learner’s work”* (Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 96). If a *portfolio* is to be used for RPL assessment, then the criteria should be clear before the learner begins to put the *portfolio* together, as they govern what evidence is to be included.

### **(i) WHAT IS EVIDENCE?**

Evidence is something produced by the learner to show that he/she has skills and knowledge in a certain area: i.e. the proof that a learner is competent in a field of learning. This can either be proof generated by the learner, or proof of the competence observed and recorded by the assessor or others. This evidence is assessed against the criteria in the unit standards. Evidence can take many forms, and be shown through a variety of tasks, activities, records, references and testimonies showing the learner’s competence in a particular field of learning. This list is by no means exhaustive. Evidence is of particular importance in developing and putting together a *portfolio* for RPL and competence-based assessment (Department of Education, 1999c: 12 and Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 272 – 273).

### **(ii) TYPES OF EVIDENCE**

Types of evidence will vary according to the field of learning, the context and each learner. The following table lists some of the possible types of evidence. This has been categorised according to the source of the information, that is, where it comes from (McKelvey & Peters, 1993: 22 – 23):

- Direct observation of performance** – usually recorded by the educator, assessor or RPL mentor.
- Products/documentation/evidence generated by the candidate** – directly related to a specific outcome.
- Supporting evidence** – usually generated by a third person or institution.

The three categories and examples of types of evidence are given in figure 2.5.



**FIGURE 2.5**

- CATEGORY 1:** Direct observation of performance – usually recorded by educator, assessor or RPL mentor.  
**CATEGORY 2:** Products/documentation/evidence generated by the candidate – directly related to a specific outcome.  
**CATEGORY 3:** Supporting evidence – usually generated by a third person or institution.

CATEGORY 1	CATEGORY 2	CATEGORY 3
Performance (on-the-job or in the normal course of events) – a checklist or record of the performance against criteria is the evidence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Audio-visual products <input type="checkbox"/> Video as product <input type="checkbox"/> Tape as product <input type="checkbox"/> Photo as product	Certificates and academic records.
Demonstration (a once-off, performance on demand) - a checklist or record of the performance against criteria is the evidence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Graphic and written presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Written assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Tables <input type="checkbox"/> Conclusion <input type="checkbox"/> Bibliographies <input type="checkbox"/> Drawings <input type="checkbox"/> Essays	Bank statements or financial records, invoices or receipts (e.g. for SMME unit standards). Cash book kept by third person but giving evidence of candidate's "performance".
Simulation (usually set up by the assessor to copy a real-life performance) - a checklist or record of the performance against criteria is the evidence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Data (from experiment)	References and testimonials (from community member, customer, friend, colleague, supervisor, employer, occupational expert, etc.).
Role play (planned by assessor) - a checklist or record of the performance against criteria is the evidence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Interviews	Witness statement (from someone who has seen the candidate's performance).
Case study by assessor on the candidate.	<input type="checkbox"/> Oral questioning – interview by candidate as part of an assessment task.	Log book kept by someone other than the candidate but that reflects the candidate's performance.
Report from assessor on the candidate.	<input type="checkbox"/> Report from candidate	Publicity received by the candidate (e.g. newspaper or magazine articles, posters, etc.).
Visual records e.g. photographs, video, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/> Case study by candidate as part of an assessment task.	
Interview or oral questioning by assessor.	<input type="checkbox"/> Cash book or financial records kept by candidate.	
Oral performance	<input type="checkbox"/> Examinations	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Log book, diary, journal kept by the candidate recording performance or a process.	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Calculations	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Product	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Posters made by the candidate.	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Oral presentation	

*Source: Department of Education, 1999c: 12*

These categories do not affect the weight of the evidence – one category is not more important than another. Each piece of evidence should be looked at in terms of the conditions given in the next section.

### (iii) CONDITIONS FOR ACCEPTABLE EVIDENCE

Some forms of evidence are better than other forms; the quality of evidence needs to be considered at all times. Learners, educators, mentors and assessors need to look at each piece of evidence and constantly keep in mind that it must comply with the following principles in order to be acceptable (McKelvey & Peters, 1993: 23 - 24; Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 23 - 30 & 274 and Simosko & Cook, 1996: 87 - 91):

- The evidence must be *valid* - that is relating to the specified standards.
- The evidence must be *authentic* – that is reflecting something the candidate did himself/herself.
- The evidence must be *current* – that is showing current competency.
- The evidence must be at the *required level* as specified by the standards.
- The evidence must be *sufficient* – that is demonstrating complete competence.
- The evidence must be *reliable* – that is reliable enough to ensure consistent outcomes.

**The following questions can be asked to determine whether the evidence is acceptable or not:**

#### ☛ IS THE EVIDENCE VALID?

- ◆ Is the evidence related to the specific outcome or unit standard(s)?
- ◆ Is this evidence proof of competence against the specific outcome(s) as in the latest unit standard(s)?
- ◆ Is the evidence from a reliable / objective source?
- ◆ Can this evidence be corroborated (supported)?
- ◆ Is this evidence from where it claims to be?

☛ **IS THE EVIDENCE AUTHENTIC?**

- ◆ Is it the candidate's own work?
- ◆ Does it refer to the candidate?

☛ **IS THE EVIDENCE CURRENT?**

- ◆ If the evidence is not recent, can the candidate still demonstrate the competence?
- ◆ Is the evidence proof that the candidate can still do it?

☛ **IS THE EVIDENCE AT THE LEVEL REQUIRED BY THE UNIT STANDARD(S)?**

- ◆ Does the evidence reflect the competence of the candidate at this level?
- ◆ Does the evidence meet the assessment criteria and range statements?

☛ **IS THE EVIDENCE SUFFICIENT?**

- ◆ Is there enough evidence to make a sound judgement of the candidate's competence against the specific outcome(s)? (Consider quantity and quality.)
- ◆ Does the evidence demonstrate that the candidate can meet the range statements per specific outcome(s) or unit standard(s)?

☛ **IS THE EVIDENCE RELIABLE?**

- ◆ Will the evidence, when presented, lead to the same conclusion by a different assessor?

**(iv) ASSESSING AND RECORDING THE EVIDENCE**

Once the evidence has been collected, it must be assessed. The educator assesses the evidence in relation to (Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 276):

- The **requirements** of the task.
- The **assessment tool** (e.g. marking memo).

- ❑ The **assessment criteria** in the unit standard(s).

A judgement is made regarding the evidence, and this is recorded in various ways. The assessment process entails a number of stages and candidates are given guidance as to what qualifications might be suitable. These stages are as follows:

- (a) The candidate recognises experience which is likely to link up with the qualification.
- (b) The candidate identifies and records achievement.
- (c) Evidence is assembled and organised into a portfolio to suit the regulations of particular awarding bodies.
- (d) The candidate submits evidence of achievement *via* the portfolio to the assessor.
- (e) The candidate meets the assessor and may undergo a skills test, interview or simulation.
- (f) The assessor evaluates the evidence and the candidate receives verification from the awarding body.
- (g) The candidate receives information on learning opportunities.

However, according to Harris & Saddington (1995: 15) there is a certain amount of opposition to the portfolio approach due to the following reasons:

- ❑ The process is time consuming and labour intensive for learners and for staff. Some students resent spending so much time on old knowledge and skills rather than developing new skills.
- ❑ In some cases the portfolio development process can involve higher-order skills than what is actually being assessed or the level of qualification sought.

- ❑ The process requires experienced staff with clear roles and responsibilities. The process could become very crude if undertaken by staff who lack the necessary skills. A staff development component is therefore essential.
- ❑ Although not solely dependent on written evidence the process can require considerable writing skills.
- ❑ The process raises language issues. For example, should the portfolio development opportunity be available in a range of languages? Could English language development be integrated with portfolio development courses? How can planners of portfolio development opportunities remove as many barriers as possible, whilst maintaining the integrity of the process and ensuring that learners develop language skills appropriate to their needs in future learning programmes or chosen fields of employment?

However, to successfully implement the model, staff development and training is essential, especially to ensure that portfolios do not become mere collections of learners' work samples, but that they are instead representations of the range of actual learner performance and that they are evaluated appropriately. The portfolio is thus more than just a collection of evidence. It is carefully structured and also contains analysis (compare Tait & Godfrey, 1999: 249 – 250).

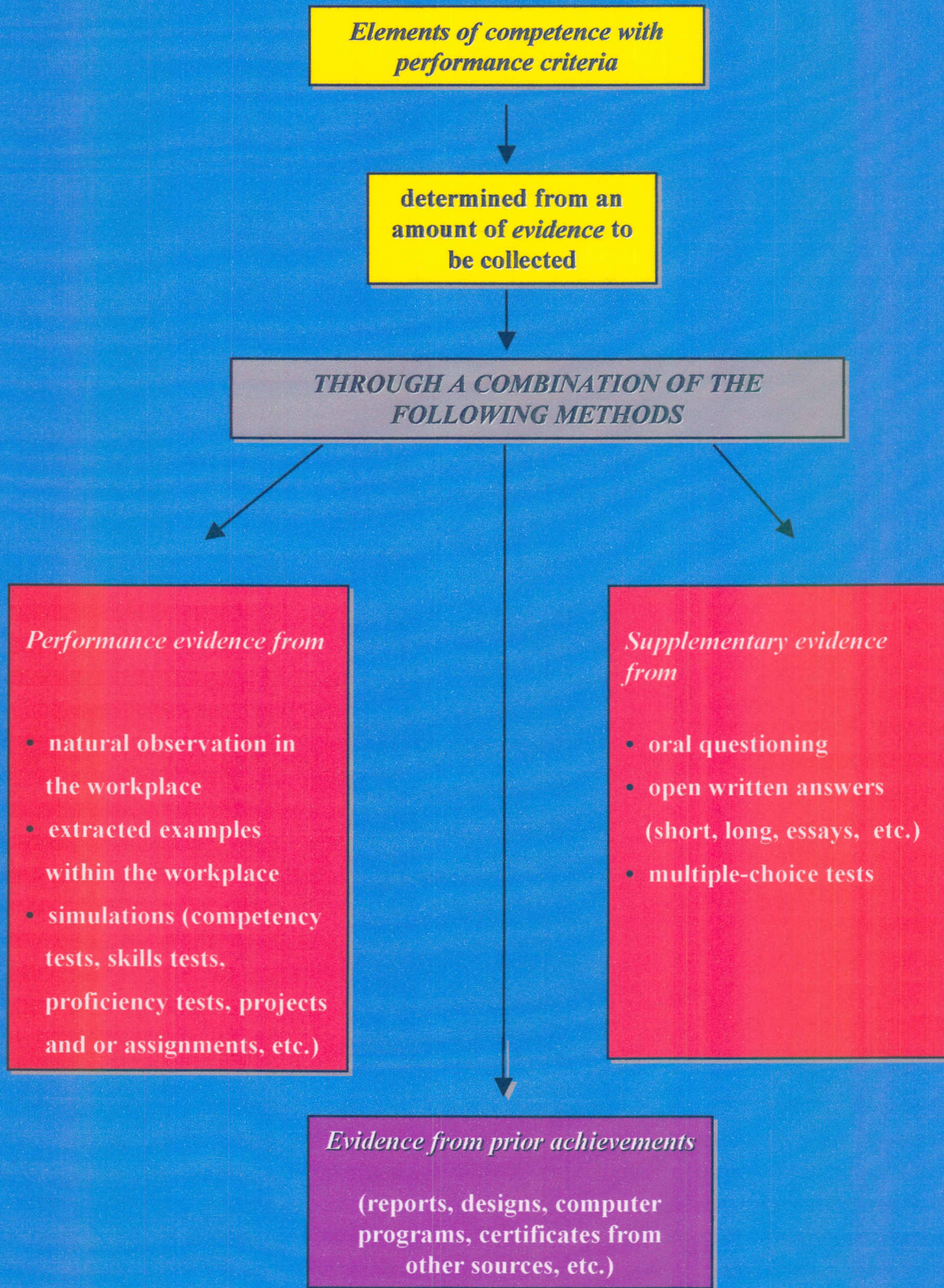
To gain credit for a particular unit, evidence must be produced. The candidate assembles and organises the evidence into a portfolio. The evidence can be supplemented by current assessment such as oral or written questions, assignments or performance testing. Figure 2.6 illustrates an assessment model that is particularly suited to the evidence collection procedure with regard to RPL.





FIGURE 2.6

AN ASSESSMENT MODEL



Source: McKelvey & Peters, 1993: 18



The statement of competence describes the standard to be reached independently of any training or education programme. The related performance criteria define how it is to be assessed. The division of qualifications into units which can be accredited separately means that candidates have a better chance of gaining unit credits through RPL. To gain credit for a particular unit, evidence must be produced.

#### **2.9.2.4 THE ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW**

During the interview interactive questioning will be done by the assessor in order to determine a candidate's prior learning. This may then be supplemented with further forms of assessment as necessary. According to Harris & Saddington (1995: 16) the assessment interview approach is seen to

*“...offer a practical alternative to portfolio development and to avoid most of the disadvantages associated with portfolios.”*

The main advantages of this approach are (Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 208 and Harris & Saddington, 1995: 16):

- Establishment of rapport with a learner.
- Avoidance of unnecessary technical language.
- Questions are answered clearly.
- Essential information is gained from the learner as to their requirements.
- Listening to what the learner says.
- Drawing appropriate conclusions from what the learner says.
- Checking understanding.
- Ensuring that the consultation process is structured.
- The interview can be conducted in a range of decentralised venues, including the workplace.
- A range of assessment methods can be used.
- It makes fewer literacy demands on the learners.
- It is potentially less intimidating than other approaches.

However, Harris & Saddington (1995: 16) also identify disadvantages of this method. These are:

- a heavy emphasis and reliance on assessor skill; and
- the process can be time consuming and costly.

#### **2.9.2.5 PROGRAMME AND COURSE EVALUATION OR CREDIT TRANSFER**

This process does not examine the learning achievements of individual students, but is concerned with evaluating the level of learning of credentialled courses or programmes. According to Working Group 9 of the National Training Board (1994: 94) this process

*“... involves the evaluation and award of credit by an institution for a course or programme of equivalent formal learning undertaken in a different institution. Such courses, programmes or awards will already have involved the assessment and grading of an individual and the granting of statements of competence or certificates. The individual, therefore, only has to prove that he/she has undertaken a particular course to be awarded a specific number of credits.”*

The evidence submitted by the RPL candidate might be in the form of existing certificated learning, i.e. certificates issued by recognised examining bodies are, where appropriate, used to grant entry or exemption only. Other certificates, licences or test results may provide evidence of skills or competence and may, subject to evaluation, be used for the award of credit. This method of assessment requires probing questions from a qualified assessor to ensure that the product has been produced by the candidate.

Course evaluation entails issues such as

- curriculum content;
- level materials used;
- delivery processes;
- qualifications of staff; and

- methods of student evaluation.

The following issues also need to be addressed:

- Currency of evidence
- Acceptability of evidence
- Sufficiency of evidence

One of the main advantages of programme and course evaluation is the ensuing closer networking between community, industry, labour and educational institutions.

However, it will be very rare that one form of evidence will be sufficient to show complete competency across the full range of performance criteria and range of variables. This may see most, if not all, of the methods of assessment used within the same element because of the needs of each performance criterion. The same could be true within individual sets of performance criteria. The needs of the standards might be brought forward to demonstrate competency (Rutherford, 1995: 189).

## **2.10 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND PLACEMENT ASSESSMENT**

The relationship between RPL and placement assessment is that placement assessment makes an initial estimate of prior learning. However, for that prior learning to be officially recognised, there needs to be more formal assessment of it (Department of Education, 1998b: 37).

### ***2.10.1 WHAT IS PLACEMENT ASSESSMENT?***

When adults join a learning programme at an adult learning centre, it is difficult to know which class they should join. For small children, the problem does not

arise. It is assumed that children of six or seven years of age arriving at school for the first time have no knowledge of the learning areas they will learn in school, and so they all start grade 1 together. For adults joining Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) classes the situation is very different. Some will have been to school as children, but forgotten all they have learned, or may only have vague memories of what they were taught (Department of Education, 1998b: 39).

On the other hand, they might have remembered what they had learned, and increased their learning, or developed high levels of skills relevant to ABET in the course of their work and communication with other people as adults. Some will have developed high levels of competence in one area, and yet have no opportunity to develop any competence in other related areas.

Therefore there is no way of instantly deciding what level, and what learning area, would be most appropriate for each particular adult learner. Placement assessments show learners' level of competence (in other words, what skills and knowledge they have) in a particular learning area. This helps educators understand their learning needs, and therefore in which classes they should be placed (Department of Education, 1999a: 3).

The Policy on Adult Basic Education and Training (Department of Education, 1997a: 26) calls for

*“...standardised placement tests to establish the entry level of learners in education and training programs.”*

The National Multi-year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training (Department of Education, 1997b: 117) states that

*“...all adult learning centres and providers will be required to have accredited (recognised) placement tests that are used for learners wishing to enrol in new courses. Should the results of the placement tests indicate that learners should be enrolled at a higher level, exemption certificates*

*will be issued for the levels in that area of learning below the level at which the learner has been placed. Such exemptions will count towards the RPL records of learning”.*

According to the *Administrative guide for placement* (Department of Education, 1999b: 16) placement assessments are designed so that the level of difficulty rises throughout the task. The assessment starts with simple tasks and finishes with difficult tasks. The idea is that the assessment becomes more and more difficult with each question/task and demands more and more skill on the part of the learner. In this way the learner’s level of skill (their prior learning) is shown by how much and what parts of the assessment they can complete correctly (compare Department of Education, 1998b: 42).

## **2.11 FINANCING OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING SYSTEMS**

Introducing RPL requires both start-up/administrative costs and service delivery costs. The charging of fees for RPL services will need to be addressed. RPL processes can be inaccessible for the majority of the population with the danger of it becoming an elitist service if RPL is an exclusionary practice on the basis of affordability.

### **2.11.1 VARIABLES WHICH AFFECT THE COST**

#### **2.11.1.1 WAY IN WHICH ASSESSMENT IS CARRIED OUT**

The cost of any assessment process obviously depends on how it is carried out. Examples of how the cost can differ are (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 30 - 33 and Simosko & Cook, 1996: 38 - 39, 143 – 144 & 176 - 177):

- (a) the use of holistic rather than atomistic assessment methods;
- (b) the use of a briefing workshop to ensure that all applicants have a good understanding of the process; and

- (c) having a mechanism which stops students approaching, in turn, all teaching staff in a course.

### **2.11.1.2 TRAINING PROVIDERS**

For a training provider (in which RPL is carried out in order to give credit within a course), there are three different bases for charging a fee for RPL:

- (a) on the basis of time spent by an assessor;
- (b) on the basis of amount of credit applied for; and
- (c) on the basis of the cost of enrolling in the relevant subjects.

### **2.11.1.3 OTHER COSTS**

Other costs might also involve

- (a) suitable and accessible venues for preparation and assessment;
- (b) transport for candidates, time for workers to attend RPL processes; and
- (c) the training of assessors.

However, there must be sustainable resources for as long as there is a demand for RPL, and there must be sufficient resources available to meet the RPL demand.

## **2.12 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE**

There is little point in developing and introducing a Recognition of Prior Learning system unless an effective quality assurance model is put in place to ensure that standards, and the credibility of the system are maintained (Simosko & Cook, 1996: 179).



According to Harris & Saddington (1995: 26) it is internationally accepted that RPL services will only be credible if they meet with stringent quality assurance measures.

There are several aspects to quality assurance within competence-based assessment systems. These vary depending upon whether a nationally approved system for RPL exists or whether in-house systems exist.

However, whether it is an in-house system, and with or without certification, there are certain key issues that need to be addressed in the design and/or establishment of a quality assurance system. The following factors should be considered (Broadmeadows College, 1994: 5; Harris & Saddington, 1995: 26 and Rutherford, 1995: 227):

- ❑ There is a set of guiding principles underpinning RPL – competence, fairness, access, openness, reliability, validity, flexibility, credibility and support. These are written into the NQF. They are central to the maintenance of a quality RPL process.
- ❑ RPL assessor training provides appropriate skills for those responsible for facilitating a rigorous and supportive RPL process.
- ❑ Before conducting RPL assessment, it is important to have benchmarks in place. Examples of benchmarks may be learning outcomes or enterprise standards.
- ❑ RPL applicants must have access to clear learning outcomes to assist them with identifying their skills and knowledge for RPL assessment.
- ❑ Best RPL practice addresses the needs of all groups and where a consistent and systematised RPL process has been implemented, then quality is established and maintained.

Serious attention to quality assurance is absolutely vital to the success of Prior Learning assessment programmes. However, Cohen & Whitaker (1990: 46) sound a note of caution regarding overreaction to the fears of opponents of RPL:

*“Another issue to emerge is the danger that RPL is seen as a “soft” option by those threatened by it, with the concomitant response from those who emphasize procedures which are overly rigorous and which over-assess. The challenge is to develop assessment procedures which are as rigorous, but not more rigorous, than those used during and at the end of the course. Views that RPL could be a soft option or “reduce standards” must be countered and challenged through discussion and research evidence, rather than the inappropriate response of over-assessment.”*

Figure 2.7 on the following page describes ten standards that must be adhered to in order to ensure quality in assessment.

## FIGURE 2.7

### TEN STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ASSESSING LEARNING FOR CREDIT

#### *ACADEMIC STANDARDS*

1. Credit should be awarded only for learning and not for experience.
2. College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning.
3. Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.
4. The determination of competence levels and credit awards must be made by academic experts in the appropriate subject matter.
5. Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.

#### *ADMINISTRATIVE STANDARDS*

6. Credit awards and their transcript entries should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
7. Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available.
8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive adequate training for the functions they perform, and there should be continued professional development.
10. Assessment programmes should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served and in the state of the assessment arts.

*Source: Cohen & Whitaker, 1990: 38*

All these processes and systems include aspects of the assessment far wider than just the evaluation of evidence and the granting of a qualification. They include the development and implementation of reliable systems that maintain the relevance of the standards to the needs of the workplace, the learning situation and the processes that support the need for on-going training and development of those involved in making these systems work.

Cohen & Whitaker (1990: 45) believe that quality assurance requires a sweeping change in the way educators are prepared for their responsibilities in RPL.

*“To adequately deal with these new realities, educators of adults will need to enhance their existing skills, knowledge and attitudes and acquire new ones. They will need a broader array of skills and knowledge than ever before. They must be counsellors and advocates, career development specialists, curriculum planners and skilled in group process. They must be flexible, willing and able to provide their educational services outside of the traditional classroom environment, especially in the workplace and the community. Their focus will increasingly be on learning facilitation and less on knowledge transmission. They must see themselves as adult learners and change agents for individuals, organisations and systems.”*

Without strong control over the quality of the processes, assessments will lose their value within most, if not all, organisations. Bad assessment habits and poorly designed processes and systems will only “...engender a feeling that near enough is good enough” (Rutherford, 1995: 20). This will result in a national system that is neither defensible nor supportable when questioned on its value, credibility and ultimate worth.

## 2.13 CONCLUSION

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a systematic process to accredit learning gained outside formal education institutions, by assessing relevant learning

against the standards required by a learning institution or a course. RPL recognises what individuals know or can do before undertaking a course of study, wherever or however they may have acquired their knowledge or skills. It includes testing, or various other techniques of assessment which may include compiling a profile or a portfolio of learning and/or experience.

Experience by itself does not promote learning. Learning is promoted through reflection upon that experience. The central premise of RPL is that theoretical, high level and quality learning can be gained through experience and informal means.

Benefits from RPL accrue to all sectors of society: learners, employers, educational/training institutions, professionals and the wider community. In terms of efficiency, by acknowledging prior learning, RPL has the capacity to reduce time and costs.

The major educational issue for institutions in implementing recognition of prior learning is the concern to maintain standards. The standards of assessment nationwide and, where applicable internationally, can be degraded leading to a loss of confidence in the RPL processes and assessments carried out under them if there is no strong control over the quality of these processes and assessments.



# CHAPTER 3



## ACRONYMS USED IN CHAPTER 3

<b>ABET</b>	Adult Basic Education and Training
<b>APEL</b>	Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning
<b>APL</b>	Accreditation of Prior Learning
<b>COSATU</b>	Congress of South African Trade Unions
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training
<b>HSRC</b>	Human Sciences Research Council
<b>LET</b>	Learning from Experience Trust
<b>NCEA</b>	National Council for Educational Awards
<b>NCHE</b>	National Commission on Higher Education
<b>NCVQ</b>	National Council for Vocational Qualification
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>NTB</b>	National Training Board
<b>NTSI</b>	National Training Strategy Initiative
<b>NUM</b>	National Union of Mine Workers

<b>NUMSA</b>	National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa
<b>NVQ</b>	National Vocational Qualification
<b>PLA</b>	Prior Learning Assessment
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SCOTVEC</b>	Scottish Vocational Education Council
<b>SETA</b>	Sector Education and Training Authority
<b>TAFE</b>	Technical and Further Education College
<b>UCT</b>	University of Cape Town
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>UTS</b>	University of Technology, Sydney
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training

## CHAPTER 3

# INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING DEVELOPMENTS

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Traditionally RPL practices have been framed by *adult learning theory* and by *experiential learning* (Kolb, 1984: 16; Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985: 19 - 20 and Rogers, 1986: 35).

During the twentieth century, thinkers such as John Dewey (1938), Jean Piaget (1951), Kurt Lewin (1952), Schon (1983), David Kolb (1984), Brookfield (1985), Boud and Walker (1990) have each stressed the critical importance of experiential learning to growth and development (see Chapter 1, section 1.2.2 as well as Chapter 2, section 2.3).

According to Lamdin (1997: 101) the roots of experiential learning can be traced back to Lewin (1952) and Dewey (1938):

*“Roots of experiential learning theory exist in Dewey’s (1938) insight that learning is a dialectic process integrating experience and abstractions, Lewin’s (1951) perspective that learning derives from here-and-now concrete experiences coupled with feedback loops, and Piaget’s (1951) analysis that learning involves accommodating concepts to experience and assimilating experience into concepts. Kolb (1984) synthesised these ideas into a rich framework which thoughtfully depicted learning as an active process of grasping and transforming information.”*

The basic premise of RPL that it represents sound educational practice and the notion that people learn by doing has been around for years (Cohen *et al*, 1994: 2).

