CHAPTER 1

ACRONYMS USED IN CHAPTER 1

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

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

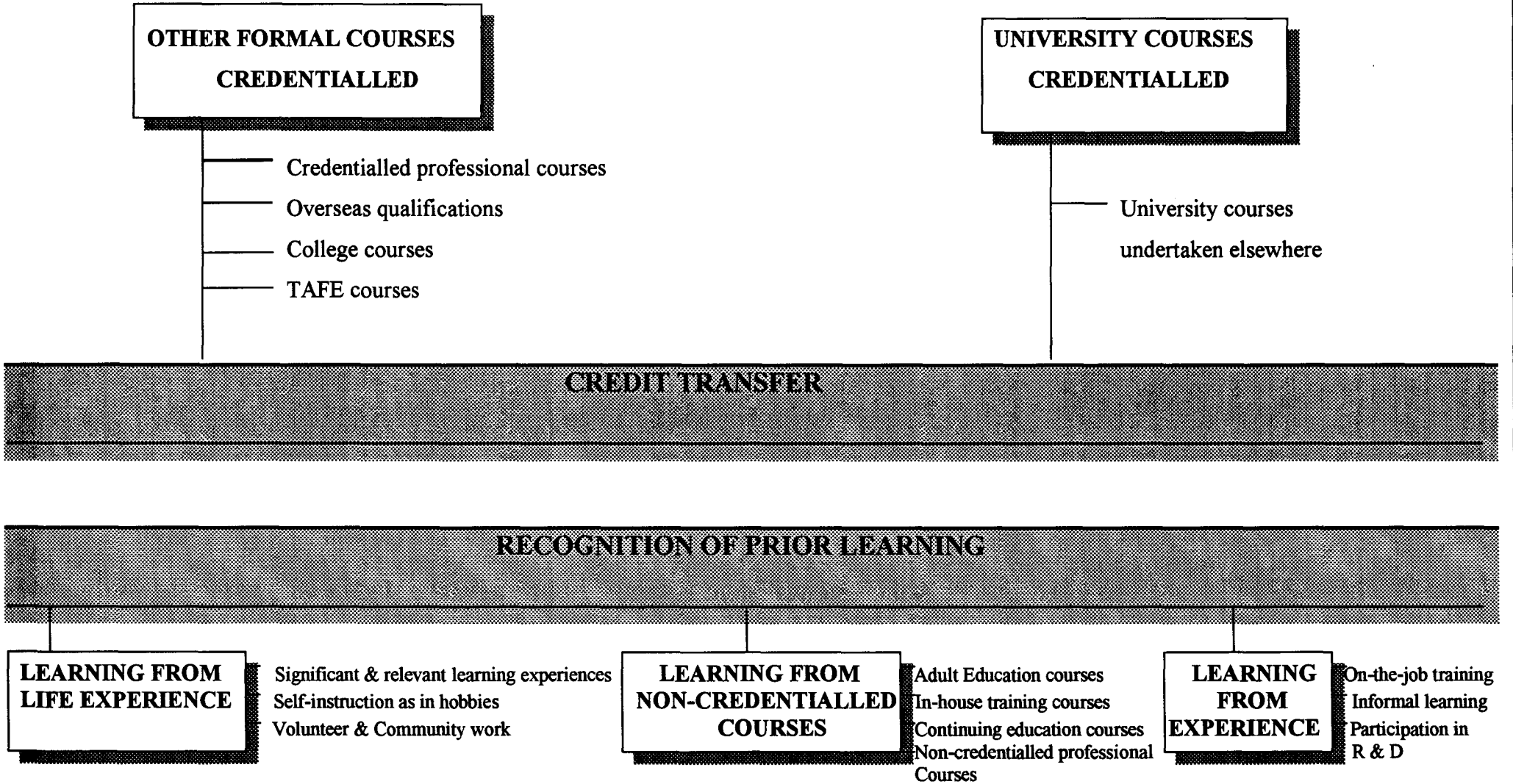❑ *Recognition of Prior Learning (non-formal and informal learning)*

