RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING PRACTICES WITHIN

THE

PUBLIC FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGE

SECTOR

NIGEL PRINSLOO

A Research Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
Masters in Education, University of the Western Cape

NOVEMBER 2009

Supervisors: Prof. Zelda Groener and Mr. Mohammed Natheem Hendricks

KEY WORDS

Further Education and Training

Recognition of Prior Learning

National Qualifications Framework

Qualifications

Skills Development

Credentialism

Assessment

Assessors

Social Justice

Access

Redress

GLOSSARY

ABET – Adult Education and Training

APEL – Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning

APL – Accreditation of Prior Learning

CAEL – The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning

CBE – Competency Based Education

CBMT – Competency Based Modular Training

DOE – Department of Education

ECD – Early Childhood Development

FET – Further Education and Training

GET – General Education and Training

HE – Higher Education

ITB – Industrial Training Boards

NSB – National Standards Body

NQF- National Qualifications Framework

PLAR – Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition

RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning

SAQA – South African Qualifications Authority

SDA – Skills Development Act

SDL – Skills Development Levy

SETA – Sector Education and Training Authority

SCOTVEC – Scottish Vocational Educational Council

TVET – Technical Vocational Education and Training

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

1. ACCESS: Entry to a learning programme or employment

2. ASSESSMENT: A process whereby evidence of performance is gathered and evaluated against set criteria

3. CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER: The process whereby credits achieved for learning are stored and accompany the learner to other institutions and courses

4. EVALUATION: Judgments placed on learning assessment and outcomes

5. FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING: A band within the National Qualifications framework that constitutes the 10th to 12th year of continuous learning or its equivalent.

6. MODERATORS: experts tasked with evaluating assessment instruments and judgements made.

7. QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK: A scaffolding of nationally recognized qualifications that allows for the accumulation and transfer of credits

8. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: The process whereby a course of action or recommendation adopted by parties in pursuit of an objective is carried out.

9. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING: The process whereby the knowledge, skills and capabilities that are acquired through a variety of means, both formal and informal are recognized and certified.

10. REDRESS: enabling those who were unfairly discriminated against in the past, especially with respect to education and training and employment opportunities, to access these.

ABSTRACT

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process of recognizing and crediting a person for his/her knowledge and experience however attained and promoting that person along a development pathway. In South Africa RPL has been promoted for social justice purposes related to access and redress. However these intentions have been lost within current educational discourses despite being rooted in several policies.

Recently the role of vocational education has received increased prominence as a means to provide skills development. However there is often a disjuncture between policy formulation and implementation and this has given rise to this study of how RPL policy has been implemented within public Further Education and Training (FET) colleges.

This paper investigates the RPL policies and practices in two public FET colleges and analyses how these employ social justice intentions of access and redress. The study reveals that there are similar conceptions of RPL amongst lecturers but varying RPL practices in these colleges. The study also reveals that there are a limited number of RPL candidates. Although access and redress are acknowledged as important aspirations, success in this regard is impeded by several barriers. The study also found that there was limited implementation of RPL policies and where RPL practices existed, these reflected an instrumentalist approach. There was little evidence of policy intentions of access and redress reflected in RPL practices. The social justice intention of transformative policy is therefore not being reflected in practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DECLARATION

I, Nigel Prinsloo, declare that "Recognition of Prior Learning Practices within the public Further Education and Training college sector" is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted from have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

_____
Nigel Prinsloo
November 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Fifteen years after its first democratic elections, South Africa still has the challenge to transform itself into a more equitable and just society. The achievement of the social justice objectives of access and redress to educational opportunities for historically disadvantaged people still remains a critical issue. Educational institutions, most notably public Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges and the process of Recognition of Prior Learning are seen as critical to achieving these objectives.

1.1 Background to the study

This study will investigate the RPL practices in two public FET colleges and the extent to which these reflect the policy intentions of access and redress.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) debate has a long and varied history in South Africa. Debates include the radical social transformation RPL argued by social movements versus the human capital RPL position adopted by industry and some training institutions. In the 1980's RPL was seen by the unions as a vehicle through which the social justice objectives of access and redress could be promoted and achieved (Cooper 1998. p 4).