According to Harris & Saddington (1995: 3)

*“...the experiential learning ‘movement’ originated in the United States of America in the radical and liberal critiques of traditional education mounted in the 1960s and broadly refers to a range of innovative and popular approaches used particularly with adult learners.”*

Simosko & Cook (1996: 10) mention that it is also possible to analyse a number of social movements to understand the origins of RPL:

*“For example, during the Middle Ages, the guild system required that the master determine when an apprentice was ready to move on to journeyman status and the journeyman on to master status. To no small extent this was a type of assessment and accreditation of prior learning.”*

However, in most countries RPL has traditionally been a relatively marginal practice in education and training conducted at a distance from the main business of the institution.

The following question needs to be asked: *What is so unique about RPL?* If it is acknowledged that experiential learning is so critical to human experience and so deeply embedded in many of the current traditions, RPL can force a person to recognise that any experience, whether formal or informal (or maybe even accidental) may provide a powerful learning opportunity for an individual. With proper assessment the outcomes of that learning experience can be formally recognised and credited.

## 3.2 RELEVANCE OF EXPERIENTIAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Experiential learning is about learners being in direct contact with what is being learned and is an approach to learning which encompasses reflection as a tool for making sense of and learning from experience. It has become almost a “movement” in education (i.e. extending beyond adult education), and has attempted to formalise the role of experience in learning (Harris, 2000: 22).

Weil & McGill (1989: 3) view experiential learning as

*“...a spectrum of meanings, practices and ideologies which emerge out of the work and commitments of policy makers, educators, trainers, change agents, and ‘ordinary people’ all over the world. They see experiential learning – with different meanings – as relevant to the challenges they currently face: in their lives, in education, in institutions, in commerce and industry, in communities, and in society as a whole. Across such diversity, however we discern four emphases for experiential learning. Each emphasis forms the basis for a cluster of interrelated ideas and concerns...We have chosen to refer to these clusters of people as ‘villages’....”*

### 3.2.1 THEORETICAL NICHE OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING WITHIN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

According to Harris (2000: 22) RPL has a comfortable theoretical niche within the experiential learning as one of the “four villages”. The four villages can be described as follows (Weil & McGill, 1989: 3):

3.2.1.1 *Village One* which is concerned particularly with assessing and accrediting learning from life and work experience as the basis for creating new routes into higher education, employment and training

opportunities, and professional bodies, i.e. the assessment and accreditation of prior experiential learning.

3.2.1.2 *Village Two* which focuses on experiential learning as the basis for bringing about change in the structures, purposes and curricula of post-school education and training.

3.2.1.3 *Village Three* which emphasises experiential learning as the basis for consciousness raising, community action and social change.

3.2.1.4 *Village Four* which is concerned with personal growth and development and experiential learning approaches that increase self-awareness and group effectiveness.

Kolb's experiential learning cycle (see Chapter 1, figures 1.2 and 1.3) has been central to RPL methodologies. It is a cycle of growth and development that involves learners in an iterative reflective process starting from their experiences, reflecting on them, generalising from them and applying them in new situations. Thus, whilst a particular experience might generate a learning impetus, it is only after engaging in a process of observation and reflection, creating ideas and generalisation, and applying ideas to new situations that recognisable learning and understanding are seen to emerge. In short, experience by itself, does not promote learning. It leads to learning and learning to understanding. From understanding comes the ability to generalise and from that comes insight (Cohen *et al*, 1994: 12 - 13).

### 3.2.2 *THREE-STAGE MODEL OF REFLECTION*

Boud, Keogh and Walker (<http://led.gcal.ac.uk/APEL/Activities/Boud.htm>)<sup>1</sup> attempt to examine, in some detail, the process of reflection itself. They propose a three-stage model of reflection (see Chapter 1, section 1.2.2.1).

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<sup>1</sup> Information obtained from the Internet.



- 3.2.2.1 *Firstly*, the learner returns to the experience and rehearses what has happened in as much detail as possible.
- 3.2.2.2 *Secondly*, the learner attempts to recognise and accept the feelings generated by this experience – both positive and negative.
- 3.2.2.3 *Finally*, the learner re-evaluates the experience by analysing its meaning and relationship with existing knowledge.

They identify several aspects at this stage:

- (a) **integration** (seeking relationships amongst data and drawing conclusions through using a process of synthesis);
- (b) **validation** (determining the authenticity of ideas and feelings, testing for consistency, using rehearsal); and
- (c) **appropriation** (making knowledge one's own and part of a value system).

The stages in the three-stage model of reflection as described above, are not viewed as discrete stages but elements of a whole.

However, according to Weil & McGill (1989: 5), experiential learning remains a diffuse, somewhat incoherent concept that encompasses many different viewpoints and theories and refers to a wide range of disciplines and practices such as therapy; formal, non-formal and informal education; social and cultural work; community organisation and organisational development.

### 3.3 INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

According to Gawe (1999: 23) many institutions of higher learning all over the world have been assessing prior learning for over thirty years (United States, Canada, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom and Australia). The point of

departure for these institutions is the understanding that adults have generally learned a great deal from work experience, hobbies, community activities and volunteer work. The difference among the groups could lie in the manner in which the prior learning is assessed and credit granted.

In this study the focus will be on the developments in the United States, Canada, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom and Australia to establish which one or perhaps a combination of their various RPL approaches would best meet the diverse South African situations.

The driving force behind RPL developments in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland and Canada has been a mix of demographic, economic and social factors along with altruistic concerns amongst practitioners to take seriously the needs and interests of adult learners and to widen access to learning opportunities for reasons of equity. Demographic changes over recent years have led to institutions having to provide adequate services for adult learners if they were not to find themselves in acute recruitment difficulties. The economic impetus has been reinforced recently as a result of intensifying concerns at government levels regarding the skill level of the workforce as related to productivity and economic competitiveness (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 4).

### ***3.3.1 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA***

The G.I. Bill of 1946 represents one of the first examples of the use of RPL. Returning war veterans wanted their skills recognised by universities, and the G.I. Bill promoted these opportunities. It set an important precedent in establishing administrative flexibility for dealing with returning veterans. The prior learning was evaluated by each department, but still conformed to traditional course material (Olsen, 1974: 141).

In 1974 the Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning Project (CAEL) which was a three-year project (1974 – 1977), began in Princeton, New Jersey.

This project involved ten colleges and universities. There were three basic questions to be investigated during the three-year study (Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning, 1975: 11):

- 3.3.1.1 *“Is it possible to equate non-college learning with that offered in traditional college curricula?”*
- 3.3.1.2 *“If it is possible, can assessment techniques other than paper-and-pencil tests be used to evaluate the outcomes of this learning?”*
- 3.3.1.3 *“If such a system proves feasible, would it be possible to integrate the ensuing model in current educational programmes?”*

The outcomes of the project demonstrated that (Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning, 1975: 11):

- (a) *“It was possible to equate non-college learning with that of traditional college curricula.*
- (b) *It is feasible to use a wide variety of evidence in conducting valid and reliable assessments.*
- (c) *The emerging process could well be embedded in existing programmes and was of particular use with adults who were entering for the first time or returning to college or university with rich and varied experiential learning.”*

Based on these findings the Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning, set about finding valid and reliable assessment methods. Upon completion of the initial three-year research and development effort, the Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning began to operate under a new charter as a free-standing association of colleges and universities, named the *Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning*. In 1985, to reflect the emerging implications of its initial commitments, it again took a new name, viz., *“Council for Adult and Experiential Learning” (CAEL)*. RPL became firmly established practice in academia in the United States of America in the 1970’s mainly due to the work of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 4).

Standardised exams, the challenge process, portfolio development and course evaluation are all recognised practices in the United States. According to Harris and Saddington (1995: 19) RPL is

*“...largely determined at individual institutional level. Each institution tends to conceive of its curriculum differently leading to a range of different interpretations of RPL.”*

As mentioned above, in the mid-1970s, the Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning led the pioneering research and validation efforts regarding the use of portfolio-assisted assessment as a process for determining college credit awards for learning acquired through experience. Results of a 1991 nation wide survey on Prior Learning Assessment practices throughout all the colleges and universities in the United States showed that 49 percent of the institutions reporting the use of some form of Prior Learning Assessment indicated they awarded credit based on comprehensive individualised assessment of prior learning. Of this group, 87 percent used the portfolio as the methodology for the assessment. Almost all institutions (97%) said the credit can be used at the undergraduate level, while a small portion awarded credits at the graduate level.

According to the UTS Training and Development Services (1995: 11), more than 1700 universities and colleges in the United States offer assessment and accreditation of prior learning and many have been doing so for over twenty years. Most have well-developed publicity and orientation programmes and offer academic advice. Many also provide specific courses of guidance for those students who need help in preparing and presenting their evidence of learning (often called portfolio development courses).

Colleges often produce guides showing how prior experiential learning should be presented and whether it will be treated as credit against named courses, programme equivalencies, which in the American education context is known as “bloc credits” (i.e. credit for all the units in a programme that relate to a particular subject/area of prior knowledge), general credit (i.e. credit that is not linked to a particular course - perhaps listed under independent study), or in some other way.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), now a major national professional organisation, has been dedicated to expanding lifelong learning opportunities for adults. Through collaboration with educational institutions, industry, government and labour, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) promotes learning as a tool to empower people and organisations. It has been active in initiating, developing, implementing and monitoring progress of RPL and providing training in RPL across the United States (Cohen *et al*, 1994: 6).

According to the UTS Training and Development Services (1995: 6) and Michelson (1996: 141 - 144) RPL has been used in the vocational areas in both the United States and United Kingdom

*“...as a training needs analysis tool, while concurrently helping people to value their experience and give them confidence in their ability to learn. These aspects have been particularly important in assisting the unemployed or those whose jobs are likely to be made redundant. It has also been used in joint industry/education ventures to assist those who have warning of potential redundancy. In the declining timber industry in the USA, RPL has enabled adults to gain entry to tertiary courses and acquire organisational and study skills through preparing documentation of their learning from experience.”*

According to Simosko & Cook (1996: 12) great numbers of employers are becoming involved in the work, most often fostering RPL joint ventures with a wide range of educational and/or training providers (UTS Training and Development Services, 1995: 6). The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) is actively engaged in promoting these joint ventures to bring RPL and other educational and training programmes to people in the work place.

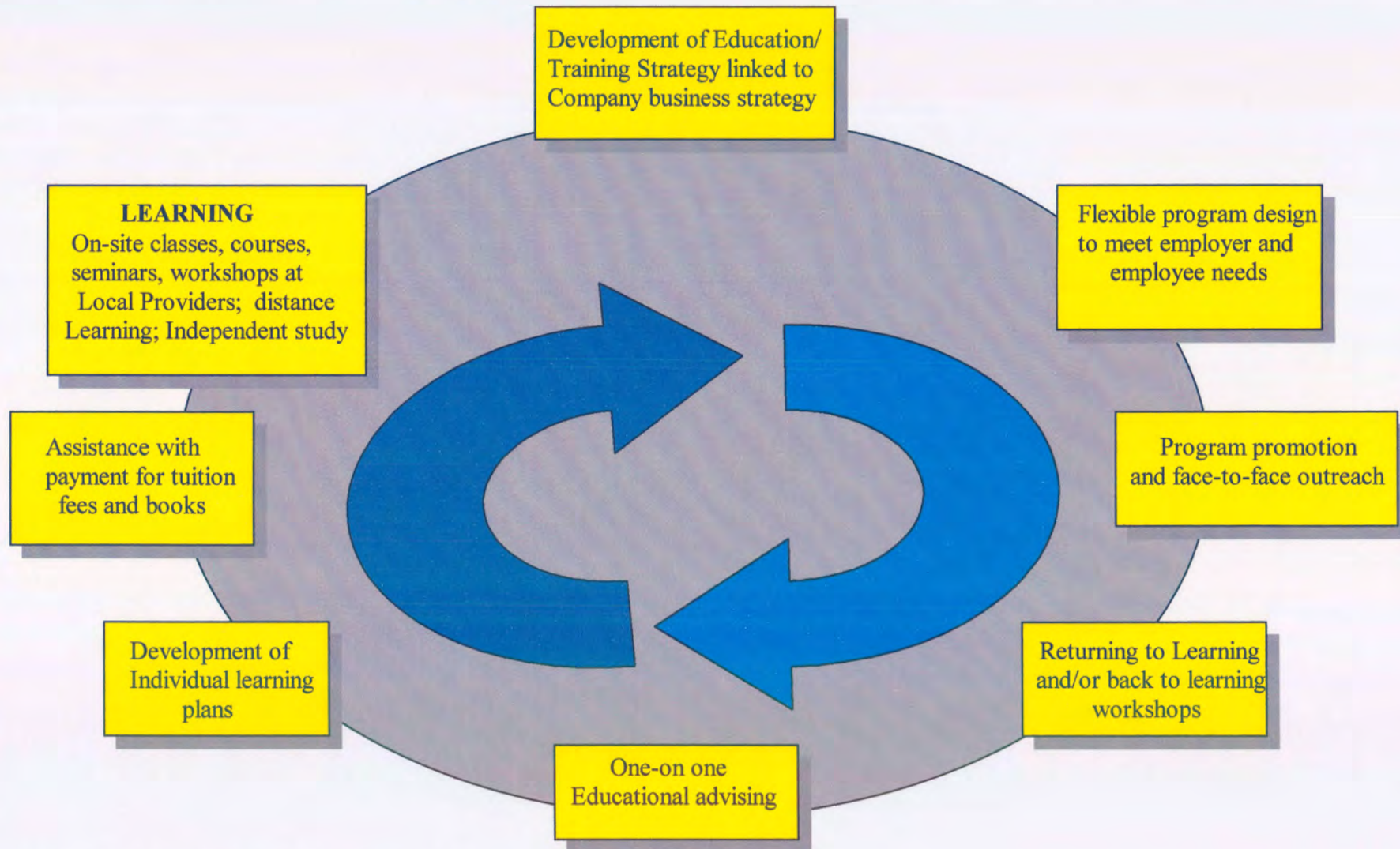
The key elements of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) approach to workforce development are displayed in figure 3.1.





FIGURE 3.1

## KEY ELEMENTS OF THE CAEL APPROACH TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



Source: Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 1994: 1

Today, on the average college campus, about two out of five students are combining their studies with working at full-time jobs, caring for young children, and carrying on other family and community responsibilities. More than one – third of college students today are 25 or older. In community colleges, the average age of students is 38. On most campuses, working adults predominate in evening and weekend classes (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2000: [http://www.cael.org/pla/live\\_pl.html](http://www.cael.org/pla/live_pl.html))<sup>2</sup>.

Working adults who are returning to a learning environment often possess skills and knowledge gained through life experiences. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning helps employers and their employees to prepare for assessment of their non-collegiate learning by providing information on portfolio development, directing individuals to appropriate education institutions, and preparing them for a formal meeting with a faculty at those institutions. Figure 3.2 indicates the barriers to workforce learning that have been identified by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).

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<sup>2</sup> Information obtained from the Internet.



**FIGURE 3.2**

**BARRIERS TO WORKFORCE LEARNING**

	INDIVIDUALS	EMPLOYERS
<b>PERCEPTUAL BARRIERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Fear</b> of failure.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Anxiety</b> about change.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Negative experiences</b> in prior learning settings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Short-term</b> goals and planning.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Fear</b> that workers will take unfair advantage of education and training benefits; fear that workers will acquire new skills and leave the workplace.</li> </ul>
<b>RESOURCE BARRIERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Time</b> to pursue learning after work hours.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Money</b> for transportation, books, childcare.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Information</b> about employers' skill needs and ways to meet those needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Time</b> to research education and training options; time to implement strategies.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Money</b> to provide tuition reimbursement and/or training during working hours.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Information</b> about employees' current skill levels and the different ways of meeting employees' education and training needs.</li> </ul>
<b>STRUCTURAL BARRIERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Poorly organised</b> service delivery system.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Education providers who <b>do not meet needs</b> of adult learners.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Inflexible workplace</b> organisation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Poorly organised</b> service delivery system.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Investment community's emphasis on <b>short-term profits</b> (e.g. through quarterly reporting).</li> </ul>

*Source: Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 1994: 1*

However, RPL developed in the United States and continues mainly for the purposes of academic credit, although greater numbers of employers are becoming involved through joint venture programmes. There is also a traditional commitment to mass higher and lifelong education.

### 3.3.2 UNITED KINGDOM

The assessment of prior experiential learning was introduced in Britain in the 1980s largely as an outgrowth of on-going work in the United States. They drew heavily on the work of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and on the support of key individuals within CAEL. A series of staff development study visits to the United States was planned at the beginning of the 1980s. All the tours took a similar format. During a week period some seven or eight American community colleges, liberal arts colleges and universities were visited to talk about the various ways in which the assessment of prior learning was being used. At the end of each visit participants focused on possible short and long term developments in the United Kingdom context (Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning, 1975: 11; Gamson, 1989: 12 - 14; Harris & Saddington, 1995: 5 and Simosko & Cook, 1996: 12).

Although RPL began in the United Kingdom as a means of gaining academic credit, it now has greater application to the workplace and the long-term unemployed. In 1981 the Manpower Service Commission published a review of vocational education and training called *A New Training Initiative*. It moved education further towards a market driven approach (UTS Training and Development Services, 1995: 11). According to Simosko & Cook (1996: 13) it stated the problem in unequivocal terms and provided a mandate:

*“Britain needs a flexible, adaptable work force to cope with the uncertainties which cloud the future. The technological revolution and the need to become more competitive present real challenges for as far ahead as we can see. Markets and prices for products, processes and service will continue to fluctuate. Firms and individuals must either adapt to change or become its victims.”*

The 1986 White Paper *Working Together – Education and Training* (Employment Department, 1986: 14 - 20) laid further groundwork for the introduction of APL and the competence-based assessment system.

According to Cohen *et al* (1994: 6), a social justice element has been of major concern in the initial implementation of RPL in the United Kingdom, particularly as practised by the University of East London's School of Independent Study. Other universities have adopted a more traditional purpose for implementing RPL, which was used for both entry and progression. They included Goldsmiths College at the University of London, the University of the South Bank, University of Lancaster and University of Leeds.

The Learning from Experience Trust (LET) is a United Kingdom equivalent of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) which was established in 1986. It is an independent charity with a social justice orientation aiming to develop ways in which people can make maximum use of their prior experiential learning. LET undertakes research and development work "*in the borders between the world of employment, life and leisure and formal education*" (Evans, 1992: 38). It also acts as a catalyst for changes within mainstream post-secondary education and training systems.

According to Harris & Saddington (1995: 20), there are *two* distinct national credit frameworks which have greatly influenced the way RPL has developed and is currently delivered. Both of the frameworks have enabled institutions offering RPL to move from being concerned with access for students without traditional entry requirements to being more concerned with credit towards qualifications.

At the *higher education level* the Council for National Academic Award's Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) covers 95% of the "new" universities. It is based on the principle that appropriate learning wherever it occurs, provided it can be assessed, may be recognised for academic credit towards an award (i.e. certificate, diploma, degree).

At *further education level* the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) system has established a set of industry-based occupational standards to which qualifications and training systems have been aligned.

In addition, RPL has been used successfully in cooperative ventures between industry and higher and further education. According to Evans (1987: 22) the aim of the **higher education research** was to “... *negotiate, establish, monitor and appraise schemes for the assessment of prior learning*”. The **further education research**, with an emphasis on vocational education, conducted two studies to ascertain the feasibility of using evidence from prior learning to achieve vocational qualifications. According to Harris & Saddington (1995: 5)

*“...the studies confirmed that RPL could be a useful tool in this regard and identified several positive factors – that RPL saves learner time; that it allows learners to be in greater control of their own learning and development; that it can build on individual strengths towards earning a nationally recognised qualification and that the process challenges organisations and institutions to be more flexible in their learning and assessment practices.”*

RPL has also been used in the workplace context with managers. In initial research that was conducted by the Management Charter Initiative (Simosko & Cook, 1996: 16) it was found that very few British managers over 35 years of age have had any formal management training or development, nor did they expect to receive any.

During 1989 the Employment Department supported a special project based on national competency standards for managers that was implemented (Employment Department, 1990: 19). This project was designed to help managers:

- 3.3.2.1 recognise their strengths *and* weaknesses;
- 3.3.2.2 receive formal recognition towards national management qualifications;
- and

3.3.2.3 take greater responsibility for their own development and education as managers.

According to Simosko & Cook (1996: 17) 400 managers completed the RPL process over a nine-month period and almost all earned credit towards a recognised management qualification and some were able to earn the full award.

As an outcome of the success of this project, the concept of APL was integrated with all of the Management Charter Initiatives under the banner of “*Crediting Competence*”. Managers throughout the United Kingdom are now able to have their skills and knowledge competence-assessed and recognised in the form of credit towards national qualifications.

It was in Scotland, however, that some of the significant changes were implemented initially. The acceptance of criterion-referenced assessment led to the achievement of credit no longer being tied to fixed periods of study and, hand in hand with this was a decision to implement a modular structure.

The White Paper *Working Together – Education and Training* (Employment Department, 1986: 14) made provision for the establishment of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) which was to take the lead in the reform of vocational qualifications which were to be based on nationally recognised standards of competence. In 1987 the Manpower Services Commission mounted an exploratory study and then two major feasibility projects to investigate the potential of applying APL processes to National Vocational Qualifications and, also in Scotland, National Certificate modules. The NCVQ as well as the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) both endorsed the concept of RPL (which they called APL) and recommended implementation procedures (SCOTVEC, 1990: 13 – 14).

Over the last decade or so approaches to RPL in many countries have changed. Figure 3.3 on the following page maps the shift in the portfolio development approach to RPL in the United Kingdom as the concept became embedded in the National Vocational Qualifications Framework.





### FIGURE 3.3

#### COMPARISON OF SELF-ORIENTATED AND OUTCOMES-ORIENTATED PORTFOLIOS

SELF-ORIENTATED	OUTCOMES-ORIENTATED
Portfolio created as a learning process.	Portfolio as product.
Structured by a sense of identity defined and extended through past, present and future.	Structure by existing knowledge of job or by qualification specification.
The self is explored as a process for its own sake, including areas considered private.	Presents aspects of self at present summed up to fit needs of job or qualification.
Emphasis on life experiences with focus on what has been learned from them without preconceptions about vocational or occupational relevance.	Includes lists of competencies and aptitudes appropriate to the job/qualification.
Holistic	Specific to end purpose.
All-inclusive. May or may not contain materials that will be useful in applying for jobs or gaining qualifications.	Edited for a specific purpose.

Source: Harris, 2000: 23



Practices associated with the development of the *self-orientated portfolio* draw directly from Kolb. Adults describe their experiences, reflect on them, analyse and organise them, identify the learning from them, document that learning, and (optionally) seek some form of external recognition or accreditation for it.

In Britain, North America and elsewhere, underemployed and unemployed people report

*“how much they value the opportunity to identify and reflect on all they know and can do, whether or not they achieve a qualification. Not surprisingly, improved self-confidence, so necessary to breaking the cycle of underemployment or unemployment, has been a natural outcome for many people completing the process as part of ‘returning to learning’ programmes”* (Simosko & Cook, 1996: 19).

As a result of all the developments regarding APL, Butterworth (1992: 39) argues that in the United Kingdom, the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) evolved with the notion of frameworks for credit and qualifications. APEL approaches fall into two models:

**(a) The credit-exchange model**

In this model credits are awarded for informal learning through the assessment of competence.

**(b) The developmental model**

In the developmental model the applicant explores his/her personal experience following a series of reflective exposures like keeping journals, interviews and writing biographies.

However, irrespective of which model is to follow, APL is regarded as the vehicle through which employees turn their workplace experience and training into qualifications.

### 3.3.3 AUSTRALIA

Although RPL in Australia is still in its early stages, it is already in place in a number of universities, both as an option for admission to a course or for advanced standing or credit within it. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of the Australian universities that responded to a 1992 questionnaire on RPL were able to identify a number of RPL initiatives that had taken place in various fields of study (Cohen *et al*, 1994: 3 and UTS Training and Development Services, 1994: 12).

While it is clear that few have RPL policies and procedures formally in place, a number have policies in draft stage and many are using RPL in an *ad hoc* fashion. Several universities have also initiated pilot projects for trial RPL assessment procedures, or plan to do so. Responding to the questionnaire, several universities indicated awareness of RPL and the need to introduce or (where already in place) further develop RPL (Cohen *et al*, 1994: 3).

In Australia RPL for credit is divided into two broad kinds: **learning acquired in a credentialled context other than a tertiary institution, and learning acquired in a non-credentialled context such as through work or life experience** (Gawe, 1999: 23).

RPL is also widely accepted and used in the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system. It is underpinned by the existence of industry-competency standards and competency-based curricula. These standards are linked to salary payments (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 6). In restructured awards, employees earn more salary as their skills and educational levels increase rather than as a result of time served. By altering the basis on which promotions and pay rises are determined, incentives have been positioned to encourage employees to develop their skills and knowledge (UTS Training and Development Services, 1995: 13).

According to Harris & Saddington (1995: 24), the TAFE system encompasses all education and training which is not higher education (apprenticeship training,

vocational diplomas, adult continuing education). TAFE is organised around a competence-based credit framework.

Industry and unions are also anxious to recognise the competencies of the workforce. There is close collaboration between TAFE, higher education providers and industry (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 25).

However, the Federal Government's aim over the last couple of years has been to reform vocational education and workplace training in order to assist Australia to become more internationally competitive. Fortuitously, these current changes in industry and education in Australia are readily conducive to the development and implementation of RPL (UTS Training and Development Services, 1995: 12).

In attempting to address some of these problems the Federal and State Governments have initiated a number of policies which bring together education, employment and industrial relations reforms. These policies attempt to change obsolete work practices, provide incentives for workers to develop skills and ensure that skills developed through both on and off the job training are those actually needed in industry.

According to UTS Training and Development Services (1995: 12) the major changes include:

- ❑ *“development of performance indicators based on Best Practice principles;*
- ❑ *award restructuring with a reduction in the number of job classifications*
- ❑ *job redesign;*
- ❑ *clearer definition of career paths within and across industries; and*
- ❑ *encouragement of multi-skilling to establish a more efficient and flexible workforce.”*

These micro-economic reforms, by recognising more than formal educational qualifications, were designed to remove unnecessary barriers to the free movement of labour both within and between organisations and industries. If only formal off-the-job learning is recognised, the direct training costs of award

restructuring will be prohibitive and ignore substantial relevant experience and learning.

