A MODEL FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

by

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Anso Harding for providing a point of reference from which to work.
A MODEL FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Name : VENTER, A.
Degree : M. Com. (Business Management) [Short dissertation]
Title : A model for Recognition of Prior Learning in higher education institutions in South Africa.
University : Rand Afrikaans University.
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The South African education and training system has for many years been fragmented and unfair towards underprivileged population groups. Since 1994, many changes have been initiated via legislation to ensure a unified and equal national system of education and training. Higher education has not been excluded from this and is undergoing major changes. These changes are mainly driven by current higher education legislation together with the regulations of the South African Qualifications Authority towards establishing a National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Higher education transformation is built around three central features, namely increased participation, greater responsiveness, and increased cooperation and partnerships. One of the ways in which participation and responsiveness can be achieved is through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Formal RPL has not yet been implemented in higher education institutions, although informal forms of RPL have taken place.

In an attempt to understand RPL, the approaches to prior learning recognition in various countries are analysed. Aspects such as the forms of
RPL, sources, objectives and uses, benefits and advantages are extrapolated from current sources. A table with a summary per country is provided as a future reference guide.

A Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process model is synthesised after analysis of prior learning recognition process models in different countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada and Australia. This model serves as suggested process model for Recognition of Prior Learning in higher education institutions in South Africa. The model consists of ten stages, namely pre-entry, initial contact, learning identification, preparation for assessment, assessment, verification, accreditation and certification, appeals, recording and post-RPL counselling.

Research is based on an analytical and descriptive literature study. The process model requires further empirical testing.
OPSOMMING

Naam : VENTER, A.
Graad : M. Com. (Ondernemingsbestuur) [Skripsie]
Titel : 'n Model vir die Erkenning van Vorige Leer in Hoëronderwysinstellings in Suid-Afrika.
Universiteit : Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit.
Studieleier : Prof. B.C. Lessing
Datum : Junie 1999

Die Suid-Afrikaanse opvoeding- en opleidingsisteem was vir baie jare gefragmenteer en onbillik ten opsigte van minderbevoorregte bevolkingsgroep. Heelwat veranderinge is sedert 1994 deur wetgewing geïnisieer om 'n gelyke en eenvormige nasionale opleidings- en opvoedingsisteem te verseker. Hoëronderwys is nie hiervan uitgesluit nie en ondergaan tans heelwat veranderinge. Hierdie veranderinge vind hoofsaaklik plaas deur huidige hoëronderwyswetgewing asook die regulasies van die Suid-Afrikaanse Kwalifikasie Owerheid ten einde 'n Nasionale Kwalifikasieraamwerk (NKR) daar te stel.

Hoëronderwystransformasie is verweef rondom drie sentrale beginsels, naamlik verhoogde deelname, groter reaksie en verhoogde samewerking en vennootskappe. Een van die wyses waardeur samewerking en groter reaksie bewerkstellig kan word, is deur Erkenning van Vorige Leer (EVL). Formele EVL is nog nie in hoëronderwysinstellings geïmplementeer nie, hoewel informele vorme van EVL wel voorgekom het.

In 'n poging om EVL te verstaan, word die benadering tot vorige leererkenning in verskeie lande ontleed. Aspekte soos die vorme van EVL, bronne, doelwitte en gebruikte en voordele word aan die hand van huidige
beskikbare bronne bespreek. ’n Tabel met ’n opsomming ten opsigte van elke land word verskaf as toekomstige verwysingsraamwerk.

’n Erkenning van Vorige Leer (EVL)-prosesmodel word saamgestel nadat die vorige leererkenningprosesmodelle van verskeie lande soos die Verenigde Koninkryk, die Verenigde State van Amerika, Kanada en Australië ontleed is. Hierdie model dien as ’n voorgestelde prosesmodel vir Erkenning van Vorige Leer in hoëronderwysinstellings in Suid-Afrika. Die model bestaan uit tien stadiums, naamlik voor-toetrede, aanvanklike kontak, leeridentifikasie, voorbereiding vir assessering, assessering, verifikasie, akkreditasie en sertifisering, appèlle, aantekening en na-EVL-berading.

Navorsing is gebaseer op ’n analitiese en beskrywende literatuurstudie. Die prosesmodel vereis verdere empiriese toetsing.
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1.1 BACKGROUND

In South Africa the field of education, training and development that includes formal and informal environments for learning, has undergone immense and uneven changes since 1994 (Bellis, 1998:156-157). Higher education, which represents one of the formal sub-fields within the field of education, training and development, has not been excluded from these changes. Higher education according to the RSA (1997:17) and NCHE Discussion Document (1996), comprises all learning programmes leading to qualifications higher than the Further Education and Training Certificate or the old Standard 10 Certificate.

The ETDP Project (1998:13) states that education for different population groups differed tremendously in terms of quality, relevance and resources due to the political history of South Africa. During the 1970s and 1980s the community based People's Education movement sparked thinking around a unified education system that included formal and informal education as well as the public and private sector. The outcome of years of deliberation was a proposal to introduce a single educational philosophy and approach called Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and form a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) on which all qualifications could be pegged. This educational approach and framework would unify early childhood education, schooling, higher education, industry-based training and informal education and training.

The implementation of a totally new educational approach and a new framework in higher education, is in itself a momentous and assiduous task. But even before this approach and framework was designed, a real
need amongst learners emerged. Many learners have for years been subjected to an unfair system of education and training, - a system that deprived certain learners of the right to gain acknowledgement for learning, as well as denying them access into certain learning institutions and formal learning programmes.

The real issues for previously disadvantaged learners (not only from the disadvantaged population groups) are formal recognition of learning and access to institutions of higher learning. The two issues cannot be separated as access may be given to a learner only to repeat learning that has already taken place and recognition can only be provided in the context of a specific learning field or environment with the purpose of providing access either into a learning programme or a further learning pathway. In order to provide the required acknowledgement of learning and to assist in accelerating access, a process called Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is proposed in new higher education and South African Qualifications Authority legislation (RSA, 1995 and 1997).

Recognition of prior learning can be explained by looking at the definition of learning. Louw (1986:342) indicates that learning can be derived or observed from the behaviour of a human being. Louw (1986) further states that learning is an active process in that it is the result of an experience and the appropriate use of the experience in the life of a human being.

According to Louw (1986), learning can directly be linked to the environment of the human being and the opportunity for learning to take place in that environment, as well as the intrinsic potential of the human being.
From the above definition of learning it can be seen that the environment of a human being has a great influence on the learning that takes place. The definition however does not state that the environment must be formal and organised i.e. schooling and higher education, or informal and unorganised i.e. everyday living. It merely states that learning can take place as long as the environment provides opportunity for it to take place.

This brings forth the notion of human beings having learnt outside the formal environment. Structures and evaluation processes and methods exist within the formal environment, but it becomes more difficult to evaluate and "label" the type of learning that has occurred in an informal environment.

This challenge now faces South African higher education institutions. How to measure and recognise the learning that has for the most part not taken place in the formal educational domain, and this is what is to be researched in this dissertation.

1.2 PROBLEM DEFINITION

Educational policy requires higher education institutions in South Africa to implement Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This topic is an area where very little formal research has been done in South African higher education institutions. Many institutions have informally been recognising learning in a haphazard manner. Some institutions have been awarding credit on courses in exchange for years of working experience and job seniority level.

As institutions have to move towards meeting the requirements of the Higher Education Act and the South African Qualifications Authority Act,
formal RPL processes have to be investigated and initiated. All of this happens within a specific context. The context in this instance is higher education. Within higher education there are many variables and changes. It is within this dynamic ever-changing environment that a fair and equitable RPL process must be initiated and managed.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:
1. What is the context of higher education in South Africa today?
2. What is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)?
3. What are the different approaches towards prior learning recognition in various countries?
4. What processes do different countries use to conduct RPL?
5. What RPL process model can be synthesised for South African higher education?
6. Are there other important issues to consider when implementing an RPL process model for higher education?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Following on the research questions, the following objectives of the study have been formulated.

The overall objective (Objective 1) of this study is to analyse and discuss various RPL process models and then synthesise a Recognition of Prior Learning process model for South African higher education institutions. Secondary objectives are:

Objective 2: To research and discuss South African higher education today, to serve as the context for specific RPL issues;

Objective 3: To research and discuss the concept of Recognition of Prior Learning; and
Objective 4: To discuss various issues that have an influence on the implementation of RPL in higher education institutions - especially in South Africa.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a literature study and is analytical and descriptive and not empirical in nature. A theoretical process model will be created together with a discussion of the model.

Various books and articles were studied in order to form a point of reference for this study. A literature study was done using the following databases:

- the library catalogue at the Rand Afrikaans University;
- the library catalogue at the University of South Africa;
- the library catalogue at the Human Sciences Research Council;
- the library catalogue at the University of Pretoria; and

Literature on Recognition of Prior Learning may be found under key words such as experiential learning, open learning, prior learning, accreditation and recognition. A literature study forms the bulk of this study and plays an important role in the achievement of objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4. The literature study provides input from various approaches towards Recognition of Prior Learning in many countries as well as RPL process models currently in use in these countries. The ideas and points of view of various writers are discussed and analysed whereafter they are synthesised into an integrated process model.
The objectives of this study provide background for the analysis and evaluation of information collected. The information is descriptive and not statistical in nature and therefore an interpretative-deductive approach is used to analyse relevant information in order to reach synthesis and objective 1.

1.5 DEMARCATION OF RESEARCH

Literature on Recognition of Prior Learning is limited, more so is the application of RPL in higher education. RPL is conducted in the workplace and in educational institutions. The study focuses on higher education in South Africa as this is an area of research that has not been greatly explored and many research questions remain unanswered. The study does not require empirical testing of the RPL process model and does therefore not provide for such testing.

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The structure of the study is directly related to the objectives. The paper will cover an understanding of higher education and the concept of Recognition of Prior Learning whereafter a process model will be synthesised for RPL within higher education.

The structure of the study follows the following format:

Chapter 2: In order to provide a context in which to understand RPL, the history of South African higher education and the new context for higher education will be discussed. The central features of the new higher education framework is provided whereafter the chapter culminates in a discussion of the integration of higher education with the
National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Recognition of Prior learning (RPL) is highlighted as one of the principles of the NQF. (Objective 2)

Chapter 3: RPL is discussed as one of the principles of the NQF. The chapter provides a literature study on RPL that includes an analysis of various approaches towards RPL in the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States of America (USA) and Canada. The chapter provides a broad-based discussion of RPL as a concept and ends by highlighting issues to consider when implementing RPL in South Africa. (Objective 3)

Chapter 4: This chapter provides a critical analysis of RPL process models by using an evaluation matrix. The results of the analysis are evaluated by identifying the similarities, differences, strengths and weaknesses of each model. (Objective 1)

Chapter 5: A RPL process model is synthesised from Chapter 4 and is proposed for South African higher education institutions. (Objective 1). Due consideration is given to the fact that a process model does not function within a vacuum and various issues are discussed that have bearing on the implementation of RPL in higher education institutions. (Objective 4)

Chapter 6: A summary of all the chapters is provided to give an overview of the total dissertation.

1.7 CONCLUSION

Higher education institutions are faced with a challenge from learners. Failing to meet the challenge of access and recognition of learning could
result in a further lack of trust and breakdown in communication. As educators, our task is to support learners and to provide for an accessible learning system.

Accepting the challenge has its own unique considerations, each with a cause and effect. Knowing and understanding the causes will assist in better choices to ensure positive effects for the learner and the institution. This will be achieved by providing a context of South African higher education history.