After the advent of democracy, social justice became entrenched in the legislative process. The Skills Development Act (hereafter the SDA) of 1998 identifies access and redress as one of its key purposes:

> to improve the employment prospects of persons previously
> disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those
> disadvantaged through training and education. (1998, p. 2)

The SDA is one of a plethora of Acts passed in the post 1994 period to create the environment to address social justice issues brought about by years of oppressive apartheid policies. A key element of social justice in the context of education was the promotion of access and redress as evidenced by transformative legislation like the South African Qualifications Act (SAQA) Act (1995). However over the years there appears to have been a gradual rolling

back from the broader social aims of education to a more human capital focus on skills development.

South Africa is currently facing a skills shortage. Historically this shortage can be traced to the exclusivist apartheid policies of the National Party Regime (1948 – 1993) which were entrenched by racially segregated educational policies and job reservation legislation. After 1994 when racist laws were abolished and new economic policies were introduced, South Africa began to experience growth rates of between 4 – 6 percent. However the economy has not been able to absorb all entrants to the labour market, leaving unemployment at around 23% (Labour Force Survey, 2007).

FET Colleges are seen as vehicles to address the skills challenges in South Africa. In addition, being public institutions, FET Colleges are seen as a means to address social justice concerns by offering access and redress to those marginalized by Apartheid. Within the context of the skills shortage various drivers have been identified for achieving access and redress, inter-alia modernised, upgraded FET colleges and RPL to address these shortages. This paper investigates the RPL practices that exist within FET colleges to find out if these practices reflect the national RPL policy mandates of access and redress.

1.2 Context of the study

This study takes place at a time when the education and training sector is expected to address the competing demands of industry for more skilled workers, and organized labour who among others, demand access to training opportunities on behalf of its members. Public FET Colleges operate within these tensions and RPL is seen particularly by organised labour as the vehicle for recognizing these skills.

Skills development, FET and RPL in South Africa

As mentioned, South Africa is currently facing a skills shortage as well as high unemployment. Consequently, skills development and job creation are high on the government's agenda. After democratization, the South African

government changed its economic policies. Groener (2000, p. 1) notes that at this time the insurgence of neoliberalism had become entrenched in South Africa. At the same time the country opened up to globalization and there was an exodus of highly skilled individuals to developed nations, resulting in loss of people and skills that were not easily replaced. Accordingly, McGrath (2004, p. 3) advised that:

> One of the biggest challenges for the government is to find ways of keeping skilled South Africans at home. Undertaking this, coupled with increasing workplace learnerships, will likely improve the current skills shortages but, clearly, what is needed now is a comprehensive strategy that deals with ongoing unemployment, at the same time increasing efforts to improve skills

In South Africa, debates on the nature of the skills crisis are intensified within the context of bringing about race, gender and employment equity. It is in this context that the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is seen as a means, through which historically disadvantaged people who have learning and experience in critical skills areas might access education to improve their prospects of gaining employment (COSATU 2000) and redress historical inequalities.

Since 1994 there has been a progressive shift in the government's political and economic agendas from social transformation as defined in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) towards neo-liberalism, more visible in the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. (Cooper 1998, Groener 2000) Recently this focus became more entrenched in the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) and the Joint Implementation Plan for South Africa (JIPSA) policies[1]. New relationships and expectations were forged between the economy and education. Within the two FET colleges new programmes were introduced to address the needs of industry, notably learnerships and the new National Certificate Vocational (NCV).

---

[1] RDP, GEAR, Jipsa and Asgisa form part of government's macro-economic policies

With regard to the role of Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in respect of skills development and economic development, the Minister of Education in 2007 stated at an awards ceremony:

> …. the expectations and pressure for the expanded delivery of vocational education in South Africa and worldwide has never been higher. South Africa is short of priority skills that are necessary to ensure wider access and participation in the county's growing economy. FET colleges are central to the delivery of these priority skills. As part of our plans for economic growth and social development, we have to ensure that the FET colleges are given a proper platform to contribute to South Africa's competitiveness. This is essential for us to create opportunities for economic participation for our youth. It is crucial that we should be internationally competitive in order for us to be able to retain our skilled youth. (Pandor. 2007)

