CHAPTER 2

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN RPL
PROVISIONING: EXPLORING
INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

2.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a synthesis of what others have written already on quality assurance practices in RPL provisioning, or not written, or wrote in a way that is conceptually or methodologically inadequate or contextually inappropriate (Vithal & Jansen 1997:14-15). The purpose is to show how this particular research would address the 'gap', silence or weaknesses in the existing knowledge base. This critical analysis of information in the public domain provided the framework for establishing the importance of the study and criteria for evaluating the RPL practice in the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria against practices in other local institutions and countries (Creswell 2003:30). Valuable lessons learnt from best practices in offering a quality assured RPL service (Flint, Zakos & Frey 1999:1), as applied to the current practice in this Faculty helped to identify areas of weakness and shape recommendations made regarding the improvement of the Faculty's quality assurance practice in RPL provisioning.

There are three knowledge domains related to the context of the study, i.e. the concept RPL, quality assurance practices in RPL provisioning, nationally and internationally and the nature of the higher education sector. The review of literature centred on: (1) the RPL phenomenon: approach to implementation, purpose, and form (section 2.4); (2) RPL and quality assurance in higher education (HE): international best practices (section 2.5); and (3) RPL and quality assurance practices in South African higher education institutions (HEIs) (section 2.6). To address the three specific research questions in this study, I conducted an investigation into what research exists or the knowledge base on designing a quality assured RPL system, in terms of the quality of the **inputs**; the quality of the **process** for prior learning assessment and the quality of the **output** of this system. The central theme was to identify quality indicators, i.e.

standards (criteria) for evaluating and judging quality, as indicated in the national and international literature, in these three main areas. A comparative analysis of the five countries chosen for benchmarking the Faculty's quality assurance practice in RPL provisioning, centred on the strengths, weaknesses and lessons learnt on each countries model of quality assurance in RPL provisioning.

Table 2.1: *A plan for the literature review*

The RPL phenomenon: approach, purpose and form	
RPL and QA in Higher Education: International Best Practices	
RPL and QA in South African HEIs	
The design of the RPL system: inputs	RQ: 1
The process and procedures for RPL assessment	RQ: 2
The output of the RPL system	RQ: 3
Conceptual framework	

The structure of the chapters will be as follows: Chapter 2 deals with reflections on the phenomenon RPL, RPL and Quality Assurance Practices in other countries and in South African Higher Education Institutions. Chapter 3 will deal with the research and literature that exists on how to design a quality assured RPL programme, i.e. in relation to the inputs, procedures and processes that need to be in place for RPL assessments, and the nature of the output of the system that can bring about client satisfaction with the RPL programme. In this chapter will also be a detailed discussion of the conceptual framework for the study.

2.2 LITERATURE SEARCH

An extensive literature search (desktop research) was undertaken, which resulted into reference to a variety of reliable and up-to-date material. The sources include books, paper-based and electronic journals. Relevant databases (UPExplore, ERIC, SABINET: ISAP, SA EPublications and SACat) were consulted. I also visited the websites of international universities and various quality assurance agencies for their conference proceedings on quality assurance in higher education. Specifically, a visit to the website of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in the United States of America, the Canadian Information Centre for International

Credentials (CICIC) and the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) in Canada, and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) in Australia, and several smaller sites in the United Kingdom, was for purposes of keeping abreast with developments in RPL implementation in these countries. As a matter of preference, accredited (peer reviewed) journals were sought after. I have also used both primary and secondary sources of information. The bibliographies of reference materials provided a rich source of further material to be reviewed.

I used the search phrase "Recognition of Prior Learning and Quality Assurance in Higher Education" to search the databases of current and completed research in South Africa (SABINET and NEXUS). Although there are a lot of publications on RPL in Higher Education and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Osman 2004a; Snyman 2004; Hendricks & Volbrecht 2001; Kilfoil 2003; Underwood 2003; Moore & van Rooyen 2002; Osman & Castle 2002; Van Rooy 2002; Kistan 2002; Geyser 2001; Van Rooyen 2001; Osman & Castle 2001; Koch, Foxcroft & Watson 2001; Breier 2001), none of these sources attempted to show the relationship between quality assurance practices at a practical level, i.e. providing evaluation reports of the RPL practice at institutions of higher learning.

I subsequently found the following publications in which certain aspects of the research conducted relate to the focus of this study:

1. A completed MEd Dissertation done by Ronel Heyns in 2004, which identified some of the issues central to this study that is 'elements of a credible RPL system'. I used and incorporated these elements when developing quality indicators regarding the inputs used in designing the RPL system, which were complementary to the ones suggested by SAQA (2004). These three elements identified as crucial in establishing a quality RPL system are (1) having a quality assurance framework, (2) creating an enabling environment for RPL provisioning, and (3) reviewing policies and regulations that govern access (Heyns 2004:117-182).

2. An article written by Ruksana Osman (2004:1) on: "What matters in RPL? Learning from Experience in Higher Education", identified several institutional variables that need to be taken into account if institutions wish to implement RPL

properly (establishing a quality assured RPL system). Van Rooy (2002:1-8) in his article on: "RPL: from principle to practice" articulated similar issues related to RPL implementation at an institutional level, as in the above article. The variables cited addressed the same concerns articulated by SAQA (2004) for establishing systems for quality assurance in RPL provisioning. She maintains that Higher Education Institutions need to: address policy framework and vision matters; have clear aims for implementing RPL; show evidence of support from senior management; address staff development issues; attend to RPL advocacy matters; and restructure their curricula to allow for flexible entry and exit points.

3.   An article written by Litha Beekman (2001) on "RPL: an educational correction", based on a practical engagement with issues of RPL provisioning at the University of South Africa (UNISA), highlighted and addressed fundamental issues of interest in this study ranging from: What is RPL? Do higher education institutions have a choice in implementing RPL? Who should be eligible for RPL? What quality assurance measures for the assessment process should be in place? How should the RPL system function within an institution? Which methods of RPL assessment are suitable? What is the position on the award of a degree through RPL? How much should the RPL assessment cost? Which process of RPL assessment is most suitable?

4.   The research done (MPhil) by Mohammed Hendricks on the provisioning of RPL at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in 2001 addressed pertinent issues related to RPL implementation in higher education. The results of the study demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that **"RPL works",** that RPL can be a powerful strategy for enhancing access into higher education learning, especially in instances where an institution might be experiencing shortages in student numbers. The issue of admitting RPL students into university-level learning is a highly contentious one, however, the research results in this study indicate that prior learning can be successfully assessed, and given an opportunity, RPL learners can progress well academically in a higher education environment.

5.   The Widening Participation (Access) Project of the Free State Higher Education and Further Education and Trust (FSHEFET) (Snyman 2004:39) is the first to regard regional collaborations as a way of implementing RPL. The assertion is that if implemented correctly, RPL at a regional level could be a powerful means

for higher education institutions to meet the targets of student access more effectively, while maximising the use of scarce resources.

2.2.1 Literature study and review

An extensive literature study and review conducted on RPL implementation globally, involved the following activities:

a) A careful selection of published research work and articles globally on RPL that speak to issues (tackle issues; talk to issues) related to the purpose of this research, namely, quality assurance measures in the provisioning of RPL in higher education.

b) A systematic identification, location and analysis of documents and communiqués containing information related to the main research problem and the specific research questions, from the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria, the Quality Assurance Unit of this institution and the ETQA for the Higher Education Band, i.e. the Council on Higher Education (CHE)/Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC).

c) A study of RPL implementation in other countries – identification of best practices in setting standards for quality management of the provisioning of RPL, with special reference to countries such as the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Canada, France, and The Netherlands.

d) A review of RPL implementation in South Africa – national requirements for quality assurance of the provisioning of RPL, from SAQA and the criteria for institutional audits from CHE/HEQC on RPL provisioning, so as to determine implications for the higher education sector. Not much is known about the extent of RPL implementation in the higher education sector, either within or across institutions. The review of literature on RPL implementation in higher education was therefore limited to a few institutions involving the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS), the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the University of South Africa (UNISA), and the University of the Free State.

A synthesis of all these elements, characteristics, variables, and contextual issues cited by various authors resulted into the development of the indicators of a quality assured system of RPL provisioning, in conjunction with other various views and perspectives from national documentation and international trends.

2.3 RPL APPROACHES, PURPOSE AND FORM

2.3.1 Approaches to RPL provisioning

There are different approaches to RPL provisioning, broadly categorised into two, i.e. RPL adapted to the system or RPL changing the status quo (Day 2002:54-71; Butterworth & Mckelvey 1997:153-175; Osman & Castle 2002:64-67; Harris 1999a; Evans 2002:96 – 97). Below is a detailed explanation of each method:

The **developmental approach** is an RPL provisioning in which the RPL training programme is an integral part of the assessment and accreditation processes of an institution. This type of RPL programme offers mentored skills identification, skills documentation and the preparation of evidence (usually a portfolio), which occurs under supervision (Butterworth & McKelvey 1997:157). Assessment methods used in this approach include interviews, reflective writing tasks, portfolio of learning and portfolio development courses or modules (PDCs). RPL candidates are encouraged by their instructors (trainers, mentors, or coaches) to reflect on their experiences and to extract and articulate learning from it by way of writing an autobiographical life learning narrative. The presentation of this learning should be in a format that relates closely (is complementary) to the academic learning in the programme for which access to, or credit in, is sought.

This approach demonstrates quality as transformation, in terms of enhancement and empowerment of RPL learners or the development of new knowledge and skills in prior learning assessment. Mosia (2002:87) says, "The extent and intensity of any training programme that includes learner-participation should bring about a significant change or transformation to the individual who initially entered the programme with little knowledge or none". The expectation is that since this style of assessing prior

learning is interactive and offers a high level of learner participation, candidates would acquire new insights and skills in prior learning assessment.

Butterworth and McKelvey (1997:153-175) and Day (2002:60-71) describe the **credit exchange approach** as one, which enables students to obtain credit at a receiving institution for formal courses (modules) completed at a previous institution. The advantage of this approach is that it does not require candidates to reflect on their prior learning. Candidates simply provide evidence of having achieved the knowledge and skills prescribed for the course, module or programme for which credit is sought (Osman & Castle 2004:128). This approach represents a systematic way to the portability of prior learning credits by evaluating previously earned certificates against the requirements of the academic and training programmes of the receiving institution or standards of practice set by the professional body. The portfolio of evidence demonstrating continuing competence to practice can or not be submitted, for university-level credits, but just to display evidence of lifelong learning as well as academic ability in a specified profession.

It is Day's contention (2002:63) that within this approach, the distinction between the credit exchange and the developmental approaches towards implementing RPL is fading. He says the principles of both approaches ought to be relevant for meeting the needs of the learner (internal customer requirements) and the university's demand for accreditation (external customer's requirements). In using this methodology, institutions need to be consistent in the manner in which they render this service (award credits). Osman and Castle (2002:64) caution that if this process alone is followed, "the implementation process runs the risk of being reductionist and simplistic, possibly coercive and potentially confrontational".

The greatest challenge with this approach in the higher education sector is that, for it to be successful there should be accreditation agreements between institutions, which were non-existent at the time of this study. RPL implementers when using this approach should bear in mind the notion of quality as 'value for money'. Candidates should receive quality RPL services (profiling, advising, actual assessment and communication) at the lowest possible costs. The services rendered should meet

customer requirements, i.e. client satisfaction, more so if it can offer the candidate more than what they expected.

The **transformational approach,** what Harris (1999a:133) calls 'radical RPL', as it recognises informal and experiential learning on their own terms (Osman & Castle in Gravett & Geyser 2004:130), and is closely linked with societal transformation and redress. This approach "holds that what is learnt experientially is not a disembedded skill that can easily be matched with the contents of an academic programme" *(ibid.).* The methodology centres on the learners in that it views learning as a collective process, which is socially constructed. The methods used are various, and include focus group discussions, collages, and other forms of self-expression such as music and dance. The transformational model of RPL has been criticised by Usher, Bryant and Johnston in Gravett and Geyser (2004:130), who argue that the model does not have the capacity to challenge the dominant and hegemonic discourses of the academy.

Smith (2003) introduced another approach, which she referred to as the **summative approach** in which the assessing institution allows its candidates to prepare and submit evidence independently in their own time. Its responsibility is to provide guidelines on the preparation of the portfolio and to offer advice to candidates throughout the preparation of the portfolio, but not present a portfolio development programme as an integral part of the assessment and accreditation processes. She says the use of this approach in the provisioning of RPL does not end with the assessment of the candidate's evidence, but should ideally continue offering candidate support. The assessing institution should help the candidate with the transition from informal, and non-formal learning to formal learning by recommending top-up training where required, such as learner support, academic bridging modules or fast-tracking certain modules or courses. The difference between Smith's approach and the one advocated for by Osman (2003), i.e. the **technical approach,** is that the latter one "values prior learning only to the extent that it matches the skills and knowledge of a curriculum in which access or credit is sought, but student development is not fore grounded".