Persson (1995: 2) mentions that national initiatives have to be developed and implemented to increase efficiency in the vocational, education and training sector. Some of these developments are:

- ❑ *“devolving responsibilities to ‘best practice’ bodies such as TAFE colleges and moving away from regulation;*
- ❑ *simplifying national structures and improving national co-ordination;*
- ❑ *piloting a ‘user choice’ approach to entry level training;*
- ❑ *allowing enterprises to select the most suitable provider for their off-job training; and*
- ❑ *improving the information services to participants in the system.”*

According to Persson (1995: 2) a national system of Vocational Education and Training (VET) must offer individuals a wide choice of training pathways. In order to meet industry’s needs for more highly skilled workers as well as to ensure fair and equitable pathways for all clients, the VET system, is faced with many challenges.

Until recently, lack of recognition of skills and qualifications has discouraged people from moving between and within states, and combined with the lack of career paths in many occupations, there has been little incentive for people to develop skills while remaining in an occupation. This in turn has led to an under-skilled workforce and an industrially uncompetitive position for Australia.

These changes have led to an interest in developing practices to measure and record competency assessments which are portable and applicable to a wide range of industrial contexts.

Many awards have been completely rewritten to include the principles of participative practices regarding the devolution of power and authority to individuals to manage their own job within a framework. The newer awards also

include a clearer delineation of career path progression from unskilled to trade to paraprofessional to professional status (UTS Training and Development Services, 1995: 13 and Persson, 1995: 2).

At the heart of these policies is the promotion of national competency standards for occupations in Australia. It is envisaged by Commonwealth and State Governments that these standards will form the basis for all other components of the training and vocational education system including curriculum development, delivery, assessment and accreditation.

According to UTS Training and Development Services (1995: 13), efforts are under way to change the education and training systems so that they can:

- “deliver competency to the standards expected in employment by the industrial parties;*
- integrate on and off the job training;*
- provide portability of qualifications across the country and across the industry;*
- recognise the outcome of training no matter where or when it took place; and*
- recognise flexible time periods for acquiring competency.”*

Social justice issues are evident in the preliminary findings of RPL initiatives of Australian universities. At least four higher education institutions are developing RPL arrangements in their programmes for Aboriginal students (Cohen *et al*, 1994: 5).

### **3.3.4 CANADA (ONTARIO)**

In Canada, RPL is developing on a provincial basis. In Ontario major modifications to the college system are currently underway. In 1991, the Minister of Colleges and Universities established an advisory committee to advise him on the development and implementation of a system of prior learning for Ontario's colleges. A series of implementation recommendations have been

published which outline developments for the three years beginning in January 1993 (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 7).

Ontario's colleges of applied arts and technology have been actively implementing Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) since 1993 when the provincial government mandated it for all courses as part of ministry-approved programmes. Special support for the initial three years of implementation ended during 1996 along with the mandate of the provincial Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) advisory body (Matthews, 1997: 6).

Following the end of targeted grants for supporting a position of local PLAR facilitator, the first challenge to the colleges was whether or not to allocate funds to maintain the position. Individuals in these positions were essential to the acceptance and expansion of PLAR. As the college's contact person, the facilitator supported the work of the local PLA advisory committee, helping to develop college policies around PLA and related issues such as learner orientation and advanced standing, and assisting in staff training. They also promoted PLA internally and externally to the community, responded to information requests and supported learners as they progressed from initial orientation to assessment of portfolios or challenge evaluations (Lizotte, 1997: 13).

According to Lizotte (1997: 13) their involvement was certainly a key to the rapid increase in the number of assessments of prior learning which took place during the three-year initiative. There were 741 assessments reported in 1993-1994, growing to 2 767 assessments in 1995-1996 - almost a four-fold increase. Although the level of activity is still small in relation to the size of the province's college system, this remains a significant increase.

Today, all colleges offer PLAR upon request, although the level of activity varies considerably among institutions and, respectively, within programme areas. In most colleges, students now approach departments directly with their requests for PLA, in some cases after having received guidance from central college service, such as the Registrar's Office or the Counselling Office.



According to Lizotte (1997: 13), PLAR has become

*“... a prominent selling point for the colleges in the key area of contract training. Today’s employers are wary of paying for duplicate training and are requiring colleges to provide clear outcomes of training programs, with flexible assessment prior, during and at the end of training. Several important training agreements have integrated recognition of prior learning as a key component.”*

Another important development during the initial three-year period was the establishment of a PLAR network through which facilitators were able to support one another while collectively boosting their pool of expertise.

Due to the financial implications of education costs, students are more conscious of the cost of educational services they receive. As a result thereof any duplication of learning is no longer acceptable. Post-secondary education itself is becoming more competitive as society embraces globalisation, the knowledge economy and lifelong learning. In this challenging context, relevance, flexibility and cost-effectiveness define successful college offerings (Lizotte, 1997: 18).

The three-year provincial PLAR initiative paved the way for Ontario colleges to establish a key tool for making lifelong learning a reality. The next few years will tell which colleges were able to capitalise on this investment. With continued advancement of PLAR, colleges will remain the “trainers of choice” for Ontario’s labour force.

### **3.3.5 IRELAND**

According to Harris and Saddington (1995: 6) RPL developments in Ireland have followed a similar path to the developments in the United Kingdom, starting with a study tour organised by the Irish National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) in co-operation with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the United Kingdom Learning from Experience Trust to the United States in 1986. A working group was established to formulate a policy on RPL

for the NCEA. This policy was published during 1993. Subsequently senior academics undertook intensive training and pilot projects were initiated. RPL is now fully in operation in the non-university sector of higher education in Ireland (FAS International, 1996: 3 – 5).

Ireland does not have a national credit framework at the higher education level, although the NCEA has the role of encouraging, promoting and co-ordinating higher education outside the universities. Most curricula are based on learning outcomes. RPL within this sector is largely undertaken using the portfolio development approach supplemented by assessment interviews and additional assessment activities as required (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 24).

At the vocational level, Ireland has developed a certification framework, which in many ways is similar to the United Kingdom's National Vocational Qualification system due to the fact that it is based on industry standards, and has a competence, skills and modular focus. At this level, Ireland's Training and Employment Authority (FAS) has undertaken a special project in RPL with the purpose of developing a generic computer-based expert system which allows for qualifications to be awarded for prior and experiential learning (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 24).

FAS is a statutory awarding (certification) body in Ireland. The FAS certification structures provide both for certification of skills achieved in formal training courses, at work and in other Lifelong Learning situations. The overall approach to certification of FAS is enshrined in a Certification Framework which is designed to accommodate RPL. The FAS Certification framework is displayed in figure 3.4 on the following page (FAS, 1996: 3 - 5).

**FIGURE 3.4**  
**FAS CERTIFICATION FRAMEWORK**

<b>FRAMEWORK</b>	
<b>SKILLS FOCUS</b>	FAS certifies skills and skill levels, rather than certifying courses.
<b>MODULAR FOCUS</b>	Modular training is matched by modular assessment programmes.
<b>COMPETENCE FOCUS</b>	The emphasis is on practical and personal skills as well as related knowledge – not just knowledge alone.
<b>INDUSTRY STANDARDS</b>	Industrial endorsement is essential for national recognition of vocational training awards.
<b>ASSESSMENT BASED ON CRITERION-REFERENCED STANDARDS</b>	Each assessment is presented in terms of key objectives identifying the skills and knowledge which need to be achieved for certification purposes. These performance standards are derived from business requirements.
<b>LOCAL ADMINISTRATION AND MARKING</b>	Training, assessment and certification are subject to national monitoring to assure the reliability and integrity of the system.
<b>ACCESS TO CERTIFICATION FOR ALL TRAINEES</b>	Trainees are strongly encouraged to avail of certification at the appropriate level.
<b>PROGRESSION BASED ON FAS SKILL LEVELS</b>	In determining FAS training levels, skill levels in industry and EU training levels are used as benchmarks to assist progression.

*Source: FAS, 1996: 5*

These principles focus on the certification of skills rather than the certification of courses. As such, certification is available for acquisition of skills whether achieved in formal courses, on-the-job or in informal settings. The modular focus provides either for full certification or part credits. Candidates can then be directed in their further training towards full certification. The competence-focus emphasises the skill and vocational nature of the certification while the industry-based, criterion-referenced standards provide the links to labour market needs. According to Technikon SA (1996: 6), FAS activity in RPL stems “...*from a policy of widening access to certification*”.

RPL in FAS is referred to as “taking credit”. It is “taking credit” for what you know and can do.

It is clear from the above-mentioned developments that RPL has a well-established history in the countries discussed. RPL in South Africa is still in its infancy stages. The growing South African literature as well as the RPL developments internationally should be utilised to establish which one or perhaps a combination of the various RPL international approaches would best meet the diverse South African situations.

### **3.4 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS (SOUTH AFRICA)**

In 1993 the National Training Board, a tri-partite statutory body established in terms of the Manpower Training Act (Act No. 56 of 1981), began a process of negotiation between four national stakeholder groupings: employers, trade unions, education and training providers and representatives from the national Department of Education and the Department of Manpower. This process, which involved approximately one hundred and fifty people nominated from across these constituencies, culminated in the publication of the *National Training Strategy Initiative* (NTSI). The NTSI enumerated twelve principles on which a future education and training model should be based, and central amongst these is:



*“Recognition of Prior Learning – Education and training should through assessment give credit to prior learning obtained through formal, non-formal and informal learning and/or experience”* (Working Group 9 of the National Training Board, 1994: 2).

The NTSI did not itself expand on this principle to any great extent. However, RPL was an area identified as needing substantial further research and development.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, section 1.1, *formal work* on the *Recognition of Prior Learning* (RPL) in South Africa began in June 1994 when the National Training Board (NTB) established a sub-committee to address assessment issues. Prior to this point there were various initiatives at national and local levels, although they often were not officially referred to as RPL. Comparative international research and an investigation into the current status of RPL in South Africa was undertaken. This culminated in the production of several documents (Harris & Saddington, 1995: 7).

RPL has already appeared in all the major education policy documents, namely the White Paper on the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP White Paper, African National Congress, 1994: 9), the National Training Strategy Initiative – Working Group 9 of the National Training Board (1994: 3), the White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education, 1995: 16), the South African Qualifications Authority Act (Act No. 58 of 1995: 5) and the Policy Document on Adult Basic Education and Training (Department of Education, 1997a: 25).

The National Education Policy Act (Act No. 27 of 1996: 1035) stipulates that every person has a right to “...*basic education and equal access to education institutions*” regardless of age, gender, racial origin, religious persuasion, sexual orientation or disability. That means that everyone has access to programmes, examinations and assessment. The assessment system for the Education and Training sector - of which RPL is a sub-set - is “...*the cornerstone of*

*transformation activities and programmes*” (Department of Education, 1997a: 117).

The radical potential of RPL has been given greater immediacy through its introduction in South Africa. Nkomo (1991: 309) argues that the post-apartheid dispensation will require profound social, political and economic transformation, but “*perhaps more daunting*” will be the task of challenging the epistemology of apartheid, that is, its embedding in formal and informal knowledge structures that were then used as justificatory strategies. In challenging traditional divisions of knowledge and, with them, divisions of labour and of power, RPL is potentially an important tool in deconstructing that epistemology. Due to fact that RPL insists,

- ❑ *firstly*, that socially useful knowledge is gained through active engagement with the world and,
- ❑ *secondly*, that work is our primary means of engagement. It recognises workers as creators of knowledge and thus encourages, according to Nkomo (1991: 309), “*...a re-conceptualization of knowledge-power relation*”.

Simultaneously, and in spite of this radical potential, RPL has evolved both academically and vocationally within quite conservative constraints. While recognising alternative sources of knowledge, academic RPL has, according to Michelson (1996: 143)

*“...never challenged the university as the sole legitimate arbiter for what is or isn’t creditable. It has therefore not proved an opportunity to enrich academic learning with alternative ways of knowing or to value knowledge for its difference from rather than its similarity to academic expertise”.*

Academic RPL in most institutions is on a “course-equivalent” basis. According to the University of Ohio (1995: 7), the process that students have to undergo for the External Student Programme consists of



*“...analysing and document [their] learning and then matching that learning to...University courses. The portfolio of learning thus assembled is then submitted to appropriate faculty members who evaluate the learning to determine if it matches what they teach.”*

Little attention has been paid to the shift from university to corporation as educational authority.

### **3.4.1 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN THE VOCATIONAL SECTOR**

Since 1994, numerous projects regarding RPL have been embarked upon in the vocational sector.

Between June and December 1995, FAS and the Building Industry Training Board carried out a pilot project for RPL in the construction sector in South Africa. The National Training Board (NTB) and the respective Industry Training Boards have estimated that some 4 – 5 million South Africans would benefit from the process of RPL (Sonnendecker, 1995: 3). The project focused on Bricklaying and Carpentry given the extent of informal skills in this sector and also to give an impetus to the housing programme which is a key part of the Reconstruction and Development Programme. The project was carried out in Bloemfontein and focused on unemployed people from the nearby townships as well as the formal sector.

In the pilot project 315 candidates were screened and registered. Two hundred and sixty seven (267) of these candidates were advised. Two hundred and two (202) of the remaining candidates were tested of which 161 were awarded skill certificates and 19 were awarded full craft qualifications. The pilot project was successful in meeting its objectives and showed that RPL could work in the vocational sector in South Africa. It was the first project to be completed in the education and training area of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (Technikon South Africa, 1996: 9).

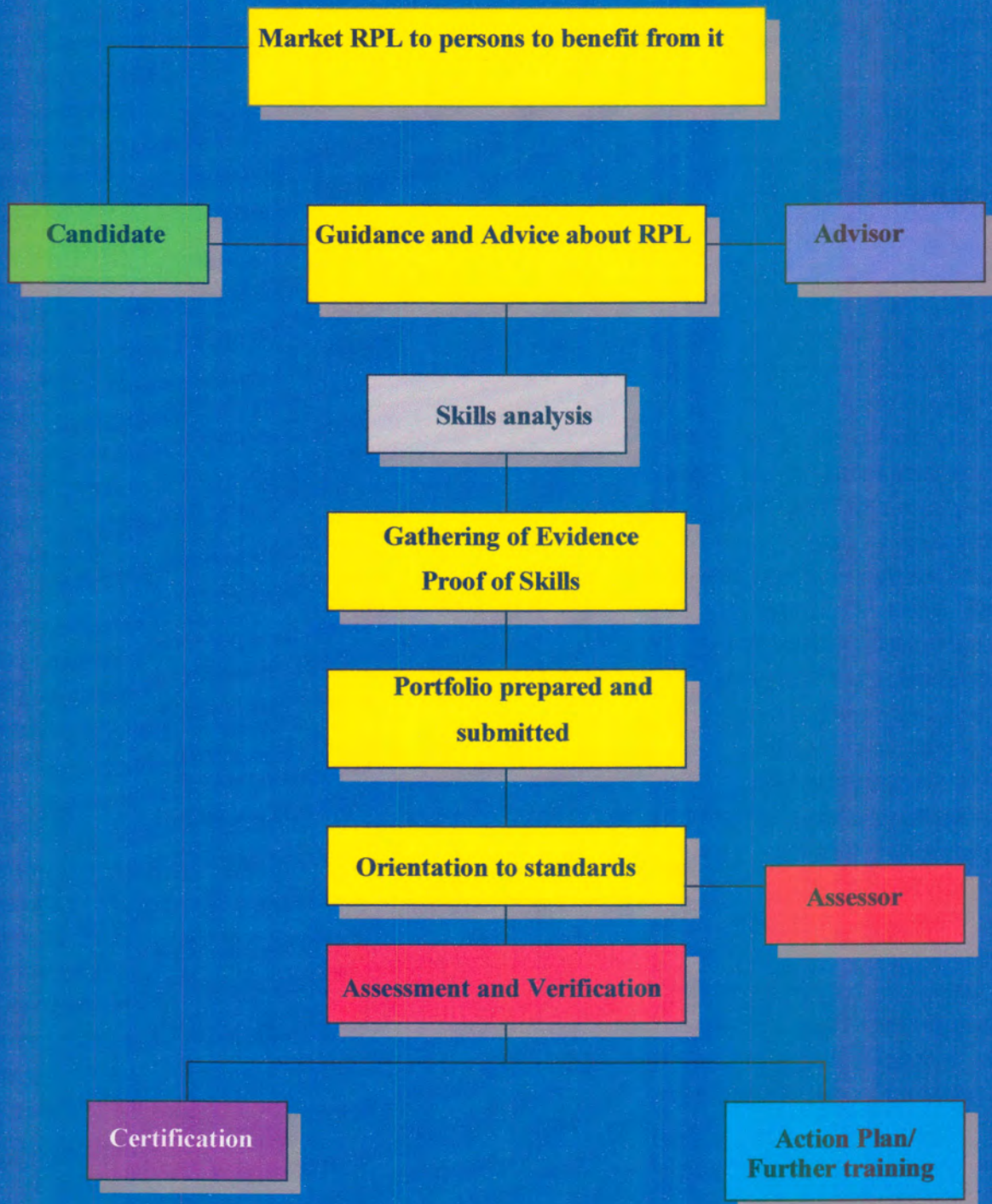
The experiences, outputs and models resulting from this pilot project form the foundation for the expansion of RPL in the construction and other sectors on a national basis. Training programmes for RPL Advisors and Assessors were developed and implemented. This resulted in certified and motivated RPL practitioners capable of managing the essential advisory and assessment process of RPL.

Links were also made with the Free State University to widen the context of the Bloemfontein project.

The RPL process as developed by the Building Industry Training Board in collaboration with FAS is displayed in figure 3.5 on the following page. Please note that in the diagram the availability of RPL facilities, Advisors, Assessors, Assessment Tests and Funding were taken for granted (Sonnendecker, 1995: 10).



**FIGURE 3.5**  
**THE RPL PROCESS**



Source: Sonnendecker, 1995: 12



Upon completion of the pilot project numerous recommendations were made of which the following are essential for the successful implementation of an RPL model (Sonnendecker, 1995: 11):

- ❑ For the RPL model to be sustainable it should be implemented as an integral component of the National Qualification Framework (NQF).
- ❑ Accreditation criteria and procedures should be developed that impact on institutions and RPL practitioners to provide a standardised model for delivery of RPL on a national basis, involving other Industry Training Boards (Sector Education and Training Authorities, hereafter referred to as SETAs)<sup>3</sup> (Department of Labour, 1999: 2) and delivered in a de-centralised cost effective system.
- ❑ The RPL process should be expanded in order to include trades and occupations in other Industry sectors.
- ❑ The Industry Training Boards (SETAs) and other approved Institutions should be assisted with the development of National Standards and Skill Test Programmes necessary to extend the accessibility of the RPL system to skilled workers in South Africa.
- ❑ Industry linkages with the RPL process should be consolidated through the provision of an on-the-job development period for successful RPL candidates to enable them to further develop their skills and experiences.

Industries should also keep in mind that employers will be responsible for upgrading staff skills and qualifications. According to the Skills Development Levies Act (Act No. 9 of 1999: 6), *“every employer must pay a skills development levy from 1 April 2000 at a rate of 0,5 % of the leviable amount and from 1 April 2001, at a rate of 1 % of the leviable amount”*.

This places a demand on companies to demonstrate the success of their training programmes in order to qualify for subsidies from the Department of Labour. The assessment and recognition of prior learning will be central to the cost-effectiveness of this scheme because the tangible evidence of learner

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<sup>3</sup> SETAs have replaced the former Industry Training Boards

achievement and accumulation of credits will be utilised to qualify companies to obtain subsidies to augment internal training programmes in the field of continuous education and training.

### ***3.4.2 WORKERS' EXPERIENCES OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA***

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has played a “*pivotal role in ensuring that RPL assessment be included as a key principle of the reforming education and training system in South Africa, as RPL is seen to be an important mechanism for redressing past injustices and inequalities*” (Lugg *et al*, 1998: 1).

COSATU embarked upon a RPL research project during 1997. The project used a social research approach to learn more about RPL in the workplace and to develop an RPL policy from workers' experiences of RPL in their industries. COSATU realised that in order to change social structures for the better, and to correct the distortions of the past, it is critical to include the knowledge of those people who have been oppressed in a situation (Shuttleworth, Somerton & Vulliamy, 1994: 2 - 4). The research focused on the RPL pilot projects that were undertaken by

- ❑ the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) from 1993 – 1996; and
- ❑ the National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) from 1995 – 1997.

It seems that COSATU identified the RPL research projects due to several reasons. *Firstly*, RPL processes had taken place in several industries and COSATU wanted to use their members' experiences in these processes to gain a better understanding of the perceived successes and problems with RPL. *Secondly*, COSATU already had a broad RPL policy and wished to use the understanding and information gained through the research to develop more detailed policy (Lugg *et al*, 1998: 6).

### 3.4.2.1 NUMSA PROJECT

In 1993 NUMSA and the automotive employers agreed to negotiate around an industry-wide skills-based grading system and training system. It was agreed that unit standards would be used to describe the skills and knowledge against which workers would be assessed and for which they could be trained and recognised. In 1995, the automotive industry employers and NUMSA agreed to a one-time RPL process in which workers would be assessed in terms of their current competence.

The purpose of the project for NUMSA was to allow workers to progress through the grading system by demonstrating and, where necessary, increasing their skills and knowledge. NUMSA envisaged that the project would prove their members' skill and identify those who were eligible for a grade and wage increase and, that they could use the process to further NUMSA's demand for training (Lugg *et al*, 1998: 204).

Once the framework for the RPL process was agreed upon, the Automotive Training Board was given the responsibility for implementation. It was agreed that adaptations of Australian unit standards would be used to assess workers' job-related skills. The Training Board ran a workshop to adapt the Australian unit standards, and a three-day short course to prepare one union and one employer representative from each company involved in the RPL process. Company-level implementation was supposed to be carried out by a joint committee within the company.

Each company identified and trained its own assessors. The companies also developed their own assessment tools from the adapted unit standards. The RPL process took place over a six-month period which started in April 1996. Workers were assessed by an oral examination and on-the-job observation. A shop steward was supposed to be present at each assessment. Workers were given their results in the form of a number of credits which were used to determine their level in terms of the new grading system.



### 3.4.2.2 NUM PROJECT

During 1995, a pilot RPL process was implemented on a mass scale during which NUM workers were assessed for basic language and mathematical skills against the interim national communication and numeracy standards at ABET levels 1, 2 and 3. According to Lugg *et al* (1998: 7) NUM agreed to the project for two main reasons:

- (a) *“First, it provided an opportunity for members to have their language and maths skills recognized and nationally certified.*
- (b) *Second, involvement in the RPL project could strengthen NUM in the negotiations for an ABET agreement in that company“.*

The **outcomes** of the projects of the two Unions show a similarity in that the vast majority of the workers who went through the RPL process did not receive any direct benefit.

During the research process of COSATU, it became clear that there were many instances during which workers and management had gone into the RPL process with quite different intentions. Management spoke about wanting to do a skills audit so that it would have a reliable profile of the plant. The context that management painted was one which spoke about the needs and requirements of the globalising context of production, the need to be internationally competitive and the requirements from the parent company located in Asia or Europe. Much of this translated to developing a multi-skilled workforce. This dilemma of management is on-going in that training interventions are necessary to develop multi-skilled workers which in turn translated into higher wages (Lugg *et al*, 1998: 5).

COSATU, however, advocated for an integrated education and training system which focused on both worker empowerment and industrial development. From the point of view of individual workers, the focus of emphasis and discussion was consistently on availing themselves for RPL assessment, for improved material

conditions of increased pay, for acknowledgment of their skills and abilities, for acknowledgement of their contribution to the company by being re-graded, and for having increased opportunities for training and advancement in the company. When such material and personal advancement did not emerge from the RPL process, morale plummeted in an environment already low due to retrenchments in a shrinking industry (compare Cooper, 1998: 9 - 10).

According to Lugg *et al* (1998: 9) the experience of NUM and NUMSA and its members has important implications for both the ideological frame within which RPL is understood and the establishment of practical policies and procedures.

- *“First, it indicates that labour and other progressive sectors of South African society must be vigilant concerning what standards are applied and what methods are used to assess against those standards.*
  
- *Second, the ability of RPL to serve the interests of workers cannot simply be assumed, but must be concretized within particular practices that both create a supportive environment for workers and assure that workers are heard in the establishment of RPL policy.”*

### **3.4.3 THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR**

RPL is provided for as an integral part of education and training provision in South Africa. The White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education, 1995: 15) states that

*“...an integrated education and training approach linked to the NQF will open doors of opportunities to people whose academic or career paths have been unnecessarily blocked because their prior knowledge and work experience have not been assessed and certified, or because their qualifications have not been recognised for admission to further learning, or for employment purposes.”*

The National Education Policy Act (Act no. 27 of 1996: 1037) stipulates, as a guiding principle, that the education and training policy in South Africa shall be directed towards, *inter alia*, providing opportunities for and encouraging lifelong learning, as well as recognising the aptitudes, abilities, interests, *prior knowledge* and *experience* of all learners.

The Assessment Policy for Grades Reception (R) to 9 and ABET states that

*“...recognition of prior learning is an important application of assessment in ABET. It is intended to provide learners with the recognition of existing competency regardless of where, how and when it was acquired”* (Department of Education, 1998c: 8).

The policy on **adult education and training** further emphasises that

*“...recognition will be given to prior learning and experience which learners have obtained through formal, non-formal and informal means”* (Department of Education, 1997a: 25 and Department of Education, 1997b: 116 – 117).

Policy documents are clear on the role of RPL in the **further education and training** band as well as the **higher education and training** band. According to the Education White Paper 4 (Department of Education, 1998a: 33), the Department of Education, *“...in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, SETAs and interested NGOs, academic institutions, will develop a framework for the recognition of prior learning”* with regard to **the further education and training** band.

In respect of **higher education and training** the Education White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997f: 29) states that

*“...the Ministry [of Education] strongly supports the developmental work and pilot projects that will help institutions develop criteria to assess*

*applicants' prior learning and experience, so that those with clear potential to succeed in higher education can be admitted."*

Outlining the implications for adopting an outcomes-based NQF, the Technical Committee on the revision of *Norms and Standards for Educators* (Department of Education, 1998b: 12) maintains that

*"...the NQF provides a means of recognising prior learning. This opens the way for learners who may have informally acquired knowledge and skills to proceed with studies relevant to their level and need, without [necessarily] having attained the formal qualification, which would previously have served as a requirement for entering a learning programme."*

This Committee further argues that on-going professional development of teachers has to be achieved through a system that can recognise appropriate prior learning and experience. It recommends that institutions (higher education and training providers) should pay particular attention to developing an education system that can assess learners' prior competence and develop the administration that allows them to credit them with such competence (Department of Education, 1998b: 135).