This speech echoes the FET Act (1998) which states that the "FET policy framework provides, in the main, a strategy for the suppliers of education and training to respond to labour market needs as identified by the needs of the private and public employers" (DOE, 1998). Research conducted by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) Forum and the Joint Education Trust suggest that the potential for RPL initiatives exist in South African FET colleges. The research noted that:

> …greater emphasis is placed on recognizing prior learning and developing a skilled nation. These initiatives have created an enabling environment for the development of centres of excellence and Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges that will become more responsive to the current education needs. (CAEL 2006, p. 3)

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has received renewed attention particularly by unions as a means to address the skills challenges and unemployment. During a keynote address at an Education and Training Development Practitioners (ETDP) SETA conference the Secretary General of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) stated:

> …Many workers learned their skills on the job, informally, and never got a certificate. …….In skills development, the main aims were to improve qualifications for black workers, so that they could improve their career chances and productivity. The key instruments to achieve this aim were recognition of prior learning; increased resourcing through the skills levy; and the SETAs, to ensure training responded to real sectoral needs, rather than just becoming a paper chase where workers get irrelevant and useless qualifications. (Vavi. 2006)

Although there is broad agreement among policy makers on the potential of RPL to facilitate access and redress, educational institutions are doubtful about the abilities and skills of RPL candidates and whether they are able to meet the requirements of registered qualifications without large concessions being made (Blom, 2007).

Although some forms of RPL have roots in the union movement where knowledge was based in part on experience, over time new policies began to emerge which moved away from this initial conception of knowledge. Driving the new policies were neo-liberal, economic imperatives which became the dominant discourse (Cooper, 1998).

These new policy developments had an impact on the nature and conception of RPL. Harris (2000, p. 18) notes that post-fordist forms of economic organisation have established new relationships between the economy and education, which led to the marketisation of education and training. Changing views and understandings of knowledge, learning, experience, learning from experience and pedagogy are central to any understanding of RPL. At the same time, with the introduction of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) more was required of the assessor who would be making a judgment of the candidates' prior learning.

After 1994, new definitions of RPL began to emerge in education and training discourse. One of the first official definitions of RPL evident in the regulatory framework was developed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The SAQA NSB Regulations (18787) defined RPL as follows:

5

> The Recognition of Prior Learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements. (SAQA, 2002, p. 7)

This policy implies that RPL assesses learners' prior knowledge against outcomes which are set nationally. Questions arise as to who defines the applied competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) and whether the RPL assessment is conducted by providers in a fair, reliable and authentic manner.

The SAQA RPL policy document (2002) notes the dangers of social exclusion where candidates could experience prejudice due to their educational background, language and other barriers (p. 8). The document states further that a valid assessment of prior learning for some candidates cannot take place outside the context of their communities when constructing portfolios of past experiences, as this would separate the candidate from that context. Individual candidates/ applicants inevitably confront barriers to learning and assessment and both these arise from their structural and political realities as well as from ways in which adult learners have internalised their realities (2002, p. 11).

FET Colleges and RPL

Prior to 1994 South Africa had some 200 Technical Colleges whose primary focus was technical and vocational education provision. According to Badroodien (in McGrath 2004), this provision was shaped according to the prevailing system of apprenticeship in South Africa at the time as well as the kinds of jobs available for the various learners in a racially constituted labour market (p. 22). This apartheid architecture was maintained until 1998. Historically most of the RPL done within FET colleges has been conducted though the Trade Test (TT) and Competency Based Modular Training (CBMT) assessment regimes.

The Further Education and Training (FET) Act (1998) Chapter 2 Section 6 laid the regulatory framework for the transition of the Technical Colleges to Public FET colleges. The new colleges are now structured in terms of the interests and values of the state and the economy (Harris, 2000, p. 59). This restructuring resulted in the creation of 50 FET Colleges from the previous 200 Technical Colleges by 2001 (Sooklal, 2004, p. 2). New programmes were introduced, notably the National Certificate Vocational (NCV), while the NATED programmes were intended to be phased out. In addition there was a significant decline in apprenticeships during this phase (McGrath 2004). The restructuring process resulted in many challenges noted by Sooklal (2004, p. 4) for existing staff as well as conflicts and loss of experience resulting from the merging process. McGrath (2004) expresses the view that the current lack of skilled workers can be attributed to the decline in apprenticeships and the poor quality of technical training at colleges. He notes that research has shown a decline in apprenticeships from 29,800 in 1986 to 16,500 in 1998. Although apprenticeships have been replaced by learnerships, throughput rates for learnerships remain low (2004, p. 2).

