

Unit 1: Readings

Recognition of Prior Learning on the NQF

READINGS ON PURPOSE

READING 1A

Extract from **Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African NQF**, SAQA Policy Document, June 2002

1.3 The differing contexts within which RPL are implemented

The contexts within which RPL are practised are as varied as the candidates seeking credits for learning achieved. RPL is practised in the Higher Education and Training (HET), Further Education and Training (FET) and General Education and Training (GET) Bands and in Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), in formal institutions of learning, as well as at workplace-based education and training centres and by small private single purpose providers.

In addition, RPL is done against unit standard-based qualifications, as well as against the learning outcomes of non-unit standard based qualifications. Qualifications based on unit standards and non-unit standard based qualifications are equally valid expressions of outcomes-based education. Perpetuating the division between these two types of qualification would be an unwarranted position. It is much more important to establish ways in which articulation between vocationally oriented, professional and academic qualifications can take place to facilitate the development of multiple learning pathways. Therefore, it goes without saying that the contexts within which RPL is practised will be linked to the varied purposes for embarking on a process of Recognition of Prior Learning.

These purposes include the following options:

- ✓ **Personal development** and/or certification of current skills without progression into a learning programme, if the candidate so chooses;
- ✓ **Progression into a learning programme**, using RPL to fast-track progression through the learning programme;
- ✓ **Promotion**; and
- ✓ Career or **job change**.

RPL practice therefore cannot take a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. However, all RPL practice will be measured against the agreed criteria (discussed in Chapter 2), which are considered the core, the basis upon which all RPL systems are developed.

It is therefore acknowledged that providers of education and training will have very different strategies in implementing RPL and that these strategies will be closely linked to the target group for which the system is developed.

(page 13-14)

READINGS ON PURPOSE

READING 1B

Extract from **Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning**, SAQA Guideline Document, June 2004.

2.1.1 The purpose of RPL within the sector

The purpose could include **access** to and appropriate **placement** at a particular level at an institution; granting **advanced status, advanced standing, crediting** and **certifying** learners for the parts of the qualification where all the requirements have been met; or, depending on the context, a combination of these. It should also be noted that the NSB Regulations make it clear that a learner could achieve a qualification either in part or wholly through the process of RPL.

The following descriptions for the abovementioned options may be helpful:

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 higher than the logical next level following
Advanced standing	To award credits 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

The purpose of RPL within a particular sector would be closely linked to the target market and target area.
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READINGS ON PURPOSE

READING 1C

Extract from **Learning and Work RPL**, Steps to Implement RPL, COSATU August 2000.

[Steps 1 and 2 deal with developing the union mandate, and establishing a Joint Committee to oversee the RPL project.]

STEP 3: Agree on the purpose(s) of RPL

- Define and agree on the purpose(s).
- These purposes will guide the design of the RPL process and how it is implemented.
- The manner in which the purposes are achieved should be consistent with COSATU policy.
- This means that RPL should not undermine job security or lead to downgrading. This must be agreed to up front.

STEP 4: Agree on the purpose(s) of RPL

There are a number of possible purposes:

- Re-grading for job advancement
- Access to further education and training opportunities
- Identify career path options
- Transform the workplace, which can include Employment Equity and democratization
- Planning, including skills audit and skills development plans
- Certification

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Unit 2: Readings

Recognition of Prior Learning on the NQF

READINGS ON REGULATIONS AND POLICIES

READING 1A

Extract from “Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): In search of a valid and sustainable mechanism for South Africa”, Chapter 2. Dissertation for Masters in Education degree, Ronel Heyns, April 2004.

In this chapter, the education acts, national policies and regulations are analysed to highlight the extent to which there is legislative and regulatory coherence and agreement on RPL and on all the aspect of its implementation.

As seen from the acts and regulations and other formal publications, it seems that RPL has become an integral part of the psyche of South African education and training. In the Ministerial Review (known as the Study Team) of the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (2002), the slow progress towards the systemic implementation of RPL is mentioned as one of the current disappointments in the NQF. However, many of the acts and regulations were formulated and promulgated long before the Study Team review of 2001/2002. The legislative and regulatory framework for the implementation of RPL therefore already exists.

In 2.1 the first education act promulgated after the 1994 elections, the South African Qualifications Authority Act, no. 58 of 1995, in particular its supporting regulations, policies and guidelines are discussed. In 2.2, the Skills Development Act, no. 97 of 1997 and its regulations will be discussed. 2.3 will deal with the Higher Education Act, no 101 of 1997, the Education White Paper (1997, DoE, number 3), as well as the draft New Academic Policy (CHE, 2001). In 2.4, the Further Education and Training Act (no 98 of 1998) and policies are briefly explored.

2.1 The SAQA Act, Regulations, Policies and Guidelines

The South African Qualifications Authority's *National Standards Bodies Regulations* (Number 482 of March 1998) in particular, are specific regarding Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). These regulations provide an overarching definition of RPL and are explicit about the inclusion of RPL in the development, design and construction of qualifications. For example, the requirements for the registration of qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) make clear that a qualification shall:

indicate in the rules governing the award of the qualification that the qualification may be achieved in whole or in part through the recognition of prior learning, which concept includes but is not limited to learning outcomes achieved through formal, informal and non-formal learning and work experience (p.6).

This means that every registered qualification, in principle at the very least, can be achieved through recognition of prior learning.

The Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies Regulations (1998) to the SAQA Act, are equally explicit about RPL, but from a quality assurance point of view: in the criteria for accreditation of providers, a provider may be accredited if it has the necessary “policies and practices for the management of assessment” (including RPL) (p.7).

In addition, SAQA as the body responsible for the development and implementation of the NQF has developed a national RPL policy, namely: The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework, (SAQA, 2002). In this policy, RPL in the South African context refers specifically to the facilitation of “access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths; and redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities” (p.9). The policy puts forward a set of quality criteria as minimum expectations for the development and implementation of RPL. (The criteria are discussed in Chapter 3 – refer to Table 3.4) Further, a guidelines document, The Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (adopted by the Authority in August 2003) was developed with the purpose to aid implementation at the level of the education and training provider.

2.2 The Skills Development Act, Regulations, Policies and Guidelines

The Skills Development Act (Number 97 of 1998) provides for an institutional framework for the implementation of national, sector and workplace strategies with the purpose to improve the skills of the South African workforce. Much of the drive behind the development of processes for the Recognition of Prior Learning emanated from the needs of the labour force to achieve recognition for learning and skills attained through work and life experiences, particularly as these people were prevented from accessing education and training by unjust educational policies of the past. This act is explicit on the need for redress. One of the purposes of this Act is “to improve the employment prospects of persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those disadvantages through training and education” (p.4).

Under the Skills Development Act, statutory bodies with the responsibility to quality assure education and training in designated sectors, were instituted. These bodies are known as Sector Education and Training Authorities’ (SETAs). The SETAs have to facilitate development and implementation of RPL processes for the workforce in their sectors, and will quality assure the processes. Together with the act, it becomes a powerful driver for the implementation of RPL. (Some SETA initiatives are discussed in Chapter 3.)

2.3 Higher Education Acts and Policies

The Higher Education Act (Number 101 of 1997), states its position on access and redress in the preamble to the act namely that it is desirable to “REDRESS past discrimination and ensure representivity and equal access” (p.2).

However, it is in the Education White Paper (A programme for the transformation of Higher Education, number 3 of 1997), where these principles are expressed explicitly, namely that the “higher education system must be transformed to redress past inequalities, to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs and to respond to new realities and opportunities” (p.2).

It goes further to say that the Ministry [of Education’s] vision is that of a transformed, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist system of higher education that will promote equity of access and a fair chance of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities.

In addition, the White Paper (3 of 1997), proposes that a single nationally coordinated system will enhance the broadening of the social base of the higher education system in terms of race, class, gender and age. It is intended that a new system will cater for a considerably more diverse body of learners. The White Paper states that higher education will open its doors, in the spirit of lifelong learning, to workers, professionals and adult learners in pursuit of multi-skilling and re-skilling, whose access to higher education had been thwarted in the past.

The White Paper (3 of 1997) also suggests that such a system will enable the removal of “obstacles, which unnecessarily limit learners’ access to programmes, and enable proper academic recognition to be given for prior learning achieved, thus permitting greater horizontal and vertical mobility by learners in the higher education system” (p.8).

Further, in its discussion of admission and selection procedures, in particular, the issue of RPL is highlighted, stating that the Ministry of Education “strongly supports developmental work and pilot projects which will help institutions to develop criteria to assess applicants’ prior learning and experience, so that those with clear potential to succeed in higher education can be admitted” (p.15).

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) is the statutory body established to provide a single nationally coordinated system in higher education. It also has the task to manage quality assurance and quality promotion in higher education and as such is similar to the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). For this purpose, the draft New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education (CHE, 2001) was published in December of 2001. This document is still in draft form, awaiting the outcome of the Study Team review of the implementation of the NQF. Nevertheless, the position of the CHE in terms of RPL is clear. It uses a comprehensive description of RPL, namely:

RPL is a way of recognising what individuals already know and can do. RPL is based on the premise that people learn both inside and outside formal learning structures (including learning from work and life experience) and this learning can be worthy of recognition and credit ...RPL is used extensively by those seeking: admission to a course, advanced standing for a course; or credits towards a qualification. It can also be used by those seeking entry to a particular field of employment; promotion of self-development.

The draft New Academic Policy (NAP) distinguishes between two types of RPL: the recognition of accredited learning and the recognition of prior experiential learning. The second type of RPL, in particular, is seen to be facilitated by the development of a common standardised currency in terms of the level of qualifications and the credits awarded to such qualifications. In the words of the policy, higher education institutions “will need to develop appropriate, consistent and quality assured RPL policies, practices and assessment instruments based on the specification of entry requirements and learning outcomes” (p. 104).

This position echoes the critical aspects identified in the literature, i.e. that of a quality assured process, and of using common criteria for the evaluation and assessment of prior learning.

However, despite the Higher Education Act and the draft New Academic Policy’s clear principled expression supporting recognition or prior learning, at least two current statutory regulations are inhibiting the development and implementation of RPL within the public and private higher education institutions.

2.3.1 Matriculation with endorsement as Entry requirement to Higher Education

In 1918, the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB), came into being as a result of a Royal Charter establishing the first South African university in 1873, with the purpose to govern entry of candidates for first degree studies at the university. Its statutory obligations were to:

- determine the minimum statutory requirements for first degree studies at South African universities;
- conduct the matriculation examination as the norm examination for university admission; and to
- maintain equivalent standards at various senior certificate examinations leading to university admission (SAUVCA, 2001).