The challenge lies in not only initiating and implementing a new RPL process model to redress access and recognition issues, but also in finding ways of improving the process and enlightening the people that it affects. Further research on the topic of RPL in higher education is imperative to ensure a fair and equitable system and process.
CHAPTER 2

2. THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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CHAPTER 2: THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

“South Africa’s higher education system has considerable capacity in research, teaching and physical and human resources. Yet the system is fundamentally flawed by inequities, imbalances and distortions deriving from its history and present structure” (NCHE, Final Report, 1996:1). This statement forms the backdrop for the drive towards transformation and reconstruction in higher education.

Never before has such pressure for change been placed on higher education in South Africa. Legislation and the restructuring of the funding formula are enforcing the change. This poses an imminent crisis in higher education as the bastion of knowledge and theory is challenged by external forces.

To understand the challenges and changes in higher education, background on the history and the new developments in higher education in South Africa is provided. The legacy of segregation in higher education has necessitated unique measures to be taken to ensure that higher education remains relevant and responsive to the needs of society.

One such unique measure is Recognition of Prior Learning. This topic will be covered at the end of this chapter as a means of indicating the links with higher education and greater detail will be provided in chapters three and four.
2.2 SOME ASPECTS OF THE HISTORY OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Behr (1987:168) and Flynn (1998:8) state that higher education, and especially university education in South Africa, is strongly rooted in the British system. The foundation of university education was laid in the last century in the Cape Colony. The first institution, the South African College, was opened in 1829. It adopted a British tradition and this continued with the establishment of the University of the Cape of Good Hope in 1873, which according to Behr (1987), was modelled on the then University of London.

During the past few decades, various educational reforms have been initiated world-wide. Behr (1987:168) sites that Europe embarked on a reconstruction campaign from the 1950s onwards and the Robbins Report of 1963 spurned a major reformative action in Britain. During the 1960s countries such as the USA, France and Germany experienced student revolts, which eventually led to a reorganisation of university structures and policies.

The reasons for the student revolt are according to Lemmer (1998:2) mainly found in the difference between the debate about modernism and post-modernism. Lemmer (1998:19) defines modernism as "a faith in universals discovered through reason; in science and in the scientific method as superior means for arriving at truth and reality; and language as a credible and reliable access to that reality". Modernism is thus indicative of a historical period in which, according to Lemmer (1998), a higher education institution's main function is the production of scientific knowledge and the higher education practitioner enjoys special status and autonomy. Lemmer (1998) further contests that the student revolt revolved and still
reflects upon the essential purpose of a university, questioning of the relevance of the knowledge it produces and querying the appropriateness of this knowledge towards the needs of society.

Post-modernism is the opposite of modernism and is explained by Lemmer (1998:20) as “a scepticism, a doubt, even unbelief expressed towards modernist ideals in the light of a rapidly post-industrialising society”. Bickel (1975: as indicated by Behr, 1987:169) states that the university of the Western world is now seen as the “practical servant of society rather than as a haven of independent inquiry”.

According to Behr (1987:169), South African universities, though not excluded from the wave of world-wide changes in higher education, focused on the establishment of separate university facilities for different race groups during the 1960s. The separate educational systems ensured varied preparation of students from different race groups. Behr (1987) states that it was not until 1983 that the Government took steps to make universities more open.

In South Africa a National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was formed in February 1995 to investigate the transformation of higher education. The Commission had to advise on issues of restructuring higher education to ensure a well-planned, integrated and high quality system for higher education in South Africa (NCHE Discussion Document, 1996:1). The vision of the commission for higher education is as follows:

- A system for higher education that is underpinned by the principles of high quality, lifelong learning, equity, democracy and efficiency;
- a well planned and integrated component of the national system of education and training;
- students and staff that are representative of the South African society;
• a mission of developing human resources, research capacity and communities; and
• the production of knowledge to promote economic, political, cultural and intellectual development nationally, regionally and internationally.

The post-modern discourse is clearly reflected in the debate on the role of a university in developing countries, of which South African is one of the many countries. Cloete and Muller (1998:3) mention that universities should become "...engines of development and centres and conduits for innovation". Cloete and Muller (1998:5) indicate that the NCHE Report of 1996 leans towards this type of developmental approach for universities.

2.3 FOCUS ON THE LEGACY OF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SEGREGATION

For the purposes of this paper, the NCHE Discussion Document (1996) and NCHE Final Report (1996) will be used as the basis for discussion of the history and changes in South African higher education. The documents provide extensive coverage of all the major issues with which South African higher education institutions are confronted.

During the investigation of the NCHE, the history of inequality in higher education was focused on. Although many negative issues were noted and considered, the quality of qualifications from the Apartheid era were acknowledged to have sustained the country’s economic and financial infrastructure and industrial products as well as services (NCHE Discussion Document, 1996:19). Higher education consists of three sectors. The legacy of segregation in higher education in total will be discussed after explaining the difference between the three sectors.
The current higher education model in use in South Africa distinguishes between three sectors of higher education institutions. In the NCHE Discussion Document (1996:2), the first sector, namely the university sector, is defined with the main function to “…educate students in a range of basic scientific (or scholarly) disciplines with a view to high-level professional training”. Universities also engage in basic scientific research.

The second sector is the Technikon sector. The function according to the NCHE Discussion Document (1996:2) of a Technikon is to train students in the application of knowledge itself with a view to high-level career training. Technikons engage in developmental scientific research. The final sector is the College sector. Colleges according to the NCHE Discussion Document (1996:2), prepare students for specific vocations and are not expected to conduct research.

The NCHE Final Report (1996:8-15) states that as divergent as the definitions of the three different sectors are, so are the qualifications offered by the institutions. Research outputs in the past varied amongst the historically white and black universities. Governance structures and responsibility were co-ordinated by a department of national education and separate responsibilities were allocated to departments of education concerning universities, technikons and colleges.

Funding and control over the institutions was fragmented into different policies and applications. The state controlled historically black universities and allowed a great deal of autonomy to historically white universities. Naidoo and Cooke (1998:1) indicate that in the past curriculum development at technikons has been skewed towards tight national control, whilst universities have had local control of the curriculum process. Together with this, democracy and representativeness
was sorely lacking, especially in management and lecturing positions at both types of institutions.

Bellis (1998:156) states that South African education and training reflected all the imbalances, all the injustices and the separateness of the ruling apartheid ideology. The outcome of a fragmented higher education sector has led to restricted access for previously disadvantaged communities into institutions; unplanned and uncoordinated national goals without a single educational approach or qualification structure. The previously mentioned point leads to an inability to respond to the economic and social needs of the majority of the South African population.

2.4 PRINCIPLES FOR TRANSFORMATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The NCHE Discussion Document (1996) indicates five principles that are used to guide the restructuring of the present higher education system. The principles were chosen to ensure that the imbalances of the old educational system would be eradicated. The principles are:

2.4.1 Equity

According to the NCHE Final Report (1996:3) "...the principle of equity concerns the distribution of benefits; in this instance the benefits of higher education opportunities, privileges and funds." It refers to ensuring fairness and impartiality and of redressing the inequalities of the past. Astin (1993:214) makes the statement that equity can be achieved for many students by providing access into institutions, even if their entering performance levels are not good. Astin (1993) indicates that an institution’s excellence will depend primarily on how effectively it is able to develop its students’ talents.
2.4.2 Democratisation

Democratisation according to the NCHE Final Report (1996:4) refers to the structural and procedural arrangements in making decisions so that those affected by such decisions, have a say in making them. It further entails accountability for taking and implementing decisions. All higher education decision-making processes should thus become transparent and co-operative.

2.4.3 Development

The NCHE Final Report (1996:4) defines development as “...a set of programmes or actions initiated and implemented to create the conditions for a system (or entity) to improve through the gradual realisation of its potential”. Higher education plays a pivotal role in the realisation of the nation’s development.

2.4.4 Quality

The pursuit of quality implies maintaining and applying academic and educational standards according to the NCHE Final Report (1996:5). Quality should be defined in terms of the purpose pursued and measurement against a set of standards. Quality is thus equated with ‘fitness for purpose’.

2.4.5 Academic freedom and institutional autonomy

Academic freedom is defined by the NCHE Final Report (1996:5) as “...the absence of outside interference, censure or obstacles in the pursuits and practices of academic work.” Institutions are however accountable to society for quality and applicability. It therefore stands to reason that an institution may practice academic freedom but not be totally autonomous.
Richards (1997:21) says that academic freedom is subject to the overriding principle of public accountability. He further highlights the issue of language policy as "it's optional, but you have got to do it" to illustrate the link between institutional autonomy and public accountability. The Commission (NCHE Final Report, 1996:5) did however stress the importance of maintaining the current principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

It is within the boundaries of the above-mentioned principles that higher education is to be transformed. The new framework for higher education transformation has, according to the NCHE Final Report (1996), three central features, namely increased participation and increased co-operation with more partnerships and greater responsiveness. All three of these points will be discussed in detail whereafter other aspects of the transformation process will be highlighted.

2.5 CENTRAL FEATURES OF THE NEW FRAMEWORK

For the purposes of this paper, the NCHE Discussion Document (1996) and NCHE Final Report (1996) will be used as the basis for discussion of the history and changes in South African higher education. The documents provide extensive coverage of all the major issues with which higher education institutions are confronted.

2.5.1 Increased participation

The traditional feeder of higher education will in future be replaced by a wider diversity of feeder constituencies and programmes. The process of moving from an 'elite' to a 'mass' system according to Stumpf (1998:74) refers to the massification of higher education. Massification has workload implications for the current administration and academic staff of higher
education institutions and this implies that the funding formula will have to be adapted.

Not only will an institution grow in size, but also the types and mixes of qualifications and courses being presented will have to change to meet the diversified needs of the new constituents. Higher education programmes have to be re-organised and the currency for qualifications will have to be quoted through the National Qualifications Framework.

2.5.2 Increased co-operation and partnerships

A whole new movement away from institutional self-reliance to functional interdependence with other institutions, organisations and sectors of society, is emerging. A movement like this infers a wide range of partnerships and co-operative relations. Increased co-operation is viewed from four different perspectives, namely:

2.5.2.1 State and higher education co-operation where the state will become less directive and the individual institution less autonomous. Less autonomy will take the form of becoming more answerable to the treasury’s demands for the use of resources.

2.5.2.2 Higher education and civil society interactions where civil society stakeholders will acquire interest in how higher education institutions are run and institutions will cater for greater social demands such as providing access to non-traditional students.
2.5.2.3 **Higher education and economic linkages** where partnerships between parastatals, private business institutions and higher education institutions will ensure economic growth as all of these institutions contribute towards knowledge-generation.

2.5.2.4 **Inter and intra institutional partnerships** where programmes will become joint ventures. It is envisaged that ‘schools’ will be established within higher education institutions for more effective use of resources.

2.5.3 **Greater responsiveness**

Higher education should shift and become more open and interactive, responding to the social, cultural, political and economic needs of the country. It is said that higher education should take the problems and challenges presented by the development context of South Africa seriously. This point of view underlines the post-modernist view that higher education systems should focus on consumer and client demand. This will have an impact on the manner in which research topics are identified and conducted.

It is however refreshing to note that the Commission states that the new framework should also provide sufficient room for academic freedom, to ensure that autonomous academic inputs address more than reactive short-term problems and are thus more responsive to learner needs.

2.6 **OTHER ASPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION**

The Commission (NCHE Discussion Document, 1996:7) proposed further transformational aspects in higher education. In the next section these aspects will be elaborated on.
2.6.1 The development of a single co-ordinated system of higher education

One Ministry of Education, a common approach to education called Outcomes-based education and a single qualification framework - the National Qualifications Framework, all set the stage for a single co-ordinated system between universities, technikons, colleges and private providers. Governance will be based on the Higher Education Act. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) will fulfil the functions of the act.

2.6.2 An expanded role for distance education and "resource-based" learning

The concept of life long learning is now part of the total vision of the Ministry of Education. Not only does it mean that institutions will constantly have a regular flow of students and that learning does not stop when a qualification is obtained, but that student ages will increase and that the institution has to encourage life long learning through its teaching philosophy. To ensure that life long learning may take place, institutions will have to investigate distance education as a means of reaching the masses.