Each of these approaches has its specific role to play in the provisioning of RPL. The choice of one or a combination of approaches used by the assessing/awarding

institution should accommodate the unique situation of individual RPL candidates. Smith (2003) maintains that it is the responsibility of the assessing institution to initiate target group and market analyses, and then decide on the most suitable approach to include in its implementation strategy.

2.3.2 What is the purpose for RPL?

RPL as a tool for **social justice** will have value for the learners, institutions, workplaces and the country at large. Many adults and out-of-school youths may have been part of non-formal and informal training programmes and acquired a great deal of knowledge and experience in the process. Such expertise (capabilities) if not recognised or certificated often leads to exclusion from certain jobs, promotion on the job, and from further education and training opportunities, for all of which some kind of 'certificate' is usually needed. These skills need to be certified in order to provide access into the labour market, therefore through RPL, the education system could assist in: eliminating unnecessary duplication of learning; encouraging self-assessment; enabling RPL learners to make judgments concerning their own knowledge and skills; reducing the time learners need to spend in training and help to build learner confidence (Challis 1993:14-15).

RPL also has benefits for the employer in that existing worker competence can be easily measured against required standards (employable skill standards). There could be a reduction in costs involved in the identification of further training needs. A better-qualified workforce increases competitiveness and this strategy could aid effective recruitment of workers (Coetzee 2002:155).

A case study done by Korpel (1998: 67-68) with tellers in a financial institution indicated that those who attended the RPL Training Course to determine their prior knowledge and did well in the post assessment were able to deliver quality teller work. What this means is that if assessment of worker's prior learning is in the field they are working in, placement within the organisation in terms of their competencies where they could function effectively could be easy. Opportunities for promotion, which contribute significantly towards improvement of people's socio-economic status avail themselves easily under these circumstances.

At country level, Harris and Saddington (1995:7) state that in terms of the current political, economic and social context in the country, RPL has the capacity to "contribute to redress and equity by opening up more ways for people to attain qualified status (qualifications); 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 workplace 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 qualify existing competence".

If we consider the various groups of people who have to benefit from the RPL system, we cannot use a one-size-fit-all approach, for example, access only. The service needs to meet the needs of the individual clients. It follows from these arguments that depending on the context for implementing RPL, any of the following purposes for RPL as indicated by SAQA (2002) can be utilised.

Table 2.2: *A description of the purposes of RPL*

Term	Description
Access	To provide ease of entry to appropriate level of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression
Placement	To determine the appropriate level for learners wanting to enter education and training through a diagnostic assessment
Advanced status	To grant access to a level of a qualification for which a candidate has registered
Advanced standing	To award credit towards a qualification for which a candidate has registered
Credit	To award formal, transferable credits to the learning that meets the requirements of the part or full qualification
Certification	To certify credits attained for the purposes of a qualification

2.3.3 RPL and experiential learning

Morris Keeton insists that, "all learning is experiential" (Hoffmann 2006a:4). Experiential learning is about: acting and observing; understanding the effects of the action in a specific instance and understanding the general principle and applying it in new circumstances (Whitaker 1989:3). Kelly (2003:2-3) emphasised the value of learning by experience, where he describes experiential learning as "activities in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied". He says, "It is

not about observing the phenomenon only, but also doing something with it, such as testing the action and interaction to learn more about it, or applying the theory to achieve some desired results". Harris (2000:1) emphasises that such learning ought to be given currency within formal education and training frameworks.

David Kolb developed the process that explains how people learn from a particular activity (experience), illustrated in figure 2.2 below. Kolb (1984a: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". According to Kolb's argument, experience on its own does not promote learning, but reflection on that experience results into learning, hence the term 'experiential learning'.

The four elements of learning Kolb presents are: *concrete experience*, *reflective observation*, *abstract conceptualisation* and *active experimentation* (Kolb 1984b:40-43; Kolb 1999:8). He uses them to describe how this 'reflective learning' takes place, which in principle is what is needed from potential RPL candidates to demonstrate what they have learnt during the assessment process. In the learning process, Kolb (1984a) describes four types of learners: accommodators (action-oriented and intuitive problem-solvers), divergers (people-oriented and ideas driven), assimilators (observers, ideas driven, inductive thinkers and models) and convergers (uses logical analysis and deductive reasoning). Kolb's concept of learning styles has provided strong support for experiential learners who often prefer to begin the learning process by doing.

The following diagram depicts Kolb's model of experiential learning:
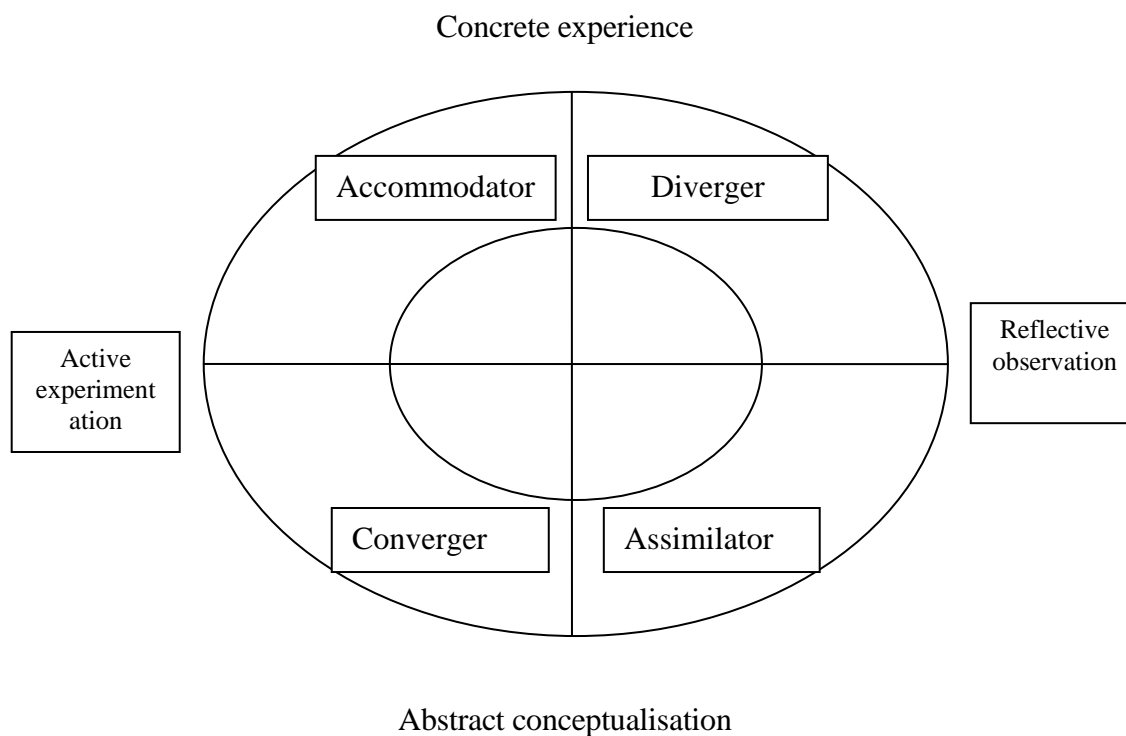
Concrete experience

Abstract conceptualisation

Figure 2.1: Kolb's model of experiential learning

According to Colvin (2006:89-91), by targeting each quadrant, RPL learners can more effectively describe their learning around the cycle:

- Concrete experience involves a description of one's experience, such as, what did you do and what actions did you take? The candidate's life learning narrative should reflect common verbs such as worked, created, prepared, implemented, conducted and produced.
- Reflective observation involves what one noticed and observed about the experience. The candidate's life learning narrative should exhibit common verbs such as observed, watched, noticed, saw, thought and discovered.
- Abstract conceptualisation is about rules, theories and concepts applicable in a particular situation. The candidate's life learning narrative should display common verbs such as concluded, theorised, found, realised, deducted and learned.
- Active experimentation is about how one applied his/her learning in new situations. The candidate's life learning narrative should show the use of common verbs such as used, updated, implemented and changed.

Smith (2003:47-48) contends that the *concrete experience* coupled with *active experimentation* especially where they occur in the workplace, in community involvement or in life experience, can be classified as *informal or non-formal learning*. It is generally accepted that the RPL candidate must employ some form of *reflective observation* in order to be able to identify, formulate and document his/her prior learning *(abstract conceptualisation)* in ways that are acceptable to higher education academic standards. The challenge that remains after determining this form of learning is to assess and accredit the candidate's prior learning against learning outcomes and express it in terms of formal education credits. Kolb (b) (1984:3) argues that there is a link between experience and assessment for college or university credit: "people do learn from their experience, and the results of that learning can be reliably assessed and certified for college or university credit". However, he contends that this area is not free of problems (challenges).

The final step in the RPL candidate's integration into higher education is making the transition between informal and non-formal learning on the one hand, and formal learning on the other. In other words, it is important that the RPL candidate be able to arrive at *abstract conceptualisation*, which is the requirement of formal higher education-level learning. Luckett (1999) and Osman and Castle (2002) established that many non-traditional learners were unable to make this transition of their own accord, due to a number of barriers. Should this be the case, the implication is that the RPL process cannot end once assessment has been carried out, but that the institution should put learner support systems for RPL candidates. In addition, the situation calls for the appointment of the RPL coach (trainer or mentor) to facilitate the correct articulation of the needed learning acquired from other learning situations.

2.4 RPL AND QUALITY ASSURANCE: EXPLORING INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

Internationally, the countries in which there is a form of RPL implementation are the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Canada and The Netherlands. I have judged them as being exemplary, since they have demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that **'quality provisioning of RPL'** exists. All these countries have developed and documented models and processes for quality

assuring the RPL implementation process, with the USA having played a major role in developing standards for RPL quality assurance, described in details in section 2.5.1.3. The sources of *Best Practice Candidates* were comments from RPL experts; online secondary literature databases; site visits; the Internet; country-specific reports; professional organisation meetings; and conference proceedings.

I had an opportunity of attending a workshop and conference hosted by CAEL in 2006, on Learn, Engage and Change: Making a Difference in Lifelong Learning, on the 7-11 November 2006, at Boston, Massachusetts, which afforded me an opportunity of making informed decisions about the inclusion of the USA as a best candidate in quality provisioning of RPL. Many other countries including South Africa have adapted the standards used in this country for quality assurance purposes. In this section is a description of how each country quality assures its RPL assessment process.

I also entered into an intense dialogue with key figures in Australia who participated in a project commissioned by the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB) regarding the status of RPL provisioning in that country. This is with special reference to Leesa Wheelahan, the Principal Researcher, and Diane Newton, the Research Associate. Much of the information below comes from the National Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) sent on 04 September 2006, and the report documenting the status of RPL provisioning in this country too.

Standards of excellence (criteria for evaluation) for comparing RPL practices in each country included how they define RPL; why they are offering the RPL service; historical and current developments in RPL provisioning; the quality assurance model for RPL provisioning and how they assess candidates for their prior learning. The common thread was to identify strengths and weaknesses in each criterion and show what South African Higher Education Institutions can learn from each country's RPL practice. I utilised the American Productivity and Quality Centre (APQC) framework for developing benchmarks, for the RPL practice, that was fully integrated with the entire research process (planning stage, general data collection phase, data analysis, and adaptation of the best practices learnt) (Zucker, Johnston & Flint 1999:5-7).

2.4.1 PLA IMPLEMENTATION IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

2.4.1.1 PLA: definition and purpose

In the USA, the term College-Level Learning (CLL) is used to imply the necessary prior learning required for admission into a college or university. On the other hand, the term Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is used to mean the process candidates are taken through to demonstrate the prior learning acquired. A multilevel approach to viewing RPL is used (Hoffmann 2006b:8), as indicated in Chapter 1, section 1.7.1. According to this approach, there are four groups of people, who play a role in defining RPL, i.e. policy makers; individual institutions and organisations; Faculty assessors; and RPL candidates. At policymaking level, the concept is defined in broad and generic terms, with set parameters. Clarity needs to be provided on what broad initiatives are being met by allowing this credit. The definition used at institutional level should be operational. It is at this level where certain questions need to be answered, such as, "How can CLL be demonstrated as equivalent to courses?" What are the criteria that can assure academic quality? Moreover, how does CLL fit into the curriculum?

At Faculty level, practical issues regarding the concept need to be accounted for, i.e. application and relevance of the concept to Faculty needs. The questions that need answers are: Is there CLL in the Life Learning Narrative? Does the student provide adequate documentation to support the learning claimed? Does the portfolio articulate theoretical understanding and applied learning? Is the learning implied or explicit? The bottom line perspective involves RPL candidates themselves and at this level, questions that need to be addressed are: How do I show the assessor that I have the necessary prior learning? Do I have enough knowledge for a course? Moreover, what level is my prior learning?