Currently, the Further Education and Training (FET) College sector is at the intersection of a number of learning pathways, each with its own tensions. These are the intersections between General Education and Training (GET) Grade R to 9 and Higher Education (HE) (Post Grade 12), and also the intersection between Workplace Learning (apprenticeships and learnerships) and the Industry. Public FET Colleges occupy this nexus and are seen as alternative pathways. Colleges are under increasing pressure to increase the throughput of students who often fail at school (McGrath 2004, p. 2). Public FET colleges are also seen as key vehicles for skills development within the South African context primarily because of their vocational focus. In 2006 these colleges received extensive recapitalisation funding to acquire cutting edge technology and infrastructure.

FET colleges can access SETA funding as an additional revenue stream particularly through learnership programmes. In order to access SETA funding, all providers including FET colleges are required by the SETA ETQA

regulations to have RPL policies, if this form of assessment is used (2007, p. 9). Although RPL assessment occurs at colleges via Section 28 Trade Tests, Competency Based Modular Training (CBMT) and Learnerships it is not uniform or systemic. Candidates are able to get recognition (RPL) for the CBMT courses but do not receive certification based on RPL assessment. RPL is mentioned in some FET College brochures:

> Furthermore, learners with working experience obviously have acquired some level of competence in the workplace already. For many qualifications it is possible to undergo a formal process of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) that will give them credit for the knowledge and competence that they have obtained through their experience. (RPL is often no cheaper than enrolling for a subject as the process is academically rigorous. For practical reasons, up until the present it has only been used for fundamentals, and never for whole qualifications. (FET College brochure 2008)

In addition to Trade Tests and CBMT, learnerships delivered by the two FET colleges have allowed for RPL to be administered but the numbers have been small. There have been changes within individual colleges to RPL implementation where RPL has been adopted by colleges but has been located within their Innovation Hubs (business units) and Trade Testing programmes to satisfy the requirements of SETA-funded learnerships and skills programmes.

The FET College sector has been given new impetus via the FET Colleges Act (2006), the recapitalization process and the new NQF Bill (2008). These promulgations continue the process of aligning colleges and RPL processes more closely with skills development and the National Human Resource Development (HRD) strategy. However this signifies a move away from the social underpinnings of RPL and moves it closer to the dominant discourse of neo-liberal capitalism.

1.3 Significance of the study

In this research paper, the nature and form of RPL practices within two public FET Colleges have been investigated to consider whether social justice

objectives of access and redress contained in national and institutional policies are being met in practice. This research objective is framed by the research question: "How do Further Education and Training Colleges understand and implement RPL?" Using a qualitative research methodology comprising interviews and surveys of a number of policies, the study investigates the extent to which RPL policy intentions are being implemented in practice. The study has found that RPL policy is being implemented to a limited extent, the RPL practices are limited and that where RPL practices were found, an instrumentalist approach evident. The study has also found little evidence of the RPL policy intentions of access and redress reflected in practice. This is because the institutional systems to allow these objectives to be achieved either do not exist or are inadequately resourced.

The study offers 3 key recommendations:

First with regards to RPL policy, the study highlights the need for college wide, uniform RPL implementation guidelines that are easy to use. These implementation guidelines need to be integrated within the college assessment policy and allow for articulation and credit awarding processes

Second, the study recommends that RPL practices should accommodate different languages and knowledges and that increased resourcing and training needs to be undertaken to achieve the transformation necessary to provide effective access and redress.

Third, regarding social justice the study suggests that increased resourcing to target specifically the marginalized should be initiated to achieve RPL policy intentions of access and redress. Social justice objectives should be seen as part of the assessment policies of the college.