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**

| OTHER FORMAL COURSES CREDENTIALLED |

- Credentialled professional courses
- Overseas qualifications
- College courses
- TAFE courses

| UNIVERSITY COURSES CREDENTIALLED |

- University courses undertaken elsewhere

CREDIT TRANSFER

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

| **LEARNING FROM LIFE EXPERIENCE** | Significant & relevant learning experiences
Self-instruction as in hobbies
Volunteer & Community work | **LEARNING FROM NON-CREDENTIALLED COURSES** | Adult Education courses
In-house training courses
Continuing education courses
Non-credentialled professional Courses | **LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE** | On-the-job training
Informal learning
Participation in R & D |

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

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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)[1] 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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[1] 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)[2] 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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[2] 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

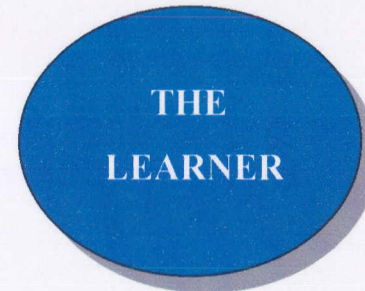**KOLB'S LEARNING CYCLE**
FIGURE 1.2

Source: Kolb, 1984

CONCRETE EXPERIENCE

* *Name the experience*

* *Describe the experience*

* *What did I do?*

* *When did I do it?*

* *For how long?*

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?*

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?*

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?*

Source: Kolb, 1984

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."*

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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 Luckett (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 that 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) agues 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
CONCEPT OF LEARNER	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.
ROLE OF LEARNERS' EXPERIENCE	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.
READINESS TO LEARN	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.
ORIENTATION TO LEARNING	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.

FIGURE 1.5 CTURE

NQF LEVEL	BAND	TYPES OF QUALIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATES	LOCATIONS OF LEARNING FOR UNITS AND QUALIFICATIONS
8	Higher Education and Training Band	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

FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING CERTIFICATES

NQF LEVEL	BAND	TYPES OF QUALIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATES	LOCATIONS OF LEARNING FOR UNITS AND QUALIFICATIONS		
4	Further Education And Training Band	School/College/Trade Certificates Mix of units from all	• Formal high schools • Private • State schools	• Technical • Community • Police • Nursing • Private colleges	• RDP and labour market scheme • Industry training boards • Unions • Workplace, etc.
3		School/College/Trade Certificates Mix of units from all			
2		School/College/Trade Certificates Mix of units from all			

1	**GENERAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING CERTIFICATE**				

NQF LEVEL	BAND	TYPES OF QUALIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATES		LOCATIONS OF LEARNING FOR UNITS AND QUALIFICATIONS		
	General Education And Training Band	Senior Phase	ABET Level 4	Formal Schools (Urban, Rural, Farm or Special)	• Occupation • Work-based training • RDP • Labour Market schemes • Upliftment programmes • Community programmes	• NGOs • Churches • Night schools • ABET programmes • Private providers • Industry Training Boards • Unions • Workplace, etc.
		Intermediate Phase	ABET Level 3			
			ABET Level 2			
		Foundation Phase	ABET Level 1			
		Pre-school				

Source: McKay et al, 1998: 158 - 159

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 **OBJE**... **IPLES OF THE NQF**