In the USA, RPL is a term that describes both sponsored and un-sponsored experiential learning. The difference between the two types of experiential learning is that sponsored experiential learning, such as co-operative education, hands-on training, service learning and internships, is usually a mix of teacher directed/supervised and self-directed events, whereas un-sponsored experiential

learning is devoid of external direction. It is often unplanned and cumulative, and its structure is markedly different from a pre-designed and delivered curriculum (Fiddler, Marienau & Whitaker (2006:6-7). The primary implication of differentiating types of experiential learning for prior learning assessment is that it is the outcomes of learning that are the raison d´etre for assessment, not the inputs *(ibid.)*.

Many misunderstandings might arise if there is no clear distinction between what is meant by RPL, and what it is not. In instances where this misrepresentation is allowed, the RPL system can easily be misused and abused by assessing and or awarding institutions and beneficiaries alike. Challis (1993:13-14) makes it succinctly clear that RPL is not: "a means of giving 'credit for living', it is 'credit for learning'; a quick and easy route for the learner to some how get something for nothing, the process is arduous, both emotionally and physically; a cheap process, either for learners or for providers of the service". The users of the service need to pay for the services rendered. He also says, "RPL is not the most appropriate route for every learner". That is why it would be essential to identify the candidate's learning needs so that appropriate guidance may be given, in the event where the original application is not viable for RPL purposes.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) provided a list of criteria for College-Level Learning (Hoffmann 2006b:10-12). The Council says, in order for CLL to be credit worthy, a student's learning must be "measurable; at the level of achievement defined by college Faculty as equivalent or consistent with the learning of other students engaged in college studies; and applicable outside the specific job or context in which it was learned". "It must also have a knowledge base; be reasonably current; have a conceptual or theoretical as well as a practical understanding; show some relationship to one's degree goals and/or life-long learning goals; and not repeat learning for which credit has already been awarded" *(ibid.)*.

There are various ways institutions define College-Level Learning and use student's prior learning in a college degree programme. An institution may "allow a student to target specific courses using course objectives and/or syllabi; take course challenge examinations that are institution specific; and create a holistic picture of the learning in an academic area rather than in a specific course framework". "They could also

examine competency-based learning as in ACE (Advanced Certificate in Education) credits and military training; create a degree based on RPL learning; utilise RPL credits earned through standardised testing; participate in oral interviews with Faculty assessors; and read textbooks and add their examples from their experiences to apply to theories" *(ibid.).*

The following are criteria for using college-level learning at Faculty and assessor level, developed by Theresa Hoffmann (2006b:11). She asserts that RPL candidates should: "be grounded in theory, concepts and principles; demonstrate expert level knowledge through how projects were described and the level of sophistication in understanding how things worked and the principles behind them; have the experience necessary to learn what is claimed; identify principles, best practices, concepts, patterns and knowledge that can be applied to new situations; cover material stated in the course objectives; provide models and assumptions that are analytical and critical rather than rote; present a wealth of background and real life scenarios in which theoretical understanding is embedded and permeates it with a sophisticated synthesis; have the quality of repeatability, meaning that because of the level of detail provided, someone else could do what the candidate/learner described; define a sequence from simple to complex; know what is relevant to the field; provide an analysis of problem-solving situations, strategies and results; identify and illustrate patterns and connections; show cause and effect; demonstrate an ability to see alternative uses for the principles learned; be able to place knowledge into a larger context and in another setting; use or approximate jargon of the field, stating ideas in other ways; and approximate or have comparable knowledge contained in traditional course descriptions or syllabi".

At the candidate level, this is where RPL candidates are expected to take advantage of the following to help them identify and articulate their learning from life experiences within the structure of a module or programme: "college catalogues; schedule of classes; syllabi; course objectives; RPL textbooks; RPL workbooks; student mentors; and samples narratives and guidance from their trainer/instructor/coach" *(ibid.).* In the literature, PLA refers to any knowledge building or skills attainment that occurs prior to enrolment or outside of enrolment at a post-secondary institution, assessed for awarding college or university credit (Zucker, Johnson & Flint 1999:3). In relation to the purpose

for prior learning assessment, PLA in this country is mainly for advanced standing rather than access to an institution.

2.4.1.2 PLA implementation: historical and current developments

According to Anderson and Fejes (2005:3) RPL emerged in higher education in the USA in 1974, under the leadership of Morris Keeton. The first type of RPL was regarded as a tool of social justice that made higher education more available to individuals from non-traditional student populations. An experimental research project, 'Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning Project' at the Educational Testing Services in Princeton, New Jersey, showed that it was possible to use different certificates to grant students admission to the university, and PLA has since become a common practice for most colleges and universities across this country. When CAEL was established, it had the following objectives (Nyatanga *et al* 1993:3): "development and dissemination of techniques for evaluating work and life experiences that can be given academic credit; creation and distribution of publications to help those involved with adult and experiential learning; and expanding research-based knowledge about adult learners and good practice in assessment for prior learning".

Currently, in the USA, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in Chicago is a leading advocate of RPL, with over 1700 affiliates (colleges and universities) that offered RPL by the mid 90s (Taylor 2000:3). As part of CAEL's initiatives, there is training and support given to its affiliates and interested parties on the basic 'nuts and bolts' of how to design and implement RPL at colleges and universities. The presentation is in the form of 1½-day workshops referred to as PLA 101. There is an online RPL certificate programme, to learn how to develop a professional assessment system for one's institution, or to strengthen the institution's existing RPL programme, and conferences where those who are involved in PLA programmes at their institutions come together to learn, engage and share experiences with others, so as to bring change to their institutional practices. CAEL in the USA had a profound influence on the development and shape of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) inside the country and elsewhere. The council comes across as a leader in

training adult learning practitioners and preparing institutions to provide quality prior learning assessment programmes.

2.4.1.3 PLA Provisioning: model of quality assurance

The USA has set trends to the rest of the world in terms of conducting prior learning assessments. For quality assurance purposes, there are standards, principles and procedures developed by CAEL, which have greatly informed and influenced PLA practices worldwide (Nyatanga *et al* 1998:38). Any authentic practice requires that there be an agreed code of practice in order to achieve a standard of excellence in the assessment. PLA provisioning is no different. Given the diversity of circumstances and levels of use it requires clear guides on what is to be done. A presentation of each standard (current ones) (Fiddler *et al* 2006:13-27) is given below accompanied by an explanation. They are divided into academic and administrative standards. Academic standards deal mainly with those standards used for the assessment process itself and administrative ones are for quality assurance of the process:

2.4.1.3.1   Quality Assurance: standards, principles and procedures for PLA

Academic standards

Standard 1: Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience. RPL candidates should not be given an impression that they will be granted credits for 'time served' or just experience they have gathered elsewhere other than at formal institutions. In order to give credence to the entire system, credits are awarded for the actual learning that has taken place and not experience alone. Experience is an excellent potential source of learning (input), but experience alone is not an adequate yardstick for learning (Whitaker 1989:11). The assessment of learning should not be based on a simple calculation of inputs (hours or years spent in experience); instead, credit awards should be based on the learning outcomes for a particular programme or qualification (Fiddler *et al* 2006:45).

Standard 2: Prior learning assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public, i.e. listed

in an institution's catalogue. According to Colvin (2006:46-47) the learning must have been acquired after high school to be considered college level. It must be comparable to college-level courses, a distinction that should be made by academic experts. The student's knowledge and skills need to match the level of learning typically taught in a college course. This learning must be transferable to several contexts or settings that a student might encounter. When assigning credit, every college has the freedom to design an evaluation form, which an evaluator or team of evaluators can use to write comments and indicate if the learning is college level as well as determine the number and level of credits earned. The measure for awarding credits for prior learning is generally whether a student learned at a level of competence, which is usually considered a C minus (or 70 percent) or higher grade (Fiddler *et al* 2006:46).

Standard 3: Assessment is to be handled as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of the learning processes. There are two principles entrenched here (Fiddler *et al* 2006:18-19), i.e. "assessment should be a measure, not an audit of learning and how assessment is done is an outgrowth of beliefs and assumptions about learning". This means that assessment is more likely to be experienced as a part of learning if based on criteria that are clearly expressed and known to both the assessor and the learner, and presented in ways that are likely to be read or heard by the learner as constructive and useful for a future learning agenda, if one is desired. In addition, assessment of learning requires that multiple capabilities be represented and it relies on quality feedback. The model of learning, which the institution uses, determines largely how assessment will be done, and can affect how this standard will be met *(ibid.)*. For example, if a model of learning posits that much of what is learnt from experience remains tacit until prompted, the assessment should be constructed to provide relevant or stimulating prompts. This phase may require considerable care and patience to avoid pre-empting the demonstration of the learning outcomes.

Standard 4: The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter, academic or credentialing experts. Assessment is an academic expertise, a role that needs to be done by Faculty members (Colvin 2006:48-49). There are two kinds of expertise involved in determining creditworthy

learning. That is, content expertise: how much does the learner know, and how well does she/he know it? Moreover, academic or credentialing expertise: how much learning is required in each subject, at what level, and is it with or without the completion of additional learning? The central question to be asked in order to meet this standard is: who can or should assess? Even in instances where an external expert is involved in this type of assessment, the person should be a specialist in the area the candidate is being assessed on or is seeking credit in.

Standard 5: Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted. Experiential learning should be balanced by enough theoretical learning to make it useful for entry into any higher learning programmes. A common way of ascertaining this would be to test if candidates can transfer their knowledge and skills to a different context. According to Whitaker (1989:14), the assessment process is short-changed when it does not represent that balance. He further says the learning is not complete until the learner has some understanding of what both the theory and the practical experience mean.

Administrative standards

Standard 6: If awards are for credit, transcript entries should describe what learning is recognised and monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning. Meeting this standard is a simple administrative matter (task). However, it may require academic judgement in cases where the relationships of the subject matter are complex or where credited learning has not been adequately described or clearly labelled (Fiddler *et al* 2006:21-22). In essence, duplication and overlap of credits should be avoided.

Standard 7: Policies, procedures and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process. Failing to publicly declare in advance the rules, regulations and criteria used for RPL assessment is not acceptable. The principle of fairness and transparency must be adhered to. As a matter of principle, policies regarding prior learning assessment need to be published in the school's catalogue or on the website. Alternatively, anyone needing information on RPL should get the

necessary policy documentation from the RPL office, or prospective candidates could contact the registrar's office for such policies. Fiddler, Marieneau and Whitaker (2006:22) say: "truth in advertising" is a vital component of quality assurance.

Standard 8: Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded. The basis for any fees should be the assessment itself as well as associated administrative costs, not the tuition cost of the credit hours that are awarded. Additional fees may be required to transcript the credit or place the credit officially with the institution's registrar. However, paying the assessment fee is not a guarantee of credit. No one should promise credits and/or admission to programmes before assessment takes place, or even before checking the authenticity and currency of the candidate's claims. It is inconceivable to regard PLA as an intuitive judgement. It is a process based on objectivity and tangible evidence about the learning (Fiddler *et al* 2006:22-23; Colvin 2006:50).

Standard 9: All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions performed. In order to maintain the effectiveness of the entire set of standards rests on both the desire of assessors to assume knowledge-based responsibility for their efforts, and the intention of organisations they represent to provide sustained training along with assessment of the quality of the frontline assessor's work. It has often been noted that college and university professors are better prepared in content than in process (Fiddler *et al* 2006:23; Colvin 2006:50). The argument here is that even for those who have developed appropriate assessment expertise for classroom learning, it is essential that professional development be sought and provided in support of any experiential learning assessment they undertake.

Standard 10: Assessment programmes should be monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed, to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and in the state of the assessment arts. It has been noted that assessment practices in the area of RPL have been modified greatly over a number of years. Faculty assessors with hands-on-experience have identified what works and what doesn't, and they continue to do so. It is essential therefore, for any institution

involved in prior learning assessment to align their practices with new developments. Local review and evaluation can take various formal and informal forms, including internal self-study and assessment and involvement of outside advisory panels. Accrediting agencies and professional associations can collaborate with national organisations that offer assistance for monitoring programmes and assuring quality (Fiddler *et al* 2006:24).

2.4.1.4 The PLA process of assessment

A candidate seeking for admission into any of the many institutions in the USA that offer PLA goes through a particular process (Nyatanga *et al* 1998:8; Fiddler *et al* 2006:31):

Table 2.3: *The PLA process of assessment*

STEPS	DESCRIPTION	ACTIONS
Step 1	Identify	Identify college-level learning acquired through life experiences
Step 2	Articulate	Show how and what parts of that learning are related to the degree objectives
Step 3	Document	Verify in order to provide evidence of learning
Step 4	Measure	Determine the extent and character of learning acquired
Step 5	Evaluate	Decide whether the learning meets an acceptable standard and determine its credit equivalence
Step 6	Transcribe	Record the credit or recognition of learning

The steps followed for assessing sponsored experiential and un-sponsored experiential learning may not necessarily be the same, considering the differences between the two types of learning. In using this process, RPL assessors identify which standard(s) of assessment is suitable for each step. In this particular way, an inter-play between the steps of the assessment process and the standards for quality assurance is allowed to take place (Fiddler *et al* 2006:27). The essential aspect with these steps is that the assessment process becomes both dynamic and an important source of new learning and new insights about personal and professional goals. The recommendation in applying the model is to avoid a rigid and mechanistic approach to the process.