Distance education has to be supported by resource-based learning. The Education White Paper (RSA, 1997:26-27) indicates that resource-based learning, based on the principles of open-learning, has a crucial role to play in ensuring that the learner can learn in different contexts, at their own pace and using a variety of teaching approaches and media.

2.6.3 Three year rolling national education plan

With the three year rolling national education plan according to the NCHE Final Report (1996:11-12), institutions seek approval and funding for a proposed programme mix and enrolment levels. Institutions must devise
three year rolling plans in terms of their own missions and where necessary, modification of institutional plans will be negotiated. The criteria for institutional plans include institutional capacity, regional and national needs, national equity goals, the need to promote resource sharing, collaboration and articulation between institutions.

2.6.4 Fundamental importance of research within higher education

The transformation process intends to stress the fundamental importance of research within higher education and its vital contribution to a national system of innovation. The NCHE Final Report (1996:11) states that access to masters and doctoral and postdoctoral studies for black people and women should be enhanced. The institutional base for research should be expanded.

2.6.5 Student admissions and the establishment of a National Higher Education Information and Admissions Service

The NCHE Final Report (1996:11) suggests that the minimum entry requirement for all higher education programmes should be a pass in the proposed Further Education Certificate (FEC). A single FEC is proposed with the understanding that institutions can further stipulate their own entry and re-admission requirements (NCHE Discussion Document (1996) and RSA (1997:28)). The feasibility of national selection tests is not ruled out and the contribution of Recognition of Prior Learning towards selection has to be investigated.

A National Higher Education Information and Admissions Service is proposed in the NCHE Final Report (1996:12) to provide students with information about programmes and financial aid. All selection decisions would however be taken by institutions themselves.
2.6.6 Co-operative governance

The NCHE Final Report (1996:13) states clearly that co-operative governance is a system of governance which entails autonomous institutions working closely with an assertive government. Co-operative governance promotes interaction and co-ordination through a range of partnerships.

Co-operative governance is viewed on three main levels, namely the national, regional and institutional levels. On national level, the government, through the Minister of Education, will ensure that co-operative governance structures are formed and implemented.

The regional level entails the formation of non-statutory regional structures with a mix of internal and external stakeholders. Such structures could be consulted in the planning of the needs of the region. The final level is at the institutional level. As stated in the NCHE Final Report (1996:16), co-operative governance at this level requires the acknowledgement of competing and complementary interests as well as independence and common goals. Issues such as gender, race, staff development, curriculum transformation and institutional culture will be dealt with at this level. Institutional autonomy will operate within the context of co-operation and greater accountability.

2.6.7 Goal-directed funding

The NCHE Final Report (1996:16) states that the current funding formula for higher education institutions is based on principles which are not valid for the current context. Present funding formulas do not support the funding of a single higher education system, diversification in terms of
institutional missions, promotion of increased participation and equal opportunities. The key elements, as stated by RSA (1997:47) of the new funding framework are:

- A funding formula component that will generate block grants for institutions offering approved higher education programmes; and
- An earmarked funding component through which funds will be allocated to institutions offering approved higher education programmes in accordance with clearly specified policy objectives.

As stated in the Education White Paper (RSA, 1997:49), the new funding framework will not in itself increase or decrease the total public funding to the higher education sector, but distribute it differently.

2.6.8 Inclusion of higher education programmes in the NQF

All higher education programmes according to the NCHE Final Report (1996:8) will be included in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and a quality assurance system is to be developed within the ambit of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). In order to explain the inclusion of higher education in the NQF, a detailed discussion will follow.

2.6.8.1 The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act number 58, was passed in October 1995 with the purpose to establish the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The National Qualifications Framework aims to correct the legacy of quality differences between different education and training systems and policies and to provide a level playing field through which national standards can be registered, life long learning can be ensured and Recognition of Prior Learning can be achieved (Phillips, 1996:5).
The NQF has the following objectives (RSA, 1995:1201):

- to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- to facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
- to enhance the quality of education and training;
- to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby
- to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

The objectives of the NQF are underpinned by a structured set of principles. According to Bellis (1998:166) the principles “...identified, explored, clarified, defined, refined and finally agreed upon became not only the basis for the NQF... but also became the very principles that guided the process of policy analysis, formulation and so on”. Bellis (1998) further states that the relationships between the principles are of utmost importance (refer to figure 1) and “…unless they reflect integration, include fully representative participation (legitimacy), and clearly are relevant to all stakeholder concerns, they do not achieve credibility. All processes are aimed at proposals, policy notions, structures that reflect coherence and flexibility.” Full definitions of the principles follow in Table 1.
Figure 1: Principles for the integration of education and training - the NQF.
(Taken from Bellis, 1998:167)

Table 1: The full definitions of the principles of the NQF.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Forms part of a system of human resource development, which provides for the establishment of a unifying approach to education and training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimacy</td>
<td>Provide for the participation of all national stakeholders in the planning and co-ordination of standards and qualifications. This also ties up with the principles of OBE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Be and remain responsive and appropriate to national development needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Have national and international value and acceptance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>Work within a consistent framework of principles and certification. The paths should all “hang together” in the overall framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Allow for multiple pathways to the same learning ends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>Be expressed in terms of a nationally agreed framework and internationally acceptable outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance of learners</td>
<td>Provide for the counselling of learners by specially trained individuals who meet nationally recognised standards for educators and trainers. To assist learners to understand and make decisions about entry into and progression through the education and training system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portability</td>
<td>Enable learners to transfer their credits or qualifications from one learning institution and/or employer to another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Provide ease of entry to appropriate levels of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner, which facilitates progression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation</td>
<td>Provide for learners, on successful completion of accredited prerequisites, to move between components of the delivery system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
<td>Through assessment give credit to learning, which has already been acquired in different ways. Linking informally acquired or unaccredited knowledge and skills to formal provision and accreditation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principle Definition

Progression 
Ensure that the framework of qualifications permits individuals to move through levels of national qualifications via different appropriate combinations of the components of the delivery system.

(Adapted from ETDP Project, 1998:20 and HSRC, 1995:11)

The principles guide the functioning of the NQF. The framework however, as illustrated in Table 2, consists of eight levels on which all recognised South African qualification templates will be pegged.

Table 2: The National Qualifications Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NQF level</th>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Types of Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>HIGHER EDUCATION</td>
<td>Doctorates and further research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Honours degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>First degrees/Higher Diplomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Diplomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Further Education and Training Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>FURTHER EDUCATION</td>
<td>School/College/Trade Certificates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>School/College/Trade Certificates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>School/College/Trade Certificates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>Grade 9/ABET level 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BAND</td>
<td>Grade 7/ABET level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 5/ABET level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 3/ABET level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 year reception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from HSRC, 1995:20)
Three main bands of education exist namely the general education band, the further education band and the higher education band. Of the main differences between the old qualifications system and the new qualifications framework is the inclusion of informal and formal education and training in all bands. This is evident in the general education band where adult basic education and training (ABET) is combined with the formal schooling levels. In this band the first exit point has changed from Grade 10 to 9 (old Standard 8 to 7).

The framework functions on the premise that all providers of education and training, be it higher education institutions, schools or private providers, make use of outcomes-based education.

2.6.8.2 Outcomes-based education (OBE)

Outcomes-based education is described as an educational approach that focuses on two aspects. Firstly on the desired end results of each learning process. Thus the outcomes of learning that learners have to demonstrate. Secondly the focus is on the learning and assessment approaches and processes that will guide the learners to these end results or outcomes (Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:7) and RAU (1998:9)). It is clear that OBE advocates a greater emphasis on the learner and clearly defined end results of learning.

The following principles underlie outcomes-based education (Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:7), RAU (1998:9) and Spady (1998:26)):

- Both learners and lecturers must have high expectations of the potential of the learner. These expectations are not built on the previous learning or background of the learner. All students can learn and succeed, but not in the same manner;
OBE positively reinforces learning achievement and encourages progression through continuous assessment and learning opportunity creation. Success breeds success;

the responsibility lies with the lecturer to create a learning environment that is conducive to the achievement of outcomes; and

the lecturer and the learner are not the only two stakeholders in OBE. Different stakeholders partake in the responsibility for learner progress e.g. practical exposure of learners and learner counselling.

Higher education is thus faced with a totally new approach to learners and learning. Focusing on the institution and the lecturer is no longer acceptable and many institutions will have to undergo massive changes in reshaping thinking around the teaching and learning functions.

Another challenge is the approach towards assessment. Assessment of the end-results of learning becomes imperative for the successful practice of OBE. Traditional examinations and pen and paper tests could become obsolete and will be replaced by continuous, relevant assessment techniques. These however could also be pen and paper tests.

Hewlett (1997:14) indicates that the pursuit of flexible entry points into programmes as advocated by OBE creates tension between the aim of flexible access and the sequential linear assumptions that underpin the content elements. In other words, the prerequisites for certain content elements can never be completely eliminated.

2.7 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

As illustrated in figure 1, Recognition of Prior Learning is one of the principles of the NQF. As defined by the ETDP project (1998:20) and HSRC
(1995:11), RPL aims to give credit to learning which has already been acquired in different ways. RPL is thus a very important mechanism in providing equity and access to previously disadvantaged higher education learners.

RPL supports two of the three central features of the new higher education framework, namely greater responsiveness and increased participation. Greater responsiveness in that there are many learners who are currently blocked from access into a higher education institution due to the fact that they do not possess any formal qualifications or formal proof of learning. There is a great need to change this and therefore higher education institutions should become more responsive to this societal need.

Increased participation could be a spin-off from the implementation of RPL processes since learners are now provided with the opportunity to prove their academic worth in more than one traditional way. Various assessment methods may be implemented during the RPL process.

2.8 CONCLUSION

The legacy of higher education in South Africa has many ramifications for its future. Segregation of higher education institutions by race and the resulting mangle of administration is sufficient cause for a total overhaul of the band.

The higher education band is faced with many changes and uncertainties. Legislative intervention should merely be the vehicle through which change is initiated and should not become the driving force behind change.
Institutional autonomy is only threatened in cases where institutions refuse to look into current legislated educational practice and ignore outcomes-based education. Issues such as access and Recognition of Prior Learning will remain burning issues for learners. Even if legislation did not indicate that RPL should take place, the pressure from society would ultimately be prescriptive to higher education institutions.

The following chapters will investigate the term Recognition of Prior Learning and aim to formulate a RPL process after analysing RPL processes from various countries.
CHAPTER 3

3. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

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CHAPTER 3: RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Formal Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a new concept in South African higher education. Providing learners with access to higher education institutions when they either have not undergone traditional schooling or do not possess a recognised qualification seems foreign and almost impossible. In the traditional order of higher education, products from the normal order are acknowledged, any other order is rejected.

Higher education institutions are obliged to start investigating RPL as the Higher Education Act (1997:12) states that the institution must comply with the criteria and policies as formulated by the SAQA. RPL is one of the principles of the NQF, so the link is sure.

In order to understand RPL in the higher education context, a discussion of its definitions and application in various countries will be provided. This discussion serves as the foundation in the exploration of concepts such as the forms of RPL, the sources of prior learning, the objectives and uses of RPL, the benefits and advantages as well as the issues to consider when implementing RPL.

Cohen, Flowers, McDonald and Schaafsma (1993:vii) state that the major educational issue for universities in implementing RPL is the concern to maintain standards. Standards are however determined by the institution itself and can possibly be dropped if higher education practitioners (lecturers) allow them to drop through disinterest in RPL or a fear of the unknown.
3.2 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING: AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

In order to understand Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and its many facets in South African terms, the discussion will contain a brief overview of the development of Accreditation of Prior Learning (as RPL is referred to in the United Kingdom), and then move on to other countries in the world, finally culminating in the South African understanding of RPL.