This statute determined the criteria upon which candidates were granted access to higher education up to 4 September 1992, when the JMB was dissolved. The norm determining and equivalating functions were transferred to the South African Certification Council (SAFCERT), which was in its turn, replaced by Umalusi (the General and Further Education Quality Assurance Council), in 2003. The function of determining university admission was transferred to the Committee of University Principals (CUP), also known as The South African Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA).

These old statutory regulations have had a profound effect on admissions to higher education. In the Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (SAQA a, 2003), the following observation is made:

Many institutional practices have emanated from the deeply entrenched view that only an elite few may have access to education and training, particularly in higher education (Unpublished SAQA publication, adopted August 2003).

Nevertheless, when the Matriculation Board of the Committee of University Principals came into being, a key change, with the purpose of opening up access to larger numbers of non-traditional learners, was affected. This is known as the Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption, which makes provision for the admittance of non-traditional students. It reads as follows (SAUVCA, 2001):

Certificate of conditional exemption by virtue of certificate issued by the senate of a university.

- (1) The Committee of Principals shall issue a certificate of conditional exemption to a person who, in the opinion of the senate of a university, has demonstrated, in a selection process approved by that senate, that he or she is suitable for admission to bachelor's degree studies, which certificate shall be valid for admission to that university only.
- (2) The issuing of such a certificate shall be provisional and shall not entitle a university to claim a subsidy for the person before a certificate of complete exemption is issued to him, or her, but shall nevertheless entitle the university to admit him or her to bachelor's degree studies and to award credit(s) towards a degree of that university for work completed towards the degree.
- (3) Where the senate of a university certifies that a holder of a certificate of conditional exemption issued in terms of this paragraph has completed one full credit of instructional offerings, the Committee of Principals shall issue a certificate of exemption to him or her dated from the date of coming into operation of the certificate of conditional exemption (p.54).

This could be viewed as a form of recognising prior learning, but is only applicable to candidates who have completed their final year of schooling (grade 12). 'Non-traditional' students therefore only refer to learners who have a school leaving certificate, but without the minimum requirements

for entry into a university and disregards the thousands of learners who were prevented or discouraged from, completing formal schooling.

2.3.2 The 50% Residency Clause

The 50% residency clause emanates from the same old statutes (Joint Statutes, 1918), and while this clause was not originally intended to be used in terms of RPL, it is now used to avoid awarding formal credits to learners who meet most (or all) of the requirements for a particular qualification as evidenced through the assessment of prior learning. This clause was developed to facilitate credit transfer between institutions of higher learning where a learner wanted access to an institution other than the institution where he or she was first enrolled (i.e. when relocating), or when study was interrupted. Essentially it means that even if a learner meets all of the requirements for the achievement of a qualification through the recognition of his/her prior learning, that learner still has to complete 50% of the qualification with the new institution before the institution is willing to award a qualification.

While the Joint Statute has been repealed by the Higher Education Act (Number 101 of 1997), “The joint statutes and joint regulations and rules made in terms of the Universities Act, 1955 (Act 61 of 1955), and the Technikons Act, 1993 (Act 125 of 1993), continue to exist until the date or dates contemplated in subsection (2)” of the Higher Education Act. These currently pose important inhibitors to the development and implementation of RPL, particularly in higher education.

2.4 Further Education Acts and Policies

As in the Higher Education Act, the Further Education and Training Act (Number 98 of 1998) states its position regarding redress and access in the preamble to the act. It is in the National Curriculum Framework for Further Education and Training (1999 discussion document) however, where more direct reference is made to recognition of prior learning:

Access to the FET band can be gained through the General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) or equivalent qualification corresponding to NQF level 1, as well as by other means, e.g. via recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes (p.4).

In the discussion of the principles underpinning the new approach to further education and training, the issues of redress and access are expressed explicitly:

The policy Framework for Curriculum Development is based on principles that arise out of the need for redress, access, equity and quality; and drives all national policies for the reconstruction and development of education and training (p.14).

A large section of the Framework is devoted to assessment of prior learning and is highlighted as important, especially in the FET context. RPL in the FET band serves, a variety of purposes, namely it intends to:

- promote continuous learning by allowing learners who can demonstrate achievement of outcomes to progress along a learning path, irrespective of the learning context;
- allow learners to earn credits towards a qualification in less than the usual time where this is feasible;
- assist adults to capitalise on their accumulated prior knowledge and skills and thereby reduce the amount of time needed to fulfil qualification requirements;
- benefit women and those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, who may be able to demonstrate ability even though they may lack formal qualifications;
- enable learners wishing to diversify from one learning field to transfer between programmes;

- facilitate re-entering into FET programmes; and
- benefit adult learners by making available alternative routes to education and training, whilst enabling mobility in career and learning pathways (DoE, 1999)

However, the development of RPL policies and systems has been slowest in the public FET sector. To date, no formal policy that will govern RPL at FET institutions, has been drafted.

2.5 Conclusion

The acts, regulations, policies, frameworks and guidelines discussed in this section represent the most important sample of the new legislative and regulatory frameworks for a transforming education and training system in South Africa. It seems that the conceptualisation, particularly regarding RPL, as an important mechanism for redress and the opening up of access, has taken place, and that in principle, these formal pieces of legislation and regulation are in agreement in terms of the need for RPL in many different contexts and bands. There seems to be coherence and a common understanding of the possible purposes, and certainly of the benefits of RPL, for education and training in the wider context. However, a cautionary note seems to creep into discussion about RPL, both in the draft New Academic Policy (CHE, 2001), as well as in the discussion document: The National Curriculum Framework for the FET (DoE, 1999). In the Higher Education context for example, it is noted that:

...RPL remains a highly contested area in higher education. A key issue in the RPL debate is the nature of different kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing, and whether or not RPL can serve as a catalyst for the transformation of the higher education curriculum (p.104).

Likewise, but on a more practical level, the National Curriculum Framework for FET indicates that “RPL still needs to be researched for its effective utilisation” (p.32).

READINGS ON REGULATIONS AND POLICIES

READING 1B

Extract from **Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning**, SAQA Guideline Document, June 2004. Page 30.

The following example of a 'generic' template for an RPL policy is a combination of a number of ETQA RPL policies. Such a policy could contain the following headings:

Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

1. Objective

For example: This policy covers the process of gathering evidence and making judgements about a learner's performance in relation to standards and qualifications. The policy outlines the process whereby such evidence is assessed and credited.

2. Scope

For example: The assessment of learning is a service available to all learners who have appropriate learning and skills in relation to qualifications for which this institution is accredited, regardless of where and how the learning was obtained.

3. Legislative context

For example: The SAQA Act, NSB Regulations, Skills Development Act

4. Principles of assessment

For example: All assessments are subject to the principles of:

- validity
- fairness
- reliability
- practicability

5. Criteria and registration of assessors

6. Support structures for learners and assessors

7. Process of assessment

8. Moderation and quality assurance

For example: Assessment instruments will be moderated by learning area specialists before assessments take place. 10% of completed assessments will be moderated for consistency, fairness, and reliability.

9. Procedures for appeal

10. Certification of learners

11. Articulation of learning

12. Record keeping

READING ON FUNDING, COSTS AND FEES FOR RPL

READING 2

Extract from **Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning**, SAQA Guideline Document, June 2004. Page 15 - 19.

1.4 Funding and the sources of funding

As is the case with most developments in education and training, funding determines the rate at which implementation takes place. It is also clear that the current sources of funding will not be sustainable in the long term, and that it will become increasingly important for providers to consider financially viable models of RPL delivery.

The audit of current practice has identified the following sources of RPL funding:

- ✓ Direct funding is derived from the National Skills Fund (NSF), specifically for unemployed candidates. Discussion with the Department of Education (DoE) and the
- ✓ Department of Labour (DoL) in terms of plans for funding/subsidies and possibilities of accessing NSF funds for RPL initiatives should be accorded high priority.
- ✓ Private/Business initiatives exist mainly in larger corporate institutions, two of which have been identified in the banking sector. Cost effectiveness is a priority and is also linked to the availability of workplace-based unit standards.
- ✓ Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) funding, e.g. SERVICES SETA has put out a tender for the establishment of Career Centres in an attempt to identify learnership candidates within their sector, including RPL assessments of such candidates. To date, six Career Centres have been set up and a large number of people have undergone the first phase of the process.

The NSF is often targeted as a resource for a range of projects. It is important that provisioning of RPL is done in a cost-effective and well-planned manner. Continued dependence on external funding, from whatever source, will be detrimental in the long run.

In the draft New Academic Policy³ (CHE, 2001: 97), mention is made of the formalisation of funding and subsidy arrangements for Foundation Certificates (NQF 5) and 'academic development' programmes which, in terms of this approach, would be 'articulation' qualifications for which institutions will receive funding from the DoE. This would meet the need for funding of education for learners at the lower levels of the NQF, but it assumes that a full 'articulation' qualification is required before RPL learners will be ready to access higher education.

This approach to formalising funding and subsidy arrangements does not deal with subsidies for RPL learners who may wish to access higher levels of the NQF; neither does it address the high start-up costs associated with the development of appropriate policies and procedures for RPL. Unless these aspects are addressed, the lack of structured funding will become a disincentive to the implementation of RPL across all levels of the NQF.

1.5 Costing and Comparative Studies

The RPL policy (chapter 2) states clearly that:

Fees for the delivery and administration of assessment and RPL services, [should] not create barriers for candidates. The development of services and programmes is an investment in the lifelong learning approach across all levels and sectors of education and training in South Africa.

This statement has a number of implications for implementers of RPL:

- ✓ The extent to which high start-up costs will inhibit the development and implementation of RPL at institutional level in a resource-scarce environment.
- ✓ Cost recovery should not be the basis for the fees candidates are required to pay.
- ✓ The following options for charging fees:
 - time spent on the RPL service and RPL assessment; or
 - a common fee regardless of the number of credits claimed and the work required to complete the process; or
 - a fee in relation to the number of credits claimed.

High start-up costs

This guideline document makes it clear that there are many important factors that have to be considered when a provider/institution is planning to implement RPL. All of these considerations cost time, if not actual money. However, start-up costs should not inhibit the development of RPL services.

One possible way of absorbing the cost is to ensure that RPL activities are integrated into the reformatting processes required of all institutions that have submitted qualifications for interim registration.