2.4.1.4.1   The PLA assessment models

There are two models developed by Theresa Hoffman (2006a:17-43) on behalf of CAEL for use by its affiliates, i.e. colleges and universities offering PLA, and they are: (1) The ABCs of college-level learning and (2) The Kolb's Learning Styles and Bloom's Taxonomy, or the K-B model. There are advantaged for using either of the models. With the ABCs model, the visual picture thereof depicts the overall contents of a portfolio. It gives students an idea of what they need to produce. The model also offers the student to reflect on their learning experiences, as part of demonstrating the necessary learning for award of credits. The model is used in conjunction with well-developed worksheet(s) that candidates have to work through. Identification of College-Level Learning' in this particular way is an extremely rigorous process. The K-B model on the other hand is useful in the sense that most Faculty assessors are familiar with the use of Bloom's Taxonomy in assessment generally, which is being promoted in this model. The use of Kolb's learning cycle only adds depth to this model. It is an easy tool to use to facilitate student's learning from experience. The following is the ABC model of College-Level Learning, adapted from Hoffmann (2006a:17).
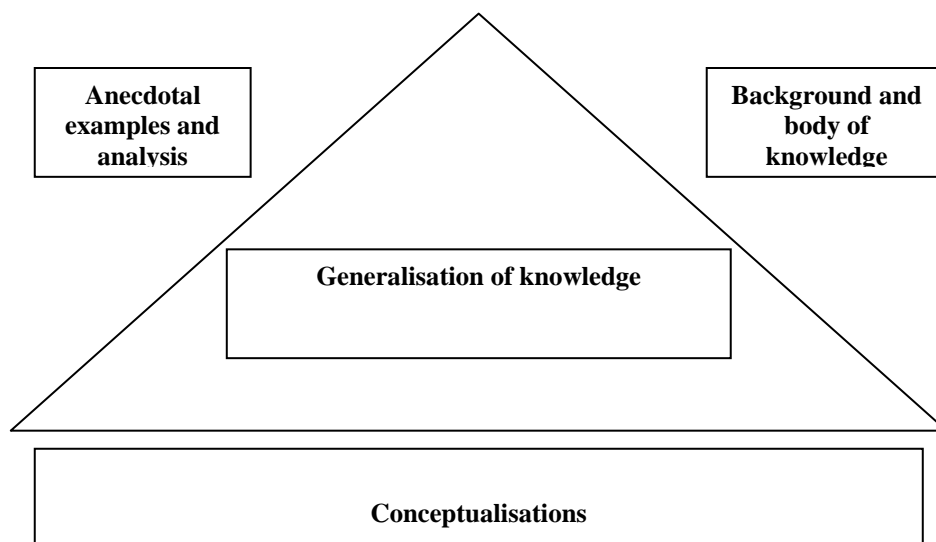

Figure 2.2: The ABCs of College-Level Learning (CLL)

Hoffmann (2006b:16-18) explains elements of the model in the following way:

"Anecdotal situations and analysis of the process means people learn by experiencing problem-solving situations; reasoning behind solutions; troubleshooting experiences; trial and error methods and through real life stories and solutions"

"Relevant background indicates past experiences that led to gaining the expertise stems from childhood lessons; learning on-the-job; life experiences at home, community, hobbies and voluntary work; training; testing; skills and accomplishments"

"Body of knowledge describes learned expertise through problem-solving situations creates a body of knowledge that can be intuitive, such as lists of topics from course descriptions and syllabi that cover expertise; explanation and detailed account of the information and knowledge base learned through experiences and students can have broad areas of knowledge, which they could use in demonstrating learning"

"Conceptualisation means theoretical understanding can be difficult to draw out from experiences since it is usually intuitive. Coaching from the PLA course instructor (mentor) can be helpful at this stage, and throughout the process. An explanation of principles working to cause problems and create solutions; and exploring the reasons why something happened and searching for patterns, connections, correlations, best practices, rationale, theories or hypotheses is essential"

"Generalisation of knowledge indicates awareness of what we know and how to use it, gives us the ability to apply the principles in new situations. Expertise means being able to describe application of the knowledge and lessons learned in a new situation or environment and creating new scenarios using well-tested procedures and knowledge of cause/effect or consequences"

In the Kolb's Learning Styles, Bloom's Taxonomy and the concept of meta-cognition are combined, to demonstrate another way to visualise what college-level learning means. Kolb's learning styles include concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Kolb 1984a), as indicated in

section 2.4.3 above. Bloom's taxonomy includes the psychomotor and affective skills, and the knowledge, comprehension and analysis from the cognitive domain (Bloom 1956; Bloom 1984). The process of meta-cognition involves combining learning from both the conscious and unconscious mind to apply to new situations. To aid in this process of reflection, Faculty assessors should use 'state of the art instruments and techniques' (well-developed worksheets and rubrics).

It is evident from the manner in which RPL is implemented in the United States of America that credibility and integrity in the RPL assessments is inherent in the use of well-developed and crafted principles, standards, models, and procedures for PLA, reviewed on a continual basis to meet the changing needs in quality assurance and assessment practices generally.

2.4.2 PLAR IMPLEMENTATION IN CANADA

2.4.2.1 PLAR: definition and purpose

Malcolm Day (2000:1) in the report of the study conducted on: "Developing Benchmarks for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition" defines RPL as "a systematic process that involves the identification, documentation, assessment and recognition of learning i.e. skills, knowledge and values". He says this learning may be acquired through formal and informal study including work and life experience, training, independent study, volunteer work, travel, hobbies and family experiences. In this country, RPL can be used towards the requirements of education and training programmes; occupational and/or professional certification; labour market entry; and organisation and human resource capacity building (Aarts *et al* 1999:83).

The goals of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) include the: identification of learning, wherever it has taken place; selection of that learning which is relevant to a desired outcome career or occupational plan; demonstration of the validity and appropriateness of the learning; matching learning outcomes to those stated within a chosen accreditation or progression framework; assessment of evidence against pre-determined criteria to ensure the validity of the claimed learning;

and accreditation of credits within an appropriate and recognised accreditation framework".

According to the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials[10], PLAR has several benefits: it improves access to education when formal credentials are not well understood; it helps place learners at appropriate levels within education programmes; it eliminates the need for students to study things they already know and it helps learners develop clear educational goals and plans. The research, which the centre conducted, indicates that PLAR also improves learner confidence, self-esteem and motivation to learn. The report concluded that if the institution's course offering are flexible, PLAR can reduce student's programme workloads and costs.

2.4.2.2 PLAR implementation: historical and current developments

In Canada, the development of Prior Learning Accreditation and Recognition (PLAR) began in the college system in the 1980's as a means to meet the needs of mature learners who were returning to college with significant learning, which had occurred from work and life experience, and the professional bodies' immediate need for qualified practitioners (Evans 2000:34). RPL in Canada reflects the following initiatives: (1) much attention to the development of assessment tools, especially regarding challenge exams; a portfolio-development course at the Ontario-based First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI), and (2) joint projects involving a number of universities, community colleges, community groups, voluntary organisations, labour, the private and public sectors.

However, Blower (2000:98-100) points out that PLAR in Canada faced some tough challenges, until recent developments. PLAR started off not as a national policy priority; provision of financial and human resources were a problem; quality assurance in PLAR practice was not provided as well as the development of national standards for purposes of quality assurance. The Canadian Association for Prior

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[10] The information on the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) in relation to RPL was accessed from the website http:www.cicic.ca/en/page.aspx?sortcode=2.17.19 on 14 January 2007.

Learning Assessment (CAPLA)[11] has been the leading voice for prior learning assessment and recognition for many years, beginning in Belleville, Ontario, CAPLA was nurtured by FNTI and experts from across Canada and abroad has helped shape the look and substance of what RPL in this country has become (http://www.capla.ca.Background.php retrieved on 16 October, 2006).

The recent developments in Canada indicate that, most public colleges recognise prior learning in at least some of their programmes. Some universities also recognise it, often in programmes offered through continuing education. British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario offer RPL to adults at the secondary level. In some parts of Canada, licensing and certification bodies use RPL to evaluate the knowledge and skills of internationally trained applicants wishing to enter their professions. Some organisations also offer RPL to Canadian applicants from different provinces and territories. In the words of Bonnie Kennedy, the Executive Director of CAPLA (CAEL Forum and News: 2006) CAPLA has yearly workshops and has been instrumental in bringing the fields of PLA and formal credential recognition together, in order to support the recognition of prior learning as a holistic enterprise. CAPLA produces regular newsletters, conducts research, and delivers training. One of its additions has been its online community of practice and national repository for PLAR resources and research launched in 2003 (www.recognitionforlearning.ca). The website provides a platform for national and international dialogue amongst PLAR practitioners.

2.4.2.3 PLAR Provisioning: model of quality assurance

2.4.2.3.1   Quality Assurance: principles for PLAR

As part of the developments in improving PLAR practice, the Canadian Institute for Recognition of Learning (CIRL) released a set of principles on January 3, 2006 in Toronto, for use by employers, professional bodies and education and training

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[11] The Canadian Association for Prior Learning (CAPLA) has been identified as a powerful organisation that speaks with authority on RPL matters in Canada. Much of the developments captured in this study are because of the work of this organisation.

practitioners. The Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB) has developed 14 minimum standards for the PLAR process (1997) and the Centre for Curriculum Transfer and Technology published guidelines in seven PLAR areas (1999). The principles are:

"**Accessibility:** PLAR should be seen as a tool for facilitating access, i.e. access to education, employment, promotion and occupational licensing/certification. The purpose of PLAR is to improve alternative mechanisms to identify, verify, and recognise knowledge and skills acquired through non-sponsored learning"

"**Accountability:** organisations should be accountable to the public and to government for their operations. This accountability requires formal policies and practices that frame PLAR activities and ensure evaluation of the process and its outcomes"

"**Criterion-referenced:** prior learning assessment and recognition is criterion-referenced. That is candidate knowledge and skills must be identified and measured against pre-set standards (standards ensure consistent results even if assessment methods and tools vary)"

"**Efficiency:** pressures created by uncertainties in applicant volume and high cost of assessment require efficient PLAR processes to ensure affordability for candidates and assessing agencies"

"**Equity:** PLAR is intended to treat candidates equally without discrimination based on the source of their learning. To be equitable, the PLAR process should hold candidates to the same standard of competency or qualification as individuals who have not undertaken PLAR. PLAR should not involve assessment processes that are more rigorous than assessment of knowledge and skills through more traditional ones"

"**Legality:** many organisations engaged in PLAR are responsible for ensuring compliance with legislation. PLAR should fit within the legal frameworks that guide organisational operations"

"**Quality:** the quality of the PLAR process is related to the quality of a candidate's subsequent performance. PLAR should assess the relevance, currency and sufficiency of candidate's prior learning. The qualifications of prior learning assessors should reflect an expertise in PLAR and the subject area of the assessment"

"**Right of appeal:** in democratic societies, the public has a right to be informed about processes and decisions that have an impact on their lives. Details on the PLAR process, its purpose, criteria and steps, and the factors, upon which PLAR decisions are made, should be made available to candidates"

"**Validity and reliability:** measurement experts agree that the assessment tool validity is tied to the purpose for which an assessment is used. Thus, a test might be valid for one purpose but inappropriate for other purposes. The reliability and validity of PLAR methods and tools are critical to its credibility and should be evaluated".

The Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB 1997) standards for prior learning assessment and recognition are:

- RPL must be accessible and relevant to people as individuals: it must focus on the unique needs and abilities of the individual
- Assessment and recognition must be of learning (knowledge and skills) and not of experience
- The RPL process must be fair and equitable: it must be barrier-free and bias-free
- The process must be effective: it must provide the opportunity for recognition of prior learning, but it must not hold out false promises
- The RPL process must be transparent, the individual must know the criteria and standards used to assess his or her skills and knowledge
- The assessment must be reliable, the criteria and standards must be recognised and respected by all the labour market partners
- The assessment tools and their RPL application must be valid: they must be recognised and accepted by all the labour market partners
- Individuals assessing prior learning must be trained to perform the task

- The assessing institution must provide a number of ways to carry out an assessment: individuals should have the opportunity to choose how their assessment will be done

- Recognition awarded through RPL should be considered equal to recognition awarded in the traditional manner

- Recognition awarded through RPL should be transferable between organisations, provinces and territories

- RPL must be an option or opportunity, not a mandatory process and if a person is not satisfied with the RPL assessment, an appeal procedure must be available

2.4.2.3.2   Quality Assurance: standards for PLAR

2.4.2.4 The PLAR process of assessment

There are three processes in place in Canada that one can use to demonstrate the knowledge and skills already acquired. They are the development of a portfolio to profile your school, life and work experiences; the challenge process for a course credit for university equivalency; and assessment of foreign out of province or foreign credentials. A portfolio is an organised collection of materials developed by an individual who records and verifies learning achievements and relates them to the requirements of labour market entry; human resources capacity building; education and training programmes and occupation and/or professional certification. A challenge process is a method of assessment, other than portfolio, developed and evaluated by subject-expert Faculty, to measure an individual's learning achievement against learning outcomes. It measures demonstrated learning through a variety of written and non-written evaluation methods, for the purpose of awarding course credit without requiring enrolment in that course. Challenge processes include one or more of the following: assessment of educational documents; standardised tests and programme reviews of employer-based training; product evaluation; interviews and oral exams; performance testing and demonstrations; essays; challenge exams; and self-assessment.