Phillips (1996:39) indicates that the concept of a National Qualifications Framework has been established in Scotland, England, Australia and New Zealand. Phillips (1996) further mentions that Canada, Argentina, the USA and Vietnam are at an advanced stage of setting up frameworks of their own.

Sources of information with regard to RPL in Scotland, Argentina and Vietnam could not be located and are not included in this paper. The National Qualifications Framework of New Zealand has, according to Gevers (1999:2), been brought to an end through the publication of a recent New Zealand Government White Paper. For this reason, no information from New Zealand has been included in this dissertation.

3.2.1 APL in the United Kingdom

Nyatanga, Forman and Fox (1998: 4-7) state that the Open University in the United Kingdom started with Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) as early as 1970 although it was only formalised in March 1986. APL is associated with certificated prior learning, thus relating to prior learning gained through organised courses, modules or workshops for which a certificate is issued. Nyatanga et al. (1998) mentions that APL covers two aspects of prior learning, namely (a) organised formal prior learning where
certification indicates successful completion and (b) organised formal learning where certification is not necessarily issued. In both the aforementioned cases the learning is organised through the formal structures of an education and training system (McKelvey and Peters, 1993:1).

As APL is concerned with organised learning, another term is used when referring to incidental prior learning or prior experiential learning. Nyatanga et al. (1998:7) refers to Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) as learning that has occurred through leisure pursuits, family experiences and unstructured work experiences. The difference between APL and APEL is that APL concerns itself with certification and organised learning and APEL with unstructured and informal learning. In both APL and APEL the focus remains on the learning and learning objectives (outcomes) rather than the experience or the learning process.

Simosko (1991:12) says that APL is essentially about four basic processes:

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

3.2.2 PLA in the United States of America

The efforts in the United Kingdom have greatly influenced thoughts on Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) as RPL is referred to in the United States of America. Nyatanga et al. (1998:3) indicates that The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in the USA started with an PLA project as far back as 1974 to investigate procedures through which experiential
and organised learning can be given credit or recognition. Simosko (1991:19) indicates that the project demonstrated that it was possible to equate non-college learning with that of traditional college curricula and it was feasible to use a wide variety of evidence in conducting valid and reliable assessments.

In the USA, PLA is used mainly in the issuing of college credits through the College Level Examination Programme. Cohen et al. (1993:6) indicate that in 1993 approximately 1700 universities and colleges in America were offering assessment and accreditation of prior learning.

3.2.3 PLAR in Canada

In Canada, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is defined by the Open Learning Agency (1994:3) as assessment done by some valid means, by a qualified specialist, of what has been learned through informal education/training or experience, that is worthy of credit in a course or programme offered by the institution providing the credit. Therefore, to earn credit through PLAR toward a course or programme offered by a post-secondary institution, the learner must demonstrate, by some valid means, that the learning is equivalent to that which normally would be acquired through conventional study.

According to the Open Learning Agency (1998:2-3) Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition allows you to gain recognition and credit for what you already know and can do. The emphasis is again placed on what the learner has learned from the experience and not the experience itself. PLAR in Canada is associated with obtaining academic credit or obtaining formal recognition by professional bodies for any non-formal learning.
3.2.4 RPL in Australia

Cohen et al. (1993:3) emphasise that approximately 79% of Australian universities already have Recognition of Prior Learning or forms of RPL in place as an option for admission to a course or for advanced placement within a course. The Office of Vocational Education and Training (1998:1) in Australia defines RPL as follows: “RPL involves matching what an individual already knows and can do (their competencies) with learning outcomes of modules in an accredited course”. The competencies referred to in the definition can be gained through the following activities:

- work experience - both paid and unpaid work;
- education - includes courses taken at school, church, etc.; and
- life experience - examples include being a voluntary worker, running a household, caring for relatives and leisure pursuits.

RPL is therefore a form of assessment that deals with the measurement of the level of learning that has taken place in an individual who has not necessarily been exposed to formal learning opportunities. The learning that is measured also has to do with a pre-determined specified standard, outcome or unit standard thus; measurement of learning is not arbitrary but focused.

3.2.5 RPL in South Africa

Recognition of Prior Learning as defined in the South African Qualifications Authority Act (RSA 1995), is the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner how so ever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements.
In South African terms, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a form of assessment that assists the learner to gain access into and/or credit for a particular qualification or part of a qualification. It deals with the outcome of learning and not the means with which learning is achieved.

Formal RPL in South African higher education institutions is only at the initiation stage, however RPL projects in industry such as the Building Industry RPL pilot project launched in 1995 (Building Industries Training Board, 1995:3), have already made some headway. RPL in industry is relatively simple, as the assessor must be able to measure whether the learner does have the claimed learning as measured against the desired standard. The desired standards will be specified in the unit standards registered on the NQF.

The higher education band will not necessarily be linking all qualifications to unit standards and many qualifications will be registered as whole qualifications (Education White Paper 3 (RSA, 1997:28)). In this instance institutions will have to produce their own standards in the form of outcome statements. RPL will be based on matching the level of learning of the candidate with the outcomes for the qualification or the modules or units for which credit is claimed. If the learner matches or surpasses the required outcomes, credit for that qualification (or part-qualification) may be awarded.

3.2.6 Similarities and differences between international points of view of prior learning recognition

From the analysis of the different countries it is evident that the United Kingdom is the only country that formally distinguishes between learning that has been achieved formally (APL) and informal learning (APEL). All
the other countries view learning as a single aspect, whether the learning was obtained formally or informally. Importantly, all the countries analysed, reflect on the learning and learning outcomes and not on the learning process or experience.

All the countries indicate that prior learning recognition is done for formal utilisation - South Africa, United Kingdom and Australia for their qualifications frameworks and Canada and the USA for formal course or academic programme recognition or access. The United States of America and Canada use PLA and PLAR respectively mainly for the awarding of college credits. The USA also makes use of tests as the main form of assessment.

RPL in Australia and both APL and APEL in the United Kingdom are very similar to the South African definition of prior learning recognition. Although RPL is a relatively new concept in South Africa, the definition requires learning to be judged against learning outcomes for the awarding of a qualification.

3.3 FORMS OF RPL

When discussing RPL in the higher education context, two forms of RPL emerge. Cohen et al. (1993:8) refers to firstly “credit transfer” and secondly “Recognition of Prior Learning” as the two forms. Davey (1998:15) refers firstly to “equivalencies” and secondly to “documentation and demonstration of achievement”. For the purposes of this study, the first form of RPL will be referred to as Articulation agreements and the second form as Assessment.
3.3.1 First form: Articulation agreements

The first form of RPL according to Cohen et al. (1993:8) and Davey (1998:15) includes credit transfer and equivalencies. The term “credit transfer” refers to formal awarding of credit by an institution(s) of a qualification or part-qualification. The term “equivalence” is similar to credit transfer as it implies that an institution recognises a qualification or part-qualification of another institution as equivalent to a qualification or part-qualification of its own.

The first form mentioned by the authors could be culminated in articulation agreements between institutions. The concept of articulation is one of the principles of the NQF and is defined by ETDP Project (1998:20) and HSRC (1995:11) as “...providing for learners, on successful completion of accredited prerequisites, to move between components of the delivery system”.

In layman’s terms an articulation agreement is an agreement between one or more academic or professional institution(s), to acknowledge and exchange credits for specified qualifications or part-qualifications. Learners who have studied at institution A that has an articulation agreement with institution B, will be able to produce certificates as evidence of successful completion of a whole or part-qualification and thereby obtain entry into or credit for a particular qualification at institution B.

Agreements of this kind will be simplified through the commonalties on the NQF. Many higher education institutions already have articulation agreements with other institutions. This practice however has been extremely random and uncoordinated. Articulation agreements just refer to awarding credit for formal learning as achieved by the learner through
the participatory institutions to the agreement. Informal learning is not accommodated by articulation agreements.

3.3.2 Second form: Assessment

The second form, which according to Cohen et al. (1993:8) and Davey (1998:15) includes Recognition of Prior Learning and documentation and demonstration of learning, refers to a form of assessment that has to take place. In this instance informal learning can also be accommodated. No formal qualification or part-qualification has to necessarily be present although it is not excluded.

Recognition of Prior Learning for unrecognised credits can be conducted by means of assessment. Assessments can fall into two main categories namely prompted and unprompted assessments. The difference between prompted and unprompted assessments lie in the input and guidance of the assessing party in the instructions to the assessee. Prompted evidence then is the evidence that the learner gathers upon being prompted by the assessor. Unprompted evidence is where the assessee is provided with the standards or outcomes and guided to collect their own choice of evidence to support their request for credit.

Of the unprompted assessments, portfolio assessment and the portfolio of evidence are the most commonly known. A portfolio of evidence is described by Davey (1998:18) as the learner preparing, for instance, a biographical narrative, a statement of educational goals, a request for credit, a description of learning, and documentation which provides evidence of learning. Emphasis remains on the learning and not experience. Lambdin (1992) in Nyatanga et al. (1998:10), describes a portfolio as a formal written communication, presented to an institution /
awarding body by the student requesting recognition for previous learning.

Cohen et al. (1993:22-23) and Open Learning Association (1994:14-16) provide the following examples as assessment methods when assessing through prompted evidence: interviews, debates, presentations, performance testing, examinations, essays, work samples, testimonies of experience, assignments, models, skills demonstrations and testing.

3.3.3 Summary of forms of RPL

The term Recognition of Prior Learning focuses on learning that has already taken place, and a manner of determining and measuring that learning. The forms of RPL attempt to classify various measurement methods and ways into two categories. The formal and most widely practised form is through articulation agreements. The second and less frequently used form is by conducting assessments where assessment methods are put to use with the aim of formalising the learning of the learner.

In order for RPL to take place, the learning has to have taken place in some way or another for it to have occurred (prior). These ways are referred to as sources of prior learning.

3.4 SOURCES OF PRIOR LEARNING

Prior learning scenarios emerge through various learning sources. Learning sources according to Cohen et al. (1993:9) differ in the type of institution at which learning takes place, whether the courses are formal or informal in nature and whether accreditation or certification of courses is present. As illustrated in figure 2, five main sources of prior learning can
be identified, namely higher education courses at the same type of institution, other formal courses, life experience, informal courses and work experience.

Figure 2: Sources of prior learning
(Adapted from Cohen et al., 1993:8)

3.4.1 Higher education courses at the same type of institution refer to learning that took place at University A and thereafter the student wants to continue with studies at University B. The same could be true for Technikon A and Technikon B. What matters in this instance is that the
type of institution i.e. university, technikon and college should remain the same.

### 3.4.2 Other formal courses

Other formal courses refer to any other formal higher education courses that the candidate has undertaken. Examples of these could be formal professional courses, overseas qualifications and switches between the types of institutions i.e. a switch between studying at a Technikon and now wanting to continue at a University. The type of institution differs in this source.

For both higher education courses at the same type of institution and other formal courses, RPL can be conducted via articulation agreements.

### 3.4.3 Learning from life experience

Learning from life experience includes all learning done informally without clear formal learning guidelines, i.e. volunteer work. Linked to this is the scenario of learning from informal courses where the learning process is more formalised than the previous scenario but still not accredited with any specific body or authority. Examples of this type of learning could be in-house training courses offered at work.

### 3.4.4 Learning from work experience

The final source through which learning can occur is learning from work experience. This source has an inclination towards a formalised learning process but learning is not certificated or accredited. Learning occurs in any facet of the work environment, from training to participation on project teams.