These policy statements on RPL clearly indicate that RPL is applicable to all NQF bands.

#### **3.4.3.1 RESEARCH PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN IN THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR**

##### **(a) RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

This project started in mid-1996 and ended in September 1999. It was a joint venture between the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the University

of Cape Town (UCT) (Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies) and the Peninsula Technikon.

The overall aim of the project was to investigate RPL as an alternative access mechanism into higher education, particularly for those adults who have historically been excluded. As such RPL was seen as a practice that had the potential to contribute to redress and affirmative action. There has been little research on RPL in South Africa to date although RPL is a hallmark of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The rationales and associated research questions for the project were as follows (University of Cape Town, 2000: <http://www.uct.ac.za/dpts/adult-ed/rpl/rplpoj.htm>)<sup>4</sup>:

- “that RPL might be a way to address the legacy of apartheid education;*
- that the current educational policy context may facilitate the development of RPL;*
- that the global social and economic changes and the resultant shifting boundaries between forms of knowledge and sites of knowledge production present opportunities for the development of RPL; and*
- that individual higher education institutions may be reviewing their access/admission policies in such a way as to be open to taking account of prior learning.”*

Beyond the above rationales a set of hypotheses was also developed. Activities were divided into different phases.

**(i) PHASE 1:**

The main activities in phase 1 (September 1996 – June 1997) were:

1. The commissioning of international case studies on RPL practices.

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<sup>4</sup> Information obtained from the Internet.

2. The writing of an academic paper seeking to gain a deeper understanding of RPL policy and practice internationally over the last 20 years.
3. The commissioning of an academic paper investigating the relationship between RPL and mainstream curriculum and teaching/learning practices.
4. The writing of a second paper seeking to address questions of an RPL approach and methodology.
5. The undertaking of situational analyses in two fields: firstly, the professional development of adult educators/trainers and secondly, community nurses.

Phase 1 research led to the identification of two sites for empirical work.

## **(ii) PHASE 2**

During phase 2 (June 1997 – April 1998) agreements and detailed research questions were drawn up with the two sites and the following empirical work was undertaken:

### ***Adult educators/trainers***

The site for phase 2 work with adult educators/trainers was UCT (Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies). A curriculum was developed which could be utilised for RPL and a process was designed and implemented to widen access to the Advanced Diploma Course for Educators of Adults. This included:

#### **(aa) Design of a curriculum to facilitate the RPL process**

- further conceptualisation of RPL within the Department;
- marketing the RPL opportunity;
- selection of candidates;
- identification of criteria for assessment of candidates;
- development of curriculum content and materials to be used; and
- associated administrative work (e.g. negotiating formal admissions with university administration).



**(bb) Implementation of an RPL process**

- delivery of an orientation workshop for potential candidates;
- three consultations with each individual candidate;
- delivery of an RPL programme;
- assessment of candidates' portfolios (involving departmental staff as moderators);
- post-assessment debriefing of candidates.

***Community***

The site for phase 2 work with community nurses was the Peninsula Technikon (Department of Public Health) with a focus on post-basic level. The project Situation Analysis (phase 1) revealed the need for a different RPL process in the field of nursing. The formal and regulated nature of the field generally (plus Technikon Regulations) necessitated a longer preparatory phase prior to the development of RPL processes. Although it was not appropriate to develop a full curriculum and process at this point in time, elements and aspects of RPL were designed and implemented. These included:

**(aa) Design**

- a review of current selection and interview procedures; and
- the formulation of access criteria.

**(bb) Implementation**

- researching the prior learning of a sample of community nurses (through interviews);
- the development of a "challenge test" to further research the prior knowledge of all of the 1998 applicants to the Bridging Diploma for community nurses; and

- ❑ further lobbying and capacity building which included the establishment of a provincial interest group, the holding of seminars and meetings leading to the conceptualisation of a wider RPL project.

### **(iii) PHASE 3**

Phase 3 of the project (May 1998 – September 1999) was concerned with the development of a conceptual guide and an implementation guide for RPL – linking theory to practice and including principles, practices, assessment methodologies, roles and responsibilities, institutional issues (including policy development and implementation strategies), candidate support, curriculum implications and evaluative criteria.

The final report regarding this study is not yet available.

### **(b) THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MANAGEMENT DEGREE PROGRAMME FOR ADULT WORKERS**

The development of a Management Degree Programme for Adult Workers initiative came about during 1996 when a Task Team was appointed comprising representatives from business, industry, provincial government, NGOs and education institutions (University of the Free State, 1996: 1 - 2). The Task Team facilitated discussions with employers from the Free State region, organised labour, academics from the University of the Free State and specialists from abroad regarding the development of such a programme.

In the current stage of social transformation and political transition in the country, the need to train and empower managers in business and other organisations, with leadership skills, are critical. Addressing this need is a key element in taking the country through this difficult stage in its development. The fact that so many adult workers had no or limited access to formal training opportunities in the past, makes this all the more pertinent in the community (University of the Free State, 1996: 1). The research project departed from these premises.

The idea is to provide an educational experience that serves as a foundation for creative, co-operative and independent individuals in management positions in South Africa. Each student will have the opportunity to cultivate a capacity for understanding leadership and management development by participating in demanding educational and life experiences during the degree programme.

The learning process will take the learner through a natural development from discovery to integration, to application to synthesis and sharing of knowledge. Learners will be required to reflect on their experiences (Interview with Professor Bennie Anderson, University of the Free State, 8 May 1998). Learning will take place in both organised activities on campus and in the workplace. The outcome of learning will be documented, assessed and evaluated by both the student and the review procedures.

This programme was implemented with effect 1 January 1999. To date no progress or evaluation reports regarding this programme are available.

### **(c) ACCESS PROJECT**

The Access Project was funded by the Joint Education Trust (JET) and managed by the Management of Schools Training Programme (MSTP). The aim of the research was to evaluate whether access to the Further Diploma in Education (FDE) should be opened to school managers with a matric + 2 (M + 2) qualification, given that they perform the same functions as other school managers with a M + 3 or higher level (Musker, Host, Botha, King, Nkondo, Shalem & Slonimsky, 1998: 5).

The research was conducted through interviews with educators in relevant tertiary education programmes, a literature review, case studies in eight schools and by simulating an assignment task typical of tertiary studies in the field of educational management. In total, twenty school managers participated in the research as respondents.

At the heart of this study is the principle of RPL for educators. At the level of policy, RPL is a key principle of the NQF to be pursued across sectors. Currently, the only way to “upgrade” educators’ qualifications is through formal courses of study, and the life and work experience of M + 2 school managers is not taken into account for entrance into tertiary institutions or for qualification purposes. A fundamental feature of this project is that it examined the extent to which there are manifest differences in actual competency levels (rather than qualification levels) between M + 2 and M + 3 managers.

Through analysis of both the written assignments and the case studies, no difference was found between the management competence of the M + 2 and M + 3 school managers who participated in the study.

**(d) RPL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR CURRICULUM RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION)**

Although RPL has appeared in many policy documents since 1994, the Department of Education has not yet formulated a policy on RPL. In view of the existence of this gap, the National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development (NCCRD) set in motion a consultation process that would serve as a basis for the development of a conceptual framework for RPL.

During the conceptualisation of the project, it was agreed that the project should consist of four phases, namely (Department of Education, 1999a: 2):

- Phase 1:** Policy analysis
- Phase 2:** Literature review
- Phase 3:** Empirical investigation
- Phase 4:** Framework Development

This project is still in its initial phases. A draft report on policy analysis regarding RPL has been compiled. A report has also been completed on the theories of learning and the recognition of prior learning with a focus on

implications for South African Education and Training. This project still has a long way to go before policy on RPL for the education and training sector in South Africa will be formulated.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

Prior experiential learning is deeply connected to a context, therefore, any treatment of it will benefit from drawing on that view of mind as far as the conditions in each sector allow. RPL is only just beginning to be theorised in this way and the South African context presents opportunities to develop and extend this work. Such approaches may be *“a key to helping to ensure that RPL lives up to the equity claims made in its name and do not become alternative means of exclusion”* (Harris, 2000: 35). This can all too easily occur if there is no two-way relationship between the mainstream context and the recognition of prior learning and if the process becomes an un-problematized one-way one, whereby learners simply have to translate their prior learning into formal learning.

RPL policies have direct economic implications, both at the level of the diversion of labour on the ground and in the kinds of economic and social democracy a given society entertains. However, whether the issue is the national economic development or the promotion of social justice, not only economic power is at stake. Also at stake are the kinds of knowledge we value and who we tell ourselves we are. According to Michelson (1996: 151) it is enough to use assessment schemes

*“...to allow some women, some non-whites, some workers into the enchanted authoritative circle, or must we challenge the criteria through which some knowledge and not other knowledge is legitimated, as feminist and anti-racist theory has tried to do and value knowledge that is not necessarily available from the position of institutionalised authority?”*

In slightly other terms, experience is another word for history: whose experience counts, whose experience is remembered, whose experience attains the status of exemplary. RPL is about the stories a society chooses to tell about itself. It is a way of negotiating the politics of memory, which are always more about the future than the past. The New York City poet Langston Hughes carried with him a deep sense of the relationship between our memories and our choices (Michelson, 1996: 152). He wrote:

*“So we stand here,  
at the edge of hell  
in Harlem  
And look out at the world  
What we ’re gonna do  
In the face of  
What we remember.”*





# CHAPTER 4

## **ACRONYMS USED IN CHAPTER 4**

<b>ABET</b>	Adult Basic Education and Training
<b>ETQA</b>	Education and Training Quality Assurance Body
<b>FNTI</b>	First Nations Technical Institute
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SAQA</b>	South African Qualifications Authority

## CHAPTER 4

# PRINCIPLES ESSENTIAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING MODEL

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Cohen & Whitaker (1990: 43) successful assessment of experiential learning depends first on the identification of quality standards and then on the development of procedures and processes to assure that the standards are met. They raise the following questions regarding this:

- ❑ *“Who sets assessment standards?”*
- ❑ *“What are the vital elements of quality assurance?”*
- ❑ *“What assessment methods are most effective?”*
- ❑ *“What administrative procedures are most conducive to successful assessment?”*

Rutherford (1995: 10 – 11) supports these remarks by adding that although there are a number of assessment systems throughout the world, the most effective systems have the following in common (Fletcher, 1997: 71 – 72):

- ❑ *“They are transparent. The method of assessment, make up of the system and the standards against which assessment is being carried out are clear to anyone who looks at them.*
- ❑ *They are valid. The system provides realistic proof of competence, that skills for example, have not been assessed using only a written examination.*
- ❑ *They are reliable. Different assessors in varying locations can make the same judgement about the same candidate based on the same evidence.”*

These features do not relate to how the assessment is carried out in as much as that they can provide a wider view of how well the process worked within the assessment system. According to Rutherford (1995: 11) the system needs to have in place processes that allow assessors to clearly understand and follow the same route to successful assessment outcomes. To achieve these, a good assessment system will have built into it quality assurance processes that ensure that these features remain constant.

According to Simosko & Cook (1996: 97) assessment can be regarded as the critical activity on which the RPL system rests. The credibility of the outcome depends almost exclusively on the validity, reliability and fairness of the assessment process. Therefore, it is essential that when an RPL system is designed, it should adhere to principles of good practice in assessment.

The development of a practical RPL system(s) in South Africa is dependant on important principles. These principles can be summarised as follows (Rutherford, 1995: 122, Harris & Saddington, 1995: 26 and Cohen *et al*, 1994: 13):

- Quality assurance mechanisms.**
- Efficiency of the RPL system.**
- Equity and access.**
- Validity and reliability of the RPL system.**
- Transparency of the RPL process.**
- A curriculum based on explicit learning outcomes to be utilised for the RPL assessment.**
- Training of key players including their selection and monitoring.**

These principles will be discussed in the following section.

## 4.2 ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING MODEL

### 4.2.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

In the simplest terms, quality is all about giving people a product or service that meets their needs and expectations. Recognition of Prior Learning services will only be credible if they meet with *quality assurance* measures. According to Fletcher (1997: 85) there is little point in developing and introducing an RPL system

*“...unless an effective quality assurance model is put in place to ensure that standards, and the credibility of the system are maintained.”*

One of the central aims of the new education and training system is to ensure that all education and training provisioning meets minimum quality standards. Without the development and implementation of mechanisms for assuring the quality of learning achievements – standards and qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework – learners will continue to be disadvantaged by receiving certificates of achievement which have little credibility or value (Department of Education, 1997b: 165).

The South African Qualifications Authority Act (Act No. 58 of 1995) as well as the Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies Regulations (SAQA, 1999: 1) provide the enabling and regulatory framework for implementing the quality assurance systems and processes required by the National Qualification Framework. Quality can be regarded as a process and quality assurance, quality management and accreditation are not products (SAQA, 1999: 6).

According to the Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs (SAQA, 1999: 6), the quality process includes the following critical points:

- ❑ **The product or outcome**, for example the awards; achievement of standards or qualifications; accreditation;
- ❑ **The inputs**, for example learning provision; programmes; learning and learner resources; life or experiential learning; and
- ❑ **The process**, for example the quality of the learning and assessment interactions; the quality of the monitoring and auditing interactions.

Experience has shown that there are a number of steps that should be followed for RPL to be effectively implemented. RPL can improve the *quality* of education by protecting or clarifying the standards of assessment in courses (Rutherford, 1995: 199 and Cohen *et al*, 1994: 14). *Quality*, therefore, refers to the quality of the *processes* as well as the quality of the *outcomes* or the *products*.

The *processes* involved in RPL are not only related to *the way assessments are carried out*. They also include a wide range of other activities relating to the preparations for these assessments and their expected outcomes. A number of principles should be adhered to when carrying out RPL to ensure that the processes are put into the context of quality assurance. These principles are (Rutherford, 1995: 216):

- ❑ *“All assessors should have the necessary experience.*
- ❑ *All assessors should be trained to, and consistently perform at, the same standards.*
- ❑ *The element and performance criteria must be the focus of the assessment.*
- ❑ *Any assessment must first and foremost meet the needs of the workplace.*
- ❑ *The skills and knowledge gained as a result of the assessment must be usable over a wide range of situations.*
- ❑ *The system should be as simple as possible.*
- ❑ *Candidates should always have a right to appeal against an assessment decision.”*



The achievement of the desired outcomes or products is dependent on the tools used to obtain a successful result when carrying out the assessment. These tools are according to Rutherford (1995: 201) and Cohen & Whitaker (1990: 45):

- ❑ *“the competency standards against which the candidate is assessed;*
- ❑ *the resources used by the assessor and the candidate;*
- ❑ *the qualification obtained as a result of successful attainment of the required results; and*
- ❑ *the way in which an individual’s personal or professional circumstances support the assessment.”*

All the above-mentioned RPL principles as they relate to the products and processes, should be applied to all assessments and the systems implemented to support them.

#### ***4.2.2 EFFICIENCY OF A RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING SYSTEM***

Although RPL has costs attached, it can potentially save time and money for students, employers, the different educational sectors and ultimately the community. According to Cohen *et al* (1994: 14) RPL is *efficient* to provide a quality qualification in a shorter period of time by assessing and recognising an applicant’s relevant prior learning. The costs of unnecessary over-learning both for the community and students can be considerable.

According to Rutherford (1995: 220) an effective RPL system does not need lengthy, and in some cases complicated test design or statistical analysis techniques.

*“For the process to be understood by everyone, not only those taking the academic approach, everything from the way the standards are written to the way recommendations are made for certification must be couched in simple language and follow an easily understood system.”*

An *efficient* RPL system has certain benefits (refer to Chapter 2, section 2.6). According to Cohen *et al* (1994: 14) these are for:

#### **4.2.2.1 STUDENTS**

RPL means

- the possibility of obtaining a qualification in a shorter period of time;
- paying reduced fees;
- expending fewer resources; and
- decreasing the opportunity costs of education.

#### **4.2.2.2 EMPLOYERS**

- RPL involves positive partnerships between industry and educational institutions, both with the goal to develop qualified expertise in appropriate fields in a shorter time.

#### **4.2.2.3 INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT**

- For academic staff, the spin-off from RPL over time may well be more cost-efficient assessment methods that can be applied to a variety of applicants and courses.

#### **4.2.2.4 COMMUNITY**

- Community costs are reduced by the increased portability of recognised knowledge and skills, and the reduction of time spent in institutionalised training and education.

*Efficiency* is of major importance for the RPL system to function properly.

### 4.2.3 EQUITY AND ACCESS

*Equity and access* are cornerstones of government policy. Women learners, women with special needs, youth with special needs, disadvantaged learners with special learning needs and those from lower socio-economic or minority ethnic backgrounds are encouraged to participate voluntarily in ABET programmes or to enroll in further and higher education (Department of Education, 1997a: 9 and Le Roux, 1995: 1 – 7, 19).

RPL offers a second chance for many groups targeted by equity policies in a way that recognises the knowledge and understanding they already have and thereby shortens the time needed to fulfill formal requirements (Cohen *et al*, 1994:15).

Unlike other forms of assessment, there are no educational, demographic or cultural reasons for anyone to be denied the opportunity to be assessed in an RPL system. Nor are there time limits on how and by when an individual is to be assessed, or mandatory requirements for attendance at any higher and further education or private provider's training and education programmes, or pre-requisites that must be achieved, before any part of the assessment can be carried out (Rutherford, 1995: 221).

The principles of *equity and access* require that all unnecessary barriers are removed to enable anyone with the desire and the motivation to achieve the highest level of personal achievement. The processes of a typical RPL system ensure that no barriers are put in the way of anybody seeking assessment against established standards, and the most important aspect of these processes, the quality assurance, will ensure that this will never be allowed to happen.

#### **4.2.4 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF A RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING SYSTEM**

##### **4.2.4.1 RELIABILITY**

According to Rutherford (1995: 12) **reliability** refers to

*“...how predictable the outcome of any assessment is. No matter how often an assessment is carried out, or how many other assessors judge the same evidence, the results should always be either the same or very close to it.”*

An RPL system is only of real value if assessors in different locations would make the same judgement about the same candidate based on the same evidence (Fletcher, 1997: 72).

**Reliability** operates at two levels (Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 24):

- that of the individual assessor**
- that of a number of assessors.**

A “**reliable**” assessor makes the same decision on a particular assignment whenever he/she marks it. This means that any trained assessor would reach the same conclusion about a person’s achievement of a particular outcome. Assessors, advisors and any other staff involved in the assessment system also play a part in ensuring reliability of the processes.

Recognised standards at a national level ensure reliability of assessment and RPL assessment will only be **reliable** if the assessment covers all the learning outcomes (Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 24). Without reliable assessments, there can be no comparability of credentials (Department of Education, 1997d: 12).

High quality standards are fundamental to *reliability*. A well-designed RPL system contains tests of *reliability* through quality control and monitoring of the process (refer to section 4.2.1 above). While the individual is being assessed against widely recognised and accepted standards, the people responsible for ensuring a successful outcome are themselves performing these functions at a set of competencies equally as widely accepted. According to Rutherford (1995: 13) these standards “...*provide uniformity and ensure reliability of all assessments carried out anywhere.*”

#### **4.2.4.2 VALIDITY**

*Validity* is an essential principle for RPL assessment. It measures what it claims to measure and what is important to measure (Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 26). A well-planned assessment is one in which the assessor and the individual being assessed are clear on *what is to be assessed* and *what evidence needs to be generated* (Sieborger & Macintosh, 1998: 11).

According to Cohen *et al* (1994: 19) *validity and reliability* are widely-accepted fundamental principles of assessment. In RPL, the *validity* of the assessment procedure is vital for the credibility of the student’s results and that of the institution.

To meet the *validity* requirements, several aspects must be included which are no different to assessment expectations for enrolled learners (Freeman & Lewis, 1998: 27 and Cohen *et al*, 1994: 19). They are:

**(a) CURRICULUM VALIDITY**

The outcome must be defined and worth achieving.

**(b) CONTENT VALIDITY**

Content validity confirms that assessment includes an appropriate sampling of the content and that the method used must be an appropriate way of assessing the performance.

**(c) FACE VALIDITY**

The assessment must seem credible to students and other stakeholders - checking that the assessment procedure appears to be appropriate.

**(d) TYPICAL AND INDICATIVE VALIDITY**

The performance assessed must be an acceptable measure of the outcome.

**(e) PREDICTIVE VALIDITY**

This confirms that candidates awarded accreditation through RPL will be able to perform as well as those selected by other means.

In addition to *validity and reliability*, issues relating to the evidence that a candidate produces, in relation to maintaining assessment standards, have also been identified.

When considering evidence that a candidate submits, the assessor will ask a question such as “*What does this evidence tell me about the individual’s performance?*” (Fletcher, 1997: 73). An assessor would need to be satisfied that:

- (i) the evidence collected from the assessment activities or pieces of evidence that are in the portfolio could be related directly to the learning outcomes being assessed;
- (ii) the evidence demonstrated clearly that learning/performance outcomes had been met; and
- (iii) that there was enough evidence.

(Department of Education, 1997d: 12; also refer to Chapter 2, section 2.9.2.3 (i); (ii); (iii) & (iv).)

To achieve and maintain *validity* throughout the RPL process means assessors and other key staff have to identify what standards are used and how to select the most appropriate assessment method. They should also understand that there may be a need for more than one method to be used to ensure competency while at the same



time understand how much evidence is enough or where more is needed (Rutherford, 1995: 12).

However, Freeman & Lewis (1998: 29) caution assessors that it is sometimes tempting to sacrifice *validity for reliability*, by concentrating only on what can most easily or consistently be measured.

#### 4.2.5 *TRANSPARENCY*

In order to obtain maximum results during an assessment every aspect of the process must be clearly seen and understood by all concerned. The RPL process should be *transparent*, i.e. it should be clear to all the candidates. According to Rutherford (1995: 11) the

*“...assessment must be based on standards that are accessible, achievable and have real meaning for both the organisation and the end-users. The methods of assessment, and their purposes, should also be clearly understood by everyone, including the candidate.”*

The methods of assessment, make up of the system and the standards against which assessment is being carried out need to be clear. Candidates will have to be informed of exactly what will be required of them.

Assessors can be held responsible for fair assessment in terms of explicit criteria. According to Lubisi, Wedekind, Parker & Gultig (1997: 14 - 15) outcomes that are registered as part of unit standards on the NQF will be open to public scrutiny and will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Fletcher (1997: 72) mentions that

*“...if standards are accessible, easily understood and have real meaning to the users, and if the assessment plans and methods are well thought out then roles and responsibilities are more easily conducted.”*

#### **4.2.6 CURRICULUM BASED ON EXPLICIT LEARNING OUTCOMES TO BE UTILISED FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT**

When carrying out any assessment, the two most urgent areas needing identification are *the people to be assessed* and *the standards against which their assessment will be carried out*.

According to Harris & Saddington (1995: 27) there is international consensus that RPL is extremely difficult to operate without a curriculum based on explicit learning outcomes:

*“A learning outcome statement specifies the knowledge, skill and/or attitude that a person is expected to acquire in a given curriculum framework, enabling both teacher and student to know in advance what it is that students are expected to know and be able to do.”*

Simosko & Cook (1996: 32) mention that

*“...the process of setting standards becomes a prerequisite to offering a sound service. Whether the standards are called ‘learning outcomes’ or ‘competence-based’ standards or anything else, it is imperative that clear statements are in place and that all those involved in the assessment process – candidates, advisors, assessors, mentors and subsequent trainers or teachers – understand and can use the standards.”*

A crucial issue in the recognition of prior learning is the attainment of certain outcomes which have been made explicit. In courses in which learning outcomes are specified and where standards are clearly established and easily identifiable in relation to set criteria, all assessment processes including RPL would automatically take these into account. This includes those courses using a competency-based format.

A key role of RPL assessment is to determine whether or not these outcomes have been attained (Lubisi *et al*, 1997: 14). The emphasis will not be on the particular content of the programme, the methodology used, the duration of the programme or even whether there was a programme. The emphasis will, instead, be on what a candidate knows and can do (Department of Education, 1997c: 11 - 12).

According to Harris & Saddington (1995: 27) the South African NQF can be regarded as a fundamental means of ensuring that South Africa's education and training is integrated and co-ordinated.

#### ***4.2.7 TRAINING OF KEY PLAYERS INCLUDING THEIR SELECTION AND MONITORING***

Implementing flexible assessment strategies that embrace the concepts of RPL offers significant challenges for those responsible for staff development (Simosko & Cook, 1996: 151).