For out-of-province credentials, assessment can be done by the local educational institutions or through one of the recognised organisations. If training for a particular

job was done outside of Canada, the documents need to be translated and then assessed. Foreign credit assessment refers to the process of having foreign credentials translated and assessed. The assessment is measured against professional or academic standards. There is a cost for PLAR services and the cost differs from province to province. It also varies depending on the type of service requested, for example: face-to-face individual or group sessions; Internet assistance; translation services; tutoring; career advisement or counselling and assessments. In academic institutions, the costs of RPL assessments are usually less than taking the academic course(s).

2.4.3 RPL IMPLEMENTATION IN AUSTRALIA

2.4.3.1 RPL: definition

In Australia, there is a distinction between the learning achieved through formal education (credit transfer) and learning achieved outside the formal education and training system (RPL). Thus: **RPL** is an assessment process that assesses the individual's non-formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which that individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification. **Credit transfer** assesses the initial course that the individual is using to claim access to, or the award of credit in the destination course, to determine the extent to which it is equivalent to the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards in a qualification. This may include credit transfer based on formal learning that is outside the AQF framework (AQF Advisory Board 2000:1).

The key distinguishing characteristic is that it is the student who is assessed in the case of RPL, and the course, module or programme in the case of credit transfer. That is in credit transfer, the judgement is about the learning programme, outcomes and assessment in the initial course or subject (AQFAB 2002:10), which has to be considered for RPL purposes. Many students will use both RPL and credit transfer simultaneously, as the learning pathways students use, combined with their life and work experience is becoming increasingly complex.

Six examples[12] that illustrate the difference between RPL and Credit Transfer

Scenario 1: Victor is commencing a Bachelor of Arts at a university in Melbourne and seeks advanced standing on the basis of a Diploma of Community Services (Community Development) at a TAFE institute in Perth. The university does not have an articulation or credit transfer agreement with the TAFE institute. Victor is asked to collect information about the competency standards, delivery plan and assessment for the course before a decision can be made about whether or not he will be granted the advanced standing. Outcome: This is an example of *credit transfer.* Reason: the competency standards, delivery plan and assessment for that course are being assessed to determine equivalency to subjects in the Bachelor of Arts. Victor is not being assessed to determine the extent to which he can demonstrate whether or not he has met the required learning outcomes.

Scenario 2: Jackie is enrolled in the Diploma of Arts (Professional Writing and Editing) at a TAFE institute and seeks advanced standing based on her professional experience. Jackie is asked to collect evidence that she has met the competency standards. She prepares an annotated resume, and a portfolio that includes examples of short stories and newspaper articles she has written, examples of desktop publishing she has produced, and testimonials from supervisors about her responsibilities and tasks. Outcome: This is an example of *RPL.* Reason: Jackie is being assessed to determine the extent to which she has demonstrated that she has met the required competency standards.

Scenario 3: Ulla is undertaking the Certificate 4 in Further Education at the local neighbourhood house. She studied political science at tertiary level in her own country, but that was some time ago, and she is participating in the Cert 4 to reintroduce herself to tertiary study, which she wants to do, particularly as English is her second language. Nonetheless, she believes she can demonstrate competency for several of the standards, and wishes to pursue her application for advanced standing.

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[12] The above examples were used in a paper presented to the 11th National VET Research Conference North Point Institute of TAFE, Brisbane, 9-12 July 2002 by Leesa Wheelaham, Peter Miller and Diane Newton. The paper is accessible at: http://www.scu.edu.au/research/rpl/ncver.html

Ulla prepares a portfolio of evidence, which includes a reflective component relating her life experience, particularly her experience of migration to Australia, to demonstrate learning in areas of cross-cultural communication, problem solving, teamwork, knowledge of the Australian political framework. Outcome: This is an example of **RPL.** Reason: Ulla is being assessed to determine whether she has demonstrated that she has met the required standard.

Scenario 4: Aaron is undertaking the Certificate 2 in Retail Operations as part of senior school certificate and is seeking advanced standing for the competencies "interact with others", "work effectively in a retail environment" and "apply sale procedures". He has worked in the local supermarket since he was in the central warehouse. He has attended several in-house short training sessions in the last three years. In applying for RPL, the student attaches certificates of participation as evidence of his involvement in the in-house training. The assessor takes these into account in determining the Aaron's claim, but does not rely on them solely in deciding whether or not to grant RPL. The certificates testified only to participation and not achievement of standards or outcomes, and the outcomes of the sessions were not part of, or related to, endorsed standards or curriculum. The assessor interviews Aaron to discuss his experience further, and asks him to describe what he learnt from participating in the in-house training, and how this related to his capacity to do the job.

The in-house training proved to be very important to Aaron's skill acquisition, understanding and performance, and contributed strongly to his application. Outcome: This is an example of **RPL.** Reason: Aaron is being assessed to determine the extent to which he has demonstrated that he has met the required competency standards. Some of the learning the student has undertaken has been formal, but it is still an RPL application because in-house training is not being assessed to determine equivalence, the student is being assessed. The sessions are un-credentialed learning, outside a quality framework, and not part of a credit transfer agreement. If the sessions were to be classed as credit transfer, then they would need to be assessed to determine equivalence.

Scenario 5: Michael has been awarded a Diploma of Information Technology at a Registered Training Organisation. The diploma was awarded on the basis of recognition of prior learning, as Michael had worked for many years in the warehouse in a medium sized company, and had taken on increasing responsibility for supporting the IT infrastructure of the company as the technology was progressively introduced. The company had paid for him to attend the occasional external training program, as the need and opportunity arose. Outcome: This is an example of ***RPL.*** Reason: Michael is being assessed to determine the extent to which he has met the competency standards. The training he has undertaken is not being assessed to determine equivalence.

Scenario 6: Michael in example 5 is now enrolled in a degree course in informational technology, and is seeking the award of credit on the basis of the completed VET diploma – the diploma that was awarded on the basis of RPL. There is no articulation agreement between the private RTO and the university, but the degree course co-ordinator meets with the RTO, to discuss delivery plans and assessment approaches, standards and outcomes. The degree course co-coordinator knows the competencies, because they are part of the national training package, and are in used in all IT courses in VET. Outcome: This is an example of ***credit transfer.*** Reason: The IT diploma and the RTO are being assessed to determine equivalency, not the student, regardless of the fact that the student was awarded the IT diploma on the basis of RPL. The university has to decide whether they have confidence in the assessment of the RTO. The request for the award of credit is based on the completed IT diploma, not the original RPL application.

2.4.3.2 RPL: purpose

According to the AQFAB report (2002:11), one of the key drivers for RPL was its perceived capacity to act as a mechanism for social inclusion for those who have not had the opportunity to participate in, or who have had negative experiences of, post-compulsory education and training, but who nonetheless have much learning that is relevant to qualification outcomes. RPL is seen as one of the main objectives of the AQF. In addition, it is used as a key strategy in facilitating access to higher education qualifications and programmes, and the achievement of nationally recognised

qualifications for Australians. RPL is deemed to have benefits for individuals, education and training institutions, enterprises, unions and governments – benefits that are regarded by many as self-evident and obvious (AQFAB 2002:12).

Table 2.4: *A summary of potential benefits of RPL*

Potential benefits of RPL
A. People should not be required to repeat, and pay for learning they have already achieved, if it does not add value to the programme or qualification they are undertaking
B. Governments and taxpayers should not have to pay for learning to be repeated when it has already been achieved
C. Many individuals have not had the opportunity either to participate in formal post-secondary education and training, particularly people from disadvantaged groups or communities, or when they have participated, they may have had negative experiences of these learning environments
D. RPL opens possibilities for people to embark on pathways that include informal and non-formal learning, and formal learning
E. Workers and enterprises benefit through including RPL as a strategy for increasing overall skill levels in enterprise, tailoring training appropriately, and as a mechanism for staff selection and recruitment
F. Society and knowledge is changing rapidly, that new knowledge and skill are constantly being created, often outside formal research centres such as those in universities. RPL is one way of contributing to the renewal of qualifications and curriculum, by recognising knowledge and skills that have emerged in the workplace and in society, and not inside formal institutional contexts

2.4.3.3 RPL implementation: historical and current developments

In Australia, RPL was formally instituted in 1992 with the signing of the National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT) agreement between states and territories. This agreement was the result of the work that has been done in terms of a competency-based approach in training (CBT)[13] (Heyns 2004:48). CBT refers to an approach to vocational education and training, which focuses on the competencies gained, by an individual rather than on the training process itself. The NFROT ensures that recognition is given for accredited courses based on competency standards, credit transfer between providers, competencies and prior learning.

Universities in Australia are self-accrediting bodies established by state and territory legislation, with the authority to develop, accredit, teach and confer higher education qualifications. They consequently have considerable autonomy in developing

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[13] CBT: Competency Based Approach to Training offers an avenue for recognition of prior learning

institutional policy, including that relating to RPL. Higher education providers that are not self-accrediting institutions submit qualifications for accreditation to the respective state and territory higher education accrediting bodies. These bodies consider the academic quality, and the teaching, financial, infrastructure and resource capacity of the conferring institution in deciding whether to accredit a qualification or not (AQFAB[14] 2002:76), either through the normal route established at these universities or by assessing prospective students for their prior learning. All the bodies authorised to develop and/or issue Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)[15] qualifications are expected to consider the development of RPL policies as part of their responsibilities under the AQF.

While there is considerable diversity between universities over the extent to which they offer RPL, the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) has in place RPL guidelines to assist universities in developing their own frameworks (AVCC 2001). The AVCC guidelines (1993:4) indicate that universities should: publicise the availability of RPL services; indicate the sort of experience the university will consider and the purpose for which it will be considered (access to, or credit in, a course); ensure that prior learning is assessed at a level comparable to the content and standard of the subject for which credit is claimed, but that it should not be greater than would otherwise be required if students were undertaking the subject; ensure that staff assessing RPL applications have, in addition to their content knowledge, personal expertise in or access to advice on RPL assessment methods and ensure assessment processes are completed before the beginning of the semester in which credit is sought.

The AVCC established the Australian Credit Transfer Agency (ACTA) in March 1995, the role of which was to, in part; provide RPL assessments for individuals on a fee-for-service basis, as well as brokering between the sectors. There was insufficient demand to continue the RPL service, because students were not guaranteed a place in a

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[14] The AQF Advisory Board (AQFAB) operates as a high-level cross-sectoral forum. Membership of the Board reflects the range of stakeholders with an Independent Chairperson.

[15] AQF: Australian Qualifications Framework. This is a unified system of national qualifications in schools, vocational education and training (TAFEs and private providers) and the higher education sector (mainly universities). The framework links together all these qualifications and is a highly visible; quality assured national system of educational recognition, which promotes lifelong learning and a seamless and diverse education and training system. It was introduced on 1 January 1995 and was phased in over five years, with full implementation by the year 2000.

university on the basis of an RPL assessment, conducted by the ACTA, and nor were they guaranteed credit. With no guarantees, students were reluctant to pay for such a service (AQFAB 2002:77). The ACTA did not continue, however, the work that it did in helping to broker arrangements between the higher education and VET sectors have continued albeit under certain constraints. Firstly, it was difficult and expensive to broker such agreements, and secondly, it was cost effective for universities to work together (either as a sector, or based on groupings within the sector) to develop arrangements with institutions in other sectors to maximise credit transfer and RPL.

2.4.3.4 RPL Provisioning: model of quality assurance

2.4.3.4.1   The National Principles and Guidelines for RPL implementation

The National Principles and Guidelines for RPL (2004)[16] in Australia are explicit with regard to the following aspects: approach and model of implementation; procedures and processes for implementation; RPL assessment process; quality assurance arrangements; support services to RPL students; funding for RPL services and appeal mechanisms during the RPL assessment process. There are different approaches developed for RPL implementation, as indicated in section 2.3.1 above. In Australia there are two approaches followed. These are: the Developmental RPL and Credentialing Processes.