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

COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance Body
FNTI	First Nations Technical Institute
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
UTS	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), Stepen 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
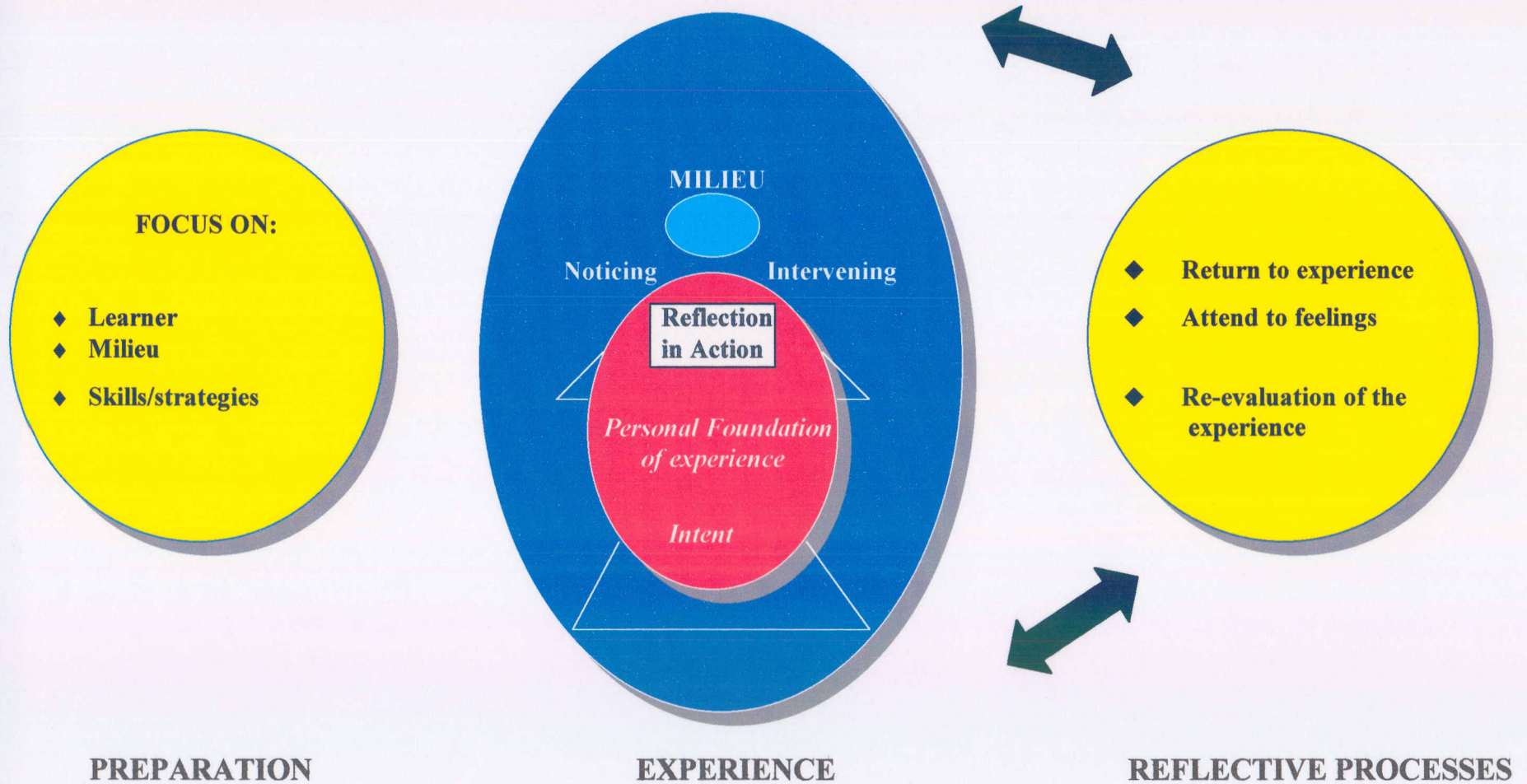
> "... commonly accepted adult learning principles, for example the notion of a life-long learning continuum; learning occurring through a wide variety of styles, methods and contexts; learning as individual and unique; and that new learning can be integrated into the experience of the learner to form 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**

FOCUS ON:

- Learner
- Milieu
- Skills/strategies

MILIEU

Noticing   Intervening

Reflection in Action

Personal Foundation of experience

Intent

- Return to experience
- Attend to feelings
- Re-evaluation of the experience

PREPARATION   EXPERIENCE   REFLECTIVE PROCESSES

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

Source: Fletcher 1997: 18
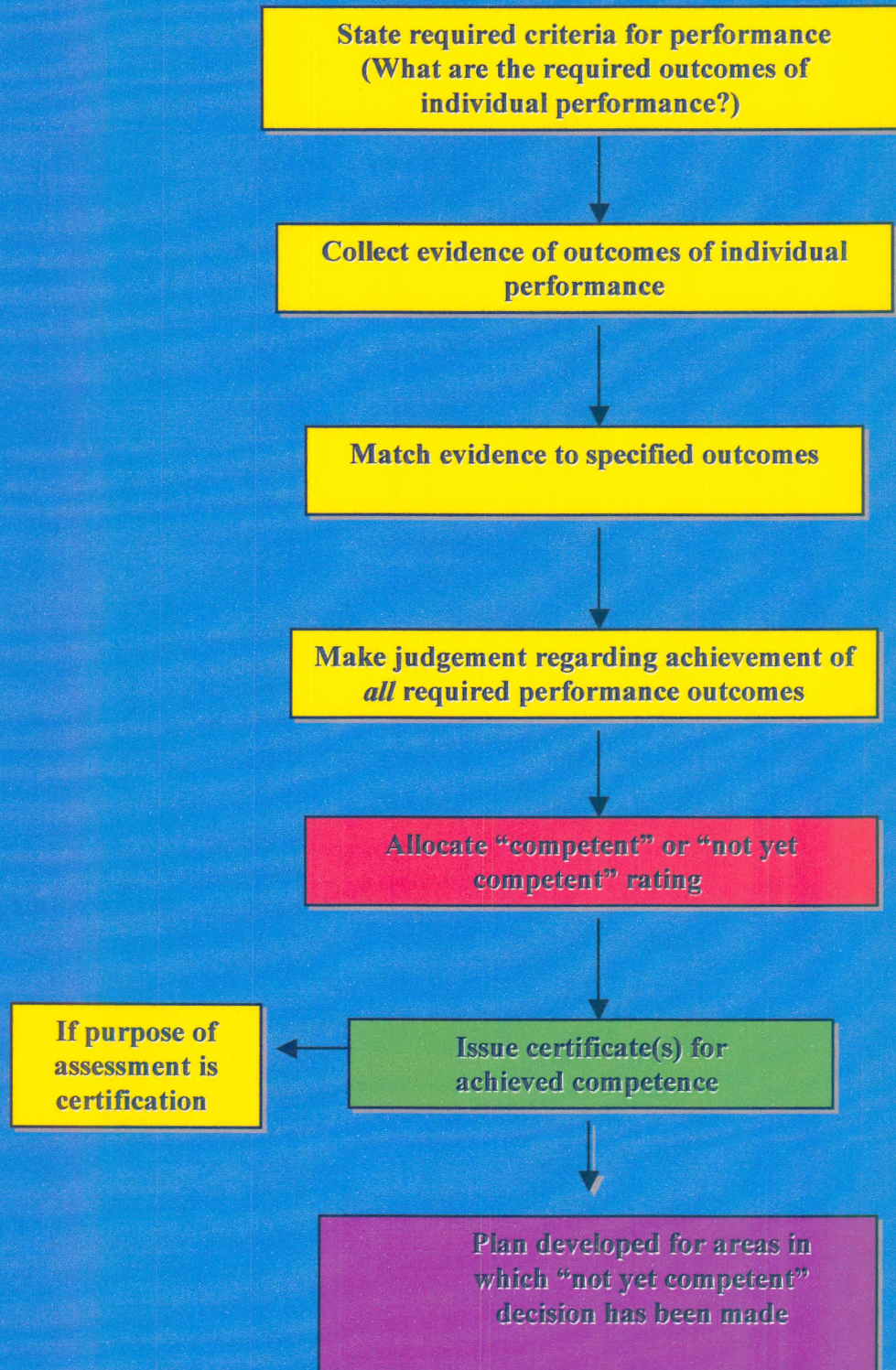
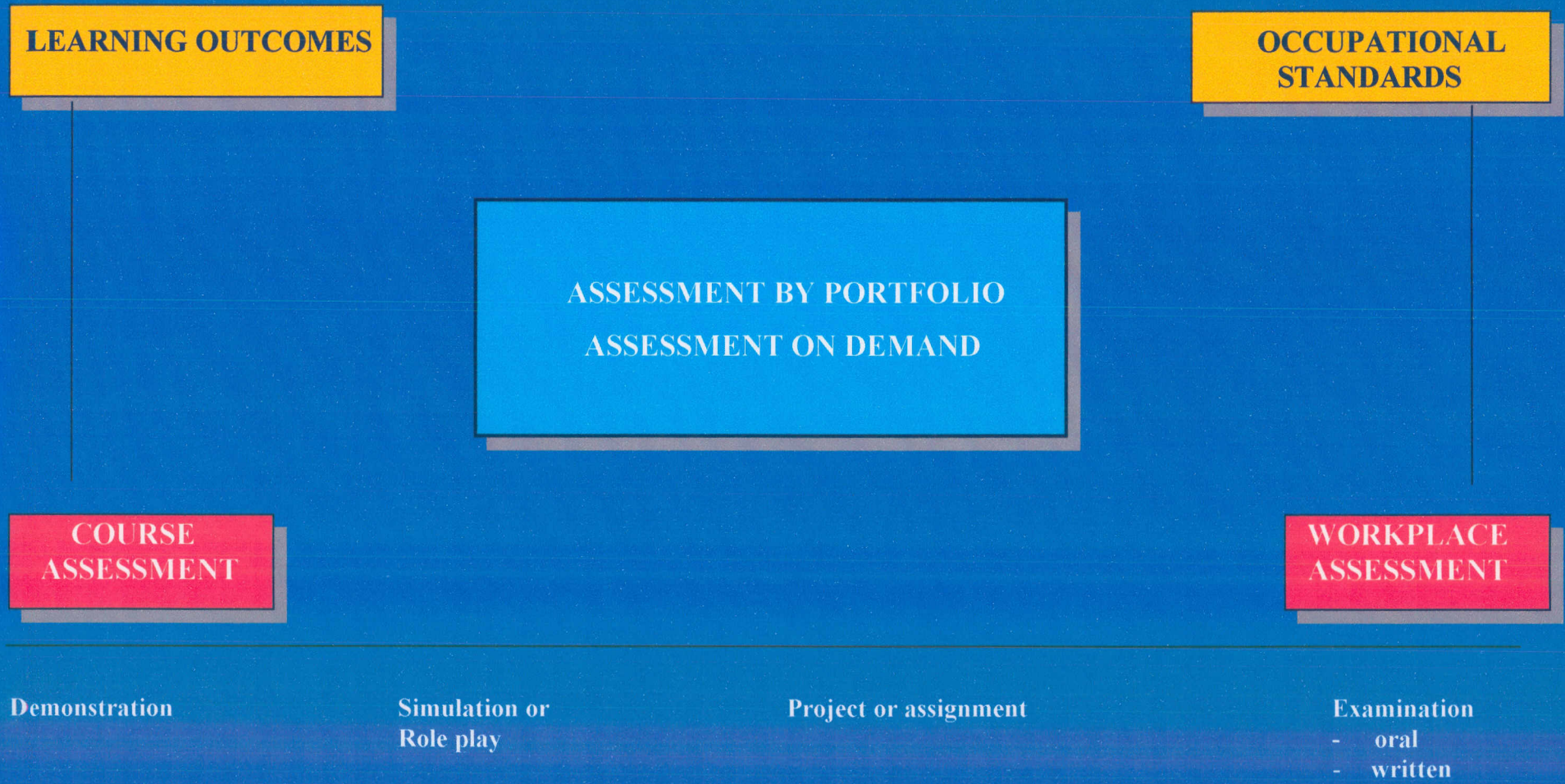During the RPL process exactly the same procedures are followed.