RPL for learning from life experience, informal courses and work experience can be conducted through assessment. Assessment can be done via prompted or unprompted evidence.
3.5 SUMMARY OF DIFFERENT RPL POINTS OF VIEW

In order to view the different points of view of the various countries discussed under points 3.2 to 3.4, table 2 summarises the different aspects of prior learning by country. A description of what prior learning means in a particular country is provided and the forms and sources of RPL is included per country, for reference.
### Table 3: Summary of prior learning per country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Term used for Prior Learning</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Forms of RPL</th>
<th>Sources of Prior Learning (Refers to figure 2 - sources of prior learning)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)</td>
<td>• Learning gained through formal organised learning opportunities. &lt;br&gt; • Learning opportunities are associated with certification.</td>
<td>Articulation agreements &lt;br&gt;(From Nyatanga et al. 1998) &lt;br&gt; • Certificates &lt;br&gt; • Syllabi containing module outlines &lt;br&gt; • May sometimes obtain recognition without producing a portfolio.</td>
<td>• Higher education courses at the same institution &lt;br&gt; • Other formal courses &lt;br&gt; • Learning from informal courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)</td>
<td>Learning gained through informal, mostly non-certificated means.</td>
<td>Assessment &lt;br&gt;(From Nyatanga et al. 1998) &lt;br&gt; • Portfolio which should be matched to learning outcomes.</td>
<td>• Learning from life experience &lt;br&gt; • Learning from work experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America</td>
<td>Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)</td>
<td>Learning gained through organised (sponsored) and experiential means.</td>
<td>Articulation agreements and sometimes Assessment &lt;br&gt;(From Nyatanga et al. 1998) &lt;br&gt; • Tests such as the college level examination programme, education testing services tests, etc. &lt;br&gt; • Portfolio which should be matched to learning outcomes.</td>
<td>• Higher education courses at the same type of institution &lt;br&gt; • Other formal courses &lt;br&gt; • Learning from life experience &lt;br&gt; • Learning from informal courses &lt;br&gt; • Learning from work experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Term used for Prior Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)</td>
<td>Learning through informal education/ training or experience, that is worthy of credit in a course or programme offered by the institution providing the credit</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Australia  | Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) | Learning acquired through:  
- work experience - both paid and unpaid work;  
- education - includes courses taken at school, church, etc.;  
- life experience - examples include being a voluntary worker, running a household, caring for relatives and leisure pursuits. |

**Forms of RPL**
- Articulation agreements and Assessment  
  (From Open Learning Agency, 1998:6)  
  - Portfolio development  
  - Oral questioning  
  - Challenge exam  
  - Case study  
  - Assignment  
  - Demonstration  
  - Simulation

**Sources of Prior Learning**  
(Refers to figure 2 - sources of prior learning)
- Higher education courses at the same type of institution  
- Other formal courses  
- Learning from life experience  
- Learning from informal courses  
- Learning from work experience
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Term used for Prior Learning</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Forms of RPL</th>
<th>Sources of Prior Learning (Refers to figure 2 - sources of prior learning)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)</td>
<td>Previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained.</td>
<td>Articulation agreements and Assessment (Adapted from Cohen et al. 1993:22-24)</td>
<td>• Higher education courses at the same type of institution</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Interviews</td>
<td>• Other formal courses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Debate</td>
<td>• Learning from life experience</td>
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<td>• Presentation</td>
<td>• Learning from informal courses</td>
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<td>• Simulations</td>
<td>• Learning from work experience</td>
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<td>• Examination</td>
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<td>• Oral examination</td>
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<td>• Work samples</td>
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<td>• Book review</td>
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<td>• Portfolio</td>
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<td>• Annotated literature review</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Special projects</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Reports, critiques, articles</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3.6 **OBJECTIVES OF RPL**

Recognition of Prior learning whether called Assessment of Prior Learning or Prior Learning Assessment as a concept, is initiated with a specific purpose in mind. Cohen *et al.* (1993:13) states that there are three major objectives when conducting RPL. Firstly RPL is conducted to redress a lack of access to higher education institutions and to provide for equity amongst previously disadvantaged groups. In this instance equity is provided in that the time period to fulfil formal requirements is shortened.

Secondly RPL is conducted to ensure quality in higher education, by clearly defining the outcomes of courses and the assessment criteria linked to the outcomes. Issues of nepotism and favouritism in higher education can be combated in this manner. The final objective in conducting RPL according to Cohen *et al.* (1993:13) is efficiency. Efficiency refers to time spent in obtaining credit for learning that has already taken place. Students do not have to redo learning that they have already obtained by other means. This ensures that studying time could be shortened.

3.7 **USES OF RPL**

In achieving the above-mentioned objectives of RPL, the outcome of the RPL process is most commonly used for four main purposes.

The first and most typical use is admission to an institution during the first year of higher education studies. A typical example would be a student that has formal ABET qualifications and wishes to further their learning at a further education institution.

A second use of RPL is to obtain course and part-course exemption through the granting of credit. This can be linked back to the forms of RPL
(articulation agreements and assessment) and is a common place where students move from one higher education institution to another.

In conducting RPL the assessor might discover that the candidate should be placed at a higher level than originally anticipated. A typical example of this third use is when a learner is assessed and proves to be beyond the required level for a specific course or part-course. In this scenario the learner is advised to enrol for other parts of the course at a higher level. RPL can thus be used to determine the placement level of a candidate.

A final use of RPL is for career counselling based on the results of the assessment. Learners are generally uneasy with assessment and in many cases misguided when applying for RPL. Once the RPL assessment has been conducted, a learner should be counselled on the various career opportunities in that particular area of study. The notion of ‘a learning society’ (NCHE Final Report, 1996:12) where there is a direct shift away from learning that occurs as a once-off situation, is supported by career counselling.

As RPL occurs with specific objectives in mind and the process of RPL could lead to any of the above-mentioned uses, the parties involved in the RPL process as well as the benefits and advantages of RPL is identified next.

### 3.8 BENEFITS AND ADVANTAGES OF RPL

There are mainly four parties involved in the RPL process. Firstly the learner or student applying for credit, secondly the institution where the learner applies for credit. The third party is the community as learners,
that obtain credit for learning, who partake in community activities, and lastly the employers who provide job opportunities to the learners.

The benefits and advantages of RPL according to Cohen et al. (1993:47) and Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology (1998:17) will be discussed in relation to the parties involved in RPL.

**The learners/students**

- Gain access to courses and programmes more quickly. This ensures that time is not wasted and can be spent furthering studies.
- Their immediate and actual learning needs are addressed as they do not repeat unnecessary parts of the qualification but focus on what is still outstanding.
- Increase in self-esteem of the learner as any negative attitudes towards formal study is eliminated and achievement is recognised.
- Learning becomes more flexible and challenging.

**The academic institutions**

- RPL stimulates thought and discussion across faculties and programmes with regard to course content and exactly what has to be measured.
- Educators have to think about the quality of their education and how it matches up to other institutions.
- Assessors have to be trained and therefore academic staff have to be developed.
- Policies and procedures have to be re-evaluated and adapted. This ensures that policy remains relevant and recent.
- Ad-hoc articulation agreements can be managed and controlled more effectively.
- The institution still has control over the assessment process and the standards that will be accepted.
• Equity and social redress issues are dealt with effectively.
• Opens up opportunities for articulation agreements and partnerships with the wider academic community and the private sector.

The Community
• Once learners have been awarded credit, their involvement in communities is highly valued.
• Faster response to the communities’ needs through learners addressing their own learning needs.
• Combination of formal and informal learning accommodates the financial, transport and social resource needs of a learner in a community.
• Provides an equal footing between communities no matter how different their resource bases are.

The Employers
• Reduces the cost of education and time away from work.
• Promotes portability of competencies.
• Accelerates the response to development and learning needs.
• Potential for building partnerships with higher education institutions.
• Employees with improved self-esteem perform better at work.

As derived from the benefits and advantages to the learners, institutions, the community and employers, RPL has the potential to greatly influence and change the lives of individuals and groups. There are however various issues to consider when implementing RPL. These issues are discussed specifically in the South African context.
3.9 ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN IMPLEMENTING RPL IN SOUTH AFRICA

According to the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology (1998:17), for many learners and communities, RPL has come to rectify injustices of the past and to provide hope for the future. The notion of providing a learner with the recognition for learning achievement no matter how the learning was obtained, has good sentiment and value. There are however many aspects that will influence the implementation and provision of RPL in South African higher education institutions.

3.9.1 Articulation agreements across institutions and within institutions are not as clear-cut as they seem (Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology, 1998). A great deal of trust will have to be fostered before the legacy of sub-standard educational practices in and amongst higher education institutions will be eradicated. Trust implies that institutions will have to work closely together. The autonomy of the institution could be at risk.

In articulation agreements, the aspect of awarding credit is of great importance. What constitutes credit? Will it be credit for a module, semester course, year course or just for a full qualification? Will there be limits to credit since the funding formula is linked with the actual presentation of class. Which institution awards the qualification if the candidate has fifty-fifty credits shared between institutions?

3.9.2 Obtaining buy-in from professional bodies to the legitimacy of awarding credit to learners that have not come through the traditional route of learning will be another challenge (Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology, 1998). Professional bodies are very strict on access for members and the maintenance of quality. Standards for acceptance by international bodies will become another challenge.
3.9.3 **Quality assurance** is another aspect that will become imperative during RPL (Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology, 1998). A single approach towards RPL will have to be followed in an institution. Quality assurance processes will also have to be adhered to amongst institutions. Should one party not adhere to the required standard, the whole process of RPL in South Africa could be seen as “window dressing” and the negative connotation will undermine any good work being done through this process.

3.9.4 Internal to all higher education institutions lies the initiation and implementation of all the **issues that compliment and support RPL** (Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology, 1998). These issues include developing and improving institutional policies regarding RPL and designing and improving information technology systems to accommodate this form of assessment and credit awarding. Information with regard to a learner’s academic record and results has to be readily available. Systems must be flexible to accommodate transparency in admission requirements, registration procedures, tracking procedures and study plans of individual learners.

3.9.5 **The cost of RPL** and where sponsorship will be obtained is yet another issue (Cohen *et al.*, 1993). Since RPL is so time consuming, an enormous financial burden can be loaded onto an institution. The fact that RPL is linked to access and social redress might mean that it would be expected that the institution would foot the bill. The initiation of an RPL process has tremendous cost implications for the institution and should be budgeted for separately.
3.9.6 RPL in South Africa has a definite **social redress** perspective. Hoppers and Angelis (1997:6) state that aspects such as the redress of political, social and economic educational inequalities and access to learning, are pertinent examples of the nature of RPL in South Africa.

The authors further relate the stance of the labour unions towards South Africa’s transformation vision: “Learning must transform society, transform the workplace and communities, and enable people to take control of their lives.”

RPL as viewed by management and higher education is a form of assessment that ensures that learners/workers are fairly assessed and the possible gaps in knowledge and skills are identified. The viewpoint of learners and workers clashes with the view of management and higher education as it is set firmly as part of the social justice movement where **access to education** and **acknowledgement of learning** is of utmost importance.

3.9.7 The **demand for RPL** is steadily on the increase. Initially many learners might not be aware of the availability of RPL. As learners are successful in obtaining credit via RPL, the demand will increase. Cohen *et al.* (1993:40) argue that higher education institutions must plan ahead to ensure that the demand for RPL can be accommodated. This can be done by either using existing academic staff to conduct RPL, by appointing non-academic staff to manage RPL or by establishing assessment and development centres. It must however be noted that RPL is as much a part of academic work as lecturing and thesis work.
3.9.8 **Academic staff workload** issues will have to be resolved and staff must be trained. Cohen *et al.* (1993) state that RPL has to be sanctioned by academic staff as a widely accepted manner of gaining entry into or credit for courses (or part courses).

3.9.9 The government has also not articulated its exact expectations regarding RPL and higher education institutions. The playing field remains open for **external interference and control** via the funding formula.