##### ***4.2.7.1 SELECTION OF KEY PLAYERS***

An effective RPL system carries with it certain functions beyond those of just the assessor and the person being assessed. According to Rutherford (1995: 21) these functions

*“...not only allow for cost and resource efficiency but also the assurance that every aspect of the assessment is covered by internal and/or external staff dedicated to the task.”*

Rutherford (1995: 23) mentions that regardless of their size and how they are structured, the following key players and their functions are common to all RPL systems:

- (a) “A candidate – the person to be assessed.*
- (b) An assessor – someone to assess him or her (the candidate).*
- (c) An advisor – the provider of advice and assistance to both the assessor and the candidate.*
- (d) A verifier – someone who can maintain an overview of quality of assessment processes (including the assessment itself) being carried out.*
- (e) The candidate’s manager or supervisor – the person to whom the candidate either directly or indirectly reports.*
- (f) A mentor – another employee, either senior to or a peer of the person being assessed, who is acknowledged and respected by the candidate as a provider of advice and guidance, particularly during the assessment.*
- (g) Peers of the candidate.*
- (h) Past employers/managers/supervisors – those who may be able to provide supporting evidence of competence for the candidate.*
- (i) Independent assessors – to carry out assessments where no in-house expertise exists or when independent assessment is needed.*
- (j) Awarding body – the institution having overall responsibility for the quality of the standards and awarding the relevant certificate or qualification as a result of successful assessment.”*

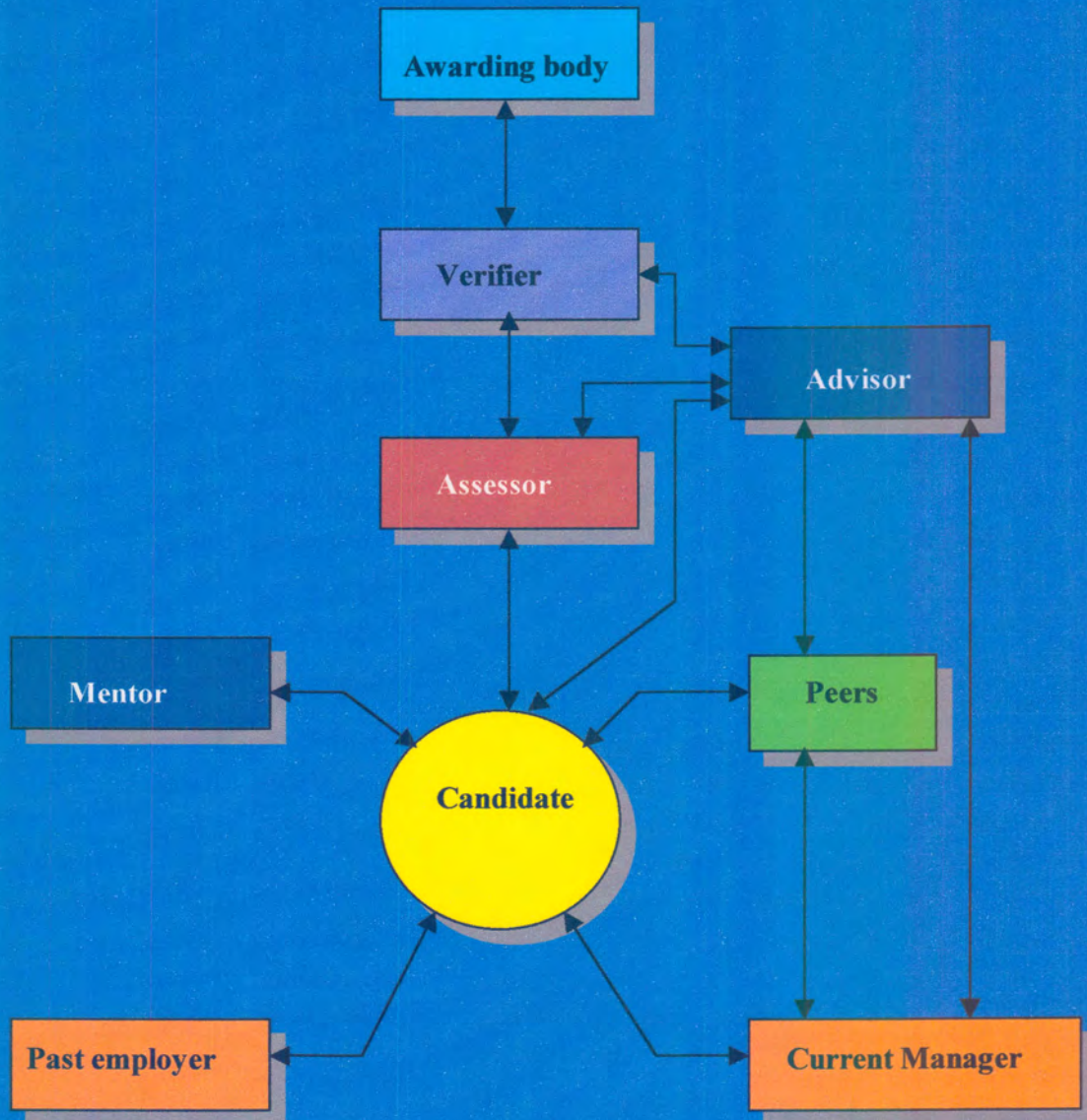
The interrelationship between the key players in the RPL process is displayed in figure 4.1.





FIGURE 4.1

THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KEY PLAYERS  
IN THE RPL SYSTEM



Source: Rutherford, 1995: 25

The assessors play a very important role in RPL process. SAQA has established a Standards Generating Body that will develop unit standards for assessors (SAQA, 1999a: 9). Once these unit standards have been approved, they will be registered on the NQF. A person interested in becoming an accredited assessor will have to be competent in the specific outcomes of these registered unit standards. According to Fletcher (1997: 86) the following criteria are also very important when selecting an assessor:

- (i) Experience in the occupational/educational role.
- (ii) Experience in supervision/ line management.
- (iii) Willingness to undertake assessment.

#### **4.2.7.2 TRAINING OF KEY PLAYERS**

Training of RPL key players is vital. The training will incorporate the system and the processes. According to Rutherford (1995: 108) the training of key players in the RPL process should be aimed at one important objective which is to produce persons who can effectively carry out their function within an RPL system. The training event is designed to enable people to understand the importance of the role activity in order to deliver a range of advisory and assessment services and the procedures which need to be followed.

Simosko & Cook (1996: 167) mention that for the staff development to be effective,

*“...the training should reflect the needs of the staff to be trained and must include organisational policies and an adequate commitment of resources by senior management. The training programme should be based on principles of andragogy, rather than pedagogy, and as such needs to be experientially based.”*

Assessors need to understand several aspects of the RPL system (Fletcher, 1997: 87) which can be listed as follows:

- (a) the principles of RPL assessment;
- (b) what makes RPL different from other forms of assessment;
- (c) using standards of competence;
- (d) rules of assessment;
- (e) rules of evidence;
- (f) methods of assessment;
- (g) room for flexibility;
- (h) roles of assessors and individuals;
- (i) the quality-assurance structure in which the assessment system operates; and
- (j) benefits of the RPL assessment system.

Staff development is essential to the successful implementation of flexible assessment services. Every role player will be trained in the specific functions that he/she will be responsible for. According to Simosko & Cook (1996: 167) by the end of the formal training period, all key role players should be able to move back into their organisations to implement the service.

#### **4.2.7.3 MONITORING OF KEY PLAYERS**

The process of monitoring assessment is usually called *verification* and entails the checking of the on-going quality of the service (Simosko & Cook, 1996: 146). Monitoring and evaluating the RPL system are essential activities that should be conducted on a regular basis. Simosko & Cook (1996: 146) argue that due to the fact that

*“...success is so dependent on maintaining the clarity and effectiveness of each stage in the process, the quality of monitoring and evaluation will*



*require the involvement of everyone connected with the service: advisors, assessors, support staff, managers and the candidates themselves.”*

Each assessor has to be monitored to ensure reliability of the RPL assessment, i.e. that the same judgement would be reached by more than one assessor when the same collection of evidence of competence is assessed (Fletcher, 1997: 87 - 88).

Effective evaluation and monitoring is seen as one key to the complex issue of improving the following:

- (a) quality and efficiency of education and training;
- (b) quality of educational management; and
- (c) quality of educational attainment.

(Department of Education, 1997e: 12)

According to Simosko & Cook (1996: 146) the RPL service can only be monitored effectively if the providing centre

- (i) identifies what regular, on-going information needs to be collected, and
- (ii) sets performance indicators so that the information collected can be judged against these indicators.

During monitoring and evaluation information will be collected, analysed and interpreted to determine whether the RPL service or programme is meeting its overall objectives (Department of Education, 1997e: 8). By monitoring and evaluating the service on an on-going basis, the organisation will be well placed to address critical issues and improve the overall service and the effectiveness of the staff.

The essential principles for RPL assessment as described above should not be seen in isolation from the minimum standards required for an effective RPL system as well

as the assessment practices and methods (see Chapter 2, sections 2.8 and 2.9) which can be utilised for the recognition of prior learning. These principles are all inter-linked and if they are carefully adhered to, assessors can be assured of both the rigour and the credibility of their assessment choices.

### **4.3 BARRIERS TO THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT**

Adult learners in general have a number of barriers to overcome when accessing the post-secondary educational system. These barriers may be personal or physical, situational and institutional which not only deny fair access to the assessment system; they can actively discourage some people from even attempting to gain a recognised qualification. These observations stemmed from the experiences of many educators who shared their thoughts during various educational conferences and meetings (FNTI, 1994: 52).

#### ***4.3.1 PHYSICAL, PERSONAL AND SITUATIONAL BARRIERS***

According to Rutherford (1995: 221) most physical barriers are not put into place to intentionally deny access to assessment. Many are put up as a result of the work of cultural conditions that emanated at the time the programmes of facilities were first developed.

The physical and personal barriers take the form of (Rutherford, 1995: 222 and FNTI, 1994: 53)

- locations where start-up workshops, assessment or top-up training is carried out that are inaccessible to persons with physical disabilities
- the financial situation or poverty that can limit their attendance

- facilities and equipment of resources that don't take into consideration visual or hearing limitations of candidates
- mental health problems that the candidate may experience
- work commitment that the candidate may have so that he/she cannot visit the assessment centre
- very low-self esteem that the candidate may have
- cultural values or gender casting that forbid him/her from going to the assessment centre
- transport difficulties where the assessment centres are not within walking distance and no transport is available to the centres
- centers that are located in a remote area which cannot easily be reached
- lack of assessment centres in the rural areas
- lack of information
- candidates having family responsibilities
- the family of the candidates that have negative attitudes towards the RPL process
- the family of the candidates that have different priorities than the candidates
- the schedules of the classes which make it impossible for some candidates to visit the assessment centre
- workbooks etc. written in language unfamiliar to candidates (including terminology, processes etc. as well as difficulties experience by those with non-English speaking backgrounds)
- assessors who are unwilling to travel
- non-modularised training courses and programmes run by further and higher education providers
- certification processes that are either not in place or which are ineffective
- limited range of options to gain additional training or learning, especially in the rural areas
- assessment that is tied more to the provider's curriculum than to the endorsed standards
- inefficient or insufficient standards

- ❑ lack of user friendly assessment material, including workbooks and, where appropriate, computer-based assessment.

In order to overcome all the above-mentioned barriers, they first have to be identified. With a concerted effort these barriers can be removed from the assessment process, making it much more accessible for everyone interested.

#### **4.3.2 INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS**

These barriers are created due to a lack of understanding the working of the RPL process as well as its benefits.

The barriers can be identified as follows (Rutherford, 1995: 222 – 223 and FNTI, 1994: 53):

- ❑ a lack of organisational policy towards RPL;
- ❑ admission criteria that are too strict and that make it difficult for the candidates to be accepted;
- ❑ lack of management and higher level support and commitment to the processes;
- ❑ lack of transferability of skills and experience to either the college or university system;
- ❑ lack of flexible scheduling of classes to accommodate adults on shift work and with childcare responsibilities;
- ❑ staffing levels within the educational system prevent smaller classes and provide less time for counselling and other help;
- ❑ lack of available vocational counselling;
- ❑ staff training and development policies and activities that are not linked to organisational objectives;
- ❑ the absence of bilingual/bi-cultural staff;
- ❑ inappropriately or insufficiently trained/motivated staff allocated to functions;

- ❑ lack of remediation and upgrading of the programmes;
- ❑ insufficient budget allocation to overall training and assessment needs;
- ❑ lack of cross-cultural sensitivity on the part of educational staff at all levels;
- ❑ general discrimination and racism which sometimes occur on the basis of a name or accent;
- ❑ the tendency of educational programmes not to take culture into account;
- ❑ other training and development activities used in the assessment process that are not competency-based nor modularised;
- ❑ RPL policies and procedures developed without wide input and consultation with staff, management and, where appropriate, clients;
- ❑ management's unwillingness to release staff, both assessors and candidates, or to devote time to the implementation of systems and feedback mechanisms;
- ❑ inter- and intra-organisational rivalries and fears of commercial or personal gains through participating in the processes (whether it be in the development, piloting or use of the standards); and
- ❑ support to RPL that is either inappropriate or given only for hidden political, industrial or commercial reasons.

Rutherford (1995: 223) mentions that overcoming these barriers completely

*“...may not always be possible, nor even practical, but identifying them enables assessors and candidates to use methods of assessment that can bypass them thereby avoiding discrimination against anyone seeking assessment.”*

Liebler (1999: 1) makes the following remark regarding barriers that adults will experience:

*“An essential quest of the midlife adult is a search for the meaning beyond the clutter and confusion of life events. This desire for deeper understanding*

*is further accelerated by the postmodern world demand for schooling in intricate and multi-faceted thinking competencies.”*

The barriers explained above could be experienced as a crisis which can be regarded as an unstable time during which an individual has the choice either to energise additional resources in order to grow or to resist change with such force as to stagnate or increase vulnerability.

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

Based upon experiences of other countries it is important to note that RPL will be perceived as something new by many academic staff and, therefore, this innovation will arouse concern (Cohen *et al*, 1994: 36). The need for information and clear policy guidelines will precede the need for staff development and training programmes in RPL assessment techniques.

According to Lockett (1999: 77) it will be unwise for South African institutions to begin to try recognising the experience and learning of others without first becoming aware of and interrogating their own experience and learning and the assumptions on which these are based.

*“It is only once we are aware of the effects of our own situatedness, interpretive frames and discourses, that we will be able to appreciate the differences between ours and others’ experiences and learnings and be less confident about presuming to judge the latter. This might lead us to accept that our and others’ learning are incommensurable and that learning and adapting by both assessors and assessees will be necessary before we are able to ‘recognise’ each other”* (Lockett, 1999: 78).





# CHAPTER 5

## ACRONYMS USED IN CHAPTER 5

<b>ABET</b>	Adult Basic Education and Training
<b>ALC</b>	Adult Learning Centre
<b>APEL</b>	Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning
<b>COSATU</b>	Congress of South African Trade Unions
<b>ETDP</b>	Education, Training and Development Practitioner
<b>ETQA</b>	Education and Training Quality Assurance Body
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SAQA</b>	South African Qualifications Authority
<b>SETA</b>	Sector Education and Training Authority
<b>SMME</b>	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises

## CHAPTER 5

# A MODEL FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING FOR THE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The NQF and its governing body, SAQA, are an attempt to bind all education and training into an integrated system in which there are minimal barriers to mobility. According to the SAQA Bulletin (SAQA, 1999b: 11), it does not matter how a certain set (unit standard) of knowledge, skills and values has been achieved in order to be recognised by the NQF.

*“As long as you can perform a specified task competently (demonstrating that you ‘have’ the required knowledge, skills and values) then you can be given credit and awarded a certificate. The process (in-put) is no longer to be specified (hence the importance of the “Recognition of Prior Learning”), what matters is the evaluated performance” (SAQA, 1999b: 11).*

In South Africa, RPL is a key principle of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to be followed across all sectors of education and training (refer to Chapter 1, section 1.2.7.2). RPL in South Africa can be seen as a mechanism to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities. RPL can empower individuals, it can provide a skill focus for employers and can assist in economic and social development.

Employers will be responsible for upgrading staff skills and qualifications. Companies will have to demonstrate the success of their training programmes in order to qualify for subsidies from the Department of Labour. The assessment

and recognition of prior learning will be central to the cost-effectiveness of this scheme because the tangible evidence of learner achievement and accumulation of credits will be utilised to qualify companies to obtain subsidies to augment internal training programmes in the field of continuous education and training.

A few institutions have already started piloting RPL (refer to Chapter 3, section 3.4) and others are bracing themselves for what seems to be an exciting yet arduous task. Many institutions are positively disposed to the idea of empowering the individuals whose skills and experiences have been overlooked. According to Gawe (1999: 25) “...*even those institutions that may be slow to consider transforming education will be pressurised to do so.*” This is as a result of what is spelled out clearly in the White Paper on Education (Department of Education, 1995: 18).

*“A priority for the national and provincial Ministries of Education is to create a transformative, democratic mission and ethos in the new departments of education... and it is now the responsibility of all South Africans who have a stake in education... to help build a just, equitable and high quality system for all the citizens...”*

According to Ralphs (1998: 12) and Gawe (1999: 22) it has become clear that the process of RPL is complex and several strategies would need to be examined in order to assess candidates correctly.

However, uncertainties and conflicting views that RPL should be qualifying and not certifying, i.e. the process of assessment does not have to lead to accreditation unless it is appropriate for the individual applicant, necessitates careful consideration when RPL models are developed in a South African context. Every education and training sector will have to decide on a model that would suit its circumstances best.

In this chapter an RPL model for the ABET sector in South Africa will be developed and discussed within the framework that emerged in the previous chapters.

## 5.2 PRINCIPLES AND SYSTEMS OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

The essential principles for the development of an RPL model, as discussed in Chapter 4, are in accordance with the principles of the NQF (Geysers, 1999: 193; Rutherford, 1995: 122; Harris & Saddington, 1995: 26 and Cohen *et al*, 1994: 13). These principles, the minimum standards required for an effective RPL system (Chapter 2, section 2.8) as well as the following guidelines will be taken into consideration when developing an RPL model for adult learners:

- Validate the worth of learning they have achieved on their own.
- Demonstrate to them what they need to learn in order to achieve their potential, career or academic goals.
- Shorten the time necessary to earn credits for the various unit standards.
- Save them (or their company) money by reducing the number of courses they need to take.
- Enhance their pride and self-esteem for what they have accomplished as learners.
- Make them aware that learning is a lifelong process.

The RPL model of APEL, which is used at the University of Ulster, will also serve as a guideline in the development of the RPL model for the ABET sector in South Africa. This APEL model accommodates various options for assessing candidates. It is known as a Six-point Typology, and based on a set of six APEL systems. According to Bailey, O'Hagan & McAleavy (1998: 4) the methodologies used for each system focus on the development of the individual and social recognition and, where learners require it, accreditation. Each method relies on the notion of personal reflection. This enables the applicant to become familiar with his/her learning whilst at the same time recognising the value of his/her experience.

The diagram of the Six-point Typology System is displayed in figure 5.1 on the following page.

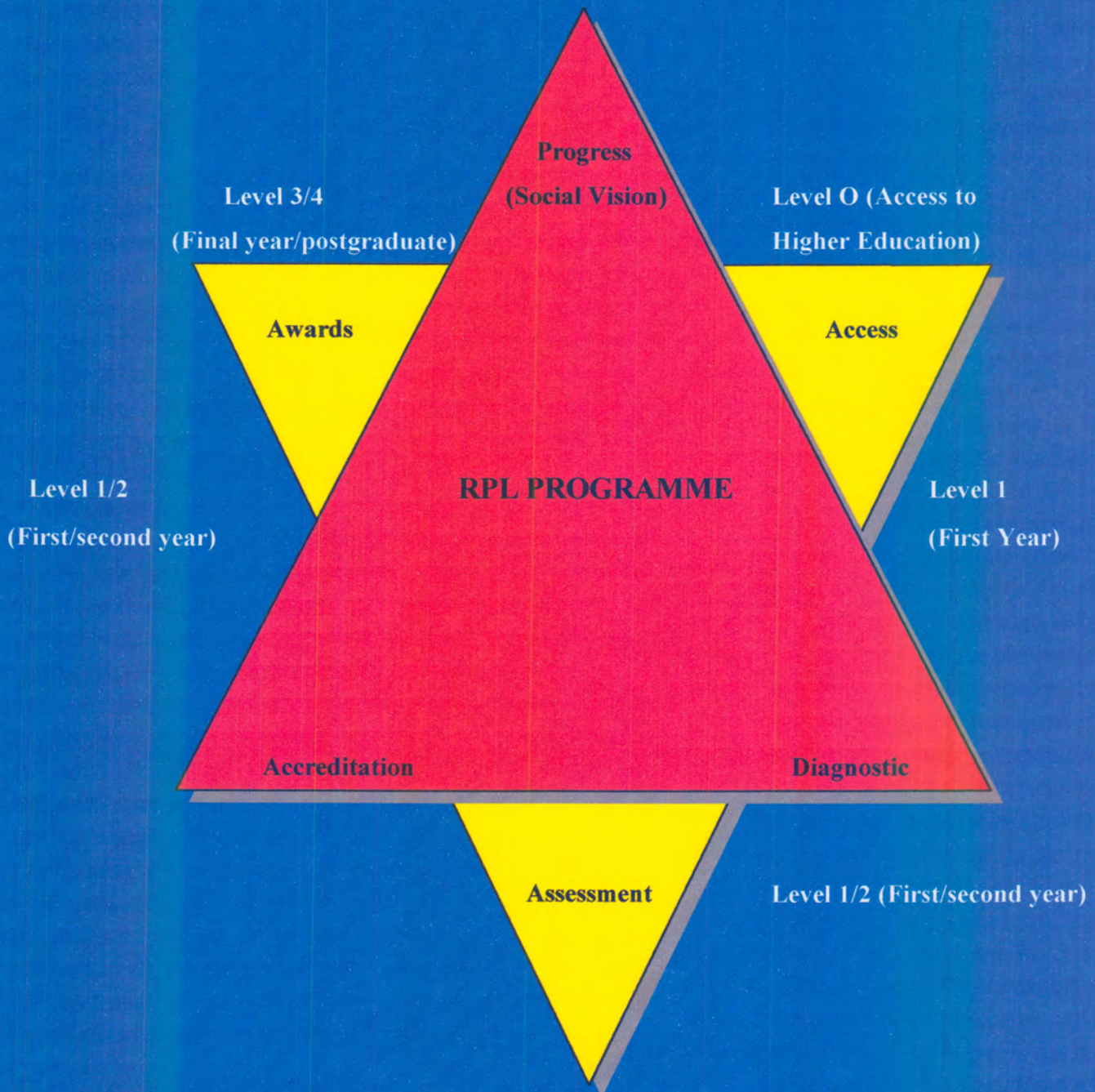




## FIGURE 5.1

### SIX-POINT TYPOLOGY

Level O (Access to Higher Education)



Source: Gawe, 1999: 24.



Gawe (1999: 24) explains the Six-point Typology as follows:

#### **5.2.1 SYSTEM 1: ACCESS**

The aim of the *Access system* is to enable applicants to demonstrate their learning and their capacity to undertake a course of study based on non-formal as well as informal learning acquired. An appropriate entry point allows the applicant to take up a course at the most appropriate level and not be required to spend time on skills already acquired.

#### **5.2.2 SYSTEM 2: DIAGNOSTIC**

The *Diagnostic system* offers applicants the opportunity to use APEL as a means of diagnosing their learning achievements by auditing their life, work and prior learning experiences.

#### **5.2.3 SYSTEM 3: ASSESSMENT**

The aim of the *Assessment system* is to offer applicants the opportunity to gain recognition by demonstrating experiential or certificated learning. In order to establish confidence and avoid repetition applicants should provide records of their achievements. It is difficult to assess learning that has not followed a traditional education route.

#### **5.2.4 SYSTEM 4: ACCREDITATION**

The *Accreditation system* focuses on the awarding of credits and thus certification in order to assist learners to gain entry at a higher level. The certification of achievement should be related to the formative and summative assessments made throughout the learning period (compare Burke, 1995: 161).

### **5.2.5 SYSTEM 5: AWARDS**

The *Awards system* is referred to as the work-based learning system which can be identified as past, current or planned experiential learning. Little or no formal teaching takes place and awards are carried out in the workplace (i.e. learners will receive certification for their past, current or experiential learning). According to Gawe (1999: 25) the awards system would approximate some but not all the needs of COSATU.

### **5.2.6 SYSTEM 6: PROGRESS**

The *Progress system* focuses on the programme of reflective learning. It could be used to assist disadvantaged or marginalised groups to participate in Higher Education. These groups at times fail to articulate correctly the kinds of skills they have and again it is essential to engage the services of an experienced assessor to guide the applicant.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the focus of the Six-point Typology system, as explained above, is on candidates who want to obtain access to Higher Education. The RPL model that will be developed in this study is applicable to the Adult Basic Education and Training sector.

## **5.3 DESIGN OF A RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING MODEL FOR THE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR**

### **5.3.1 TYPES OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

The NQF is an open system where people can enter and exit at any level. People will get recognition (credits) for their previous experiential learning and/or qualifications. The NQF will allow for the recognition of prior learning (see section 5.1). Skills and knowledge gained through formal or informal training as

well as through jobs and life experience will be assessed. The result of this assessment will be measured against a set of the appropriate unit standards (i.e. for the field of learning for which recognition is wanted) registered at a particular level of the NQF. If candidates meet the requirements of the unit standards, they will receive credits for their prior learning (compare Chapter 1, section 1.2.7.2).

However, it is important to note that there are *two types of RPL*:

- The recognition of prior *accredited* learning.
- The recognition of prior *experiential* learning.

According to Lockett (1999: 69) the *recognition of prior accredited learning* is relatively simple to implement, “...*provided there is a means of assigning value to both qualifications in terms of a common currency*”. The NQF has been established so that all qualifications across educational sectors will be registered on the NQF in terms of nationally agreed upon levels of complexity of the NQF and in terms of a uniform credit system. In this instance the *recognition of prior accredited learning* refers to exemption from certain programmes. In South Africa higher institutions have long been given exemptions across educational sectors.

The *recognition of prior experiential learning* is far more difficult to implement as according to Lockett (1999: 69) it “...*involves designing instruments which will capture, measure and evaluate learning which has been acquired experientially and informally in a range of differing contexts*”.

In South Africa the current discourse regarding RPL is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In developing an RPL model for the ABET sector, the *recognition of prior experiential learning* will be focused upon. A *support process* will be part of the ABET RPL model to ensure that potential RPL candidates are supported during the entire process.

### **5.3.2 PURPOSE OF A RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING MODEL FOR THE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR**

An RPL model for the ABET sector can serve two purposes:

- ❑ *Firstly*, RPL can be conducted for *diagnosis, prediction* and *access purposes*; and
- ❑ *Secondly*, it can be conducted for the *purpose of awarding credits*.

These purposes also correspond to the Six-point Typology system as described in section 5.2 (figure 5.1).

Only a *brief* description regarding these purposes will be given due to the fact that detailed step-by step processes for each purpose will be discussed in the sections to follow.

#### **5.3.2.1 *Diagnosis, Prediction and Access***

During this phase applicants' prior learning (usually non-formal and informal) will be judged to determine whether it is adequate for them to be admitted to a programme/course. As mentioned in section 5.2.1, the access phase will enable applicants to demonstrate their learning and their capacity to undertake a course of study based on non-formal and informal learning acquired.

#### **5.3.2.2 *Award of credits and exemption***

During this phase the candidate will be able to demonstrate that he/she has attained the learning outcomes prescribed for a particular module (through formal and non-formal learning). He/she can be awarded credit for it and exempted from having to take the module formally.