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

LEARNING OUTCOMES

OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS

ASSESSMENT BY PORTFOLIO

ASSESSMENT ON DEMAND

COURSE ASSESSMENT

WORKPLACE ASSESSMENT

Demonstration

Simulation or Role play

Project or assignment

Examination
- oral
- written

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 Geyser, 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 RECOGNTION 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 Geyser, 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.

ASSESSMENT METHODS	PURPOSES AND EXAMPLES
INTERVIEWS	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.) *e.g. Qualified draftsperson 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.*
DEBATE	To confirm capacity to sustain a considered argument demonstrating adequate knowledge of the subject. *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.*
PRESENTATION	To check ability to present information in a way appropriate to subject and audience. *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.* *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.* *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.*

FIGURE 2.4   ASSESSMENT METHODS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

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SPECIAL PROJECTS	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. *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.*
BOOK REVIEW	To ensure currency and analysis of appropriate literature is at a satisfactory level. (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.) *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.*
ANNOTATED LITERATURE REVIEW	To illustrate the range of reading done by applicant and ensure appropriate coverage to fulfil subject requirements. (This is particularly suitable for post-graduate assessment.) *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.*
PERFORMANCE TESTING	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) *e.g. Applicant to use specific laboratory equipment to conduct an experiment and explain the findings in writing.* *e.g. Applicant is asked to explain the rationale for a sequence of tasks undertaken using a range of complex equipment.*

ORAL EXAMINATION	To check deep understanding of complex issues and ability to explain in simple terms. *e.g. Multilingual teacher seeks credit in a language degree by means of oral examination.*
ESSAY	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.) *e.g. Applicant has read widely and done three Continuing Education Units in European History and seeks RPL for part of an Arts course.*
EXAMPLES OF WORK DONE OR PERFORMED OR DESIGNED	To check quality of work, relevance to credit sought and authenticity of production. (Often combined with interview or oral test.) *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.* *e.g. Applicant has developed design for a prototype of an energy-efficient machine, and seeks non-specific credit in an unrelated course.* *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.*
REPORTS, CRITIQUES, ARTICLES	To indicate level of knowledge and assess analytical and writing skills and issues involved in current debate. *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.* *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.*

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

*Portfolio*s 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 progressional 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.	❏ Audio-visual products ❏ Video as product ❏ Tape as product ❏ 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.	❏ Graphic and written presentation ❏ Written assignments ❏ Tables ❏ Conclusion ❏ Bibliographies ❏ Drawings ❏ 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.	❏ 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.	❏ Interviews	Witness statement (from someone who has seen the candidate's performance).
Case study by assessor on the candidate.	❏ 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.	❏ Report from candidate	Publicity received by the candidate (e.g. newspaper or magazine articles, posters, etc.).
Visual records e.g. photographs, video, etc.	❏ Case study by candidate as part of an assessment task.	
Interview or oral questioning by assessor.	❏ Cash book or financial records kept by candidate.	
Oral performance	❏ Examinations	
	❏ Log book, diary, journal kept by the candidate recording performance or a process.	
	❏ Calculations	
	❏ Product	
	❏ Posters made by the candidate.	
	❏ Oral presentation	