3.9.10 The final and one of the most important issues is the **integration of RPL with programme and curriculum development**, the writing of outcomes, choice of appropriate resources for education such as educational technology and progressive integrative assessment techniques.

**3.10 CONCLUSION**

Prior learning and the recognition thereof is an educational concept that aims to address inequality in access to higher education programmes and courses, and articulation between higher education programmes and institutions. Lugg, Mabitla, Louw and Angelis (1997:121) state that placing the sole responsibility for access and redress on RPL, is too great a demand for the strategy.

Recognising prior learning has different meanings and names in the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada, Australia and South Africa. The foundation on which recognition is built is uniform in that the recognition is awarded for the learning that has taken place and not for the means or process by which learning has occurred or for experience gained.
The objectives and uses of RPL in higher education is similar in all parts of the world. The similarity is extended to the benefits and advantages of the participants in the RPL process. In concluding the chapter the issues or concerns in implementing RPL such as articulation agreements, quality assurance, academic staff overload and potential government involvement cannot be ignored and solutions will have to be found.

In the next chapter various RPL processes will be analysed in order to serve as input for the final chapter where a process for RPL in South Africa will be suggested.
## 4. ANALYSIS OF RPL PROCESSES

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as a concept and provided information with regard to RPL definitions and practices in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and South Africa. The generic objectives, uses, benefits and advantages of RPL were elaborated on to serve as context for this chapter.

This chapter considers various RPL processes. A business process according to Orgland (1997:138) can be defined as "a collection of activities that takes one or more kinds of input and creates an output that is of value to the customer". RPL processes can thus be seen as a collection of RPL related activities that takes one or more kinds of input and creates an output that is of value to the learner, the community, the institution and employers.

RPL can better be understood by explaining the steps that are generally followed from when a candidate / learner applies for RPL up to the final outcome of the process. As will be illustrated in all the processes, **RPL is a process and not an event.** RPL is not a once-off contact session whereafter a final judgement is made. Learners and academic staff should know that it involves a lengthy process of counselling and guidance until the final determination.

A discussion of each RPL process will be provided after which the processes will be evaluated against each other. Evaluation will be conducted utilising an evaluation matrix. The aim of the chapter is to
analyse and evaluate five RPL processes where upon the similarities; differences, strengths and weaknesses will be synthesised.

4.2 RPL PROCESSES

In this section, five RPL processes will be reviewed. Three of the processes are based on processes used in the United Kingdom. As pointed out in chapter 3, the United Kingdom was instrumental in initiating the first prior learning recognition in 1970, therefore reflection on three processes from the U.K. The fourth approach is taken from RPL in Australian universities and lastly a look at the American approach.

Note should be made that not all of the processes are based on RPL in higher education. This is due to the fact that RPL in higher education is mainly left to each institution’s own discretion and no formalised process except for the United Kingdom and Australian universities exist. All of the RPL processes discussed except for the Australian, American and CNAA process model of APL (United Kingdom) are used in organisations in industry. The processes will be summarised at the end of the chapter and not at the end of each model, to ensure that a comprehensive analysis is conducted.

4.2.1 APL model used in the United Kingdom

Nvatanga, Forman and Fox (1998:7), provide a process model most commonly used in the U.K. The model consists of six stages. These are pre-entry, profiling, providing of evidence, assessment, accreditation and post APL counselling.
Stage 1  Pre-entry
During this stage, preparation for APL awareness and the conducting of marketing activities is done. Learners do not necessarily know that APL is available and which institutions provide the service. Awareness is created by using fliers, brochures, open days and advertising in the press. Simosko (1991:29) states that the primary objective of this stage is to give candidates adequate information to decide whether or not they wish to undergo the process.

Stage 2  Candidate profiling
Once candidates are aware that APL is available, they apply for APL at the institution. Although the candidate has applied for APL, the counsellor must determine what the goals of the candidate are and whether it can be
met through APL. An initial screening of the candidate which includes investigating past experience and according to Simosko (1991:29) indicating what the candidates knows and can do, is conducted.

Stage 3 Providing evidence
This stage involves the candidate gathering the necessary evidence required supporting the claim. Evidence can take many forms (refer to table 3, chapter 3) such as a portfolio, certificates, and various assessment methods.

Stage 4 Assessment
Here the assessors review the evidence that the candidate presents. All claims have to be checked and verified by subject matter experts. Assessors make a judgement and recommendations for or against credit recognition.

Stage 5 Accreditation
Although the assessors have made a recommendation in stage 4, the final accreditation of the candidate’s claim lies with the verifier. The verifier endorses or rejects the recommendation of the assessor and either awards or does not award the credits to the candidate.

Stage 6 Post APL counselling
Whether the candidate proved successful or not, the APL experience is reviewed and career counselling is conducted.

4.2.2 The NVQ process model of APL (United Kingdom)
McKelvey and Peters (1993: 19-20) provide insight into the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) model of APL. This process model
consists of seven stages and relates to figure 4. A discussion of the figure and the steps as obtained from McKelvey and Peters (1993: 19-20) follows.

**Figure 4:** The NVQ APL process
(Taken from McKelvey and Peters, 1993:20)

Stage 1
The candidate recognises experience which is likely to link up with the qualification.

Stage 2
The candidate identifies and records achievement.

Stage 3
Evidence is assembled and organised into a portfolio to suit the regulations of particular awarding bodies.
Stage 4
The candidate submits evidence of achievement via the portfolio to the assessor.

Stage 5
The candidate meets the assessor and may undergo a skills test, interview or simulation.

Stage 6
The assessor evaluates the evidence and the candidate receives verification from the awarding body.

Stage 7
The candidate receives information on learning opportunities.

4.2.2.1 The CNAA process model of APL (United Kingdom)

McKelvey and Peters (1993:24-25) points out that the influence of APL in the United States of America has influenced APL in higher education in the U.K. APL for higher education in the U.K. has developed in a different way from the NVQ system and therefore the previous NVQ process model, and is managed by the Council for National Academic Awards. The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) identified four stages to the APL process for higher education, namely:

Stage 1 Identification of learning
A mentor is appointed to guide the student during the full APL process. The mentor is responsible for helping the student prepare the submission, and for suggesting evidence and methods of presentation.
Stage 2  
**Statement**

State the credits that are claimed clearly. Credits are stated in terms of objectives, which are linked to the broad educational aims of the course. General credit not related to a particular course but of academic value such as communication skills are also stated for recognition.

Stage 3  
**Collection of evidence**

The candidates collect evidence to support the credit claim according to the guidelines provided by the mentor. A submission is presented and could take the form of a portfolio.

Stage 4  
**Assessment**

Assessment can be done through written evidence, interviews, assignments and examinations to name a few. The academic assessor is a subject matter expert in the area of assessment. The assessor makes a judgement and then reports to the assessment board to determine the level of specific credit.

4.2.3 **The City and Guilds process model of APL (United Kingdom)**

City and Guilds (1998:1) provide an RPL / APL process model applicable to all countries and organisations. The process model is built on the premise that all standards against which the candidate must be evaluated are in place. The City and Guilds model also focuses on portfolio building as the main assessment method.

The model contains eleven steps and it employs the concept of an RPL advisor to support the candidate through the RPL process. The steps in the model are depicted in figure 5.
The first three steps in the City and Guilds RPL process model focuses on candidate support and information provision regarding the total RPL process and the roles and expectations of all the parties involved. During step four candidates are supported in identifying the actual credits that are claimed, as many candidates do not know what credits are in line with their prior learning.

City and Guilds (1998:2-7) explain that during step five and six, the RPL advisor helps the candidate identify gaps in what they already can do and what they need to be able to do in order to meet the criteria. Step seven culminates in an action plan in which the additional training or work experience required by the candidate is clearly indicated. Step eight

### Figure 5: City and Guilds RPL process
(Taken from City and Guilds, 1998:1-2)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>RPL interview</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Explain the RPL process</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Establish roles</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Identify units claimed</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Identify relevant achievements</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Identify current training needs</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Arrange top-up training and work experience</td>
</tr>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Monitor progress and overcome barriers</td>
</tr>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Build evidence Portfolio</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Arrange assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Judging, recording, verification, accreditation and certification</td>
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</table>
concerns itself with the monitoring of the candidate as the action plan is implemented. When the portfolio of evidence is compiled in step nine, the RPL advisor may be actively involved in assisting the candidate to identify relevant pieces of evidence.

The portfolio is submitted in step ten and assessed by an assessor other than the RPL advisor. This assessor makes the final judgement in step eleven and records the results. A verification process may be followed after step eleven.

4.2.4 The RPL process in Australian Universities

Cohen et al. (1993:27-36) provides insight into the six step process model for RPL in use in Australian universities. The same process as depicted in figure 6 is used whether a student applies to gain entry to a course or for course credit.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Preliminary information and advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Preparation of an application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assessment and accreditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Appeals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Post-assessment guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Recording of RPL results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Stages in RPL Credit Application in Australian universities (Taken from Cohen et al., 1993:27)

Step 1 Preliminary information and advice
A step-by-step guide is provided to the student explaining eligibility, principles, guidelines, procedures, costs and conditions. Advice is provided by either academic staff or a RPL counsellor. Information with
regard to the level of university learning is provided together with access to a range of assessment examples. In some cases workshops and training sessions are offered to students.

**Step 2 Preparation of an application**

Five aspects are considered during the preparation of an application. Firstly consideration is given to the actual documenting of learning evidence. The student is encouraged to describe the experiences in which learning occurred. The purpose of documenting and profiling prior learning is to prepare a credit application, however it also serves as an instrument to impact on self-awareness and self-esteem.

Secondly the students find that the difference between learning and experience is difficult to grasp. The difference is explained in that experience is the input and learning is the outcome. In most cases a portfolio is used to overcome this difficulty. The third aspect to consider is that the outcomes or standards must be clearly explained. Fourthly, academic staff must advise the student on how the prior learning may contribute to a particular qualification.

The final aspect to consider is the organising and presentation of evidence collected. The RPL advisor provides examples of portfolios and explains procedures of verification of evidence.

**Step 3 Assessment and accreditation**

Various assessment techniques may be utilised as indicated in table 2, chapter 3.
Step 4 Appeals
The suggestion is made that the university’s policy of RPL appeals should be the same as the appeals policy for any other assessments.

Step 5 Post-assessment guidance
Successful students will embark on a course of study but should be counselled on how to adjust study plans and workload. The unsuccessful students are provided with career guidance.

Step 6 Recording RPL results
Results are recorded according to the university information system requirements. Recording in Australia takes place according to credit points or in credit banks. Credit banks are systems where students store credits for later use.

4.2.5 The American APL process model
Nyatanga et al. (1998:8) provides a glimpse of the American APL process model. The model is illustrated in figure 7 and has six steps.

Step 1 Identify
The American model starts by identifying the credits that the learner is claiming. The learning is acquired through life experience or other means.

Step 2 Articulate
The student is assisted in identifying the parts of learning that is related to the qualification objectives.
Step 3  Document

The student documents the evidence. Documentation is verified by the assessor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP 1  Identify</th>
<th>Identify college level learning acquired through life experience.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEP 2  Articulate</td>
<td>Show how and what parts of that learning are related to the qualification objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 3  Document</td>
<td>Verify in order to provide evidence of Learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 4  Measure</td>
<td>Determine the extent and character of learning acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 5  Evaluate</td>
<td>Decide whether the learning meets the standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 6  Transcribe</td>
<td>Record the credit or recognition of learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: The American APL process model
(Taken from Nyatanga et al., 1998:8)

Step 4  Measure

Determine the extent and character of learning acquired. This could possibly be done by the student taking a test.

Step 6  Evaluate

The actual assessment takes place in this step. The evaluator or assessor determines whether the learning meets acceptable standards and determines the credit equivalence.

Step 6  Transcribe

4-73
The credit or recognition of learning is recorded.