### **5.4 THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING PROCESS**

#### **5.4.1 *APPLICATION FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING***

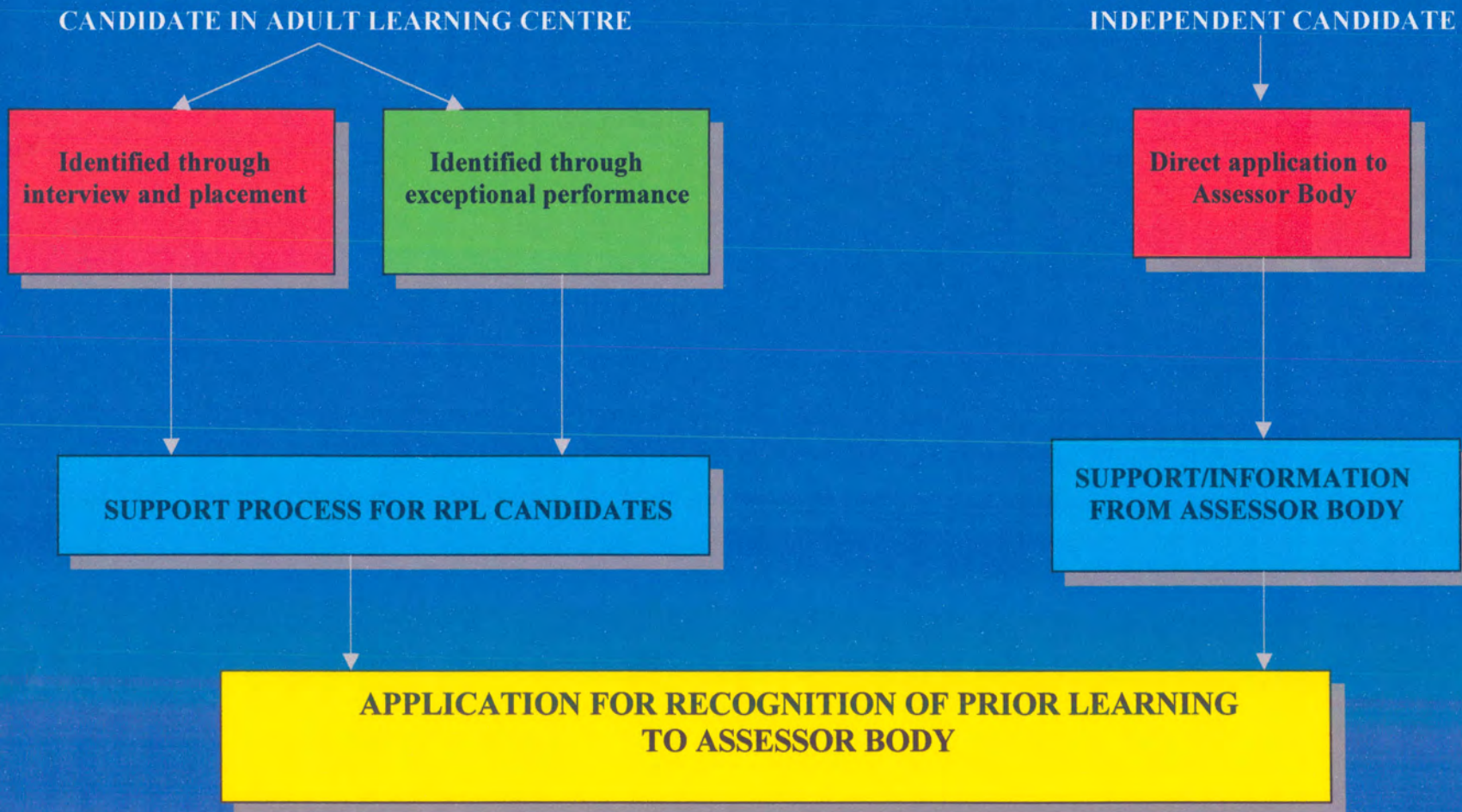
A candidate may apply for the recognition of her/his prior learning through an *Adult Learning Centre* (ALC) or directly to the appropriate accredited *Assessor Body*. Figure 5.2 represents possible routes that a candidate can follow when applying for RPL.





FIGURE 5.2

APPLYING FOR RPL



#### **5.4.1.1 APPLICATION THROUGH AN ADULT LEARNING CENTRE**

**(a) *Potential RPL candidates identified through an interview and/or placement assessment***

When adult learners come to an adult learning centre for the first time, they have to undergo placement assessments in order for them to be placed in the right learning area and at the appropriate ABET level. Before learners complete the selected placement assessment tasks, one of the educators can take learners for a short **private** interview. The interviewer should be a registered assessor.

***The interviewer has to explain that the interview is confidential and that learners should feel free to ask any questions that they have.***

Learners may be nervous when they come in for an interview. The interviewer should put them at ease and make sure that they understand the purpose of the interview. Background information to ABET at the centre as well as an explanation regarding the reason for doing the needs assessment should be given.

During the interview with the learners, the questionnaire on the following page (figure 5.3) can be utilised as a possible ***interview questionnaire***.





**INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE**

**SECTION A**

The interviewer must complete this section and fill in the learner's details. Ask the learner the following questions and write his/her response clearly. Draw a circle around the YES or NO response.

- 1. Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Surname: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. First name: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. ID number:
 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
- 6. Male/Female (tick the appropriate box):      M      F
- 7. Highest grade/standard passed: \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. Year in which this was passed: \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. Do you have hearing problems?     YES / NO
- 11. Do you have eye-sight problems?     YES / NO
- 12. Do you have other special needs (e.g. physical) \_\_\_\_\_
- 13. Home language: \_\_\_\_\_
- 14. Can you read and write in your home language? YES / NO
- 15. What other languages can you speak, read and write? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 16. How did you hear about this learning centre? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 17. What courses have you done since you have left school? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 18. What learning areas are you interested in? (Inform the learner what learning areas are offered by the centre.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 19. Why are you studying further? (tick the most appropriate box)
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Personal development	<input type="checkbox"/> To increase productive capacity
<input type="checkbox"/> Higher salary	<input type="checkbox"/> To obtain employment
<input type="checkbox"/> To obtain a qualification	



## SECTION B

The next three questions must be asked in *English*. If the interview has been in any other language, explain this to the learner. Mark the appropriate box with a tick (✓)

QUESTION	RESPONSE IS CLEAR	RESPONSE IS UNCLEAR AND LIMITED	NO RESPONSE AT ALL
1. Where were you born?			
2. What do you do at work?			
3. Tell me more about your family.			

## NOTES

1. Counsel the learner with regard to the recognition of prior learning (RPL) or possible learning paths to obtain credits and qualifications.
2. The Placement profile (at the end of section 5.4.1.1 (ii), figure 5.4) will be filled in once the learner has gone through the placement process for the various learning areas.
3. A copy of the placement profile will be kept by the learner in his/her file as well as by the educator.

**(i) Interview**

In **Section A**, the interviewer asks the questions and fills in the answers as well. **The learner must not write anything at this stage.** The interviewer can translate and ask the questions in any language that the learner requests.

When filling in the highest level the learner has passed it has to be kept in mind that a learner leaving school in the middle of the year, e.g. in Grade 3, has only passed Grade 2.

In **Section B**, the interviewer must ask questions in **English only**. This section assesses the understanding of the learner as well as his/her ability to respond to the questions in English.

At the end of the interview the learner can continue with the placement assessment tasks. The placement assessment will indicate the level(s) and learning programme most appropriate for the learner.

*During the first interview at a learning centre*, the interviewer may find that a learner has sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to apply for RPL. Potential RPL candidates will then be given the choice to go through a *support process* (section 5.4.2) before presenting themselves for RPL.

**(ii) Placement assessment**

According to the *Administrative guide for placement* (Department of Education, 1999b: 16), placement assessments are designed so that the level of difficulty rises throughout the task. The assessment starts with simple tasks and finishes with difficult tasks. The idea is that the assessment becomes more and more difficult with each question/task and demands more and more skill on the part of the learner. In this way the learner's level of skill (their prior learning) is shown by how much and what parts of the assessment they can complete correctly (compare Department of Education, 1998b: 42).

Once the learner has been interviewed, he/she will undergo *placement assessments in the different learning areas* (as determined during the interview), to determine the level at which the learner will be placed. These placement assessments will have to be developed by the learning area specialists at the adult learning centres, or the placement assessments that were developed by the national Department of Education (Adult Education and Training Directorate), in consultation with ABET stakeholders, can be utilised for this purpose. A placement profile must be filled in once the placement assessments have been conducted. *Placement assessments are not substitutes for RPL and learners cannot receive any credits for the results of the placement assessments.*

A possible placement profile that can be utilised is given in figure 5.4 on the following page.

**FIGURE 5.4**  
**PLACEMENT PROFILE**

LEVEL	LANG	MLMMS	NS	TECH	EMS	A&C	LO	HSS	ELECTIVE (SPECIFY)
4									
3									
2									
1									
MT 3									
MT 2									
MT 1									

**KEY: LEARNING AREAS<sup>1</sup> AND ELECTIVES**

<b>MLMMS:</b>	<b>Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences</b>
<b>NS:</b>	<b>Natural Sciences</b>
<b>TECH:</b>	<b>Technology</b>
<b>EMS:</b>	<b>Economic and Management Sciences</b>
<b>A&amp;C:</b>	<b>Arts and Culture</b>
<b>LO:</b>	<b>Life Orientation</b>
<b>HSS:</b>	<b>Human and Social Sciences</b>
<b>MT:</b>	<b>Mother Tongue Literacy</b>
<b>ELECTIVE:</b>	<b>(This must be specified by the interviewer)</b>

<sup>1</sup> PLEASE NOTE: The learning areas were determined by the Department of Education and fall within the twelve fields of learning identified by SAQA.

If a learner performs very well in the **placement assessment**, he/she will be advised to apply for RPL. Potential RPL candidates will then be given the choice to go through a *support process* (section 5.4.2) before presenting themselves for RPL.

***(b) Identified through exceptional performance in a learning programme***

An educator might identify a learner who is doing exceptionally well in a particular **learning programme**. This learner can be advised to request RPL, rather than complete the entire learning programme. This potential RPL candidate then has the choice of participating in a *support process* before presenting him/herself for RPL.

**5.4.1.2 DIRECT APPLICATION TO THE EDUCATION TRAINING  
QUALITY ASSURANCE BODY OR APPROPRIATE ASSESSOR  
BODY**

When individuals believe that they have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience, they can apply for RPL. These candidates present themselves directly to the Assessor Body, and are personally responsible for collecting sufficient evidence to demonstrate competence.

Assessor bodies are granted authority by the Education and Training Quality Assurance Body (ETQA) to assess evidence presented against specific unit standards. The RPL assessment should be conducted by a registered assessor from the assessor body. Assessor bodies need to be accessible to people throughout the country. This implies that regional offices need to be established in all provinces, taking the field of learning into consideration (for example, the assessor body dealing with the Mining unit standards and qualifications will not necessarily have a site in a province where no mining takes place). Assessor bodies should arrange to visit centres where RPL needs to be conducted. This should happen at least twice a year.



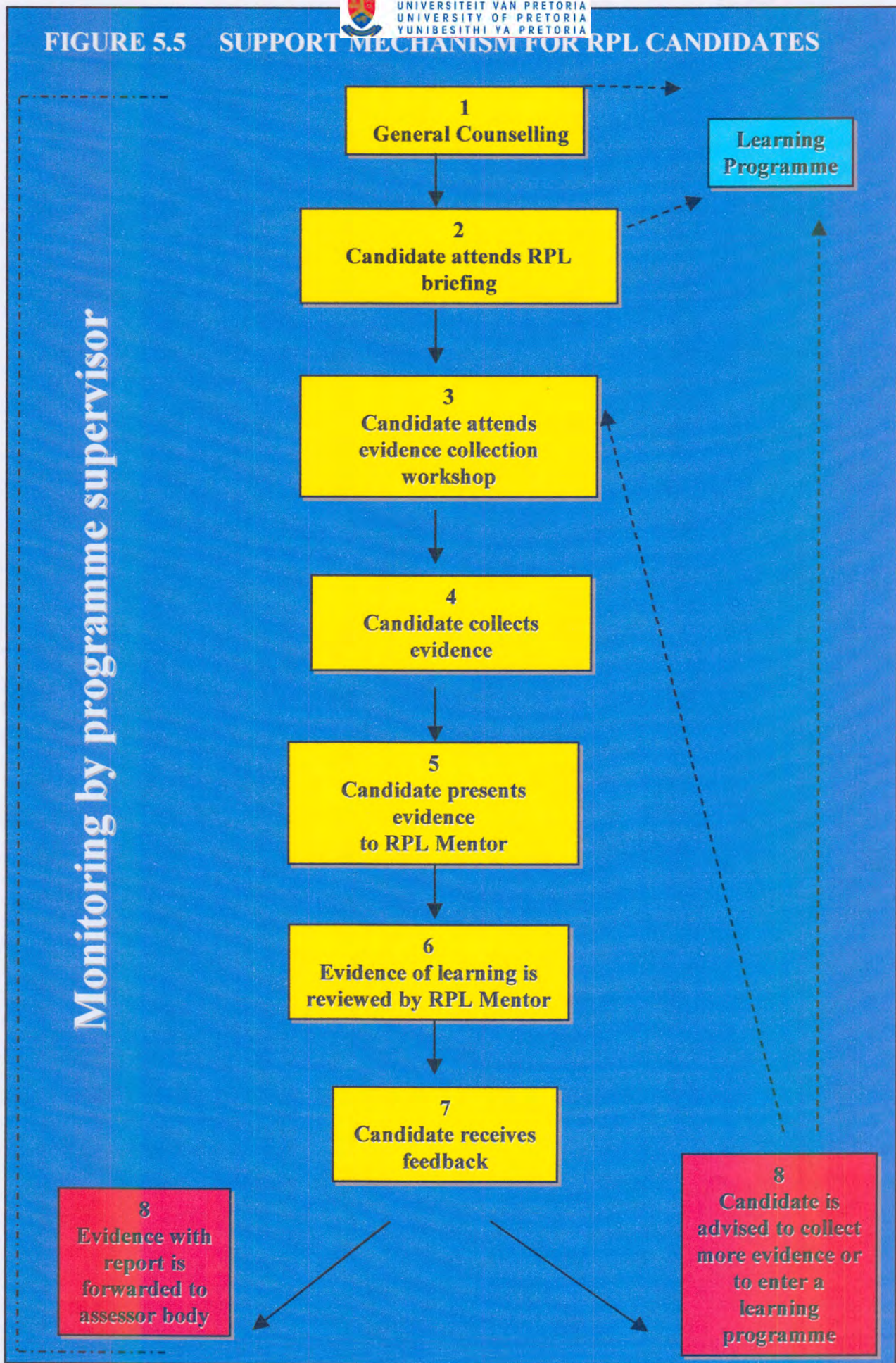
#### **5.4.2 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING CANDIDATES**

RPL candidates should be supported by means of counselling and guided in the collection of evidence. The *interview, placement assessment* and *support services* for RPL candidates (ABET), as designed in this study, correspond to system 1 (*Access system*) and system 2 (*Diagnostic system*) of the Six-point Typology system (see sections 5.2.1 & 5.2.2).

The *support process* (as designed in this study) will generally be offered by the adult learning centre, but the collection of evidence may result in the RPL mentor visiting the site where the candidate works in order to collect the appropriate evidence. In certain cases other people, for example line supervisors, may help workplace candidates to collect evidence of skills demonstrated in the work place. Candidates will have the choice of first going through the support process before presenting themselves for RPL.

A possible *support service* for an RPL candidate is illustrated in figure 5.5.

FIGURE 5.5 SUPPORT MECHANISM FOR RPL CANDIDATES





#### **5.4.2.1 COUNSELLING**

Each potential RPL candidate will attend a *counselling session*. The purpose of the counselling session is to establish the candidate's areas of interest and past experience. It will also create an opportunity for the candidates to think about their future goals and objectives at the same time as the counsellor discusses what is expected of candidates for RPL.

Figure 5.6 represents possible guidelines that can be utilised when conducting a *counselling session* during RPL. These steps can be adapted to meet individual circumstances.

## FIGURE 5.6

## GENERAL COUNSELLING SESSION

1. Make the candidate/s feel at ease.
2. Ask about the interests of the candidate/s.
3. Find out about the past learning experience of the candidate.  
List knowledge and skills that the candidate mentions and attempt to identify all the potential areas/fields of learning in which the candidate may be eligible for RPL. (It is important to incorporate prior learning experience in both education and training into the discussion.)
4. Ask the candidates where they see themselves in 3 – 5 – 10 years' time.
5. Explain what RPL is.
6. Why does the candidate want to apply for RPL?  
(This is to encourage the candidates to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of applying for RPL rather than participating in a learning programme.)
7. What is the NQF?  
(Give a very general explanation that informs candidates that adults can access the NQF at any level and that RPL is a principle of the NQF. Concrete examples of individuals accessing the NQF without formal training would be useful here. Prepare some examples to which the candidates can relate.)
8. What are unit standards?  
(Keep this simple - e.g. *“These are documents that explain what you will need to know and be able to do in order to have prior learning recognised so that credits can be awarded.”*)



9. What are the qualifications or learnerships that can be accessed by the candidates after RPL in this instance?
10. Discuss the various routes to RPL - e.g. attending *support workshops* to gather evidence versus applying directly to the Assessor Body as an independent candidate.
11. Discuss the roles and responsibilities of RPL candidates. Ensure that the candidate understands clearly that it will be up to him/her to collect the evidence necessary to show competence for each specific unit standard. Try to ascertain whether the candidate will have the self-management skills necessary to undertake the RPL process. If this is problematic, consider recommending that the candidate enters a learning programme that will offer more support.
12. If RPL is offered by the adult learning centre, make the logistical arrangements for the candidate to meet with the RPL mentor/s responsible for RPL of the relevant unit standards. If RPL is not offered by the adult learning centre, the RPL mentor should assist the candidate in making the initial arrangements.
13. Give the candidate time to ask any questions he/she has.
14. Close the counselling session once the candidate is clear about the next step in the process. Motivate the candidates and help them to develop a vision of their *lifelong learning*, a belief in themselves and their ability to succeed.

#### **5.4.2.2 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING BRIEFING SESSION**

RPL mentor(s) who are familiar with the appropriate unit standards should be assigned to the candidates. The RPL mentor needs to arrange a time to meet with the RPL candidate in order to work out the details of the RPL process for each unit standard for which the candidate wants recognition. The mentor will give the candidate information concerning the unit standards, their specific outcomes and assessment criteria, and explain how the candidate will be assessed against these standards and outcomes. The mentor will discuss the different ways in which the candidate can collect and/or generate the necessary evidence.

Figure 5.7 represents possible guidelines that can be utilised when conducting an *RPL briefing session*. These steps can be adapted to meet individual circumstances.



## **FIGURE 5.7**                      **GUIDELINES FOR BRIEFING SESSION**

(Please Note: where a fairly high level of literacy is required e.g. guidelines no. 2 & 5, the RPL mentor will have to explain in easy understandable language what is required of the candidate.)

1. The RPL mentor needs to identify the specific unit standards and the specific levels that are applicable to the candidates' knowledge and skills.
2. These unit standards should be given to the candidate, and the mentor should go through these with the candidate. The credit value of the standards, the specific outcomes, assessment criteria and relevant range statements should be explained to the candidate. How the standards relate to a qualification, learnership and/or skills programme should also be discussed if this is relevant.
3. The appeal procedure must be explained.
4. The procedure for gathering evidence should be discussed with the candidate. It should be explained that it is the candidates' own responsibility to collect the evidence.
5. The RPL mentor should explain what type of evidence would be required to demonstrate competence in a particular specific outcome or unit standard. The candidate should be supplied with the table categorising different types of evidence.
6. A variety of evidence should be combined to ensure that each candidate will have the best opportunity to demonstrate prior learning.
7. The guidelines and conditions governing what kind of evidence is admissible should be discussed with the candidate.
8. The procedure for assessing the evidence should be explained to the candidate. The timeframes for gathering of evidence, dates of workshops with the RPL mentor and the date of the RPL assessment should be given to the candidate.
9. At this stage the candidate should decide whether s/he wants to go through with the RPL process, or whether s/he rather chooses to enter a learning programme. If the candidate wants to be assessed for RPL, formal application needs to be made. This ensures that the candidate is committed to the process. Once this has been done the RPL mentor is obliged to submit whatever evidence is collected as well as details of the support process to a registered assessor.

### 5.4.2.3 *EVIDENCE COLLECTION WORKSHOPS (SUPPORT SESSIONS)*

*Evidence collection workshops (support sessions)* can be conducted to assist potential RPL candidates to collect the appropriate evidence to prove prior learning.

During these workshops the mentor provides guidelines, advice and support to the candidate regarding the collection of evidence. These workshops should not become a form of tuition and/or replacement of a learning programme. The mentor must ensure that the evidence is the work of the candidate and not that of the mentor. If a candidate disagrees with the mentor on this issue, s/he can approach the assessor directly for the RPL assessment. Refer to section 2.9.2.3, Chapter 2, (b) ii and iii of this study regarding the types of evidence that a candidate can submit as well as the conditions for acceptable evidence.

During these support sessions, the candidate presents evidence to the mentor. The mentor identifies which evidence is acceptable and which is not acceptable according to the conditions for evidence for that learning area. The acceptable evidence is used to determine whether the assessment criteria of the relevant specific outcomes have been met. At each session, the RPL mentor, together with the candidate, should draw up a plan of action which details the evidence to be collected, sets deadlines for this evidence to be presented to the RPL mentor and a date for the next session with the RPL mentor. This action plan should outline steps and tasks that the candidate can manage independently and must ensure that he/she leaves the workshop (support session) understanding exactly what to do and where to go.

A possible *RPL action plan* that can be utilised is reflected in figure 5.8 on the following page.

**FIGURE 5.8**

**EVIDENCE COLLECTION SUPPORT SESSION**

**RPL ACTION PLAN**

**CANDIDATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**UNIT STANDARD (S):**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

<b>EVIDENCE TO BE COLLECTED</b>	<b>HOW</b>	<b>DATE TO BE PRESENTED TO RPL MENTOR</b>	<b>DONE</b> ✓

During this period, if the mentor becomes aware that the candidate is not able to present sufficient evidence, the mentor can advise the candidate to enter a learning programme instead of following the RPL process. In this instance, the evidence collected thus far, as well as a report must still be submitted to the assessor. If the candidate chooses to continue with the RPL process, the mentor should continue supporting the candidate.

The mentor should discuss what further evidence is necessary to demonstrate competence in the specific outcomes not yet met. This process continues until all requirements for the specific outcomes have been fulfilled, or until the candidate is no longer able to present further evidence. On the date of the assessment, the support process also comes to an end and the evidence is submitted to the assessor.

#### ***5.4.2.4 CANDIDATE COLLECTS AND/OR GENERATES EVIDENCE***

The process of collecting evidence can be a learning experience for the candidate. The evidence support sessions will have informed him/her what kind of evidence to generate or collect as well as the due date. This information will be in the action plan of the candidate. The unit standards inform the candidate of which criteria will be utilised in determining whether his/her evidence meets the required standards. Regardless of the way in which the evidence is presented, the candidate must make sure that nothing from his/her experience and prior learning has been omitted.

The candidate will have to use his or her own judgement when putting together a good set of evidence. Converting life, work and learning experience into sufficient evidence is not easy, and can itself be a learning experience. Evidence collection support sessions should allow for reflection on the life experiences of the candidate as well as ways in which these can be used to provide evidence of competence for the specific unit standard.

#### **5.4.2.5 CANDIDATE PRESENTS EVIDENCE TO THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING MENTOR**

The candidate is permitted to present and re-present evidence to the mentor until such time as the mentor and candidate agree that there is sufficient evidence of the appropriate quality.

This may mean that the mentor must do a site visit.

#### **Role of RPL Mentor – Role of Registered Assessor**

In cases where RPL mentors are also **registered assessors**, they should be clear concerning the role they are playing at different stages of the RPL process. During the RPL **support process**, the role is that of **mentoring** the candidate. Once the final evidence is ready to be assessed, the role is that of an assessor who makes an overall judgement regarding all the evidence presented.

Note that for quality assurance purposes, external moderation is still required.

The evidence presented should meet the required conditions for evidence, i.e. it should be **valid, authentic, current, sufficient, at the required level and reliable** (refer to section 2.9.2.3, (b) iii). For example, in the case of a unit standard entitled: “ Start, Run and Adapt a Business”, the evidence could be in the form of either bank statements, direct observations, testimonials, oral evidence, a business plan or an audit report.

#### **5.4.2.6 EVIDENCE IS REVIEWED BY RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING MENTOR**

The RPL mentor will review the evidence of prior learning collected by the candidate thus far and will check it against the assessment criteria of the appropriate unit standard(s). He/she will consider how the evidence could be organised so that the assessor will be able to make the appropriate judgement. At the same time, the RPL mentor will plan the feedback session for the candidate.

#### **5.4.2.7 CANDIDATE RECEIVES FEEDBACK**

The candidate should receive feedback from the RPL mentor's review of the evidence. This session should include guidance regarding the submission of the evidence to the assessor. At this point the candidate and mentor together decide whether more evidence is required or whether the evidence is sufficient to be submitted to the assessor.

If more evidence is needed, a new plan of action is negotiated and the candidate collects more evidence. If it becomes apparent that the candidate is not able to collect the evidence required, he/she may decide to stop attending the RPL evidence collecting support sessions and enter a learning programme. The RPL mentor should nevertheless ensure that all evidence and relevant comments are forwarded to the assessor body.

Once the candidate is of the opinion that he/she is ready to submit the evidence to the assessor, the RPL mentor must complete an *RPL Evidence Collection Grid* and document the RPL support process as used by the candidate. A possible Evidence Collection Grid that can be utilised has been included in figure 5.9a. An example of how such a grid can be completed has been included as figure 5.9b (the draft unit standards that have been developed for Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises - hereafter referred to as SMME – ABET level 4, have been utilised in the example).