Firstly, RPL is seen as a developmental process whereby the RPL candidate/learner engages in a process of self-actualisation, personal development, and self-knowledge and an understanding of the world and their place in it (Australian Report 2003). RPL provisioning in this way would offer students an opportunity to learn the skill of reflection and self-evaluation, and it is important that this happens if the assessment outcomes are to be related to the course or programmed outcomes. The skill of self-reflection is not always easy to learn, and students would need considerable support to do so. With this approach, assessment processes would include reflective essays, journals, or developmental and reflective portfolios. Therefore, development RPL is

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[16] A copy of the brochure was made available from the AQFAB offices on 4 September 2006. The same information can be accessed on this web address: www.aqf.edu.au. To request for the copy of the brochure this email address should be used: aqfab@aqf.edu.au

or should be an empowering process to the student. Developmental RPL is an example of good practice in RPL provisioning due to a number of positive aspects identified (Learning From Experience Trust 2000).

Secondly, in many cases, the purpose of undertaking RPL is to achieve accreditation of the knowledge one has and skills in which a person is already competent, and has been so for years. Appropriate assessment processes for RPL depend on whether the process is to be student or candidate driven, or teacher, lecturer or assessor driven, with the support of the institution. In the case of the latter, it may not be so important to provide RPL students with a framework to learn about RPL, learning outcomes or competencies, and the nature of evidence. However, this requires the assessor to undertake the mapping of a person's skills or knowledge to the learning outcomes/competencies in a qualification, and to tell the student exactly what sort of evidence and how much, they are required to produce. This sort of process is most easily conducted in the workplace, and where this is so, it is possible to distinguish between RPL and work-based assessment.

2.4.3.5 Quality Assurance: procedures and processes

For quality assurance arrangements in RPL provisioning, RPL policies, procedures, processes and assessment outcomes should be explicitly included in the sectoral or institutional quality assurance mechanisms; and clear and transparent quality assurance mechanisms are essential for ensuring that one sector has confidence in the RPL decisions made by another sector. These arrangements should be included in negotiations between providers within and across sectors about credit transfer, articulation and other qualifications. These should take the form of "information and advice to students about which subjects, modules, competencies, courses and qualifications for which RPL can be used to establish access and exemptions; information for students about how to apply for RPL, who to contact for further information concerning the process, who to contact for support in preparing their application and information about timelines, appeals process, and fees; an outline of the learning or competency outcomes against which students will be assessed; advice to students as to the nature of the RPL assessment process, the kind of evidence that can be used, the forms in which it can be presented, and where appropriate, a guide as to

what is considered sufficient and valid evidence; administrative processes for receiving RPL applications, administering assessment, recording results, advising students of the outcome, and administering appeals processes; designation of responsibilities and accountabilities for undertaking RPL assessments, and a statement of the qualifications and skills RPL assessors are expected to possess; an outline of the different assessment process that may be used; and an outline of the way in which RPL policies, processes, and assessments are quality assured (Australian Report 2003).

2.4.3.5.1   RPL process of implementation

Processes should ensure that, where possible, the student is able to complete the qualification in less time than if registered through the traditional route; include and clearly indicate academic and administrative responsibilities and accountability, and these should be widely publicised in information about RPL; and be timely; and where possible, decisions made prior to the commencement of the course, subject or unit for which the RPL is being claimed (Australian Report 2003).

2.4.3.6 The RPL process of assessment

The **RPL assessment process** should consist of establishing the purpose of the assessment; identifying the evidence required; using appropriate evidence gathering methods; interpreting the evidence and making a judgement on the evidence brought towards the claim for RPL or credit transfer; recording the outcome and reporting to key stakeholders. In addition, assessment methods should accommodate the literacy levels, cultural background and educational background and experiences of students. Assessment methods should provide for a range of ways for students to demonstrate that they have met the required outcomes. Students need sufficient information to enable them to prepare their evidence to the standard required for the RPL assessment process. It is the responsibility of academic or teaching staff with expertise in the subject, content or skills area, as well as knowledge of, and expertise in RPL policies and procedures to undertake the RPL assessments. RPL assessment processes should be comparable to other assessment processes used to assess whether the learning or competency outcome in a subject, module, unit, course or qualification have been met (Australian Report 2003).

Forms of credit

RPL may be for access into a course that is when the specified prerequisites based on completion of a formal course of education have not been undertaken, or where other access mechanisms are not applicable or appropriate. The award of credit in a course as the result of a successful RPL application may include specified credit for designated subjects, modules, units or competencies; unspecified credit, resulting in the student being required to complete fewer subjects, modules or competencies; block credit, resulting in exemptions from the required requirements to undertake a block component of a course; and exemptions or advanced standing. This involves exempting a student from undertaking preparatory subjects, units, modules or competencies in the early stages of the course or qualification, while still requiring them to undertake the same number of subjects, units, modules or competencies, as they would be required to complete if they had not been granted the exemption. This usually involves substituting the exempted subjects, units, modules or competencies with others. Credits based on a combination of credit transfer plus an individual RPL assessment for additional non-formal or informal learning (Australian Report 2003).

Support for RPL learners

RPL should be offered prior to, or at enrolment, and be available to students, where necessary, to learn the skills needed to gain RPL, so either in a formal group, or an informal setting. Student support should ensure they engage in appropriate learning pathways because of their RPL process. In some sectors, this may include advice about 'gaps' training or education that may be necessary to meet the full requirements of the qualification. It may also include advice as to learning pathways that are available to them, and how to access those pathways (Australian Report 2003).

Advice and information to RPL candidates/learners

Institutions and other relevant bodies in each of the sectors, should promote the RPL policies and include information about whether RPL is offered, and the qualifications, courses, modules, subjects, units and competencies in which it is offered. Information should be provided about the processes, timelines, appeal mechanisms, whom to contact

for more information and where to go for support. Information should be availed via institutional, Faculty and school websites, in promotional material and advertising, in handbooks and through the State and Tertiary Admissions Centres. Information should be written in clear, accessible language, and should take into account the literacy skills, cultural background and educational background and experience of students and potential students (Australian Report 2003).

Fees and Funding for RPL services

Policies and procedures implemented by jurisdictions and institutions to improve cost efficiency and remove financial disincentives in the implementation of RPL may include working with groups of students from industries, enterprises or occupational areas to achieve economies of scale. Fees charges should be no higher that students would normally be required to pay if they were undertaking formal study towards the qualification; incorporating RPL duties into workloads for teaching and administrative staff (Australian Report 2003).

Appeal mechanisms during the process of RPL assessment

An effective means of appeal in each institution in relation to RPL decisions and processes should be fair, transparent, accountable, and subject to appeal. Institutions need to avail information about appeal mechanisms at the commencement of RPL procedures and throughout a student's enrolment or qualification.

However, while RPL appears to have been successful as a mechanism for social inclusion for individuals from regional Australia and for those with a disability, it has not been successful as a mechanism of social inclusion for Indigenous Australians, for people from a non-English speaking background, those with low levels of education, those in unskilled jobs and the unemployed. The main beneficiaries have been those from socio-economic backgrounds who have experience in and success in post-compulsory education and training (Buchler & Ralph 2000; Learning from Experience Trust 2000; Ryan & Watson 2001; Bateman & Knight 2002). It is also clear that RPL has not yet delivered the potential benefits on the scale originally envisaged and hoped for in policy documents and reform to qualifications.

The potential of RPL is clearly aspirational (AQFAB 2002:34). The form of RPL introduced in Australia in 1987 was connected to the labour market (Andersson *et al* 2004:3; Evans 2000:122) There is little evidence that RPL in Australia has led to significantly improved access to formal credits for disadvantaged groups or individuals (Evans 2000:151). The expected links between academic knowledge and work-based and experience-based learning have not appeared, especially at universities. The main reasons for fading interest in RPL is given by Flowers and Hawke (2000:155 and 159) as a clash between traditionalists that prior learning cannot be equated to "academic knowledge" especially where theory is concerned and that the process involves more effort than it is worth and government funding has not been forthcoming.

2.4.4 AP(E)L IMPLEMENTATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

2.4.4.1 AP(E)L definition and purpose

APL[17] (accreditation of prior learning) is the generic term used for the award of credit based on demonstrated learning that has occurred at some time in the past. This learning may have come about as the result of a course, or self-directed study, or as the result of experience either at work or in leisure pursuits. The latter is usually referred to as Prior Experiential Learning (Nyatanga *et al* 1988:7-8). According to Evans (2006:19), experiential learning is uncertified learning. He says: it is what is in someone's head for which there is no formal evidence that it does exist. It is also worth noting that "while both forms of prior learning focus on learning rather that experience, and outcome rather than process, they can differ in the way candidates may gather and submit evidence to support their claim" (Nyatanga *et al* 1988:7-8).

2.4.4.2 AP(E)L implementation: historical and current developments

According to Evans (2006:23), AP(E)L was introduced in Great Britain in the 1980s, based mainly on the work done by CAEL in America. The emerging agenda for

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[17] APL: Accreditation of Prior Learning, i.e.: learning for which certification has been awarded by an educational institution or another education/training provider. Within APL, there are two main categories: APLCL: The accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (learning which certification has been awarded by an educational institution or another education/training provider. APEL: The accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (uncertificated learning gained from experience. APEL is sometimes referred to as RPEL (The Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning).

Higher Education in the UK promotes lifelong learning, social inclusion, wider participation, employability, partnership working with business, community organisations and among HE providers nationally, and internationally (QAA for HE 2004:4). Consequently, HEIs are increasingly recognising the significant knowledge, skills and understanding which can be developed as a result of learning opportunities found at work, both paid and unpaid, and through individual activities and interests. At the beginning, there was no central APL/APEL system and foundations were laid through research projects mainly. These projects were funded variously by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), the government's Further Education Unit (FEU) and the Wates Foundation. The first project was the Making Experience Count (MEC)[18], a taught course, meant to explore how to do APEL in higher education (Corradi, Evans & Valk 2006:23).

The findings of this project indicated that the MEC course bore useful results as a pre-access course. Learners were able to demonstrate suitable learning for admission into diploma and degree at a university level. They also demonstrated capability of completing their qualifications. The portfolio supported RPL applications for career advancement or for a change of employment. Most learners came out of the course knowing that they do not need to study for the learning they already have. These results became the reference point for testing the validity of AP(E)L as an acceptable practice in higher education.

The next project was the Curriculum Opportunity (CO), a map of experiential learning in entry requirements for higher and further education award bearing courses (1983). That was followed by Access to Higher Education: no-standard entry to CNAA first degree and DipHE courses (Evans 1984). Then came the first substantial piece of development work: The Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning report of the CNAA Development project conducted at the Learning from Trust (Evans 1988). The report summed up the a three-year project doing APEL for real, covering all disciplines in ten higher education institutions. All these developments indicate that

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[18] MEC was a ten-week course of three hours per week, meant to persuade people to reflect systematically on their experiences and extract what they could to demonstrate and prove that they had learned from them (Corradi, Evans and Valk 2006:23).

implementation of prior experiential learning in England was preceded by thorough research.

The former Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), some functions of which are now performed by QAA (Quality Assurance Agency), formerly the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC)[19]. The QAA has published Guidelines on the Quality Assurance of Credit Based Learning in 1995. These guidelines were drawn in collaboration with awarding bodies such as SQA and others representing higher education institutions in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The bodies responsible for regional and national credit frameworks also issue guidelines on APL.

The Inter Consortia Credit Agreement (inCCA) project, funded by DfEE, began in 1996. The Consortia Higher Education Credit Initiative Wales (HECIW), Northern Universities Consortia of Credit Accumulation and Transfer (NaCCAT) and Southern England Consortia for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) reached an agreement on a set of principles which could form the basis of a common framework for the use of credit in higher education. The principles, together with associated advice, guidance and related issues, were published in the 1998 report: *A Common Framework for Learning*. The UK research evidence indicates that whilst the old polytechnics/new universities have adopted APEL/APL with some enthusiasm, most traditional universities have been cautious in their approach (Trower in Taylor 2000:3).

There is also very little UK based longitudinal research on the effectiveness of RPL in higher education and there seems to be no reporting of research into the long-term value of RPL. Scotland introduced RPL in 1987 when the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) developed an AP(E)L system within the further education sector. In Scotland, RPL is characterised by collaborative development and networking, links with further education, emphasis on work-based learning, partnerships with employers and professional bodies. It was seen as a key element of HEIs meeting the needs of the communities which they serve (Sharp, Reeve & Whitaker 2000:132) and in candidates' lifelong learning paths.

2.4.4.3 AP(E)L process of assessment

The steps (Challis 1993:35-85) being followed during the assessment process are:

Initial guidance: During this stage, the learner decides upon the appropriateness or otherwise of following the APEL route, either with the aim of seeking an accelerated route to accreditation, or in order to explore unrecognised skills for the purposes of dealing of defining a progression route. The counsellor should help the candidate/learner identify specific needs and provide information on the range of options available. The assessing institution's responsibility is to provide a range of support facilities such as (course and institution prospectus; checklists of learning outcomes of programmes on offer; expert system and other self-assessment materials for use by learners; bilingual counsellors and so forth).