4.2.6 Culmination of process models from various countries

RPL process models from various countries have been reviewed and discussed. The similarities and differences between these models will be determined after a thorough evaluation of the models. This evaluation is conducted and discussed under point 4.3.

4.3 EVALUATION OF RPL PROCESS MODELS

In order to evaluate the above process models, the similarities and differences between them will first be pointed out using an evaluation matrix as proposed by Orgland (1997:151). Thereafter the strengths and weaknesses of the models will be determined.

On the left-hand side of the matrix, the key steps as resulted upon combining all the RPL process models' major steps, are found. The second column represents the major steps of the each process model. For each process model the key steps as mentioned by the authors was inserted into the matrix. The heading row shows all the RPL process models from the various countries. The numbers in the matrix indicate the sequence of steps in the original process model.
Table 4  Evaluation matrix comparing six RPL process models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results upon combining RPL process models</th>
<th>Major steps in APL / RPL process models</th>
<th>APL model used in the United Kingdom</th>
<th>The NVQ process model of APL (United Kingdom)</th>
<th>The City and Guilds process model of APL (United Kingdom)</th>
<th>The CNAA process model of APL (United Kingdom)</th>
<th>The RPL process in Australian Universities</th>
<th>The American APL process model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial contact with RPL advisor</td>
<td>RPL interview</td>
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<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify credits claimed</td>
<td>Identify units claimed</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement of candidate’s learning achievements</td>
<td>Statement</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify relevant achievements/ Candidate profiling</td>
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<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
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<td>Providing evidence</td>
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<td>Results upon combining RPL process models</td>
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<td>5 &amp; 6</td>
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<td>3 Establish roles</td>
<td>4 Appeals</td>
<td>4 Measure</td>
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<td>6 Identify current training needs</td>
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<td>Results upon combining RPL process models</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Arrange top-up training and work experience</td>
<td>8 Monitor progress and overcome barriers</td>
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4.3.1 Similarities

A key similarity between the six process models is that all of them follow roughly the same basic sequence of steps. All the models follow through from initial contact with an RPL advisor, identification of credits claimed, the statement of a candidate's learning achievements, building a portfolio of evidence, assessment and judgement, verification of the assessment outcome, accreditation and certification, recording the results to provide counselling as the final step in the RPL process.

The steps ‘Build evidence portfolio’ and ‘Assessment’ are represented in respectively five and all six of the process models. Building the evidence portfolio includes aspects such as the candidate preparing for tests and examinations as well as other assessment methods. Assessment is the key to RPL in that when the assessment is successfully concluded, a candidate receives recognition and credit for learning that has taken place in either a different institution or informally. In the American model the term evaluate is used instead of assessment.

4.3.2 Differences

Both the APL model used in the U.K. and the RPL process model for Australian universities are more holistic in nature. Pre-entry is an additional step in the first model and concerns itself with creating an awareness of RPL through marketing actions. Students will not apply for RPL if they are not aware of its benefits and advantages and how it is conducted.

The second process model includes appeals as an integral step before post-RPL counselling. In many cases the student might feel that the RPL process or parts thereof were not fair and/or a true reflection of his/her learning. The appeals step contains yet another sub-process within the
larger RPL process and is extremely important in fair, valid and reliable assessment processes.

The American process model refers to a ‘measure’ step. This step could be included as part of the assessment step in the other models and focuses on determining the extent and character of learning acquired by the student.

The one model that differs the most from the other models is the City and Guilds RPL process model. As explained previously, this model is used mainly in organisations in industry, therefore it focuses on steps such as establishing roles, identifying current training needs should a development gap exist, arranging top-up training and work experience for the candidate in order to close the development gap and supporting the candidate by monitoring progress and overcoming barriers.

The above-mentioned steps in the City and Guilds model would most probably not be conducted by a higher education institution as the RPL candidate in a higher education institution will have to prove prior learning against specific outcomes. Should the learning not be evident, the candidate may be advised to follow another career or study route. The onus is not on the institution to nurture the candidate into fulfilling the learning outcomes but on the candidate to prove competence.

4.3.3 Strengths and weaknesses

The strengths of the models lie in the certainty that the importance and sequence of steps are remarkably similar in all the models. This is an indication that the models are workable. The steps are also understandable and follow a logical sequence of events. This makes the models easy to understand and use in practice. Another strength comes with the inclusion
of the appeals and verification steps to ensure that the RPL process is fair and equitable.

The weaknesses of the models lie in that they fail to consider a system where the courses or programmes are not written in an outcomes-based format and thus the outcomes or standards against which the student has to be assessed are not available. Secondly, none of the process models indicate or accommodate learners with special needs. Learners with special needs include second language learners as well as learners with disabilities and special learning needs.

Lastly, none of the models have a feedback loop to ensure that the total process may be evaluated and feedback is used to adapt and change. Making use of feedback would ensure an improved responsive process and the participation and influence of various parties in the total RPL process. A process that has checks and balances ensures quality RPL.

4.4 CONCLUSION

No matter which country's RPL process is examined, the one aspect that is common is the large amount of time that has to be set aside in not only assessing the individual but also in preparing the individual for assessment. In evaluating the RPL process models for the United Kingdom, Australia and the U.S.A., the RPL process becomes clearer for the South African context.

No single model can be seen as flawless and the steps might have to be modified for the particularities of the South African higher education context.

In the next chapter a model, derived from the information gained in this chapter, will be suggested. This model will contain all the strengths as
indicated by the evaluation and will be placed into context by discussing the other aspects that have an influence on a RPL process.
CHAPTER 5

5. SYNTHESIS OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROCESS MODEL

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CHAPTER 5: SYNTHESIS OF RPL PROCESS MODEL

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter RPL process models from the United Kingdom, the USA, and Australia were analysed. Most of the models were remarkably similar which indicates that the models are workable.

This chapter aims to synthesise the thinking around the different RPL process models into a suggested RPL process model for South African higher education institutions. The strengths of all the models and the uniqueness of the South African situation will be taken into consideration when compiling this model. But the RPL process cannot be implemented in isolation.

The chapter is finalised with the realisation that as Nyatanga et al. (1998:42) indicates, RPL will inevitably raise a number of issues which have a bearing on the organisation as a whole. The chapter will be concluded with a discussion of these issues as the macro aspects to consider during the implementation of RPL.

5.2 SYNTHESIS OF AN RPL PROCESS MODEL FOR SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

In chapter 4, RPL process models from various countries were described and analysed. Detail was provided with regard to the steps, strengths, weaknesses, similarities and differences of each of the models. The results of synthesising these models provides an RPL process model as depicted in table 5 whereafter it is discussed in detail.
Table 5: South African higher education RPL process model

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Candidate / institution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-entry</td>
<td>Plan marketing effort</td>
<td>Institution</td>
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<td>Conduct marketing and create awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initial contact</td>
<td>Contact institution for information</td>
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<td>Interview with RPL advisor</td>
<td>Candidate and institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning identification</td>
<td>Identify credits and units claimed</td>
<td>Candidate and institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compile candidate profile</td>
<td>Candidate and institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for assessment</td>
<td>Identify methods of assessment</td>
<td>Institution</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Explain evidence gathering process</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Build evidence portfolio</td>
<td>Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide evidence</td>
<td>Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Conduct assessment and make judgement</td>
<td>Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verification</td>
<td>Verify authenticity of portfolio and evidence</td>
<td>Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation and certification</td>
<td>Award credits / provide result</td>
<td>Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeals</td>
<td>Follow appeals procedure</td>
<td>Candidate and institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording</td>
<td>Transcribe result into database</td>
<td>Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-RPL counselling</td>
<td>Provide career and study counselling</td>
<td>Institution</td>
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(Adapted from Table 4, Chapter 4)

5.2.1 Pre-entry stage

RPL is a new concept in South African higher education and most learners are not aware of the availability of it. Learners will also have to be informed on what RPL can do for them (refer to chapter 3, benefits and advantages of RPL).
5.2.1.1 Plan marketing effort

Cravens (1994:362) poses that understanding your customer is the first step in planning any marketing effort. The same would be true for RPL in that the institution must understand what the learner can gain from RPL before it can be marketed through the correct promotion strategy.

5.2.1.2 Conduct marketing and create awareness

Awareness can be created through four promotion strategies according to Cravens (1994:499-500). Firstly RPL can be advertised in the media especially if an institution wishes to initially use it as part of its competitive advantage. Secondly RPL can be marketed through personal selling. This promotion strategy might be difficult to use for higher education purposes. Cohen et al. (1993:36) indicate that RPL counsellors at universities take on public relations activities in the community and provide publicity about RPL opportunities. The third strategy is sales promotion. Sales promotion according to Cravens (1994:500) consists of promotional activities including trade shows, contests or samples. Of these, trade shows might be the only promotional strategy that an institution of higher education can use. The last strategy is publicity. This strategy is very widely utilised in higher education as academics publicise research frequently. Learners become aware of RPL through the publication of articles regarding success stories or research in RPL.

5.2.2 Initial contact

5.2.2.1 Contact institution for information

Once a learner is aware of RPL, interest is created and the learner contacts the institution for more information. RPL as a concept must be widely
communicated throughout the institution before a marketing effort is embarked on. This ensures that learners making initial contact are helped immediately. The initial screening of a potential candidate may also take place in this step.

5.2.2.2 Interview with RPL advisor

The first interview with the RPL advisor is conducted and the roles are established. Role clarification is important as the learner must understand what is expected and where the institution will provide support and assistance. Attention is drawn to the concept that learning should be assessed and not experience (Nyatanga et al., 1998:7). The full implications of RPL are explained to the learner.

5.2.3 Learning identification

5.2.3.1 Identify credits and units claimed

The learning credits or units that will be claimed have to be specified clearly. During this stage the RPL advisor connects the learners’ learning back to the curriculum of the institution.

5.2.3.2 Compile candidate profile

Similar to a curriculum vitae, a candidate profile including a statement of the candidate’s learning achievements are compiled. This is used as reference for the assessor. The learning achievements of the candidate must be clearly linked with the credits or units that are claimed.
5.2.4 Preparation for assessment

5.2.4.1 Identify methods of assessment

Table 3 in chapter 3 indicates various assessment methods that may be used to conduct RPL assessment. It may also be that the credits that the learner is claiming, could be accredited through an articulation agreement with another institution (refer chapter 3).

5.2.4.2 Explain evidence gathering process

In order for the candidate to attain accreditation via RPL, a thorough explanation must be provided on ways of gathering evidence and types of evidence that may be included in a portfolio to prove competence.

5.2.4.3 Build evidence portfolio

The candidate builds a portfolio of evidence that can include copies of previous qualifications and other pieces of evidence. The RPL advisor merely assists the candidate with advice on the relevance of pieces of evidence and does not compile the portfolio.

5.2.4.4 Provide evidence

The candidate and the RPL advisor decide when the portfolio is ready for submission. The portfolio is forwarded to the assessor.

5.2.5 Assessment

5.2.5.1 Conduct assessment and make judgement

The assessor should be a subject matter expert. Cohen et al. (1993:36) emphasises the role of the academic staff member in the assessment of prior learning. The assessor makes a judgement against the criteria or
standards for the unit of learning identified in the third stage of the RPL process. The judgement could indicate that credits should be awarded or that the learner does not obtain credit for the units applied for.

5.2.6 Verification

This stage indicates the quality control process over the RPL process.

5.2.6.1 Verify authenticity of portfolio and evidence

This stage is of utmost importance especially when the judgement is based solely on a portfolio of evidence. The RPL advisor should conduct a thorough verification process to ensure that evidence submitted is in fact the true work of the candidate, but also to ensure that the evidence is relevant and recent.