FIGURE 5.9a

RPL - GRID FOR COLLECTION OF EVIDENCE

<b>Centre Name:</b>		<b>Centre No.:</b>			<b>Date:</b>	<b>Y</b>		<b>M</b>		<b>D</b>	
<b>Candidate Name:</b>		<b>ID NO.:</b>									
<b>Candidate Reg No.:</b>		<b>Grid No.:</b>									
<b>Sub-field Unit:</b>		<b>Unit Standard Title:</b>									
	<b>Evidence 1</b>	<b>Evidence 2</b>	<b>Evidence 3</b>	<b>Evidence 4</b>	<b>Evidence 5</b>	<b>Evidence 6</b>	<b>Evidence 7</b>	<b>Evidence 8</b>	<b>Evidence 9</b>	<b>Bitumeli</b>	
<b>1. Strategies / tools to gain evidence</b>											
<b>2. Is this evidence from a reliable objective source?</b>											
<b>3. Is this evidence corroborated (supported)?</b>											
<b>4. Is this evidence from where it claims to be?</b>											
<b>5. Is it the candidate's own or does the evidence pertain to the candidate?</b>											
<b>COMMENTS</b>											
<b>Evidence Admissible [Yes / No]</b>											
<b>Candidate's signature</b>											
<b>RPL Mentor signature</b>											
<b>Assessor signature</b>											
<b>Moderator signature</b>											



FIGURE 5.9b

RPL - GRID FOR COLLECTION OF EVIDENCE

(The following is an example of how the grid can be filled in)

Centre Name:	Tshailo-time Centre			Centre No.:	A/005832			Date:	Y	2000		M	04		D	28	
Candidate Name:	Peter Dumane			ID NO.:	7	8	0	5	2	2	0	3	2	1	0	8	7
Candidate Reg No.:	5832-020			Grid No.:	0	8	5	0	0	5	1	2	-	0			
Sub-field Unit:	SMME 004			Unit Standard Title:	Demonstrate the ability to start and run a business and adapt to a changing business environment												
	Evidence 1	Evidence 2	Evidence 3	Evidence 4	Evidence 5	Evidence 6	Evidence 7	Evidence 8	Evidence 9	Evidence 10							
1. Strategies / tools to gain evidence	Business plan	Record of receipts & payments of own business	Interview on "SWT"	Business licence and duplicate registration forms/ number	On-site visit of business	Bank Statements	Business implementation plan	Testimonial 1 on how business is run	Testimonial 2 on how business is run	Oral presentation of business plan							
2. Is this evidence from a reliable / objective source?	See ev.10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓							
3. Is this evidence corroborated (supported)?	See ev.10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓							
4. Is this evidence from where it claims to be?	See ev.10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
5. Is it the candidate's own or does the evidence pertain to the candidate?	See ev.10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Comments:	To be verified through oral presentation (evidence 9)			Observation of business to be carried out as evidence 5		Only old chequebooks (1988) submitted. Need more current ones	Deposit slips dated from 1988 through to 1996 - nothing current	Mother-in-law. Need more objective source to support	State. Need more objective source to support								
Evidence Admissible [Yes / No]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes							
Candidate's signature																	
RPL Mentor signature																	
Assessor signature																	
Moderator signature																	

The RPL mentor may indicate whether he/she has recommended that this evidence meets all the requirements for RPL or whether the candidate has taken an independent decision to submit the evidence. Copies of the final documents should be handed to the RPL mentor and be signed by both parties. It is important to remember that no judgement decisions were made during this support process. The RPL mentor only acts in an advisory capacity during this process.

In summary, the responsibilities of the mentor are:

- To help the candidate organise and present the evidence in a logical and accessible manner.
- To make sure that copies of evidence exist, in case originals sent to the assessor are misplaced.
- To assist the candidate in submitting the evidence portfolio to the assessor by the final assessment date.
- To provide mediation and counselling throughout the process. This includes the counselling and mediation of the final judgement after the assessor has seen the evidence.

#### ***5.4.3 ASSESSMENT OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING CANDIDATES***

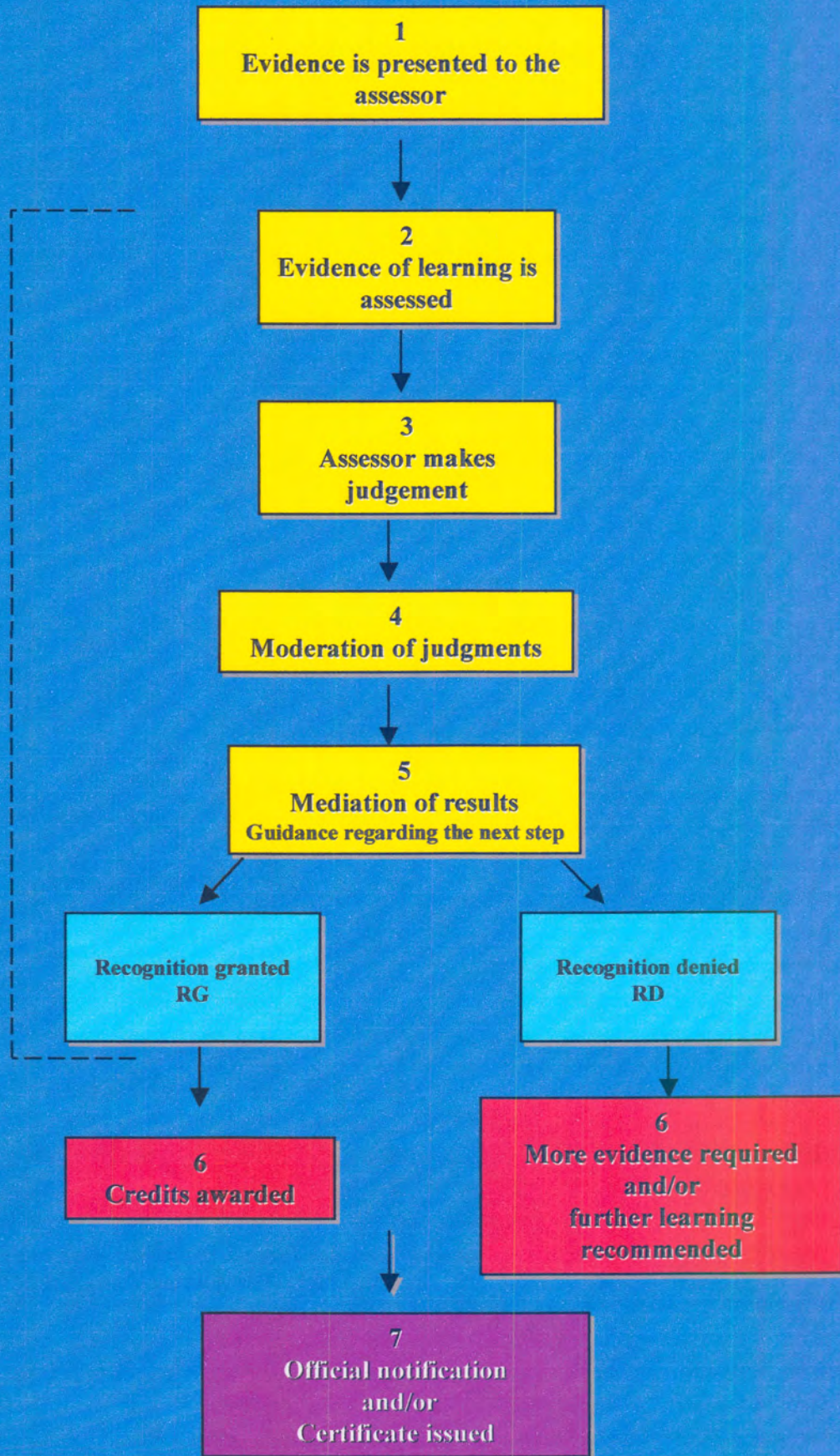
An assessor registered with the relevant ETQA should conduct the assessment of RPL candidates. This process corresponds to systems 3, 4, 5 and to some extent system 6 of the Six-point Typology system (see section 5.2). The possible steps that can be followed during an *assessment process* are illustrated in figure 5.10.





**FIGURE 5.10 ASSESSMENT OF RPL CANDIDATES**

Monitoring and evaluation by ETQA



#### **5.4.3.1 EVIDENCE IS PRESENTED TO THE ASSESSOR**

All candidates for RPL must submit evidence for **assessment**. Independent candidates will submit their evidence directly to the assessor body. Candidates who have made use of the ALC support service will have their evidence forwarded to the assessor body by the centre.

All the evidence submitted by the candidate *via* an adult learning centre, must be accompanied by the following:

- a report from the mentor who supported the candidate; and
- a relevant RPL grid.

#### **5.4.3.2 EVIDENCE OF LEARNING IS ASSESSED**

Although the RPL mentor will have indicated that the evidence of the candidate meets the relevant conditions, i.e. *valid, authentic, current, sufficient, at the required level and reliable*, the assessor should verify this (see section 5.4.2.5).

The assessor assesses all the individual evidence against the specific outcomes for the unit standards concerned. He/she must also determine whether there is enough evidence to make a judgement. Based on this assessment, a judgement will be made as to whether the evidence demonstrates the candidate's competence. If the evidence presented is not sufficient to make a judgement, the assessor, at his/her discretion may decide to interview the candidate or do an on-site observation. The assessor should then complete the assessment grid for each unit standard and signs it off.

#### **5.4.3.3 ASSESSOR MAKES JUDGEMENT**

Once the evidence has been assessed, the assessor can make one of two judgements.



- (a) **Recognition Granted (RG)** – i.e. the evidence presented shows that the candidate meets the specific outcomes for the unit standard and can be awarded the credits for the applicable unit standard.
- (b) **Recognition Denied (RD)** – i.e. the evidence presented shows that the candidate does not meet the specific outcomes of the unit standard and no credits can be awarded.

#### **5.4.3.4 MODERATION OF JUDGEMENT**

The decisions of all assessors must be moderated by a registered moderator appointed by the assessor body or the relevant ETQA. It is suggested that 1 of every 3 judgement decisions are moderated. An external moderator must be appointed.

#### **5.4.3.5 MEDIATION OF RESULTS**

The RPL candidates have the right to *a fair, transparent and confidential* discussion of their performance. Candidates have a right to know why the assessor has made a particular judgement and should be reminded about the appeal procedure (refer to section 5.5 for a detailed description of the appeal procedure).

Recognition of prior learning candidates from adult learning centres may have their results mediated *via* their RPL mentor.

All feedback should be relevant to the unit standards and the expected outcomes:

- If the prior learning of the candidate is *recognised (RG)*, explain that the evidence was sufficient and what further learning options are available to the candidate now that he/she has obtained these credits. This may include information regarding learning programmes, courses and career path options



(including possible learnerships). The candidate must be informed that the results will be forwarded to the ETQA which will officially award the credits.

- ❑ If *recognition is denied (RD)*, reasons for this decision must be explained to the candidate. The candidate needs to be informed about his/her options at this stage. As the candidate was found not to have the prior learning and experience required for the relevant unit standard, ways of achieving this competence need to be discussed. In most cases, a candidate will need to participate in some sort of learning programme in order to be capable of achieving the outcomes required and collecting further evidence.

#### **5.4.3.6 AWARDING OF CREDITS/ OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION AND / OR CERTIFICATE ISSUED**

The assessor should forward the assessment grids to the relevant ETQA office for recording of the credits. Thereafter official notification of the candidate will take place either directly or *via* the learning centre. If the moderation has not been done the ETQA should appoint a moderator.

Once the ETQA is satisfied that the process has been followed correctly and that the assessment and moderation have been done, the relevant credits should be recorded in a reliable data capturing system. Official notification should be sent to the candidate. If the candidate has gained all the credits for a full qualification, the relevant certificate will also be issued to the candidate. An ETQA official should record that this has been done by completing the relevant section of the assessment grid.

An assessment grid that can be used is included in figure 5.11a on the following page. An example of how it can be completed is included as figure 5.11b (the draft unit standards that have been developed for SMME, ABET level 4, have been utilised in the example).

FIGURE 5.11a


**ASSESSMENT GRID OF CREDITS FOR A UNIT STANDARD**  
 UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
 UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
 YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

<b>Centre Name:</b>		<b>Centre No.:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	<b>Y</b>		<b>M</b>		<b>D</b>	
<b>Candidate Name:</b>		<b>ID NO.:</b>								
<b>Candidate Reg. No.:</b>		<b>Assessment Grid No.:</b>								
<b>Sub-field Unit:</b>		<b>Unit Standard Title:</b>								

	Ev.	Ev.	Ev.	Ev.	Ev.	Ev.	Ev.	Ev.	Ev.	Sufficient (Yes/No)	Moderator
<b>Types of evidence</b>											
<b>SO 1</b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome											
<b>SO 2</b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome											
<b>SO 3</b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome											
<b>SO 4</b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome											
<b>SO 5</b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome											
<b>SO 6</b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome											

**COMMENTS:**

**JUDGEMENT**

<b>ASSESSOR</b>	RG	RD	Name:	Reg. No.	Sign:	Date:
<b>MODERATOR</b>	Name:		Reg. No.	Sign:	Date:	
	Comments:					
<b>ETQA</b>	Date received:		Credits Awarded:		Notification forwarded:	
	Sign:		Sign:		Sign:	

FIGURE 5.11b

ASSESSMENT GRID

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

OF CREDITS FOR A UNIT STANDARD

(The following is a grid that can be filled out)

Centre Name:	<i>Tshaile-time Centre</i>	Centre No.:	<i>A/005832</i>				Date:	Y	<i>2000</i>		M	<i>04</i>		D	<i>28</i>	
Candidate Name:	<i>Peter Dumane</i>	ID NO.:	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>7</i>	
Candidate Reg. No.:	<i>5832-020</i>		Assessment Grid No.:	<i>0</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	-	<i>0</i>			
Sub-field Unit:	<i>SMME 004</i>	Unit Standard Title:	<i>Demonstrate the ability to start and run a business and adapt to a changing business environment</i>													

TYPES OF EVIDENCE (refer to example in figure 5. 9b)	Ev. 1	Ev. 2	Ev. 3	Ev. 4	Ev. 5	Ev. 6	Ev. 7	Ev. 10	Sufficient (Yes/No)	Moderator
<i>Business plan</i>		<i>Record of receipts &amp; payments</i>	<i>Interview on spot</i>	<i>Licence &amp; registration form</i>	<i>On-site visit of business</i>	<i>Bank statements</i>	<i>Licence &amp; registration form</i>	<i>Old business implementation plan</i>		
<b>SO 1 <i>How to start a business</i></b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met. c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome	✓ ✓			✓ ✓					No	
<b>SO 2 <i>How to run a business</i></b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met. c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome	✓ ✓			✓		✓ <i>(1988)</i>	✓		No	
<b>SO 3 <i>How to adapt a business</i></b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met. c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome	✓ ✓		✓ ✓ ✓				✓		Yes	
<b>SO 4</b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met. c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome										
<b>SO 5</b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met. c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome										
<b>SO 6</b> a) The assessment criteria of the specific outcomes are met. b) The level required by the US has been met. c) The candidate can still demonstrate the specific outcome										

COMMENTS: *Did not turn up for oral presentation of his business plan. Did not bring up-to-date material. Unable to credit candidate for observation of his business as scheduled on 25/04/2000 because his uncle was running the business on that day and candidate was absent.*

JUDGEMENT

ASSESSOR	RG	RD	✓	Name: <i>A Twala</i>	Reg. No. <i>553 987</i>	Sign:	Date: <i>4/05/2000</i>
MODERATOR	Name: <i>T Sithole</i>		Reg. No. <i>699 322</i>		Sign:	Date: <i>8/05/2000</i>	
COMMENTS: <i>Must present up-to-date information before recognition can be granted.</i>							
ETQA	Date received:		Credits Awarded:			Notification forwarded:	
	Sign:		Sign:			Sign:	

## 5.5 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING APPEAL PROCEDURE

The appeal procedure should be available to all candidates in the RPL system. This procedure is integral to outcomes-based assessment. Due to the fact that candidates have had no recourse in the past, all candidates will need to be informed about the appeal procedure and how they can access it. This information has to be clearly explained to all candidates.

Appeals cannot be lodged during the support process as the RPL mentor is not in a position to make any judgements. The RPL mentor should only review the evidence of the candidate and supply advice on how this can be improved and presented. The programme supervisor of the adult learning centre should deal with problems during the support phase internally.

Once the evidence has been forwarded to the assessor and a judgement has been made, the appeal procedure can be accessed. Candidates may appeal if they disagree with any judgement decision.

The following stages are recommended for the appeal procedure:

### 5.5.1 STAGE 1

If the judgement is *Recognition Denied (RD)* due to insufficient evidence, the candidate must attempt to collect additional evidence and resubmit this to the **assessor** at least one more time before lodging an appeal. It should be the joint responsibility of the RPL mentor and the candidate to draft an Action Plan that outlines the additional evidence to be collected before the appeal is lodged.

The candidate can lodge an appeal (stating on what ground(s) the appeal is based) within one week of the decision. The candidate should complete an appeal form. A copy of this form should be submitted to the RPL mentor as well as the Programme Supervisor. The RPL mentor should inform the assessor that an



appeal has been lodged and forward the appeal form to the assessor. **The assessor will be responsible for dealing with the matter.**

The assessor will have to respond, to the appeal and supply concise, cogent reasons for his/her decision. If applicable, the necessary amendments must be made. (It is recommended that this process should not take longer than two weeks.)

If the candidate accepts the explanation or the adjusted decision of the assessor, the case will be settled. If the candidate is still not satisfied, the appeal will proceed to Stage 2.

### **5.5.2 STAGE 2**

The appeal should be submitted to the Programme Supervisor who will forward all the relevant documentation the **Assessor Body**. Feedback (in writing) regarding the outcome should be mediated to the Programme Supervisor as well as the candidate. If the candidate is satisfied, the case will be settled. If the candidate is still not satisfied, the appeal will proceed to stage 3.

### **5.5.3 STAGE 3**

If the candidate is still not satisfied, the appeal should be submitted to the Programme Supervisor to investigate and refer it to the relevant **ETQA** if this is deemed necessary. The Programme Supervisor has to mediate the final decision of the ETQA to the candidate.

## **5.6 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE**

It will be important for an adult learning centre that provides RPL to demonstrate on an on-going basis that it is not offering a “cheap” or “easy” route to credits or qualifications. Establishing a quality assurance system within the organisation

may be just as important as establishing one that includes external verifiers. Management at adult learning centres that offer RPL should identify quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that the assessment process is valid, reliable, transparent, and flexible. Refer to Chapter 2, section 2.12 and figure 2.7 regarding the standards for quality assurance.

In the following section the role players at the various levels in an RPL process will be discussed. All these role players should play an important role with regard to the quality assurance of the entire process.

## **5.7 ROLE-PLAYERS AT ALL LEVELS IN THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING PROCESS**

### ***5.7.1 ROLE-PLAYERS IN A RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING PROCESS: REQUIREMENTS AND FUNCTIONS***

Although the researcher recognises that, in most cases, the role-players involved in the Recognition of Prior Learning process will perform more than one function, for the purpose of this study the roles have been defined separately.

The following rules of conduct should apply to all RPL staff. They should

- seek advice from peers or specialists when this is required or they are in doubt;
- not prevent candidates from progressing to ensure learner numbers;
- not accept bribes in any form to alter evidence in any way;
- report irregularities;
- assess and review learning in relation to the standards and not the candidates;
- ensure that candidates never leave without feedback and a follow-up plan;
- not interfere with the moderation process.



### 5.7.1.1 CANDIDATES

#### (a) REQUIREMENTS

- Candidates should have prior learning relevant to the unit standards to be assessed.

#### (b) FUNCTIONS

The candidates should:

- ◆ either apply independently or *via* a learning centre for RPL.
- ◆ collect and present evidence.
- ◆ understand the outcomes stated in the relevant unit standard/s.
- ◆ co-operate with the internal assessor.
- ◆ attend scheduled Evidence Collection Workshops.
- ◆ meet the timeframes as stipulated.

### 5.7.1.2 PROGRAMME SUPERVISOR

#### (a) REQUIREMENTS

- The Programme Supervisor must have knowledge of RPL systems and processes as well as the management of quality assurance.
- The Programme Supervisor must have knowledge of outcomes-based assessment principles.
- The Programme Supervisor does not need to be familiar with *specific* unit standards.
- The Programme Supervisor has to be accredited with the unit standards related to the assessor (refer to the Education, Training and Development of the Practitioner - hereafter referred to as ETDP - unit standards as well as the unit standards for assessors in general).

- The Programme Supervisor must have knowledge of the unit standards relating to the moderator (refer to the ETDP Unit standards as well as the unit standards for moderators in general).
- The Programme Supervisor must be based in the learning centre.

**(b) FUNCTIONS**

**In administering the RPL process, the Programme Supervisor must**

- ◆ establish an RPL system in the learning centre.
- ◆ ensure advocacy of RPL.
- ◆ co-ordinate RPL processes and the internal quality assurance of RPL.
- ◆ manage the initial interview process for new learners.
- ◆ manage placement assessment processes.
- ◆ play a monitoring role of the entire RPL process against the assessment principles (see Chapter 4 for a description of these principles).
- ◆ deal with appeals that reach Stages 2 and 3 (see appeal procedure). The Programme Supervisor must investigate and mediate or refer the appeal to the assessor body and the relevant ETQA.
- ◆ delegate certain of these functions to the Heads of Department.
- ◆ ensure that there is external moderation.

**5.7.1.3 MENTOR**

**(a) REQUIREMENTS**

- The mentor should be accredited with the unit standards regarding support to adult candidates (ETDP Unit Standard).
- The mentor should be accredited or at least familiar with the unit standards related to assessment (ETDP Unit Standard as well as the unit standards for assessors in general).

- ❑ The mentor should be accredited with the unit standard regarding the NQF (ETDP Unit Standard).
- ❑ The mentor should be based in the Learning Centre and report to the Programme Supervisor/ Co-ordinator.
- ❑ The mentor should be a field/ sub-field of learning-specialist.
- ❑ Optional: The mentor should be registered as an assessor with the ETQA for *specific* unit standards.

**(b) FUNCTIONS**

**In respect of the candidate, the mentor should**

- ◆ counsel all potential RPL candidates.
- ◆ mediate the results of the Placement Process to the candidates.
- ◆ explain the RPL/learning programme options and routes to the candidates.
- ◆ prepare candidates for the RPL process and support them throughout.
- ◆ design a potential career/learning path with and for the candidates.
- ◆ clearly outline the responsibilities of the candidates. The mentor should explain the assessment process, the timeframes and costs of the RPL process.
- ◆ ensure that candidates have copies of the relevant unit standards, and understand the outcomes to be achieved.
- ◆ draw up assessment plans together with candidates.
- ◆ arrange and facilitate evidence collection workshops.
- ◆ document evidence collection workshops and keep records.
- ◆ give constructive feedback regarding evidence to candidates.
- ◆ ensure that the candidates have sufficient self-management skills and motivation to proceed with the RPL process.
- ◆ ensure that candidates understand the appeal procedure.
- ◆ forward evidence from candidates to the assessor.
- ◆ mediate the final decision to candidates if the assessor is not available.
- ◆ keep records of evidence grids and appeals.



### **In administering the RPL process, the mentor should**

- ◆ have an overview of the fields of learning of the NQF, and he/she should know how to ascertain which qualifications and unit standards might apply to a candidate.
- ◆ identify the knowledge and skills of a candidate and match these to specific unit standards within NQF level 1 and above.
- ◆ know the policy regarding the rules of combination for a GETC qualification.
- ◆ know where to obtain information regarding learnerships that might be relevant for the candidate in the GET band.
- ◆ know all other sites where RPL can be conducted in the area accessible to the candidate.
- ◆ link and liaise with assessors from workplaces, other education and training institutions and communities in the area.
- ◆ network with mentors in other learning centres in order to stay up to date with the latest developments as well as to share ideas.
- ◆ update his/her own knowledge on national policy regarding the NQF and SAQA.

#### **5.7.1.4 ASSESSOR**

##### **(a) REQUIREMENTS**

The **assessor** should be

- a field/sub-field of learning-specialist.
- registered as an assessor with the ETQA for the *specific* sub-field unit standards.
- accredited with the unit standard(s) regarding assessment (ETDP Unit Standard as well as the unit standards for assessors in general).
- accredited with the unit standard regarding support to the candidates (ETDP Unit Standard).

- accredited with the unit standard regarding the NQF (ETDP Unit Standard).
- accountable to the Assessor Body and ETQA for registration as an assessor.

**(b) FUNCTIONS**

**In administering the RPL process, the assessor should**

- ◆ assess evidence against the relevant unit standards.
- ◆ make a judgement regarding the evidence submitted by the candidates.
- ◆ complete the RPL Assessment Grid.
- ◆ document the assessment process.
- ◆ give feedback and advise the RPL mentor and the candidate on how to proceed.
- ◆ provide feedback *via* the Assessor Body to the ETQA for the awarding of credits/certificates.
- ◆ ensure that successful candidates receive certificates and are awarded credits.
- ◆ document all appeals that reach Stage 1 of the appeal procedure.

**5.7.1.5 MODERATOR**

**(a) REQUIREMENTS**

The **moderator** should be

- a field/sub-field of learning-specialist.
- registered as an assessor with the ETQA.
- registered as a moderator with the ETQA.
- accredited with all the unit standards related to assessment (ETDP Unit Standards as well as the unit standards for assessors in general).
- accredited with all relevant unit standards to be registered as a moderator.

- in the possession of sufficient management, auditing and research skills.
- based at the Assessor Body or a centre other than the centre of the candidate.

**(b) FUNCTIONS**

**In administering the RPL process ,the moderators must**

- ◆ moderate the work of the assessors.
- ◆ moderate judgement decisions (as a general guide moderate 1 of every 3 judgements).
- ◆ moderate assessment judgements across providers to prevent standards drift.
- ◆ advise RPL mentors and assessors.
- ◆ offer overall guidance and management of the process and requirements for specific unit standards.

**5.7.1.6 ADULT LEARNING CENTRES / PROVIDERS**

**(a) REQUIREMENTS**

- As set out in terms of SAQA criteria regarding the registration of providers.

**(b) FUNCTIONS**

**In administering the RPL process, the adult learning centre should**

- ◆ identify new and existing candidates who are eligible for RPL.
- ◆ support candidates through the process of collecting evidence for RPL.
- ◆ forward evidence to the Assessor Body on behalf of the candidate.
- ◆ assist with the initial placement process (e.g. marking of placement tasks).
- ◆ ensure that sufficient RPL counsellors and mentors are trained.
- ◆ advise on RPL procedures.



- ◆ train Programme Supervisors/ co-ordinators to establish, manage and monitor the RPL system.
- ◆ monitor and evaluate the support process for RPL.

#### **5.7.1.7 ASSESSOR BODY**

##### **(a) REQUIREMENTS**

- ☐ The Assessor Body should be accredited by the ETQA for the relevant unit standards and qualifications.