It also makes sense to identify particular target markets and initiate RPL services in those areas first before they become institutional practice and, from these lessons learnt, to then develop cost-effective approaches to RPL.

In addition, it seems clear that the more RPL can be integrated into mainstream services and approaches, the more cost effective it becomes.

Cost recovery versus fee structure

Formal mainstream programmes in public institutions are subsidised. Learners are therefore not required to pay the actual amount it costs the government to educate them. Although there is currently no clear subsidy structure for RPL, it is important that the main beneficiaries, the candidates, are not disadvantaged by the perceived high cost of RPL.

Also, private providers offering RPL services make up a large proportion of delivery. Such providers are not eligible for subsidies and care should be taken to see that RPL does not become too costly for the individual.

It should be acknowledged that the development of all new programmes cost money but that as the number of learners in a programme increase the more cost-effective the programme becomes. The planning of institutional RPL services will therefore be informed by the cost of development, but should not be wholly determined by it.

Charging for RPL – what and how

Costs could be based on the overall length of the programme by identifying the time it would take in a classroom-based situation to prepare and assess learners. An example of such costing is set out below.

If a National Certificate (120 credits) takes an average of 1 200 hours to complete, then calculate the time spent by a teacher/lecturer/trainer on preparation, assessment and judgement of evidence (for example, 20% of the time). This percentage could be used as a guideline for the establishment of cost.

Consider the University of South Africa (UNISA) example:

- ✓ Registration for the RPL000-X module costs two-thirds of the price of one module.
- ✓ Registration for the assessment of each module will cost one-third of the price of the module.
- ✓ For challenge examinations, only the assessment fee for each module is charged.
(www.unisa.ac.za/dept/rpl/faq.html)

In addition, international studies have revealed the following three options for charging of fees:

- i. fees based on the time spent to complete the RPL process; or
- ii. a common fee irrespective of time spent or the number of credits awarded; or
- iii. a fee based on the number of credits applied for and awarded.

(Harris, 2000: 131)

The last option seems to be problematic as this could easily associate RPL with the ‘sale’ of qualifications.

As a guideline, Whitaker (1989: 9-10) developed criteria for the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (USA) that deal particularly with fees:

Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the [number] of credit[s] awarded.

The British system is in agreement with the above approach. It is considered a ‘malpractice’ to base “assessment fees on the number of credits awarded” (Nyatanga et al., 1998: 9).

The SAQA RPL policy provides quality criteria, inter alia, in relation to fees and charging for services (below). The core criteria were developed to facilitate quality assurance of RPL processes and services by an ETQA. The table below is an example of an evaluation tool, which could be used by the ETQA and by the provider/institution as a self-audit tool. Also, would-be implementers of RPL could use these criteria as a guideline towards attaining the ‘ideal’:

FEES FOR RPL SERVICES		
Fees for the delivery and administration of assessment and RPL services do not create barriers for candidates. The development of services and programmes is an investment in the lifelong learning approach across all levels and sectors of education and training in South Africa.		
	YES	NO
Fees should not create barriers for candidates.		
The fees for the assessment of prior learning should be less than the cost for a fulltime module or learning programme.		
Credit-bearing portfolio development or other articulation programmes are made increasingly available to assist candidates in their preparation for assessment, and to qualify for available subsidies for selected skills programmes and learnerships.		
Flexible payment options, in line with the policies and procedures of the ETQA and constituent providers, are available.		
Research and development priorities are identified, including those that investigate costs and cost effectiveness.		

There is no doubt that RPL ‘costs’, but would-be implementers of RPL have to find ways in which RPL ‘pays’. This means that one must look at RPL in terms of ‘cost-benefits’, rather than only in terms of high start-up costs and the cost of capacity development of resources and staff. Harris (2000: 132) suggests that the calculation of cost for RPL services should always be offset by the “social cost of not valuing prior learning”. With this in mind, she suggests the following cost-benefits to institutions:

- ✓ New and experienced learners are attracted to the institution – standards actually increase rather than decrease.
- ✓ Student recruitment and retention rates tend to increase.
- ✓ Staff can learn from the candidates, for example about developments in the workplace - this is useful for curriculum and pedagogy.
- ✓ Staff can gain valuable insights into different and non-dominant cultures of knowledge – which can and should form a useful adjunct to traditionally academic ways of thinking about knowledge.
- ✓ Engaging with RPL means that curricula can build meaningful links with the communities they seek to serve.
- ✓ The process of implementing RPL forces staff to understand what their curriculum actually requires of learners and to clarify issues such as the meaning of particular levels, notions of academic coherence and equivalence.

(Harris, 2000: 132)

READINGS ON RPL AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

READING 3A

Extract from **Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning**, SAQA Guideline Document, June 2004.

The SAQA RPL policy proposes the following set of quality criteria in this regard:

RPL and Curriculum Development		
Assessment and RPL practice increasingly inform the development of new standards, qualifications, learning programmes and curricula. Providers increasingly use methods of instruction and delivery to provide curricula to meet the diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and educational needs of learners.		
Learning programmes increasingly take into account the nature and form of knowledge produced in previously excluded constituencies and locations, e.g. indigenous knowledge, women's knowledge, workers' knowledge.	YES	NO
The curriculum increasingly incorporates indigenous and other knowledge forms to reflect the diversity of needs and goals of the learner population.		
The design of learning programmes indicates how candidates' prior knowledge has been affirmed and taken into account.		
The curriculum is sufficiently open-ended to allow for flexible entry and exit points to enhance access and the achievement of learning goals.		
Emerging trends from assessment and RPL practice, where these have implications for modification and redesign of unit standards and qualifications, are forwarded to the appropriate bodies.		
Where candidates demonstrate knowledge that does not easily fit existing unit standards or exit level outcomes, credit equivalencies are established in consultation with subject experts and relevant ETQAs.		

READINGS ON RPL AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

READING 3B

Extract from Harris, J: RPL: Power, Pedagogy and Possibility. Conceptual and Implementation Guide. Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria 2000.

Harris discusses ideas for redesigning and reshaping curricula in order to integrate RPL into curriculum design processes.

‘You will need to make decisions about:

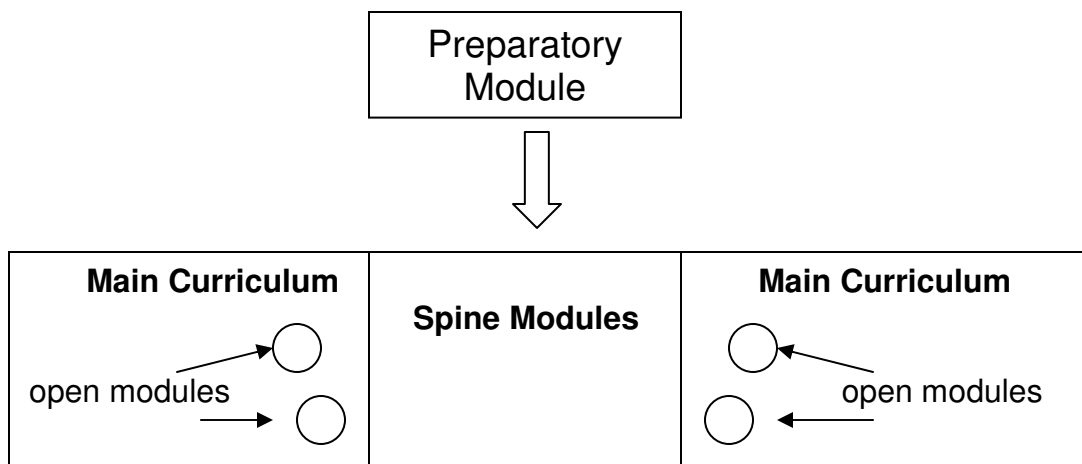
- Entry requirements – that is, should be the mix of formal education and experience;
- The most progressive ways to develop and deploy learning outcomes, assessment criteria and learning modules;
- The degree of learner choice and scope for customization within the curriculum; and
- The practical needs of adults, taking into account time constraints and other life and work commitments.

A further important technical issue – especially for an RPL procedure that aims to be optimally inclusive – is to leave some ‘spaces’ in the curriculum. These spaces can fulfill three functions:

- At pre-entry and entry points of the programme, learners can be offered the time and space to review their prior learning in relation to the overall curriculum, to decide which aspects of it might be credible, and to identify any gaps and particular learning needs that might be credible, and to identify gaps and particular learning needs that might exist. This space is referred to as *preparation for recognition/assessment or preparatory module*. It is dealt with in more detail below.
- During the main programme learners can customize aspects of the programme to suit their own interests and needs. Learners can be given opportunities to present and pursue a structure and coherent personalized study module which falls within the agreed boundaries of the overall programme. This allows non-traditional configurations of knowledge to come to the fore, thereby greatly enhancing the value and recognition that can be accorded to prior learning. These spaces are referred to as *open modules*. They are also dealt with in more detail below.
- Throughout a learning programme there can be space for learners to consolidate the coherence of their prior and new learning, to plan ahead, and to make critical links between prior learning and the curriculum. This space is referred to as the *spine module*; ideally it should be offered as selected intervals during the learning programme. The process envisaged is not dissimilar to the functions of traditional personal tutorial systems in HE. Profiling and the creation of reflective diaries/essays to capture learning processes are often used. For example, learners can work together to evaluate why and how their learning programmes shift and change over time – using that experience as the basis for reflection and the development of generic HE-level abilities. Remember, the aim is for the RPL to become a social practice and a curriculum practice, raising questions about what counts as valid knowledge.

Diagrammatically, the curriculum would look like the model shown in Figure 5.1

Figure 5.1: A curriculum conducive to RPL – Technical Issues



Unit 3: Readings

Recognition of Prior Learning on the NQF

THE UNIT STANDARD

READING 1

SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

REGISTERED UNIT STANDARD:

Develop, support and promote RPL practices

SAQA US ID	UNIT STANDARD TITLE		
116587	Develop, support and promote RPL practices		
SGB NAME		REGISTERING PROVIDER	
SGB Assessor Standards			
FIELD	SUBFIELD		
Field 05 - Education, Training and Development	Adult Learning		
ABET BAND	UNIT STANDARD TYPE	NQF LEVEL	CREDITS
Undefined	Regular	Level 7	10
REGISTRATION STATUS	REGISTRATION START DATE	REGISTRATION END DATE	SAQA DECISION NUMBER
Registered	2004-10-13	2007-10-13	SAQA 0456/04

PURPOSE OF THE UNIT STANDARD

"Recognition of Prior Learning in South Africa has, unlike similar initiatives in other countries, a very specific agenda. RPL is meant to support transformation of the education and training system of the country. This calls for an approach to the development of RPL policy and practices that explicitly addresses the visible and invisible barriers to learning and assessment. Such an approach must generate the commitment of all role players to remove these barriers and to build a visible, usable and credible system as an effective and creative vehicle for lifelong learning. It is important that consensus be generated around the criteria and support systems within which the integrity and quality of all assessments will be protected." SAQA RPL policy (2002,p. 11).