Recognising and identifying skills: The learner using the process of reflection consolidates first thoughts about using APEL towards a qualification or career move. He/she needs to create a list of competences or skills that demonstrate a range of general and occupationally specific abilities. The counsellor should support the learner through providing 'prompting' exercises to stimulate and encourage focused reflection; help the learner formulate statements of achievement and to enable the learner to create a positive self-image. This person may also need to liaise with other agencies on behalf of the learner where further advice and support is needed. It is the responsibility of the assessing institution to ensure availability of appropriately qualified counselling staff and enlist the services of career advisors to support the role of the counsellor. Tutor time and appropriate accommodation for learner support needs to be allocated as well.

Relating skills to criteria: The learner using a checklist of outcomes related to possible qualifications or parts of the qualification needs, to compare that with identified competences. He/she also needs to make decisions as to whether to continue with the next stage of APEL, or to follow a more traditional route to the desired outcome. The counsellor ensures the availability of appropriate checklists that will

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[19] The information on current developments in England regarding APL implementation was retrieved from the website:

help inform the learner of the potential pathways that identified prior learning can open up. The learner should be assisted to have a realistic picture of how far current competence will lead and whether APEL is the most appropriate route to be followed. The assessing/awarding institution needs to avail tutor time accommodate counselling.

Gathering evidence: The learner will take responsibility for identifying and recording learning, gathering and recording evidence of learning, choosing a framework of outcomes for matching learning and competence, reviewing the total evidence collected, and selecting appropriate items as proof of competence. It is their responsibility to compile a portfolio demonstrating competence to the criteria of the target framework for assessment. They should create a cross-referencing index demonstrating the relationship between evidence and the competence to which it relates. The counsellor will assist the learner with portfolio preparation; guide the learner through the process of creating the appropriate type of portfolio and liaise with appropriate assessors to establish precise requirements on types of and quantity of evidence and any additional needs of accrediting or awarding bodies. The institution should create opportunities for group or individual portfolio preparation, make appropriate arrangements with awarding bodies and ensure availability of definitions of desired outcomes within each qualification offered to facilitate matching of evidence to assessment criteria.

Assessment: The learner will present evidence of learning in a form that allows for assessment against a framework of selected criteria and undertake to provide supplementary evidence if required by the assessor. The counsellor should offer support and advice in the final stages of preparation for assessment of the portfolio, act as an advocate, between the candidate and the assessor; advise following the recommendations of the assessor on any further work to be done and prepare the candidate for any supplementary assessment to be carried out. The assessor will make judgement about the match between evidence presented and stated performance criteria; arrange additional supplementary assessment if necessary to complement evidence in the portfolio and give feedback to the learner on the portfolio and any

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http://www.ucas.com/candq/apl/ on 2006/12/06.

additional assessment procedures. The outcomes need to be recorded in a requisite form for the awarding body.

Accreditation: The learner has no role at this stage, other than to wait for the results. The counsellor should help the learner think about and plan next stages in learning. The assessor's responsibility is to transmit the results of the assessment process to the learner; submit the completed records to an appropriate awarding body for accreditation and to liaise with the awarding body verifier or moderator and retain evidence used in assessment for recommendation on the award of credit for perusal, if demanded, by the awarding body representative. For the institution, there must be structures and appropriate accreditation frameworks to meet the needs of the diverse community for which it provides learning and assessment opportunities.

Certification: The learner, counsellor and assessor have no role to play at this stage. The institution should establish mechanisms to receive certificates of achievement from the chosen awarding body, and arrange for these to reach the learner.

Progression: The learner will spend some time considering the next stage to be undertaken in the learning cycle, i.e. to continue to complete a qualification for which partial accreditation has been gained, use the qualification as a springboard into a higher level of education or training. They could also use the portfolio as evidence of vocational competence in job search activities or seek promotion at work. Even at this stage, post-assessment support to the learner is still essential. The counsellor should ensure as far as possible that people who are likely to receive the learner for the next stage in progression will accept the evidence presented for its intended purpose. The institution's responsibility is to ensure that there is a range of available information bases, which can be used by learner and counsellor together in reaching such a decision.

2.4.4.4 AP(E)L Provisioning: model of quality assurance

There are five main areas of practice identified in which stringent quality assurance measures need to be in place. These areas are: policies and procedures; information;

roles and responsibilities; support and monitoring and review. The following are guiding principles and explanatory notes (QAA 2004:7-16):

Policies and procedures

Principle 1: Decisions regarding the accreditation of prior learning are a matter of academic judgement. The decision-making process and outcomes should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.

Principle 2: Where limits are imposed on the proportion of learning that can be recognised through the accreditation process, these limits should be explicitly stated. The implication for progression, the award of any interim qualification and the classification or grading of a final qualification should be clear and transparent.

Principle 3: Higher education providers responsible for accrediting prior experiential and/or certificated learning should identified it on student's transcripts.

Information

Principle 4: Higher education providers should provide clear and accessible information for applicants, academic staff, examiners and stakeholders about its policies, procedures and practices for the accreditation of prior learning.

Principle 5: The terminology, scope and boundaries used by an HE provider in its policies, procedures and practices for the accreditation of prior learning should be explicitly defined in information and guidance materials.

Principle 6: Information and guidance materials outlining the process (es) for the assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior experiential and/or previously certificated learning should be clear, accurate and easily accessible.

Principle 7: Higher education providers should consider the range and forms of assessment appropriate to consider claim for the recognition of learning.

Principle 8: The criteria to be used in judging a claim for the accreditation of prior learning should be made explicit to applicants, academic staff, stakeholders, assessors and examiners.

Principle 9: Applicants should be fully informed of the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support a claim for the accreditation of prior learning.

Principle 10: The assessment of learning derived from experience should be open to internal and external scrutiny and monitoring within institutional quality assessment processes.

Roles and responsibilities

Principle 11: The locus of authority and responsibilities for making and verifying decisions about the accreditation of prior learning should be clearly specified.

Principle 12: All staff associated with the accreditation of prior learning should have their roles clearly and explicitly defined. Full details of all roles and responsibilities should be available to all associated staff and applicants.

Principle 13: Appropriate arrangements should be developed for the training and support of all staff associated with the support, guidance and assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior learning.

Support

Principle 14: Clear guidance should be given to applicants about when a claim for the accreditation of prior learning may be submitted, the timescale for considering the claim and the outcome.

Principle 15: Appropriate arrangements should be in place to support applicants submitting claims for the accreditation of prior learning and to provide feedback on decisions.

Monitoring and review

Principle 16: Arrangements for the regular monitoring and review of policies and procedures for the accreditation of prior learning should be clearly established. These arrangements should be set within established institutional frameworks for quality assurance, management and enhancement.

2.4.5 RPL IN THE NETHERLANDS

RPL is still in an experimental phase in this country. RPL is being applied in this country in order to contribute to the skills shortage by increasing the flexible 'deployment' of individuals by identifying their current competencies and using educational planning to fast track appropriate new learning that is individualised and its implementation success is due largely to 'enthusiastic pioneers'. The Dutch government has set up the Knowledge Centre APL at the beginning of 2001 for a period of four years. The functions of the knowledge centre are: the development of expertise; dissemination of information on APL; research and development of best practices; networking and supporting the new vocational qualifications framework (SAQA 2002: 48).

2.4.6 RPL IN NEW ZEALAND

In New Zealand, reasons for the lack of RPL as a means to advance educational equity are given by Ker, Melrose and Reid (2000:174 – 175) as a lack of funding, a lack of leadership and a failure to put in place co-coordinating mechanisms; a tendency to follow "classroom assessment practices" as well as a tendency to tightly prescribe the learning outcomes of courses thereby ignoring broad learning outcomes. The elements of quality assurance to be included in institutional policy documents are review and update, operational approaches, assessment, applicants and communications contained in principles and operational guidelines for RPL in higher education and training.

2.4.7 RPL IN FRANCE

In France, great emphasis is based on the candidate's professional experience. The approach is deductive: based on evidence submitted by the candidate. The emphasis of assessment falls on the complexity of candidate knowledge and the verification of candidate potential (Feutrie 2000:106 – 108 in Smith 2003:30). University modules are officially awarded without the candidate having passed the required examinations. It is not the formal knowledge of the candidate, which is assessed; it is the ability to prove the achievement of a level of intellectual development corresponding to that required. This situation calls for diverse approaches to assessment and the involvement of the candidate in "the rules of the game"; result in possible intrusion on teachers' prerogatives and a contractual process of identification. It has lead to uneasiness on the part of teachers as a result of trying to match up traditional curriculum with experiential knowledge (Feutrie 2000:110 in Smith 2003:33).

2.4.8 RPL IMPLEMENTATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.4.8.1 RPL definition and purpose

There is an attempt in this section to show if there is a general agreement on what RPL is from the main organisations in the country. Definitions in general, be it at policy, institutional, Faculty or individual level, indicate if there is an understanding of the phenomenon in question. In my opinion, if there is proper interpretation of what RPL is, there will be proper understanding, and the likelihood is that there will be sound application of the RPL policy. Issues of delays in implementation, resistance by institutions of higher learning to implement, lack of RPL services at institutional level, will not easily surface.

In **South Africa,** RPL is defined in the National Standard Bodies Regulations (No 18787 of 28 March 1998) issued in terms of the SAQA Act 58 of 1995. This definition makes a number of principles clear: learning occurs in all kinds of situations, formally, informally and non-formally; measurement of the learning takes place against specific learning outcomes required for a specific qualification; and credits are awarded for such learning if it meets the requirements of the qualification. Therefore, the process of

recognising prior learning is about: identifying what the candidate knows and can do; matching the candidate's skills, knowledge and experience to specific standards and the associated criteria of a qualification; and crediting the candidate for the skills, knowledge and experience build up through formal, informal and non-formal learning that occurred in the past.

According to the **Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC),** RPL means "the formal identification, assessment and acknowledgement of the full range of a person's knowledge, skills and capabilities acquired through formal, informal training, on-the-job or life experience" (HEQC: 2004:26). The HEQC is the accrediting body in higher education and plays a major role in promoting quality in the higher education sector. This body is also responsible for the monitoring of the full implementation of RPL in the sector.

The **Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)** in their discussion document (1995:3) defines RPL as a 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". The council's position is that 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 definition used by the **Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)** is reflected in the discussion document (1997:6) used by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which says "RPL is a process of giving recognition to people for the skills and knowledge that they already have, but which they have not been given credit for". In order to be promoted or to get a better job with better wages, some form of qualification or certificate is needed. The definition highlights that South African workers in various sectors may have the knowledge, experience and skills without the necessary paper qualifications, and that is what the trade union argues should be corrected.

The **University of Pretoria,** where the study was conducted makes use of the same definition as the HEQC (Policy on Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning

2002:3). In the Faculty of Education, a very practical definition of RPL is being used. The Faculty says "RPL implies the recognition of the work done by prospective students in the field of education or in a field of interest relevant to education, for the purpose of admitting such students into programmes for which they have no formal recognised and required qualification" (University of Pretoria 2003:2).

What emerges from the definitions used is that, there seems to be a general acknowledgement of what RPL is, the need for recognising prior learning however, there are variations within these major groups in terms of the focus, emphasis and the purpose for RPL.

2.4.8.2 RPL implementation: historical and current developments

In South Africa, RPL has a very specific agenda, i.e. addressing issues of social justice. It was meant to support the transformation of the education and training system of the country (SAQA 2002:11). According to Osman and Castle (2004:126), RPL was meant to increase the participation rate of historically disadvantaged groups in higher education, and to improve the knowledge and skills base of the workforce in the interest of global competitiveness. In the National Plan for Higher Education (2001:28), outcome 3, RPL is branded as an important avenue for increasing the intake of non-traditional students and adult learners into higher education.

These intentions link RPL to issues of equity, redress and social justice, on the one hand, and to lifelong learning on the other (Osman & Castle 2004:126-127). The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) played a major role in influencing the White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education: 1995) released by the ANC government. The Trade Union proposed RPL as a strategy through which a large number of experienced workers could be assessed for their prior learning, be granted formal qualifications (certificates) for such experience and then be able to obtain better wages through new opportunities for education (COSATU 2000). From a political perspective, RPL is a tool to narrow the wage and education gap left by the previous apartheid education system (Cooper 1998:143-157).

The HSRC initiated a three-year research and development programme in RPL between 1996 and 1999 in collaboration with the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the then Peninsula Technikon. The research addressed three major questions: What is RPL? Does the concept have applicability in the South African higher education context? If it does have application, what form might it take? The research work has since led to the development of Conceptual and Implementation Guides (Harris 2000). This supports earlier comments in that, well-developed supplements are available, but this is not an indication that there is meaningful progress in implementing RPL at institutional level.