##### **(b) FUNCTIONS**

#### **In administering the RPL process, the Assessor Body should**

- ◆ advocate for RPL assessment.
- ◆ ensure that sufficient RPL assessors are trained and registered.
- ◆ give feedback to Standards Generating Bodies on the relevant unit standards (via the ETQA).
- ◆ provide registered assessors in cases where centres do not have practitioners who are registered as assessors.
- ◆ provide registered Moderators.
- ◆ provide guidelines, requirements and advice to adult learning centres, RPL mentors, assessors and moderators.
- ◆ deal with appeals that reach Stage 2 of the appeal procedure.
- ◆ supply reasons for assessment decisions that differ from those made by the internal assessor.
- ◆ forward the names of successful candidates to the ETQA for the awarding of credits and issuing of certificates.

### **5.7.1.8 EDUCATION AND TRAINING QUALITY ASSURANCE BODY**

#### **(a) REQUIREMENTS**

- As set out in SAQA legislation.

#### **(b) FUNCTIONS**

**In administering the RPL process, the ETQA should**

- ◆ accredit Assessor Bodies to assess and award credits for specified NQF registered unit standards and/or qualifications.
- ◆ deal with appeals that reach Stage 3 and are referred to the ETQA by the Programme Supervisor in a centre.
- ◆ audit and monitor RPL systems across the sector.
- ◆ monitor providers and accredited Assessor Bodies.
- ◆ conduct overall evaluation of assessment.
- ◆ provide feedback to Standards Generating Body regarding the unit standards.
- ◆ award credits and issue certificates/qualifications to successful candidates.
- ◆ register assessors for the specific unit standards and/or qualifications.
- ◆ register moderators for the specific unit standards and/or qualifications.

## **5.8 COSTS OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING TO THE CANDIDATE**

RPL costs must be separated into those carried by the centre offering support services and the costs incurred in the assessment of prior learning.

### **5.8.1 COSTS OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING THROUGH AN ADULT LEARNING CENTRE**

When candidates utilise the support services offered by an ALC, the costs for this process need to be covered by the provider delivering the service at the

learning centre. The candidate may or may not be required to pay towards these costs. This fee may or may not include the RPL application fee payable to the assessor body. Where a candidate has completed part of a learning programme, cost implications of the learning programme need to be considered.

### ***5.8.2 COSTS OF RPL DIRECTLY THROUGH THE ASSESSOR BODY***

An RPL application fee may be charged by the Assessor body to cover costs. Candidates are responsible for the RPL application fee, payable to the RPL Assessor Body. This should be monitored by the ETQA to ensure that financially disadvantaged people will also have access to RPL systems.

## **5.9 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING CENTRES**

### ***5.9.1 ESTABLISHMENT OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING CENTRE(S)***

All stakeholders should negotiate where the RPL centre(s) will be located. Due to the costly and specialist nature of the process, the following issues should be considered.

#### ***5.9.1.1 Specialist RPL centres within a region/district should be identified. Note that the support service should be offered at the adult learning centre.***

- (a) Such centres must be identified to provide the services of an RPL centre in a region/district.
- (b) All administrative functions will be conducted at this centre as well as most of the RPL assessment activities.
- (c) Some RPL activities will require on-site visits.

**5.9.1.2** *The Recognition of Prior Learning centres should be properly resourced in terms of:*

- (a) **Human Resources** (administrative personnel, RPL assessors, RPL counsellors, RPL mentors and external RPL moderators from various fields of learning);
- (b) **Equipment** (communication, storage, transport, etc.)

**5.9.1.3** The *funding* of these RPL centres will be guided and governed by SAQA, ETQA and SETA guidelines and principles.

**5.9.1.4** To ensure *quality*, the roles of ETQA sub-sectors and SETAs in the RPL process must be clearly spelt out (see the previous section on roles and responsibilities of role-players).

## **5.9.2** *QUALIFYING FACTORS FOR A RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING CENTRE*

In order for a centre to qualify as an RPL centre, it must have the capacity to offer the following:

### **5.9.2.1** *Training*

The RPL centre should provide the necessary training to the RPL mentors and assessors in the region.

### **5.9.2.2** *Advocacy*

The RPL centre should have an advocacy strategy to ensure that the process is promoted in various sectors.

### **5.9.2.3** *Accessibility*

The centre should be in a place with good transport and accommodation facilities. It should also provide access to learners with special needs.

#### **5.9.2.4 Safety**

The centre should create a safe and supportive environment.

#### **5.9.2.5 Counselling**

The RPL centres should provide counselling with regard to the preparation of the candidates.

#### **5.9.2.6 Mediation**

The RPL site should be able to deal effectively with the mediation of results to the candidates.

#### **5.9.2.7 Flexibility**

The RPL centres should be flexible with regard to conducting of on-site visits and assessment.

### **5.10 TIME FACTORS**

Time frames for RPL processes need to be carefully scheduled. Practical issues, e.g. seasonal work, as well as the scheduled requirements of the RPL Assessor Body need to be taken into account.

RPL Assessor Bodies will schedule RPL sessions according to the factors influencing particular sectors, e.g. seasonal work, intake into public adult learning centres etc.. Timing should be flexible and create a balance between the resources available and the demand for RPL. A minimum of two RPL sessions per annum is recommended.

### **5.11 ADVOCACY**

Due to the fact that RPL is a new process aimed at redressing past imbalances in education, it will have to be actively promoted and advertised.

Advocacy for the RPL system should not only be aimed at learning centres and industry, but should also inform the general public. This will enable individuals who are not attending a learning centre and who are unemployed, to access the RPL system. They can independently choose to apply to the Assessor Body or to seek support from a learning centre or industry structure.

The staff members of the learning centre should be largely responsible for advocacy within the centre. This process should be driven by the Programme Supervisors and should also involve educators. In the industry, line supervisors, Human Resources managers and training officers should also advocate RPL. Equity forums, comprising all stakeholders, should also ensure that RPL is promoted amongst all employees. All stakeholders are responsible for advocacy, e.g. the assessor bodies, industry, government, organised labour, NGO sector, ETQAs, SETAs, SAQA, Department of Education, Department of Labour, and all other government departments.

## 5.12 CONCLUSION

The researcher is fully aware of the problems facing the ABET sector, such as the growing sense of crisis in the NGO field which saw much reduced funding as foreign donors now preferred to work directly through bilateral agreements with government and these agreements were slow to be agreed upon and implemented.

In the Republic of South Africa's *Interpellations, Questions and Replies of the National Assembly* (2000: 997) the Minister of Education, Professor Kadar Asmal made a statement that not enough money is allocated to ABET annually. When it comes to resources, the voice of ABET learners is drowned out by higher education students and school teachers demanding the continuation of the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed (Aitchison, 1998: 8).

However, despite all the problems as mentioned above, this model for recognition of prior learning for the adult basic education and training sector in South Africa



is a serious attempt to address the backlog that adult learners experience due to no recognition and or certification of their prior learning acquired non-formal or informal. Without the support of the national Ministry of Education in terms of financial as well as human resources for this model to be implemented successfully, the RPL model as proposed in this chapter will become another ambitious piece of literature and research.

The ABET field has been very closely associated with the political transformation of South Africa. It is likely, dependent as any enhancement of ABET provision is on political will, that its successes and sometimes dreadful defeats will continue to reflect the South African struggle to be a more democratic, enlightened and industrious society.



# CHAPTER 6

## **ACRONYMS USED IN CHAPTER 6**

<b>ABET</b>	Adult Basic Education and Training
<b>CAEL</b>	Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
<b>ETQA</b>	Education and Training Quality Assurance Body
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SAQA</b>	South African Qualifications Authority
<b>SETA</b>	Sector Education and Training Authority

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this study the researcher developed a Recognition of Prior Learning model for the Adult Basic Education and Training sector in South Africa. This was undertaken in an attempt to answer the problem:

**HOW CAN THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN A CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT BE ADDRESSED?**

Like most other areas of our society, education and training in South Africa are undergoing tremendous change. Since the proclamation of the South African Qualifications Authority Act, No. 58 of 1995, a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is being created, which will serve as the structure around which all education and training efforts will be positioned.

The South African NQF is underpinned by various principles, which include recognition of prior learning, access, redress and social equity. The concept of recognising and accrediting what people already know and can do (RPL), is having a significant impact on many of the education and training programmes being currently developed. This is irrespective of whether the knowledge and skills have been acquired through unstructured learning, performance development, off-the-job assessment, or skills and knowledge that meet workplace needs, but have been gained through previous employment and hobbies.

In the past many adults and out-of-school youth have attended non-formal training programmes and have acquired a great deal of informal knowledge and experience. Such knowledge and experience were not recognised or certificated and this often led to exclusion from certain jobs, promotion on the job, and exclusion from further education and training opportunities, for all of which some kind of “certificate” was a pre-requisite. It is important to certify these skills in order to provide these persons with access to the labour market, as well as for purposes of a skills audit to plan the major training programmes which will be required in the future.

In order to practice the principles of the NQF, and to allow persons to gain reward for their existing skills, experience and learning previously unrecognised, the aim of this study was to develop an RPL model for the ABET sector. This model can be utilised to support the transition from the present emphasis in our education and training system on clearly defined and demarcated opportunities for formal learning, to an approach of lifelong learning which includes learning experiences outside the formal education and training systems.

In **Chapter 1** a theme analysis was undertaken to elucidate the various concepts that appeared throughout the study. These concepts are:

- The Recognition of Prior Learning
- Experiential Learning
- Lifelong Learning and Education
- Competence-based Assessment
- Adult Education
- The Reconstruction and Development Programme
- The South African Qualifications Authority and the National Qualifications Framework
- Educational Modi

The study is based on *a literature review* during which relevant, historical as well as contemporary sources were consulted. *Personal interviews* were also conducted with ABET stakeholders. The **literature study** was conducted on an **exploratory** as well as a **descriptive** basis. The information that was collected formed the basis for an investigation and analysis of the RPL situation in South Africa. In order to gather adequate and relevant information, primary and secondary sources were also consulted and studied.

In **Chapter 2** a logical analysis of RPL was done by way of investigating the philosophical foundations, the purposes of RPL, the characteristics of an effective RPL system, the beneficiaries as well as the disadvantages of RPL. Assessment practices and methods were identified which can be utilised for RPL. Due to the fact that the focus of the study is on the ABET sector, the researcher found it necessary to distinguish between RPL and Placement Assessment, as Placement Assessment plays a very important role in the ABET sector and is sometimes mistaken for RPL. The financing of RPL systems was also investigated.

The development and introduction of an RPL system makes little sense, unless an effective quality assurance model is put in place to ensure that standards, and the credibility of the system are maintained. Therefore guidelines for the quality assurance of an RPL system were also identified and developed.

In **Chapter 3** the international as well as national developments pertaining to RPL were investigated. These developments, as well as lessons learned internationally and nationally, provided the framework for the development of an RPL model for ABET in this study.

In **Chapter 4** the principles that underpin an RPL model were identified. These principles are:

- Quality assurance mechanisms.**



- Efficiency of the RPL system.**
- Equity and access.**
- Validity and reliability of the RPL system.**
- Transparency of the RPL process.**
- A curriculum based on explicit learning outcomes to be utilised for the RPL assessment.**
- Training of key players including their selection and monitoring.**

Issues that may be barriers for adult learners were identified.

In **Chapter 5**, based upon these barriers that must be overcome, as well as the principles mentioned above, an RPL model for the ABET sector was developed. For this purpose, the Six-point Typology model of the University of Ulster was also taken into consideration. Support to the learner plays a vital role during the RPL process. In developing an RPL model for the ABET sector, the possible routes to RPL for the adult learner were first determined, i.e. a learner can apply directly to an accredited assessor body or can apply *via* the adult learning centre. Thereafter the processes that will take place when a learner applies through an adult learning centre were described. The role players and their functions at various levels in the system were identified. Issues such as costs pertaining to RPL assessments, the time factors involved, as well as the advocacy of RPL were also discussed. These issues were researched as they are integral to the RPL support and assessment processes and cannot be dealt with in isolation.

## **6.2 FINDINGS**

### **6.2.1 *In Chapter 1 it has been found that***

- 6.2.1.1 regardless of how the RPL process within each nation and context is defined, it appears that there is no basic difference in the underlying principles that each process follows;
- 6.2.1.2 based on the conceptualisation of all the terminologies and structures in relation to RPL, it becomes apparent that RPL will enable people of all ages, background and attitudes to receive formal recognition for the skills and knowledge (i.e. equal value to learning and skills) held as a result of formal training, work experience and/or life experience;
- 6.2.1.3 the development of an RPL model in South Africa has become an urgent necessity.

## CONCLUSION

Based upon the above-mentioned findings it is apparent that the development of an RPL model that addresses the needs of the adult learner has become a matter of urgency.

### *6.2.2 In Chapter 2 it was found that*

- 6.2.2.1 during an RPL assessment, learners will receive recognition for *learning* and not for *experience*. Learners will reflect on their experience and evaluate this experience by analysing its meaning and relationship in relation to existing knowledge;
- 6.2.2.2 RPL is an integral part of competency-based assessment, and not a separate process;
- 6.2.2.3 the development of an RPL model must adhere to the characteristics of an effective RPL system and also allow for the implementation of an effective

quality assurance strategy. This is to ensure that standards and the credibility of the system are maintained.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based upon these findings it became apparent that an RPL model cannot be developed without taking all the characteristics of an effective RPL system (as explained in Chapter 2) into consideration.

### ***6.2.3 In Chapter 3 it has been found that***

6.2.3.1 certain institutions have already commenced piloting RPL, while others are preparing themselves for the task. As indicated in chapter 3 these institutions are positively disposed to the idea of empowering the individuals whose skills and experiences have been overlooked in the past;

6.2.3.2 the international and national developments regarding RPL indicate that there is a “shift” in the dominant education discourse regarding experience and learning. This “shift” from a phase, which views education primarily as a support for social struggle, to a “human capital” discourse which emphasises education for individual upward mobility, is clearly apparent.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based upon the findings in Chapter 3 it is clear that an RPL model cannot be developed without taking into consideration the international and national processes and developments regarding RPL. It is through this wealth of experience of other researchers that a model can be developed without duplicating the “errors” that were made in the past.

**6.2.4 In Chapter 4 it has been found that**

6.2.4.1 a practical RPL model in South Africa should be underpinned by the following principles:

- (a) quality assurance mechanisms as part of the RPL model;
- (b) efficiency of the RPL system;
- (c) equity, access, validity and reliability of the RPL system should be ensured;
- (d) transparency of the RPL process;
- (e) a need for the curriculum to be based on explicit learning outcomes which will be utilised for the RPL assessment; as well as
- (f) the training of key players including their selection and monitoring.

6.2.4.2 Adult learners in general have a number of barriers to overcome when accessing the post-secondary educational system. These barriers may be personal, physical, situational or institutional. These barriers not only deny fair access to the assessment system, but can actively discourage certain people from even making an attempt to gain a recognised qualification.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based upon the findings in Chapter 4 it is clear that an effective RPL model is underpinned by various principles. It was also found that learners might experience certain barriers to RPL. Therefore, when RPL is introduced, it should allow for an accessible and flexible approach to individual learning. Such an approach should, as far as possible, ensure that all barriers to assessment are removed and a client-based service implemented.

**6.2.5 In Chapter 5 it has been found that**

- 6.2.5.1 the process of RPL is complex and several strategies would need to be examined to ensure that candidates are assessed correctly;
- 6.2.5.2 the process of assessment does not necessarily have to lead to the award of credits, unless it is appropriate for the individual applicant. This aspect necessitates careful consideration when RPL models are developed in a South African context;
- 6.2.5.3 every education and training sector will have to decide on a model that will suit its circumstances best. In this study an RPL model for the ABET sector has been developed;
- 6.2.5.4 the RPL model developed should focus on the recognition of the candidates' prior *experiential* learning;
- 6.2.5.5 there should be fitness of purpose between the methods of assessment and the purpose which they serve. Judgements concerning a learner's competence should not be made in isolation, but through collaboration and peer review.

**CONCLUSION**

Based upon the findings in Chapter 5, institutions will have to accept RPL as an integral part of the new model of education and training, and should not pursue it in isolation. RPL processes should be accommodated within the teaching and learning programme of all institutions. Unless academics and employers co-operate and obtain consensus regarding the assessment criteria which will be utilised to judge competencies and the routes in which these competencies have been achieved, RPL may create more frustrations than solutions.

## 6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the problem statement as stated in Chapter 1, section 1.3 and the findings as described above, the following recommendations are made:

**6.3.1 ON THE BASIS OF THE NEED FOR AN RPL MODEL IN SOUTH AFRICA AS MENTIONED IN PARAGRAPH 6.2.1.3 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT**

the RPL model for ABET learners developed in Chapter 5 be accepted.

**6.3.2 ON THE BASIS OF THE FINDINGS MADE IN SECTIONS 6.2.1.3, 6.2.2.3, AND 6.2.4 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT**

an intensive investigation be initiated and research be conducted regarding the implementation of the RPL model for ABET as suggested in Chapter 5.

**6.3.3 ON THE BASIS OF THE FINDINGS MADE IN SECTIONS 6.2.4 AND 6.2.5 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT**

6.3.3.1 learners should be allowed to negotiate and co-construct the curriculum on the basis of their needs and experiences as far as it is practically possible. These needs and experiences can be captured *via* RPL practices.

6.3.3.2 SAQA should fast track the development of standards and criteria for the registration and accreditation of the assessors and moderators. The various SETAs and ETQAs should also be established as soon as possible.

6.3.3.3 major language barriers restricting access to the RPL process should be identified and a core support programme to address those barriers should be identified.



**6.3.4 ON THE BASIS OF THE FINDINGS MADE IN SECTION 6.2.5 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT**

- 6.3.4.1 advisors and assessors have clarity regarding the purpose of the assessment, before attempting to design an instrument for the assessment process: i.e. the purpose should define the assessment instrument, rather than allowing the instrument to determine the purpose.
- 6.3.4.2 in order to successfully access the necessary funds through the Skills Development Projects, a process of prioritising the areas and skills which need to be developed and recognised on the basis of their potential to create jobs and thus build the economy, needs to be developed.
- 6.3.4.3 there will have to be a strong dialectic between context of implementation and RPL practice. This suggests that there may be many interpretations of RPL rather than universal blueprints for practice.

**6.4 SHORTCOMINGS OF THE STUDY**

- 6.4.1 A shortcoming of this study is the fact that roles and responsibilities of the various role players, as described in Chapter 5, were identified, although criteria and standards for the assessors and moderators still need to be developed. Assumptions were made regarding the roles of the assessors and moderators. The ETQA for the General Education and Training sector has to date, also not yet been established.
- 6.4.3 The researcher did not focus on the development of assessment instruments for the RPL process, as these instruments will be individualised, depending on the sub-field of learning that the credits are required for. This process requires educators who are well trained in outcomes-based assessment and

are qualified to select the most appropriate assessment instrument(s) for judging the learner's evidence. To date very little time has been utilised to train the assessors, educators and verifiers, although this training is vital to adequately prepare the various role players for the assessment processes.

## **6.5 FURTHER RESEARCH**

The researcher is of the opinion that this study offers the RPL framework as well as the model for the ABET sector to serve as a point of departure for further study and research. In this regard further potential areas of research are listed below:

- 6.5.1 In order to verify and elaborate on the findings and recommendations that were made in this study, more extensive research can be undertaken by the implementation of this RPL model (as developed in Chapter 5) in the ABET sector. The implementation of this model can be initiated by a pilot project where implementation is undertaken in a limited number of adult learning centres.
- 6.5.2 Research regarding the implementation of the proposed RPL model for the ABET sector and its impact on the community.
- 6.5.3 Research to ascertain the success rate of RPL graduates in their workplace.
- 6.5.4 Research to determine the correlation between the language proficiency of the RPL candidate and his/her demonstrated performance during the RPL process.
- 6.5.5 Research regarding the quality management systems established in the RPL process.

6.5.6 Research regarding the level of training and commitment of all the role players in the RPL process as well as the support offered to potential RPL candidates.

6.5.7 Research to evaluate the level, language, relevance, etc. of the unit standards and learning programmes that are utilised to assess potential candidates.

## 6.6 CONCLUSION

In this study an attempt was made to develop an RPL model for the ABET sector.

During the implementation of this model it will be vital to develop activities in which learners are encouraged to be active and where the focus is on meaning making and where prior learning is not removed from its social context. Adults enter ABET with vast experience and knowledge.

The RPL practices can be used to shape the nature of the context as a whole, not simply to reflect it. RPL should be seen as a learning process, not solely as an assessment event. The main issue when implementing this RPL model will be to try and develop RPL practices that are in keeping with contemporary learning theory and with the views of mind implicit in the various sectors of education and training. The need for a dialectical relationship between RPL processes and context is important. The former could inform the latter in order to work against a situation where different forms of learning and views of mind are valued in one context and devalued in another.

It should be kept in mind that many of the potential RPL candidates for ABET will be adults who will be entering their middle years. The following quotation by Jung (1969: 398 – 399) may give an indication of the fears they might experience:



*“Wholly unprepared, we embark upon the second half of life...  
Worse still, we take this step with the false assumption that  
our truths and ideas will serve us hitherto.  
But we cannot live the afternoon of life  
according to the programme of life’s morning:  
for what was great in the morning will be little at evening,  
and what in the morning was true  
will at evening become a lie.”*

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## **GLOSSARY**

### **ACCREDITATION**

The process by which an authority gives formal recognition to a body acknowledging that it is competent to carry out specified activities in accordance with appropriate regulations, criteria and guidelines.

### **ASSESSMENT**

The process of placing a value upon or deciding the correctness of an artefact, piece of academic work, performance or procedure. Assessment of prior learning is the measurement of learning that has been acquired outside of formal educational institutions and is uncertificated. It involves making judgements about what learners know; it involves setting criteria to assess learners' performance (knowledge, skills or values) and it involves recording achievements by adding them to the learners' record of learning.

### **ASSESSMENT CRITERIA**

Evidence that the learner has achieved the specific outcomes. The criteria indicate, in broad terms, the observable processes and products of learning which serve as evidence of the learner's achievement.

### **ASSESSMENT TASKS**

A series of tasks which are intended to obtain information about a learner's competence. These tasks may be workplace/coursework/classroom/homework-based or they may be set in an examination paper.



**ASSESSOR**

*Assessor* means a person who is registered by the relevant ETQA in accordance with criteria established for this purpose by a SGB to measure the achievement of specified NQF standards or qualifications. The assessor is the person that will conduct the assessment during the RPL process and who will make the judgement whether the learner can receive credits for his/her prior experiential learning.

**AWARD**

An award is a formal recognition, such as a certificate, diploma or credits for specific outcomes that can be demonstrated.

**COMPETENCE**

The capacity for continuing performance within specified ranges and contexts resulting from integration of a number of specific outcomes. The recognition of competence in this context is the award of a qualification.

**CREDIT**

Recognition formally granted towards meeting the requirements of an award course, either on the basis of prior study, or of prior experience, assessed as equivalent in content and level. Credits may be accumulated until conditions have been met for the award of a qualification.

**CRITERION REFERENCING** The practice of assessing a learner's performance against an agreed set of criteria. In the case of outcomes-based education the learner is assessed against agreed criteria derived from the specific outcomes.

## **CRITICAL CROSS-FIELD OUTCOMES**

Critical cross-field outcomes are generic and inform all teaching and learning. They should be achieved regardless of what is taught. These outcomes are mostly taught indirectly through the learning process.

## **EDUCATOR**

The educator is also referred to as a practitioner. This person must be able to facilitate learning, determine learners' needs, select, organise and design learner activities, conduct assessments, support learners and be a good administrator.

## **ETQA**

An Education and Training Quality Assurance Body means a body accredited in terms of sections 5(1)(a)(ii) of the SAQA Act (No. 58 of 1995) responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements in terms of national standards or qualifications and to which specific functions relating to the registration of national standards or qualifications have been assigned in terms of section 5(1)(b)(i) of the Act.

## **EVALUATION**

Evaluation in education can be generally described as the process and outcome of making judgements about the worth of an education phenomenon. It a process of collecting evidence and using it to judge the degree of goodness or worth of the entity being evaluated for various types of decision-making.



<b>EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING</b>	Learning gained through intentionally and systematically reflecting on experience. The learning may arise in formal or informal setting, or be incidental.
<b>LEARNING SITE</b>	A learning site is any space, indoors or outdoors where learning can take place.
<b>MODERATION</b>	The process of ensuring that educators/markers assess work according to agreed standards, and that there is consistency from year to year within districts, provinces and nationally. At higher levels, consistency or equivalence with international assessment criteria is also sought.
<b>NORM REFERENCING</b>	A learner's performance is compared with that of other learners in a given group.
<b>OUTCOMES</b>	Outcomes are what learners should know and be able to do at the end of a learning experience. The outcome is that segment of a unit standard which is a statement of the required learner capabilities that must be demonstrated. Outcomes are specified by stated performances and assessment and range criteria.
<b>OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION (OBE)</b>	A learner-centred, result-oriented approach to education premised on the expectation that all learners can learn and succeed. It implies that learning institutions have the responsibility to optimise the conditions for success.





**PROVIDER**

Any body or organisation which provides education or training or workplace experience, such as schools, colleges, technikons, universities, workplace training centres, private training providers, employers/workplaces.

**QUALITY ASSURANCE**

The process of checking that the performance of the whole education and training system including, e.g. the development of practitioners, the quality of the training etc. meets SAQA standards.

**RECOGNITION OF PRIOR  
LEARNING**

A process which uses a variety of tools to help learners reflect on, identify, articulate and demonstrate past learning which has been acquired through study, work and other life experiences, and which is not recognised through formal transfer-of-credit mechanisms. RPL allows the evaluation of past learning against established academic standards so that credit can be awarded by a credentialing body.

**RELIABILITY**

The extent to which a given question, or test or examination will result in a given group of learners obtaining the same results on different occasions, or if marked by different assessors, or by the same assessors on different occasions. The consistency with which an assessment task is undertaken by different assessors, at different times and in different places.



**SPECIFIC OUTCOMES**

Specific outcomes indicate what competence or ability a learner should demonstrate or show in a particular learning area or field of learning. A learner's skills, knowledge, attitudes or values may demonstrate the achievement of an outcome or a set of outcomes.

**SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT**

Used to provide information about a learner's level of competence at the completion of a grade, level or programme.

**SYSTEMIC EVALUATION**

A process whereby an education system or an aspect thereof, is evaluated. Systemic evaluation targets quality factors and examines the education process holistically.

**UNIT STANDARDS**

A statement of the outcomes that are to be achieved by an individual in order to obtain credit for the unit. Unit standards are nationally agreed and internationally comparable.

**VALIDITY**

The extent to which an assessment of learning outcome measures that which it purports to measure.