This unit standard aims to recognize the expertise of people who have a deep understanding of outcomes-based assessment in general, and of the complexities concerning the initiation and implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policies and practices in particular. Such people are able to promote an awareness of RPL-related issues and provide RPL advice and support, at systems and strategic level, to a range of people/bodies, including assessors, moderators, evidence facilitators, assessment designers, teachers, trainers, managers, organisations, institutions, companies and enterprises.

People credited with this unit standard are able to:

- ✓ Demonstrate understanding of the conceptual underpinnings and purposes of the recognition of prior learning,
- ✓ Investigate current RPL practice and opportunities in an organisation or sector,
- ✓ Develop RPL policies, procedures and plans for an organisation,
- ✓ Provide RPL advice and support, and
- ✓ Promote RPL practices.

LEARNING ASSUMED TO BE IN PLACE AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

The credit value is based on the assumption that people learning towards this unit standard already understand and can practice the key principles of an outcomes-based system in general, and standards-based assessment in particular.

UNIT STANDARD RANGE

Inclusions and exclusions:

This unit standard relates to the development, support and promotion of RPL practices at organisational and/or sector level within the context of given national RPL policies, criteria and guidelines. Candidates wishing to achieve this unit standard are not required to advise RPL candidates or carry out assessments towards RPL, as the direct application of RPL is integrated into the unit standards listed below. Practitioners wishing to advise or assist RPL candidates, conduct assessments towards RPL, or design assessments for the purpose of RPL, should seek to obtain the following unit standards as applicable:

- ✓ 12544 - Facilitate the preparation and presentation of evidence for assessment (L4)
- ✓ 7978 - Conduct outcomes-based assessments (L5)
- ✓ 7976 - Design and develop outcomes-based assessments (L6)
- ✓ 4297 - Design, develop and implement the assessment of learning in higher education
- ✓ ODETD SP501- Guide and advise learners about their learning, assessment and recognition opportunities (L5)

Definition of RPL:

"Recognition of prior learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements." National Standards Bodies Regulations (no. 18787 of 28 March 1998)

This means that regardless of where, when or how a person achieved the learning, if such learning meets the requirements of a unit standard or a qualification (or part thereof), it could be recognised for credits. In this sense, RPL is an important principle of the NQF. RPL also involves an assessment process of preparing for RPL, engaging with RPL candidates, gathering evidence, judging evidence, giving feedback and reporting results.

Purposes of RPL:

The "Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning", opted 13 August 2003, indicate that the purpose of RPL could include access and appropriate placement at a particular level at an institution, granting advanced status, advanced standing, crediting and certifying learners for unit standards or the parts of the qualification where all the requirements have been met, or depending on the context, a combination of these. It should also be noted that the NSB Regulations make it clear that a learner could achieve a qualification wholly or in part through the process of RPL. Furthermore, RPL could be used to establish whether people meet minimum requirements for entry to a job.

Process of RPL and status of recognition through RPL:

The SAQA RPL policy states: "there is no fundamental difference in the assessment of previously acquired skills and knowledge and the assessment of skills and knowledge acquired through a current learning programme. The candidate seeking credits for previously acquired skills and knowledge must still comply with all the requirements as stated in unit standards and qualifications. The difference lies in the route to the assessment" (SAQA, 2002: 8).

All assessment involves the gathering and judging of evidence provided by and/or about the candidate in relation to agreed criteria, regardless of whether the candidate is a recent learner or developed their skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values in the past. Assessors are required to uphold the principles of currency, sufficiency, authenticity, reliability and validity of evidence. Credits awarded through an RPL process are therefore just as valid as credits awarded through any other assessment process. The emphasis on RPL is brought about by the need for recognition in assessment practice of evidence from prior learning activities that may have been negated in the past or were simply not considered as evidence for various reasons. In addition, many providers of training and assessment only offer assessments based on their learning programme. A person seeking RPL will not necessarily attend the full learning programme and will therefore require assessment that is not dependent on a particular learning programme, but one that recognises broadly equivalent skills and knowledge as reflected holistically in the relevant

unit standard(s) or qualification.

UNIT STANDARD OUTCOME HEADER

N/A

Specific Outcomes and Assessment Criteria:

SPECIFIC OUTCOME 1

Demonstrate understanding of the conceptual underpinnings and purposes of the recognition of prior learning.

OUTCOME RANGE

For the purposes of assessment in this unit standard, it will be sufficient for candidates to use examples from a specific sector where they have assessment experience and wish to promote RPL.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 1

Key purposes of RPL are explained in the light of the prevailing context, historical assessment practices in South Africa and the objectives of the NQF. Clarifications are provided concerning the intent of RPL and common misconceptions and misgivings are identified and clarified.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION RANGE

"Context" to include the identification of social and economic contexts.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 2

RPL is described in terms of the potential implications for candidates, organisations and society in general.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION RANGE

- ✓ Implications of RPL for the individual's career, learning opportunities and self-esteem.
- ✓ Implications in terms of funding and cost-benefits to organisations.
- ✓ Implications for the credibility of the award of standards or qualifications.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 3

Explanations are provided concerning the implications of RPL for education and training providers and the impact on assessment and moderation practices. Explanations include an analysis of assessment practices with particular reference to biases in assessment practices and possible implications for funding of providers.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 4

RPL practices are outlined in terms of national and/or international models, trends and findings.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION RANGE

- ✓ At least one national and one international model should be addressed.
- ✓ Findings to address successes, failures and identified challenges.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 5

Explanations are provided of ways in which RPL serves as a key part of an outcomes-based approach to education and training.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 6

Legislation and national guidelines relative to RPL are identified and outlined in terms of the historical development, purposes and key elements.

SPECIFIC OUTCOME 2

Investigate current RPL practice and opportunities in an organisation or sector.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 1

The investigation establishes the extent to which RPL implementation exists, and the extent to which implementation is developmental and holistic.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 2

Possible or existing barriers to implementation of RPL are identified.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION RANGE

External and internal barriers, including systemic barriers facing learning providers, social and personal barriers to RPL, and ways in which candidates are likely to view assessment and further learning.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 3

Priority areas for RPL projects are identified and profiles of relevant candidates are outlined in terms of a variety of factors.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION RANGE

"Factors" to include: demographic distribution, population groupings, age, language, culture, gender, work context, economic standing, qualifications, experiences of and attitude to learning and assessment.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 4

The investigation provides an outline of factors that could impact on the feasibility of implementation of RPL processes.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION RANGE

Factors include the following as applicable:

- ✓ Access and admissions directives from relevant authorities;
- ✓ Current regulations with regard to entry into ETD institutions and the extent to which there may be some conflict between RPL principles and such regulations;
- ✓ Requirements for moving from one level to another or from one qualification to another;
- ✓ Current regulations with regards to the awarding of credits towards qualifications and the extent to which these impact on the principles of RPL;
- ✓ Administrative systems geared to accommodate credit transfers as they relate to subjects or modules, and not to the awarding of credits towards outcomes;
- ✓ The requirements of Professional Bodies/Councils for professional registration.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 5

The investigation generates information and stimulates reflection that feeds into the processes of strategic planning towards a holistic model.

SPECIFIC OUTCOME 3

Develop RPL policies, procedures and plans for an organisation.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 1

Relevant stakeholders and management representatives are identified and included in a consultative process.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 2

Policies define the various purposes of RPL and align with employment equity policy, national skills development strategies and organisational strategic objectives.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 3

Policies express an explicit commitment to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 4

Policies and procedures provide an effective, credible and contextualised framework for holistic RPL implementation.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 5

Organisational structures are planned to ensure those involved in or affected by RPL, at any level, are given sufficient capacity building, support and resources to enable holistic and effective RPL.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 6

Admission procedures and systems are accessible and inclusive of learners with diverse needs and backgrounds.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 7

Planned quality assurance mechanisms, including monitoring, moderation and review mechanisms, ensure the critical integrity of all RPL-related activities. Reporting and recording processes inform strategic planning requirements.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 8

Plans are suitable for implementation, are manageable and meet individual, organisational and national strategic objectives. Plans include details of target groups, target area, support structures, quality assurance mechanisms, resource requirements, costs, staff development needs and processes and roll-out mechanisms.

SPECIFIC OUTCOME 4

Provide RPL advice and support.

OUTCOME RANGE

Advise and support to anyone involved or interested in RPL, including assessors, moderators, evidence facilitators, assessment designers, teachers, trainers, managers, organisations, providers, institutions, companies and enterprises.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 1

The nature and scope of advice facilitates the development of RPL strategies that are fair, manageable and effective.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 2

The concept, context, philosophy, purpose and process of RPL are described accurately and at a level suitable to the audience. Misgivings among the audience are identified and addressed in a manner that promotes the purposes of RPL.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 3

Advice is provided on suitable ways of collecting and/or generating acceptable evidence for the recognition of learning acquired outside formally assessed learning programmes.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 4

Advice is provided for the re-alignment and/or redevelopment of existing programmes or the adaptation of assessments based on formal learning programmes, to meet the needs of those who do not need to attend the relevant

learning programmes. This includes advice on the possibility of multiple entry and exit points to learning programmes.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 5

Advice and support is provided in a way that promotes the objectives of the NQF in general and the purposes of RPL in particular.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION RANGE

This includes promoting equity of access, meaningful progression along career and learning paths, the integration of education and training, and addressing the negation of non-formal or historical learning.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 6

Advice and support promotes high levels of awareness of RPL issues, resulting in increased flexibility and sensitivity related to RPL practice.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 7

Advice and support helps practitioners and/or organisations to draw people into the RPL process and deal with the barriers, anxieties, discomfort and traumas that arise when adult learners enter the RPL arena.