5.2.7 Accreditation and certification

5.2.7.1 Award credits / provide results

Once the assessment judgement has been made and the authenticity of the evidence proved, credits may be awarded. Should the candidate not meet the required criteria or standards, the negative result will be communicated.

5.2.8. Appeals

5.2.8.1 Follow appeals procedure

Should a candidate not be satisfied with the result of the RPL assessment, an appeal may be logged at the RPL advisor. Appeals procedures must be very clear, especially in the South African environment where the current labour practice and workplace bargaining is highly militant. The terminal goal of RPL, whether access or redress, has to be stated very clearly.
5.2.9 Recording

5.2.9.1 Transcribe result

The final outcome of the assessment judgement and perhaps the appeals process is logged onto the database for record keeping purposes. The institution must decide on whether the record should reflect a special code indicating that the credits were awarded via RPL or whether all credits, irrespective of method of attainment are logged in the same manner.

5.2.10 Post RPL counselling

5.2.10.1 Provide career and study counselling

Once the RPL process has taken place, the candidate would be counselled on possible future career options. Since these candidates did not obtain their credits through the traditional academic route, special attention should be given to study techniques and advice to enable the candidate to learn within the institution. The candidate also receives feedback on the outcome of the RPL process.

5.3 ISSUES TO CONSIDER

The proposed RPL process model for South African higher education institutions does not function in a vacuum. Various issues have to be considered before implementing the process. Institutions have to decide on the rationale behind the implementation of RPL. RPL is sometimes initiated in an institution due to one individual’s special interest or legislation enforcing the practice. This leads to many institutions not planning or even thinking about the strategic issues regarding RPL, and merely concentrating on the operational process as depicted in table 5 of this chapter.
Parts of the following section refer extensively to the works of Nyatanga, Forman and Fox (1998) and Simosko (1991). These two sources were found to be comprehensive in the coverage of issues that surround the implementation of RPL processes. Various issues will be stated as derived from the two sources.

5.3.1 Institutional rationale

Institutional rationale as described by Nyatanga et al. (1998:42) includes the following examples:

5.3.1.1 Drive for equal opportunity

This is especially relevant in the South African higher education environment. Equal opportunity for various groupings means that previously disadvantaged groups such as certain race groups, women and older learners are now provided with an opportunity to gain access to higher education.

5.3.1.2 Drive for consumerism

Field (1993) in Nyatanga et al. (1998) says that the hallmark of a successful higher education institution is its ability to respond to its customer needs. Yet again the post-modern notion of an academic institution being only as good as its responsiveness to its social environment is underlined. RPL may be a tool through which an institution indicates its willingness to respond to consumer needs.

5.3.1.3 Quality assurance drive

The RPL process has to be valid and fair. A very intensive quality assurance process must be put in place and is advocated by the SAQA Act
(1995:1205) where every higher education institution must establish bodies responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements in terms of standards and qualifications.

5.3.1.4 Life long learning drive

According to Nyatanga et al. (1998:43), RPL fosters a more flexible approach towards education. This is supported by OBE, which provides for modular based programmes. Life long learning is thus supported through RPL in that it opens doors for young and old to learn in many ways other than just the formal route.

5.3.2 Nature of learners

Some South African learners have been disenfranchised in the past.

![Participation rate in higher education](Taken from NCHE Final Report, 1996:4) (Based on UNESCO statistics of 1991)
The NCHE Final Report indicates participation rates of learners per population group in higher education according to figure 8. It is clear that learners from the coloured and black population groups have the most to gain from the changes in the higher education legislation that promotes greater access. It is therefore safe to assume that these are the learners who will yield the most RPL candidates. These groups were also disenfranchised in the schooling system and are therefore learners who would require a large amount of personal attention and support during the RPL process.

The nature of the South African RPL candidate is thus a learner who would require ceaseless help, support and attention. This has a large influence on the type of RPL staff member the institution should employ and the training requirements for the staff members.

5.3.3 Staff and staff training

As can be seen from the RPL process in table 5, there are various roles that staff members fulfil during the RPL process. The first role is that of the RPL advisor. The RPL advisor undertakes to inform the candidate, guide the candidate throughout the RPL process and provide advice with regard to the compilation of a portfolio of evidence.

The second role is that of the assessor. The assessor should be a subject matter expert and also a trained assessor. It is imperative that the assessor is a subject matter expert, as a accurate judgement about the learner’s learning has to be made. The third role is that of the RPL administrator. Here the notion of understanding the accreditation system, recording the results and verifying the authenticity of the portfolio is of utmost importance. Nyatanga et al. (1998:48) states that institutions already have
administrative policies and procedures in place and that these should be harmonised with new ones for RPL purposes.

Lastly the RPL moderator-role. The moderation function comes into play when an appeal is lodged. The RPL moderator should thus investigate the case and according to the appeals policy, make an independent judgement.

5.3.4 Standards and outcomes

The clarification of criteria, standards or outcomes of learning must be done before RPL can commence. This is a particular aspect that is not in place in higher education institutions. Institutions have until June 2000 to submit the outcomes of whole qualifications to SAQA but before this is done, no outcomes exist against which a learner can be measured. Outcomes also have to be written in a specific format so that a learner applying for RPL credits in different faculties may be evaluated based on understandable outcomes.

5.3.5 Costs and fees

The cost of RPL is extensive. Institutions must decide on how to calculate the cost and indicate who will bear the cost. Cohen et al. (1993:38) indicates that a major advantage of RPL for a learner is that it affords a 20%-25% cost reduction in course fees. Knapp in Cohen et al. (1993:37) indicates that research conducted by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in the USA suggests that the costs of RPL is approximately 25%-40% of the total institutional expenditures per student for instructional and related costs. The Scottish Vocational Education Council (Cohen et al., 1993:38) found that RPL costs were higher at approximately 70% of a traditional course cost.
In this respect government will have to indicate how the funding formula will be influenced should a strategy of redress be followed. Should many students apply for some form of RPL as indicated under the nature of learners, institutions could be forced to provide this service and bear the developmental and research costs whereupon the learners might only be charged a small fee.

5.3.6 Quality assurance

A quality assurance system, which includes evaluation, must be planned together with the implementation of RPL. Simosko (1991:147) indicates that the success of RPL is dependent on maintaining the clarity and effectiveness of each stage. Simosko (1991) further insists that everyone should be involved in the quality assurance process including the advisors, learners, assessors, marketers and the administrative staff.

The Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology (1998:1) indicates that a quality audit is necessary to ensure the application of national standards so that individuals receive a fair assessment of their skills and knowledge from institutions that are recognised and accountable for their work. A quality audit in this sense is done from the viewpoint of the consumers or users of training and evaluates aspects such as services, policy design and implementation, strategic planning and organisational development and lastly the comparative advantage and marketing plans.

Quality assurance can further be advanced through a thorough evaluation system during the process of recognising learning. When considering such an evaluation system, feedback from the learner, the RPL advisor, assessor and the person that does verification is of utmost importance.
5.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

The usability and accuracy of the RPL process model as depicted in table 5 of his chapter has to be tested. The implementation of this process model is suggested for a small section within an institution initially. After testing adaptations may be made to the process whereafter implementation on an institutional scale is recommended.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Evans (1980:1) provides the closing comments that “higher education is in an unenviable condition. It is changing and bound to more change in future - but there are no policies worked out let alone agreement for what it could best become.”

Learners have high expectations of higher education. RPL is but one such expectation. Higher education has already moved into the consumer-orientated world. This has never been an easy combination - education and the world of work.

The context of South African higher education has changed so dramatically that it necessitates drastic measures for redress and access. RPL could open doors to learners that may have seemed to be bolted forever. It may also cause endless aggravation and damage if it is not planned and operationalised correctly.

The RPL process model proposed in this chapter serves as input to further discussion around the implementation of RPL in a higher education institution and in this light it has by no means exhausted the topic.
Recognition of a person's learning and acknowledging this basic human need might be one of the positive steps that academic South Africa can contribute towards reconciling a fragmented learner society.
CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves to provide an overview of all the chapters of this short dissertation. Reference will be made to the chapter numbers in chronological order with an outline of the content of each chapter.

6.2 CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 contains the traditional elements of a first chapter with a brief background sketch of the higher education system in South Africa. The chapter outlines the research problem of the need to formally implement Recognition of Prior Learning at higher education institutions in South Africa. The research methodology of a literature study is highlighted since the scope of the research does not require empirical research to be conducted.

6.3 CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 links very closely with Chapter 1 for detailed background on the context of higher education in South Africa. The chapter initially draws on the history of university education in South Africa. This history is linked to the educational reforms that have been part of higher education worldwide. Continuing with this theme, modernism and post-modernism in higher education are discussed and connected with the wave of changes in higher education in general.

The difference between the three sectors in South African higher education is highlighted and then a detailed discussion on the transformation of South African higher education provides insight into the principles that
govern this transformation. Emphasis is placed on the central features of
the framework, which are increased participation, increased co-operation
and partnerships and greater responsiveness.

The chapter includes a discussion of the transformation of education and
training in general as it applies to higher education with specific reference
to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and Outcomes-based
education. In conclusion one of the principles of the NQF called
Recognition of Prior Learning is highlighted since it is the focus of the
study and this introduces the following chapter's theme.

6.4 CHAPTER 3

In this chapter Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is discussed in detail.
In order to fully understand this concept, an analysis of prior learning
recognition in various countries is made. The countries under discussion
are the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada and Australia. The chapter
refers to other countries that also practise some form of prior learning
recognition and explains why these countries are not included in the
discussion.

After analysing the different meanings of prior learning recognition in the
various countries, the forms of RPL are discussed. This serves as a way of
categorising the different ways of recognising prior learning. Articulation
agreements and assessment are the two forms of RPL that are
acknowledged in the paper.

The sources of prior learning (where and how the learning occurs),
objectives of RPL and benefits and advantages of RPL are provided as a
means of understanding why RPL is conducted and who is advantaged by
it.
The chapter culminates in a consideration of the issues to take heed of when implementing RPL in South Africa. The issues cover shortcomings in the current higher education system and basic limitations with regard to institutional autonomy and academic staff buy-in.

6.5 CHAPTER 4

A thorough discussion of Recognition of Prior Learning as a concept was provided in chapter 3, and chapter 4 continues with an analysis of RPL process models in various countries. RPL processes in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and America are analysed in order to determine the similarities and differences as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the models.

An analysis matrix is used to ensure that all the steps in the various models can be compared. All of the models are based on very similar steps and stages. This indicates that the models (since many of them are already in use) are feasible and given the correct contextual adaptations, could be implemented in South African higher education institutions.

All the models start with the initial contact between the candidate and the institution except the Accreditation of Prior Learning model (UK) and the Recognition of Prior Learning model (Australia). These two models are more holistic in nature and provide for pre-entry and post-RPL stages. Discussing the different aspects of the models and critically analysing the information from the evaluation matrix concludes the chapter.

6.6 CHAPTER 5

The overall objective of the paper is achieved in the fifth chapter when a process model for RPL for South African higher education institutions is suggested. The chapter draws from the information analysed in chapter 4.
and gives a detailed discussion of a ten stage RPL process model. Emphasis is placed on RPL counselling, as South African learners demand specific support and assistance due to the inadequacies of the past.

The chapter is brought to an end by emphasising the issues to consider when implementing RPL in a higher education institution. From this it is clear that RPL is not conducted in isolation and that strategic planning is required when implementing such a new process. Further research opportunities are also elaborated on.

6.7 CONCLUSION

This concludes chapter 6 as a summary chapter for chapters 1-5. The research objectives formulated in Chapter 1 has been reached.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


BITB
see
Building Industries Training Board


ETDP project
See Education, Training and Development Practices Project


HSRC
see Human Sciences Research Council


BIB - 103


NCHE

deer

National Commission on higher education


RAU
see Rand Afrikaans University


RSA
see South Africa (Republic)