Source: Department of Education, 1999c: 12

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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?
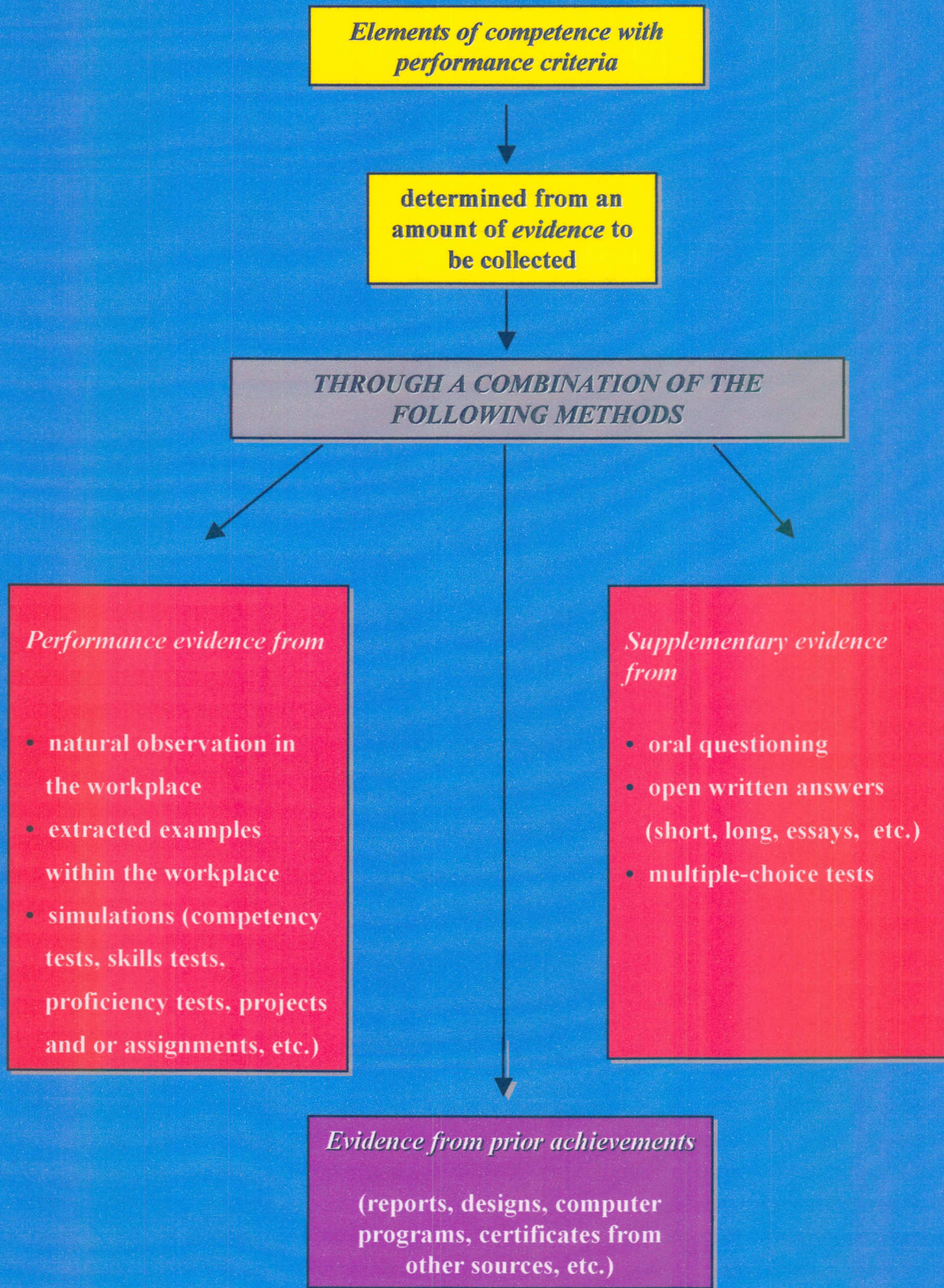
However, to successfully implement the model, staff development and training is essential, especially to ensure that portfolios do not become mere collections of learners' work samples, but that they are instead representations of the range of actual learner performance and that they are evaluated appropriately. 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**

Elements of competence with performance criteria

↓

determined from an amount of *evidence* to be collected

↓

THROUGH A COMBINATION OF THE FOLLOWING METHODS

Performance evidence from

- natural observation in the workplace
- extracted examples within the workplace
- simulations (competency tests, skills tests, proficiency tests, projects and or assignments, etc.)

Supplementary evidence from

- oral questioning
- open written answers (short, long, essays, etc.)
- multiple-choice tests

Evidence from prior achievements

(reports, designs, computer programs, certificates from other sources, etc.)

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.