SPECIFIC OUTCOME 5

Promote RPL practices.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 1

Effective advocacy campaigns are planned and implemented to sensitise people and organisations to the concept, context, philosophy, purpose and process of RPL.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 2

Knowledge, skills and learning that has not been valued historically, including indigenous knowledge, are identified and promotion activities help to address the negation of such knowledge, skills and learning.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 3

Promotion methods are sensitive to various target groups.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 4

RPL is promoted in a manner that helps to address emotional, educational, cultural, linguistic and economic factors that constitute barriers to effective learning and assessment practice.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION 5

RPL practices are monitored and trends are evaluated resulting in ever improving RPL practices.

ASSESSMENT CRITERION RANGE

Trends related to successes and failures.

UNIT STANDARD ACCREDITATION AND MODERATION OPTIONS

- ✓ An individual wishing to be assessed, including through RPL, against this unit standard may apply to an assessment agency, assessor or provider institution accredited by the relevant ETQA.
- ✓ Anyone assessing a candidate against this unit standard must be recognised as an assessor with the relevant

ETQA.

- ✓ Any institution offering learning that will enable achievement of this unit standard must be accredited as a provider with the relevant ETQA.
- ✓ Moderation of assessment will be conducted internally by the provider according to an agreed Moderation Action Plan, with external moderation provided by the relevant ETQA.

UNIT STANDARD ESSENTIAL EMBEDDED KNOWLEDGE

The following knowledge is embedded within the unit standard, and will be assessed directly or indirectly through assessment of the specific outcomes in terms of the assessment criteria:

- ✓ Outcomes-based education, training and development
- ✓ Principles of outcomes-based assessment
- ✓ Principles and practices of RPL
- ✓ Methods for gathering evidence
- ✓ Potential barriers to RPL
- ✓ The principles and mechanisms of the NQF
- ✓ Assessment policies and ETQA requirements
- ✓ Adult learning theories, principles and practice
- ✓ Experiential learning theories
- ✓ Understanding of systemic level issues facing education and training transformation in SA.

UNIT STANDARD DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOME

N/A

UNIT STANDARD LINKAGES

N/A

Critical Cross-field Outcomes (CCFO):

UNIT STANDARD CCFO IDENTIFYING

Identify and solve problems using critical and creative thinking: investigation and promotion of RPL as outlined in this unit standard will require high levels of problems solving in relation to current practices and what is required for transformation and effective RPL.

UNIT STANDARD CCFO WORKING

Work effectively in a team using critical and creative thinking: successful promotion of RPL requires careful cooperation between a variety of people and groups.

UNIT STANDARD CCFO ORGANIZING

Organise and manage oneself and one's activities: all the outcomes depend on high levels of self management.

UNIT STANDARD CCFO COLLECTING

Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information: this will be required particularly when investigating RPL practices and opportunities.

UNIT STANDARD CCFO COMMUNICATING

Communicate effectively: the entire standard depends on high levels of communication.

UNIT STANDARD CCFO DEMONSTRATING

Demonstrate the world as a set of related systems: this will be demonstrated when addressing the implications of RPL on individuals, society, organisations, sectors and the nation.

UNIT STANDARD ASSESSOR CRITERIA

N/A

UNIT STANDARD NOTES

Definition of Terms:

The following terms are defined as used within this and related unit standards:

- ✓ Assessment: - a process in which evidence is gathered and evaluated against agreed criteria in order to make a judgement of competence for developmental and/or recognition purposes.
- ✓ Assessment activities: - what a candidate does or is involved in as a means of producing evidence e.g. designing things, making things, repairing things, reporting on something, answering questions, solving problems, demonstrating techniques.
- ✓ Assessment criteria: - descriptions of the required type and quality of evidence against which candidates are to be assessed.
- ✓ Assessment design: - the analysis of defined outcomes and criteria to produce a detailed description of how an assessment should take place, including all instructions and information regarding the assessment activities and assessment methods. The product of assessment design could be termed an Assessment Guide (see definition below).
- ✓ Assessment facilitator (or evidence facilitator): - a person who works within particular contexts, under the supervision of registered assessors, to help candidates/learners gather, produce and organise evidence for assessment.
- ✓ Assessment Guide: - this is a complete package based on a thorough analysis of specified outcomes and criteria, assessment requirements and a particular assessment context. Assessment Guides are designed primarily for use by assessors to conduct an assessment (or possibly a series of related assessments) in terms of a significant and coherent outcome of learning e.g. a unit standard. Assessment Guides address the following key aspects in detail:
 - How will the assessment take place?
 - What is needed to make the assessment happen?
 - How will evidence be gathered, recorded and judged?

In general, Assessment Guides include descriptions of the approach to the assessment, assessment conditions, assessment activities, instructions to assessors and candidates/learners, assessment methods, assessment instruments (e.g. scenarios, role-plays, questions, tasks), resource requirements, guidance for contextualising assessments, relevant standard operating procedures, administrative procedures, moderation requirements, assessment outcomes and criteria, observations sheets, checklists, possible or required sources of evidence and guidance on expected quality of evidence including exemplars, memoranda or rubrics.

- ✓ Assessment instruments: - those items that an assessor uses or a candidate uses as part of the assessment e.g. scenarios with questions, case studies, description of tasks to be performed, descriptions of role play situations.
- ✓ Assessment method: - for the most part, assessment methods relate to what an assessor does to gather and evaluate evidence. Assessment methods include observing candidates, questioning candidates, interviewing supervisors/colleagues/managers of candidates, listening to candidates, reviewing written material, testing products.
- ✓ Assessment plan: - an assessment plan is produced at provider level, and gives an overview of the timeframes and responsibilities for assessment and moderation for the agreed delivery period. The plan addresses practical implementation details, including, for example, decisions about the clustering of certain outcomes or unit standards/outcomes for integrated assessment, any planned RPL, and the relation of assessment and moderation to delivery of modules/ programmes in terms of timeframes.
- ✓ Assessment principles: - see more detailed definitions in next section.
- ✓ Candidate/learner: - person whose performance is being assessed by an assessor. Such people include those who

may already be competent, but who seek assessment for formal recognition (candidates), as well as those who may have completed or are in the process of completing learning programmes (learners).

- ✓ Candidate-moderator: - the person who is being assessed against this particular unit standard.
- ✓ Evaluative expertise: - the ability to judge the quality of a performance in relation to specified criteria consistently, reliably and with insight. Evaluative expertise implies deep subject matter understanding and knowledge about the outcomes being assessed at a theoretical and practical level, but does not necessarily include practical ability in the outcome.
- ✓ Evidence: - tangible proof produced by or about individuals, that can be perceived with the senses, bearing a direct relationship to defined outcomes and criteria, based on which judgements are made concerning the competence of individuals. Evidence includes plans, products, reports, answers to questions, testimonials, certificates, descriptions of observed performances, peer review reports.
- ✓ Evidence facilitator: - see assessment facilitator.
- ✓ Moderation: - (also referred to as verification) a process that supports and evaluates the assessment environment, process and instruments with a view to improving the quality of assessments and assessors, and confirm the assessment results.
- ✓ Performance: - includes demonstration of skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes, and the ability to transfer these to new situations.
- ✓ Portfolio of evidence: - a carefully organised and complete collection of evidence compiled by candidates/learners to prove competence in relation to defined outcomes.
- ✓ RPL - Recognition of Prior Learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner against specified learning outcomes required for:
 - The award of credits for a specified unit standard or qualification,
 - Access to further learning,
 - Recognition in terms of meeting minimum requirements for a specific job,
 - Placement at a particular level in an organisation or institution, or
 - Advanced standing or status.

This means that regardless of where, when or how a person obtained the required skills and knowledge, it could be recognised for credits. In this sense, RPL is an important principle of the NQF. RPL involves an assessment process of preparing for RPL, engaging with RPL candidates, gathering evidence, evaluating and judging evidence in relation to defined criteria, giving feedback and reporting results. Given that the all candidates are assessed against the same criteria, credits awarded through RPL are therefore just as valid as credits awarded through any other assessment process.

- ✓ Outcomes-based assessment: - a planned process for gathering and judging evidence of competence, in relation to pre-determined criteria within an outcomes-based paradigm, for various purposes including further development and recognition of learning achievements.
- ✓ Verifier: - those who operate at systems level to monitor assessment and moderation practices, trends and results.

Principles of assessment:

Methods of Assessment:

- ✓ Appropriate: The method of assessment is suited to the outcome being assessed i.e. is capable of gathering evidence in relation to the intended outcome, and not something else.
- ✓ Fair: The method of assessment does not present any barriers to achievements, which are not related to the achievement of the outcome at hand.
- ✓ Manageable: The methods used make for easily arranged, cost-effective assessments that do not unduly interfere with learning.
- ✓ Integrated into work or learning: Evidence collection is integrated into the work or learning process where this is appropriate and feasible. (Often referred to as naturally occurring evidence).

Evidence

- ✓ Valid: The evidence focuses on the requirements laid down in the relevant standard and matches the evidence requirements of the outcome/s at hand under conditions that mirror the conditions of actual performance as

- closely as possible.
- ✓ Current: The evidence is sufficient proof that the candidate is able to perform the assessment outcomes at the time the assessor declares the candidate competent.
 - ✓ Authentic: The assessor is satisfied that the evidence is attributable to the person being assessed.
 - ✓ Sufficient: The evidence collected establishes that all criteria have been met and that performance to the required standard can be repeated consistently in the future i.e. the performance to standard is not a "once-off".

Overall assessment process

- ✓ Systematic: The overall process ensures assessment is fair, effective, repeatable and manageable.
- ✓ Open: The process is transparent i.e. assessment candidates understand the assessment process and the criteria that apply and can contribute to the planning and accumulation of evidence.
- ✓ Reliable/Consistent: The same assessor would make the same judgement again in similar circumstances and judgements match judgements made on similar evidence.

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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

READING 2

A hard copy will be provided of the following reading:

- ✓ Judy Harris: RPL: Power, Pedagogy and Possibility. Conceptual and Implementation Guide. HSRC, Pretoria, 2000.

- ✓ You need to read:
Theoretical perspectives: From page 9 to page 15. (Mode 1 & 2 knowledge, pedagogy, experiential learning)

CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

READING 3

Extract from “Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): In search of a valid and sustainable mechanism for South Africa”, Chapter 3. Dissertation for Masters in Education degree, Ronel Heyns, April 2004.

“it became evident that equating prior experiential learning with the agreed learning encapsulated in discipline-based curricula, is not a simple process. Despite the fact that in most of the countries investigated for this study, RPL has been implemented for two decades or more, one common approach to the assessment of prior learning has not been agreed. It may possibly be partly due to the fact that the notion of ‘experiential learning’ as a theoretical perspective, only became prominent with the experiential learning theories of David Kolb in 1984 (in Kelly, 2003).