The **Joint Education Trust (JET)**[20], established in 1992 to administer a R500-million contribution, over a period of five years, to education development by the corporate partners. JET has introduced a number of RPL initiatives, in line with their mission, which is to serve the learning needs of the most disadvantaged communities in and out of the workplaces. JET has an RPL Unit which has developed a CD-ROM based RPL and Assessor Training Course for the former Technikon Sector, which they say can be adapted to suit the University sector as well. The CD-ROM RPL course is in line with the HET 02 Unit Standard, which is a core Unit Standard on the Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education and Training (PGCHET). From JET's perspective, for the RPL training to unfold well, fully qualified RPL educators will mentor individuals registering for this course. Trained assessors who have successfully completed the course will gain 20 credits towards the PGCHET qualification.

The Workforce Development Division (WDD) at JET, seeks to train a cohort of RPL practitioners who will assist with the piloting of the RPL implementation process at their institutions, among selected RPL candidates from various fields of learning. The objective is to ensure that RPL becomes more available and accessible to historically disadvantaged individuals and marginalized communities. On the successful completion of the RPL pilot, the WDD plans to set up a fully functioning RPL centre.

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[20] The information on JET's contribution of lifelong learning opportunities for adult learners is obtainable from the website: http//www.jet.org.za/

There has not been much information on the progress of these initiatives since statements of intent and plans were issued by JET in collaboration with the then CTP.

Most of the earlier publications (Osman 2004; Snyman 2004; van Rooy 2002; Beekman 2002; Geyser 2001; Nieman 2001; Gawe 1999; and Harris 1999b) highlighted the need for national arrangements (a national RPL policy and procedures). As indicated in Chapter 1 section 1.1, through a SAQA-led process that included stakeholder participation, public inputs, and expert reviews, a national RPL policy became available in 2002, followed by another policy document on criteria and guidelines for implementation in 2004.

2.4.8.3 RPL Provisioning: model of quality assurance

There are several criteria formulated as a guide for a system of quality assurance in respect of RPL services offered by education and training providers (National policy document 2002:18-30). These criteria represent the overall national approach to the establishment of a credible assessment process, which in real terms include processes, services, and related procedures for RPL. A critique of these criteria done by van Rooyen (2001:1-17) indicates that there is a general agreement with what SAQA proposed, with very few areas of concern. It is unlikely that these concerns will remain contested areas more especially when institutions can start to implement. If the guidelines (make an audit of current practice; develop sector-specific/context-specific plans; capacity building of resources and staff; design assessment and moderation tools; and establish quality assurance mechanisms) in the strategic framework for implementation (SAQA 2004) are followed, there are possibilities that challenges in the actual implementation process can be overcome.

The areas of practice are discussed by a quality statement, followed by a self-audit tool (not included), which could be used by both ETQAs and providers to measure their progress against agreed targets. These areas of practice are:

- *Institutional policy and environment:* This area of practice highlights the fact that an enabling environment demonstrating commitment to RPL is essential.

- *Services and support to learners:* Learner/candidate support structures are a preventative measure, i.e.: a measure to enhance the success rate of candidates. These services and support structures should form part of the pre-assessment advice and counselling, which may include preparation for the assessment itself, educational planning and post-assessment support.

- *Training and registration of assessors and key personnel:* All personnel involved in the assessment of prior learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.

- *Methods and processes of assessment:* Assessment is a structured process for gathering evidence and making judgements about a candidate's performance in relation to registered national standards and qualifications. This process involves the candidate and the assessor within a particular context in a transparent and collaborative manner.

- *Quality Management Systems:* Internal and external evaluation should form a critical review and quality improvement processes. There must be moderation, effective management, and reporting structures and systems.

- *Fees for RPL services:* Fees for the delivery and administration of assessment and RPL services should not create barriers for candidates.

- *RPL and curriculum development:* Providers should use methods of instruction and delivery to provide curricula that meets the diverse needs of the candidates.

Institutional Audits conducted by the CHE at institutions of higher learning are a form of quality assurance and are associated with quality improvement and enhancement (HEQCs Framework for Institutional Audits 2004:5). In the case where an institution needs to demonstrate a rigorous quality assurance process in the area of RPL, the evaluators would look at the following, into in terms of the policy in place: is it fit for purpose in advancing the institution's mission goals; does it address transformational challenges for the development of individual learners as well as the requirements of social and economic development; and does it provide value for money in relation to the full range of higher education purposes? Further, the HEQCs audits consider the relationship between quality and fitness of purpose, and the manner and extent to

which an institution's mission and academic activities take national priorities and needs into account, as well as respond to regional and international imperatives.

The HEQC has developed a set of criteria, which specifies its requirements for effective institutional quality management in those target areas, which form part of the first cycle of institutional audits from 2004 to 2009. The criteria function as evaluative tools that enable the institution, the audit panel appointed by the HEQC to focus on important institutional signals and indicators of quality as well as quality management. They will also serve as guidelines for institutions when doing their self-evaluation reports for the HEQC audits, together with additional requirements that institutions might set for themselves in order to further strengthen their internal quality arrangements. In the case of determining quality management systems of an institution in the area of RPL, the following Audit Criterion is used (Criteria for Institutional Audits 2004: 14 -15). Audit Criterion 14 on RPL means: The institution has an RPL policy, and effective procedures for recognizing prior learning and assessing current competence. In order to meet this criterion, the following are examples of what would be expected:

a)   Institutional policy to support **access,** through RPL measures.
b)   Effective procedures stipulated for RPL. This includes the identification, documentation, assessment, evaluation and transcription of prior learning against specified learning outcomes, so that it can articulate with current academic programmes and qualifications.
c)   Assessment instruments designed for RPL and implemented in accordance with the institution's policies on fair and transparent assessment *(ibid 2004: 15-16).*

The CHE/HEQCs position on RPL based on the above criterion does not include award of credits or granting certificates through the RPL route, just ease of entry into higher education.

2.4.8.4 The RPL process of assessment

An example of a generic RPL process has been provided in the national RPL policy document from SAQA (2002:33). It has been described as follows:

Table 2.5: *RPL process in South Africa*

STAGE	EXPLANATION(S)
Stage 1: Application	Prospective RPL candidate submits an application to a higher education institution of his/her choice
Stage 2: RPL evidence facilitator meets candidates to conduct pre-screening to ascertain viability of application	If not viable, i.e.: candidate will clearly not meet the minimum requirements in terms of language/numeracy and/or other competencies, the candidate is referred for further advice on alternative pathways.
Stage 3: Pre-assessment	RPL evidence facilitator takes candidate(s) through preparation for assessment. This stage involves portfolio development; one-on-one advising; assessment approaches, tools and mechanisms and guidance on collecting evidence, which candidate undertakes.
Stage 4: The assessor (preferably with facilitator present) and candidate develop an assessment plan	This stage also includes the review of unit standard(s) requirements; determining the type and sources of evidence needed; design of assessment tools to be used in this assessment and identification of dates and times of the assessment.
Stage 5: Assessment	The candidate undergoes practical assessment, and/or sits knowledge test and/or goes through pre- and post interview.
Stage 6: Judgement	The evidence submitted is evaluated and judged by the assessor.
Stage 7: Moderation	
Stage 8: Feedback	If credit is not awarded, appeal process may be initiated.
Stage 9: Post-assessment support, if credit is awarded	

The other essential aspects of this process are that: RPL policies, procedures and system should be in place. Information on RPL is to be readily available, the provider must have developed criteria framework within which pre-screening takes place and these criteria should be readily available to candidates. There must be alternative pathways/options and additional counselling services, and where no facilitators are available, assessors should undertake all functions. The development of these procedures and processes is not an indication that they at institutional level they are being adhered to. As indicated in the preceding sections, there is not sufficient empirical data for purposes of comparison in terms of RPL practices in higher education, or for longitudinal studies. Table 2.6 shows a comparison of RPL implementation in countries utilising best practices.

The models of quality assurance for RPL assessment presented above are suitable for the South African Higher Education sector. These codes of good practice are clear and explicit. They should be easy to apply in assessing RPL candidates for their prior learning. It is worth noting that the University of Pretoria adopted these standards for its RPL practice, as reflected in the institutional RPL policy document released in 2002 (pages 7-11). However, stating them in policy documents does not necessarily mean they are being adhered to, an aspect that is being investigated in this study. Christie (1997:121) in Osman (2004a:1) says, "Policies are best understood in terms of practices on the ground, rather than in terms of idealist statement of intention or blueprints for action".

In summary, it can be stated that regardless of the above problems, issues and challenges, which have been identified worldwide, the practice of recognising prior learning for a variety of purposes has become firmly entrenched in some Developed Countries. This practice has been well documented and there are numerous testimonies by RPL beneficiaries and other stakeholders around the world who attest to its value in terms of considerable savings in time and money in higher education coupled with the benefits of personal development to mature-age learners (Simosko & Cook 1996).

Table 2.6: *A comparison of RPL implementation in countries with best practices*

Areas of comparison/Best practice candidates	RPL definition	RPL purpose	Historical and current developments	RPL model of quality assurance	RPL process of assessment
The United States of America (USA)	A very comprehensive definition of RPL including how it is to be viewed at different levels, i.e. by policy makers, institutions offering the service and related organisations, Faculty assessors, and the RPL candidates.	Social justice	RPL implementation is going strong in this country, with over 1700 colleges and universities affiliated to the most powerful organisation driving this process, i.e. the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)	There are well-developed principles, standard sand procedures for RPL provisioning, which are being reviewed on a continual basis.	There are well-developed models of RPL assessment advocated for by CAEL for its constituents.
The United Kingdom (UK)	A very comprehensive definition is in place	Social justice	RPL implementation is still going strong in the country, with a number of studies having been done to determine the impact thereof.	Adopted and adapted the principles, standards, and procedures in use in the USA	There are principles that govern the assessment of prior learning
Canada	Adequately defined	Social justice	RPL implementation is still going strong in the country, with a number of studies having been done to determine the impact thereof.	Well-developed RPL model of quality assurance for its constituents	Simple, and clear procedures and processes for RPL assessments
Australia	Adequately defined to show the difference between RPL and credit transfer, which is not done by other countries	Social justice	RPL implementation is still going strong in the country, with a number of studies having been done to determine the impact thereof.	Well-developed RPL model of quality assurance for its constituents	Simple, and clear procedures and processes for RPL assessments
The Netherlands	A very comprehensive definition	Social justice	RPL implementation is still going strong in the country, with a number of studies having been done to determine the impact thereof.	Well-developed RPL model of quality assurance for its constituents	Simple, and clear procedures and processes for RPL assessments

South Africa	A very good country specific definition complemented by those used by major research councils and organisations having a role to play in higher education	Social justice	RPL implementation is still going on in the higher education sector, although at a very minimal scale	Well-developed RPL model of quality assurance for its constituents	Simple, and clear and procedures processes for RPL assessments

2.4.9 Summary/List of terminology used globally

Table 2.7: *A summary of the RPL terminology used globally*

COUNTRY/ACRONYM	DESCRIPTION
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	
PLA	Prior Learning Assessment
CANADA	
PLAR	Prior Learning Accreditation and Recognition
UNITED KINGDOM	
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
APL	Assessment of Prior Learning
APA	Assessment of Prior Achievement
APL/A	Assessment of Prior Learning and Assessment
APCL	Assessment of Prior Certified Learning
AAPLA	Assessment of Prior Learning and Achievement
ACC	Accreditation of Current Competence
AUSTRALIA	Recognition of Prior Learning
RPL	
SOUTH AFRICA	
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
ROCC	Recognition of Current Competence

2.5   SUMMARY

Many countries including South Africa have implemented RPL for sometime. What is common in all countries is that there are guidelines on procedures and processes for RPL implementers for quality assurance purposes. However, this does not mean that at the level of practice such standards, principles and procedures are being followed and adhered to. Several key issues addressed in this chapter are: RPL should be considered as a form of learning, which has to be given academic currency. RPL has a role to play in our societies. It has the potential of being an instrument for social justice, addressing issues such as access, equity, redress and lifelong learning. Special care needs to be taken in assessing this type of learning. What this means to providers of the RPL service is that policies and procedures for implementation need to be in place in order to safeguard the integrity of the process. RPL candidates should be assessed based on a well-developed model(s) of assessment, following a carefully thought of process that fits into all the activities in the academic year of the Faculty. I have placed special value on RPL assessment, mainly due to the novelty of this

process. We are dealing here with learning that has taken place in various contexts (formally, non-formally and informally), bearing in mind that "all learning is experiential". Failure to adhere to standards of quality assurance, which should be viewed as a quality assurance mechanism, could easily lead to poor practices (malpractices). I have cited a number of RPL practices, mainly from the international world, where RPL is implemented, for benchmarking the practice in the Faculty of Education, of the University of Pretoria. What has been identified in these practices will be used to determine how best this institution can improve (adapt) the quality of its RPL provisioning.