Kelly (2003) defined ‘experiential learning’ as follows:

...learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied... experiential learning typically involves not merely *observing* the phenomenon being studied but also *doing* something with it, such as testing the dynamics of the reality to learn more about it, or applying the theory learned about it to achieve some desired result.

On the face of it, experiential learning, as a part of “traditional classroom learning” in “cooperative education, internship, and other fields and laboratory programs” (Whitaker, 1989, p. 1), is not problematic. Presumably, such ‘practical’ applications would be subject to pre-defined assessment approaches, which are in line with the requirements for the curriculum. Kolb’s four elements in the experiential learning cycle, describes his view of how this could enhance learning, and much of these principles have been absorbed in education, particularly in terms of the need for learners to become more ‘reflective’. The following figure represents the learning cycles, which, according to Kolb (in Kelly, 2003), will support and deepen learning:

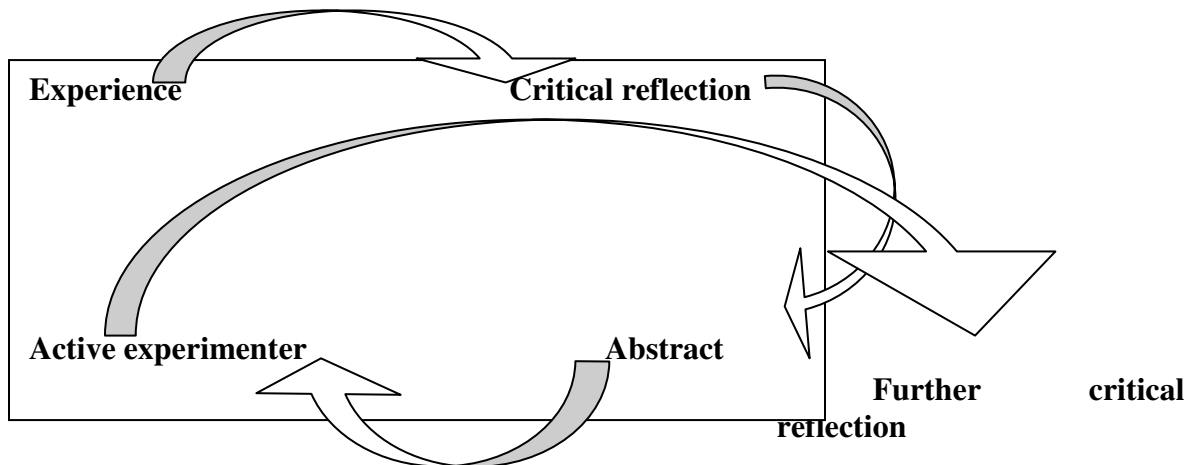


Figure 3.1. Kolb's experiential learning cycle

Experiential learning therefore, according to Whitaker (1989) is about:

1. acting and observing
2. understanding the effects of the action in a specific instance;
3. understanding the general principle
4. applying the general principle in new circumstances (p. 3)

Experiential learning (or learning by experience) is considered a key principle whereby prior learning could be assessed and recognised. The argument is that learning by experience enhances understanding and transferability of knowledge and skills. Experiential learning should therefore be an important part of formal curricula. However, the assessment of prior experiential learning, not as part of a formal curriculum, i.e. “to identify the level of knowledge of skill that has been acquired” (Whitaker, 1989, p. 2) regardless of how and where it was acquired, has been a topic of intense debate since RPL has been conceptualised.

Much research therefore, also in South Africa, where RPL is gaining prominence as a key mechanism for redress and transformation in the new education and training system, has been conducted on ‘how to assess prior learning’.

Two major approaches to the assessment of prior learning have emerged in the eighties and nineties – the “credit exchange model” and the “developmental model” (Butterworth, 1992, p.41). These two models are based, according to Butterworth, on two contrasting views of knowledge:

3.1.1 A Credit-exchange Approach

The term “credit-exchange” (p. 40), or competence-based model for the recognition of prior learning, was coined by Butterworth (1992) and is described as “the ability of the individual to perform certain job tasks or roles to a pre-defined standard” (p. 41). This type of RPL is usually closely associated with a consumer-orientated and utilitarian view of experiential learning, i.e. it looks at market-related performance as it matches or ‘fit’ prescribed outcomes. It has an “extrinsic, economic use-value” (Harris, 1999, p. 127). The only experience likely to be recognised is that which agrees with particular content of the curriculum. Luckett (1999) maintains that it is likely to be practised in the natural and applied sciences and in industrial training and workplace contexts.

The critique of this approach is in terms of the lack of engagement with the nature of knowledge. RPL undertaken in this manner challenges the “site of knowledge production”, but not “what counts as knowledge and who produces it” (Luckett, 1999, p. 71). This is a very common view of RPL, even in South Africa where extensive implementation of RPL has not yet taken place. The SAQA RPL policy (2002) warns against the “purely technical application, dislocated from a particular individual and broader context” (p.12) where knowledge is decontextualised and discrete parts of a qualification are assessed.

Harris, (1999) also suggests that credit – exchange (or the “Procrustean” model as she calls this approach, p. 127), “disguises cultural and political connotations and assumptions about people and their contexts of learning. Knowledge, skills and experience are standardised and formalised with whatever falls beyond the purview of ‘standards’ being rendered invisible” (p. 127).

Other critique of this approach to RPL also include the notion that tasks, particularly tasks at the lower levels of occupations “can be reduced to a set of repeatable procedures, and that the social context in which the job is performed does not need to be included as part of the assessment” (Butterworth, 1992, p. 40). Butterworth suggests that such a “reductionist and atomistic” approach (p. 43) is not appropriate for the assessment of prior learning gained in complex occupations such as teaching, nursing and social work, which trivialises the “complexity of decisions and judgements required by the individual in such contexts” (p.45).

3.1.2 *A Developmental Approach*

Butterworth (1992) then proposes an improved approach to RPL – that of the developmental model. In this model, the emphasis is not on the matching of competence with pre-agreed standards, which if a successful ‘fit’ is established is credited to the learner, but rather on what the learner has learnt through the experience. Evans, (1988) maintains in this regard:

The insistence throughout must be that the experience of a student is significant only as a source of learning. The intellectual task of moving from a description of experience to an identification of the learning derived from that experience is demanding. But if it cannot be accomplished, there is no learning to assess, however important to the individual that experience may have been (p. 7)

This approach was developed with the emergence of Kolb’s (in Kelly, 2003) ‘experiential learning’ theories. More importantly, Kolb’s ‘learning cycles’ were increasingly used as the preferred approach to determining prior learning. This model links the ‘critical reflection’ stage (see Figure 3.1), during experiential learning with the ‘identification of the learning derived from that experience’.

However, Harris (1999) suggests that as in the case of the credit-exchange model, the nature of knowledge is not challenged. At most, the developmental model is “a translation device, a one-way bridge-building process” (p. 130) between different knowledge forms – that of experience, and that of “canonical bodies of knowledge” (p. 130) so prevalent in higher education.

Therefore, the articulation of ‘equivalences’ between experiential and formal learning are highly contested, unless the experiential learning fits into the hierarchical disciplinary knowledge. In addition, yet again, RPL assessment is on discrete parts of the curriculum and the curriculum per se, and the knowledge underpinning the curriculum, is not challenged.

Luckett (1999) agrees and maintains that through a developmental model (she calls it the “hermeneutic paradigm”, p. 71), learners are taught to “recontextualise their prior learning and

experience in terms of academic norms” (p.72). She also points out that it is often the case that not the prior learning, but rather “the possession of academic literacy, a reflexive discourse and the appropriate cultural capital” (p. 72) enables learners to achieve credits.

Therefore, the two most prominent models for the assessment and recognition of prior learning seem to be most likely to empower the already empowered, i.e. those learners who have had sufficient exposure to discipline-based learning, in addition to experience, to engage with an RPL process. Harris (1999) describes this situation as follows:

Prior learning is valued largely in terms of its similarity to pre-existing conceptions of ‘desirable’ knowledge and skill....The gatekeepers have widened the gates slightly in terms of greater flexibility regarding the site of knowledge production but care is taken not to let any actual ‘outsider knowledge’ slip through unnoticed (p. 132).

Osman & Castle (2002) in a paper delivered at the Kenton RPL conference (November 2002), agrees with this view:

...although some developmental forms of RPL help to develop the student – rather than simply assessing existing levels of competence – they are still flawed because they do not engage with the need for institutions to transform their academic programmes and curricula to take account of ‘other’ knowledges ... which are usually invisible in the academy (.

Osman and Castle (SAARDE conference, March 2001), maintains that the developmental model prevails in higher education precisely “because it represents a pragmatic and systematic approach to the ‘portability’ of prior learning...it does not threaten institutional autonomy, standards, or existing ways of organising curricula” (p.3).

Therefore, candidates for prior learning may find themselves in a situation where their informal learning is often deemed irrelevant and inappropriate to formal learning situations. The range of ‘acceptable’ prior learning is limited to those aspects that fall within the codes and prescriptions of institutions, which serves to maintain the status quo in pedagogy and curricula.

Harris therefore proposes two more ways in which we can view RPL:

3.1.3 ‘Radical’ RPL

“Radical RPL” (Harris, 1999, p. 133) is closely linked to “societal transformation, liberation and redress” (p. 133) for the common good of the collective. This approach found strong support in the pre-1994 election period in South Africa. However, where the collective, rather than the individual, becomes the focus, Harris (1999) warns that radical practices have the tendency to “exclude diversity, obscure difference and silence the voices of those falling outside the dominant (albeit alternative [‘radical’]) grouping” (p. 134), thereby resulting in an almost reversed ‘racism’, in which only the experience of the emancipated group, counts as knowledge.

Luckett (1999) refers to this kind of RPL as “the critical paradigm” (p. 72), where knowledge is understood to be “politically interested as well as socially constructed” (p.72). The assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the curriculum are challenged, particularly from an emancipatory point of view, i.e. the “experience, especially that of oppressed classes and groups, would be viewed as authentic”(p.72).

However, both Harris and Luckett agree that ‘emancipatory’ RPL, from the point of view that learning from experience can “lead to social and political transformation has all too often not been realised” (Harris, 1999, p. 134).

Harris’ (1999) final proposition for a RPL model is called:

3.1.4 ‘Trojan-horse’ RPL

The “Trojan-horse” (p. 134) approach calls for “an enquiry into the social construction of knowledge and curricula” (p. 135) in ways in which both experiential knowledge and discipline-based knowledge move closer (and complement) each other. A two-way bridge needs to be constructed whereby practise-based learning and discipline-based learning feature equally strongly, in much more flexible ways than in traditional curricula, through a “mutual engagement and critique, a new shared language for understanding knowledges and modes of meaning” (p. 135). Osman and Castle (SAARDE conference paper, 2001) maintain that university educators “accept that experiential knowledge is distinct from academic ways of knowing, and that learning that occurs in a variety of contexts is not always transferable, but ...that they may be interdependent rather than exclusive” (p. 4).

Such an approach makes it possible to determine knowledge equivalence, whereby ‘general credit’, rather than specific, discipline-based credit, is awarded (Harris, 1999).

The SAIDE Teacher Education Team, (Kenton Conference, Nov 2002) describes this model as “transformational” (p. 6) whereby RPL seeks to “recognize non-formal and experiential learning for itself rather than attempting to articulate and match such knowledge and learning with knowledge prevalent in the receiving institution” (p.6).

Therefore, the debates seem to indicate that “knowledge is [not] universal, externalised, decontextualised and value-free” (Harris, 1999, p.126). Traditional ways of viewing experiential learning as “neutral and available to rationality”, i.e. to transform experience into a one-on-one relationship to the types of knowledge required in discipline-based learning, is not possible, or even the correct position to take. Harris maintains that experiential learning is “partial, socially constructed, highly contextualised” (Harris, 1999, p. 126).

The ‘Trojan-horse’ approach therefore poses challenges to “the way we teach, what we teach, when we teach, and what we think is worth teaching” (Osman and Castle, 2001, p.3) and furthermore, challenges the validity of curricula in general.

Lockett (1999), suggests that “we should not attempt, via RPL, to strip learners of their particular identities and turn them into “universal knowers” (p. 73) who are capable of ‘true self knowledge” (p.73), we should rather assist with “the negotiation of two worlds – the world of experience and the world of the academia” (Osman and Castle, SAARDE conference, March 2001, p.2).

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLES

READING 4

The extract below was taken off the internet, and is provided as an example of some of the more 'management focused' viewpoints on experiential learning. It also gives further references for you to follow up if you are particularly interested in this aspect of learning.

Experiential Learning Cycles

Have you ever wondered about the differences between learning cycles, planning cycles, training cycles, development cycles etc. and why there is such a huge selection? This article takes a fresh critical look at cyclical learning models. It is based on an extract from '[Powerful Learning Experiences](#)' (1995) (revised, 2002). [See below for more details and useful links.](#)

[Index to Experiential Learning pages on this and other sites](#)

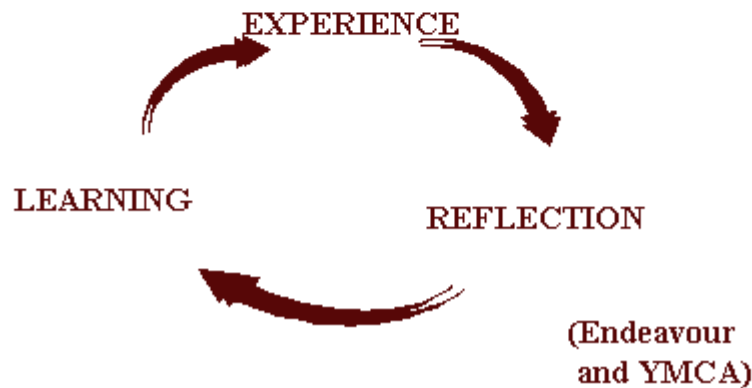
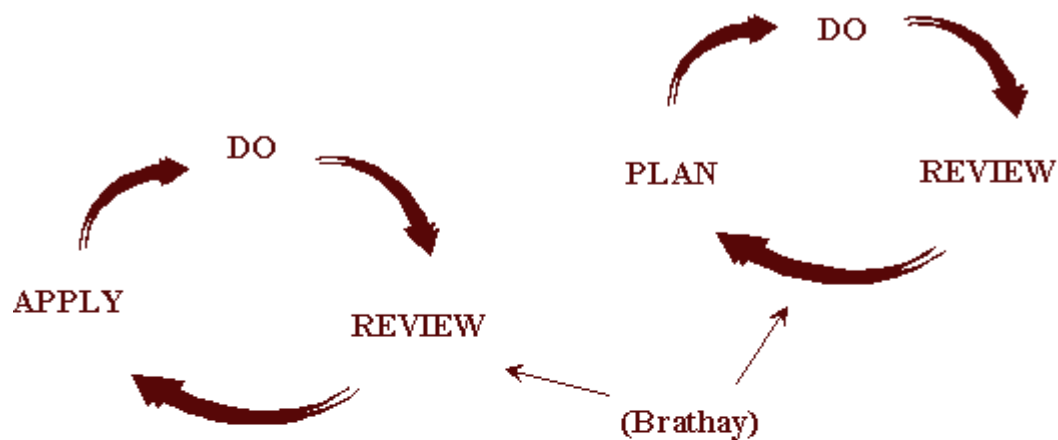
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

'Experiential learning' can apply to *any* kind of learning through experience. 'Experiential learning' is often used by providers of training or education to refer to a structured learning sequence which is guided by a cyclical model of experiential learning. Less contrived forms of experiential learning (including accidental or unintentional learning) are usually described in more everyday language such as 'learning from experience' or 'learning through experience'.

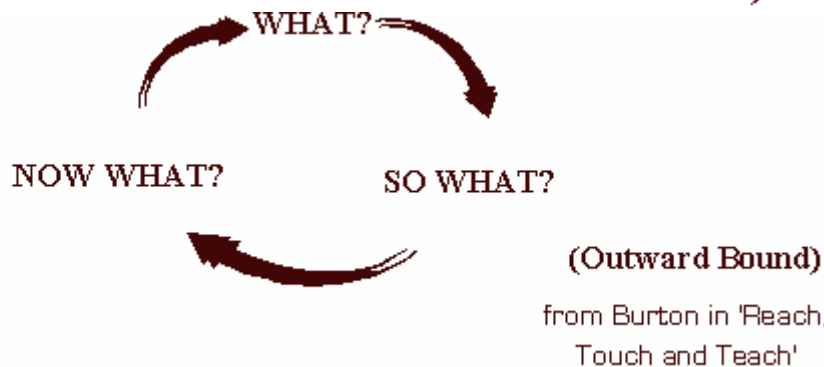
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLES

An 'experiential learning cycle' is a means of representing sequences in experiential learning. It is often assumed that the stages of a 'learning cycle' are managed by a facilitator, but they can also be self-managed or even 'unmanaged' in the sense that learning from experience is a normal everyday process for most people. From a trainer's perspective, an experiential learning cycle is a 2, 3, 4 or 5 stage learning sequence which encourages continuity from one experience to another. It is sometimes referred to as a '*training cycle*', which can be misleading, especially if the theory underpinning it is about *learners* and *learning* (e.g. [Dewey, 1938](#); [Kolb, 1984](#); [Juch, 1983](#).)

The [development training](#) process is frequently (but not exclusively) described as a **3-stage learning cycle**. For example, brochures of member organisations of the Development Training Advisory Group in the 1980's included these learning



cycles:



One or other of the two Brathay cycles were used to explain "The Way We Work" to customers, delegates and to new staff. The theory underlying the models was assumed to be Kolb's theory of experiential learning. (Kolb's model was rarely presented as a model to course delegates because of its wordiness.) The model used by Endeavour and YMCA to describe their way of working uses the same terms as those in Dewey's formula ([Dewey, 1938](#)): "Experience plus Reflection equals Learning". Although it is possible to trace the source theories, the interviews with trainers in the previous chapter [of [Powerful learning Experiences](#)] have shown that such models are seen only as general guides by trainers, and that trainers will also make use of other models to explain learning processes to course delegates.

However, learning models are meant to be neither schedules for trainers to follow, nor to be malleable visual aids for trainers to use. They are (or belong to) theories about how people learn. My research has enabled me to investigate the ways in which managers' learning experiences correspond to the various learning cycles presented above and below. Some of the learning experiences reported to me by managers might be more accurately represented by a simpler 2-stage model. Some experiences needed more stages

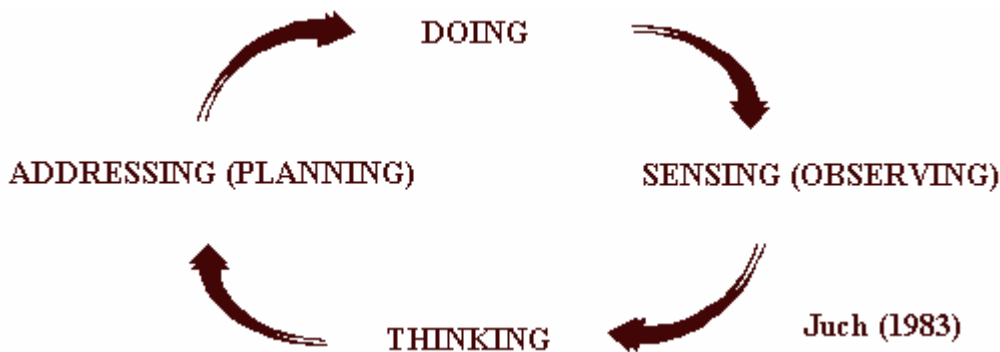
of processing than others in order to create recognisable learning or development. Some experiences also required different *kinds* of processing. My data suggest that it may not always be possible or appropriate to follow a 3-or-more-stage cycle and review *every* experience to the extent that learning can be identified and 'applied' to the next activity. If learners reflect in some way on their experience, then they can be said (in my usage) to be following an experiential learning cycle - of at least two stages. A 2-stage learning cycle might

be:



The concept of a 'cycle' may not readily fit examples of experiential learning in which there is either a significant overlap or a long interval between the 'stages' of a 'cycle'. Despite the existence of examples of experiential learning in this thesis which stretch the concept of a learning 'cycle', I still find the basic concept a useful and versatile one.

Despite the currency of 3 stage learning cycles in development training, it is **4-stage learning cycles** that appear to be the basis of most experiential learning theories. Bert Juch (1983: 216) has collected and listed seventeen 4-stage 'learning process cycles' linked to various learning theories, which he has attempted to synthesise by creating one of his own:



(I have turned Juch's presentation of this model through 180° so that 'DOING' appears at the 'top' of the cycle, as in the other models shown.) Kolb's cycle is presented below:

([Kolb, 1984: Chapter 6](#)). This theory involves converting his learning cycle model by superimposing a three tier cone on top of the cycle ([Kolb, 1984: 141](#)). Kolb also clarifies the limitations of his Learning Style Inventory, pointing out that it only represents "elementary learning orientations" which he sees as being in a different dimension to that of development ([Kolb, 1984: 76, 98](#)).

Why is it, then, that courses for personal development, social development, manager development, self development, organisation development etc. are often based on a learning model? Why is it that development training brochures generally show just one model - a cyclical learning model? Is there not a development model that would be more suitable? Would a development model more accurately describe what learners experience on these courses? Would a development model more accurately describe what clients expect from outdoor management development?

Customers and participants are often seeking both *learning and development*. While experiential learning theories and models help trainers and learners to conceptualise learning, the same theories are not, in my view, well suited for conceptualising development.

Notes, References and Links about Experiential Learning

This page is an extract from [Powerful Learning Experiences in Management Learning and Development](#) by Roger Greenaway.

I explore the 'learning vs. development' issue more thoroughly in:

- [Reviewing for Development](#)
- [In Search of Respectable Adventure](#)
- [Reviewing Adventures: Why and How?](#)

[The Active Reviewing Cycle](#) is my e-learning tutorial illustrating how active and creative reviewing techniques match the stages of this cycle.

The article [Experiential Learning on the Web](#) by Tim Pickles' is followed by [some critiques of Kolb's experiential learning theory](#) from a range of perspectives - together with a link to [Kolb's FAQ page](#) about his experiential learning theory and learning styles.

Direct links to other sites about experiential learning and learning styles

[Learning to Learn](#) a summary of 2 learning cycles (Kolb, Honey and Mumford), descriptions of Honey and Mumford's 4 learning styles, Temporal and Boydell's blockages to learning, and Mumford's list of skills involved in effective learning behaviour.

[Teaching Learners to be Self-Directed](#) by Gerald Grow. This article (originally published in *Adult Education Quarterly*) presents a model for developing self-directed, lifelong learners. It is based on an adaptation of *Situational Leadership* to the classroom. Even better is Gerald Grow's [In Defense of the Staged Self-Directed Learning Model](#) in which he responds to issues raised by Mark Tennant's critique of his original article. Issues include whether "mismatches" of teaching and learning styles should be sought or avoided.

David Kolb's Big Bibliography

Alice and David Kolb maintain an extensive bibliography of books and articles about experiential learning theory since 1971 (over 1,500 entries). It is updated twice a year. The latest bibliography is available from www.learningfromexperience.com

[Index to some critiques of Kolb's experiential learning theory](#) | [Index to Experiential Learning pages on this and other sites](#)

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READING 5

The extracts below give you a few summary examples of features of international models of RPL.

Extracts taken from “Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): In search of a valid and sustainable mechanism for South Africa”, Chapter 3. Dissertation for Masters in Education degree, Ronel Heyns, April 2004.

Extract 1: *United States of America*

In the United States of America, RPL was introduced with the G.I. Bill of 1946, where Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), enabled war veterans to achieve recognition for their skills built up outside of formal institutional education (SAQA, 2002, Appendix C).

In 1975, the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning Project (CAEL) located within Princeton University, undertook a research project with three basic questions to be investigated:

1. Is it possible to equate non-college learning with that offered in traditional college curricula?
2. If it is possible, can assessment techniques other than paper-and-pencil tests be used to evaluate the outcomes of this learning?
3. If such a system proves feasible, would it be possible to integrate the ensuing model in current educational programmes?” (Simosko & Cook, 1996, p.11)

This project involved ten colleges and universities during the research period. The project demonstrated that PLA was indeed a feasible mechanism to recognise the skills and knowledge of (particularly) adult learners, who wished to enter or return to higher education, bringing with them a host of rich and varied experiential learning.

Today more than 1200 colleges and universities in the USA offer RPL (PLA) services.

As a result of this and other projects in the USA, a set of quality criteria was developed for prior learning assessment. These quality criteria include two categories of standards. The first category (1 – 5) deals with the assessment process, and the second category (6 – 10) with administrative contexts. They are (Whitaker, 1989):

Assessment:

1. Credit must be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
2. Credit should be awarded only for the appropriate college-level learning.
3. Credit can be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.
4. Appropriate subject matter and academic experts must make the determination of competence levels and of credit awards.
5. Credit should be appropriate to the academic (or other) contexts within which it is accepted.

Administration:

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

Extract 2: Britain

Assessment of prior learning (APL) was developed in Britain in the 1980s. In Britain, APL includes Accreditation of Prior Experiential learning (APEL) and Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL).

A number of APL projects were established under the leadership of the ‘Learning from Experience Trust’, with the purpose of opening up access to higher education for adults. The main thrust for these developments emanated from the British government’s call for “a more flexible, adaptable workforce; training programmes that were more responsive to the needs of employers and individuals; [and] greater access to education and training for greater numbers of people” (Simosko & Cook, 1996, p.13).

.....

As in the USA, a set of ‘good practice’ principles ensures the credibility of the British system. These include a description of ‘malpractices to be avoided’. The malpractices include:

- ❑ Granting credits for the length of time served or just for experience and not for the learning which may take place as a result of experience.
- ❑ Basing fees for the development of portfolios etc. on the number of credits awarded.
- ❑ The failure to focus on specific credits and programmes.
- ❑ The failure to separate the role of the RPL advisor from that of the assessor (called APL in England)
- ❑ Promising RPL services without the regard for resources, staff development and expertise in the area.
- ❑ Inconsistencies in RPL practice: offering uncoordinated and inauthentic services.
- ❑ The failure to be transparent and to publicly declare in advance the rules, regulations and criteria used for RPL assessment.
- ❑ The failure to provide a justified transcription of RPL outcomes, including sufficiency of evidence as part of quality assurance.
- ❑ The failure to give feedback to applicants.

- ❑ Promising credits and/or admission to programme before assessment takes place (not checking authenticity of claim) (Nyatanga, Forman & Fox, 1998).

In addition, the following ‘guiding principles’ have been identified as good practice. They are very similar to the quality criteria developed and established by Whitaker (1989, p. 9 and 10).

They include macro (or administrative) quality criteria, namely:

- ❑ The institution should have a clear RPL (APL) policy, which is translated into operational structures.
- ❑ Marketing and publicity strategy.
- ❑ Staff development at macro as well as micro quality level.
- ❑ An RPL committee or board that oversees RPL activities on behalf of the institution.
- ❑ Co-ordination between the centre and the schools or faculties.
- ❑ Well-publicised communication channels for staff and students.
- ❑ Ensure that students understand their responsibilities within the RPL process.
- ❑ The administrative office should have appropriate forms, or their equivalent, available: (1) RPL application form that combines certificated and non-certificated learning; (2) RPL (Accreditation of Prior Credentialed Learning) form specifically for certificated learning and a form specifically for non-certificated learning.
- ❑ Administration office should also have an RPL evaluation form and an RPL monitoring log.
- ❑ An evaluative section on RPL experiences together with an appropriate plan for the future.

The micro or academic quality criteria include:

- ❑ Programmes or modules have clear learning outcomes both staff and students can base their RPL assessments on.
- ❑ Programme leaders and admission tutors are conversant with RPL principles and their application to assessment.
- ❑ Within the institution each school or faculty should have an RPL co-ordinator to enhance subject-specific debate and feedback.
- ❑ Subject teams should have a nucleus of people capable of either advising on or assessing RPL claims.
- ❑ Support and feedback to students.
- ❑ Identify strengths and weaknesses of the RPL provision through (a) self-evaluation (critical peer review); (b) institutional audit of artefacts (c) students’ feedback; (d) external views and external examiner feedback. (External views may be requested from professional bodies, industry and commerce and funding bodies).
- ❑ Disseminate good practice in the recognition and accreditation of prior learning. (Nyatanga, Forman & Fox, 1998)

Extract 3: *New Zealand*

New Zealand has initially been very successful in integrating RPL into teaching and learning practice. This is partly as a result of their successful implementation of an National Qualifications Framework where, since 1995, with the introduction of the framework, the numbers of learners who are registered on the framework has grown from 40 000 to 626 000 in 2001. In addition, there are 770 National Certificates and National Diplomas and 15 800 unit standards against which recognition of prior learning may take place (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2001, p. v).

Quality assurance is based on the following principles:

- ❑ Framework credits are awarded when the achievements meet national standards, regardless of where those achievements were attained.
- ❑ Candidates who already have skills and knowledge can be assessed immediately by presenting evidence of prior performance and by completing assessment tasks.
- ❑ Workers can be assessed by completing regular on-the-job tasks
- ❑ Accredited providers and registered workplace assessors assess prior learning against the same standards and within the same moderation systems that are utilised for other education and training programmes.
- ❑ Assessment of prior learning provides qualifications credits where no previous credits exist. RPL is not normally used to describe exemptions from qualifications, credit transfers or translating whole qualifications to Framework qualifications (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 1996).

Extract 4: *The Netherlands*

In the Netherlands, APL (RPL) is a more recent development, where it was implemented to accommodate the need for re-skilling and up-skilling of the workforce. Increasingly, the globalisation of society, technological and scientific advances necessitate the development of mechanisms to deal with these dynamics. In 1994, the Committee for Accreditation of Prior Learning concluded that a system of APL is desirable and feasible. It defines APL as (Klarus, 1998):

A process in which an individual's knowledge, skills and attitudes (competencies) are measured against standards, which are derived from the qualifications structure under development (p.7).

The Netherlands places its approach within the larger European knowledge-economy in which lifelong learning is a necessity. According to Ruud Duvekot (2001) “we need high-grade know-how and people who can develop, transfer, acquire and use that know-how” (p. 2). In many European countries there is strong support for the use of RPL as an important way to deal with the needs of the economy. Also, as mentioned above, competency standards are being developed that will help describe the skills, knowledge and values required for particular professions that will enable assessors to determine whether a candidate has met the requirements for a qualification. This approach, i.e. an approach where clear criteria for the assessment of prior learning are

established against the requirements for a field of learning, is increasingly being used to clarify and define what it is that will tell an assessor that a candidate's prior knowledge is on par.

ⁱ Butterworth C, 1992, quoted in Heyns, M Ed dissertation 2004.