This study is particularly relevant because though RPL has been studied in Higher Education (HE) institutions and international Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, there is limited literature on RPL practices in South African public FET Colleges. This study therefore

contributes to a growing body of literature on RPL practices in FET College settings.

Furthermore, this study investigates the relationship between policy and practice at a local institutional level within two public FET institutions and the extent to which social justice concerns of access and redress which appear in the SETA and College RPL policies is applied in practice.

Finally, this study takes place at a time when the two FET colleges and RPL are in the midst of several government initiatives for example ASGISA, to address skills shortages. Learnerships and skills programmes offered by colleges are seen as important to addressing this. This research will therefore contribute to ongoing studies within the FET college field.

1.4 Personal Motivation

On a personal note I have experienced RPL in my role as an Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) facilitator where the debilitating effects of apartheid education on adult learners who have not managed to complete formal qualifications can be seen. In spite of extensive learning in their field of work, they are unable to access formal academic pathways or workplace progression. It is here where RPL holds much promise. Being an RPL candidate on the Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change (ALGC) myself has been both empowering and daunting. These experiences motivated me to explore the gaps in this area of research.

Chapter 2 of this paper will offer a review of the literature on RPL, social justice and policy implementation. It will also provide a critical theory framework to develop a Habermasian perspective on RPL.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

RPL is an emerging field of academic study with a developing literature. This section will review literature in five broad areas. First a review of different conceptions of RPL is presented. Second, an overview of literature related to RPL and social justice. Third, different sites of RPL practice are investigated, followed by a review of literature on policy implementation. Finally, some theoretical perspectives of RPL are explained.

2.2 Conceptions of RPL

The review of literature for this long paper has revealed several different conceptions of RPL by noted authors in the field. Positions on RPL can be loosely grouped as follows:

Instrumentalist

This view of RPL speaks to the assessment of candidates by matching and crediting their achievements against a set of criteria. Harris (2000) views this as 'fitting' candidates within defined parameters. This model is based on deficit modeling and Human Capital Theory and is also referred to as the Credit Exchange model (Osman, 2003) or the Technical Paradigm (Luckett, 1999).

Liberal

Liberal conceptions of RPL take into account the experience of the individual and validate experiences within particular knowledge disciplines. The emancipatory aspect of RPL in this paradigm plays an important role but relates mostly to knowledge-accessing economic objectives and a greater emphasis on learner centeredness. This conception is based on Liberal Humanism, and forms the theoretical basis of what Osman refers to as the Developmental model (2003). It is also referred to as the Practical or Hermeneutic Paradigm (Luckett, 1999).

Radical

Here RPL is seen as potentially contributing to social equity and transformation. Social justice objectives of access and redress play an important role within this perspective. It critiques the weaknesses of the first two models by challenging the nature of knowledge and proposes alternatives with the emphasis on the candidate. Emancipation within this conception of RPL is both social and economic, with a notion of experiential RPL to which a critical theory lens (Michaelson, 1996; Cooper, 1998) has been applied. In the literature this is referred to as the Critical Paradigm (Luckett 1999) while Osman (2003) refers to this model as the Radical Transformative Model. Most of the writers on RPL (Harris, 2000; Hendricks, 2001; Cooper, 1998) adopt this conception of RPL.

These three broad categories provide a useful framing of conceptions of RPL proposed by the literature.

2.3 RPL as Social Justice

In South Africa, RPL offers the opportunity for social justice intentions of access and redress to be achieved through validation of a candidate's knowledge and experience.

Social Justice Theory (Rawls, 1996) considers the principles of social justice in a liberal society where income and wealth are partially redistributed to benefit the least advantaged members. For example, the notion of social justice was a motivating force behind the trade unions demand that RPL be linked to remuneration (Cooper, 1998).

The development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (1995) was an important step in the mainstreaming of RPL as it outlined one of the first official definitions of RPL within the regulatory framework developed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The SAQA NSB Regulations (No 18787) defined RPL as follows:

> The Recognition of Prior Learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements. (SAQA, 2002, p. 7)

Blom (2007), using policy symbolism as a theoretical lens (p. 40), considers the concept of integration of knowledge and experience within South Africa's education and training system and notes the social inclusivity, access and redress intentions of RPL espoused by NQF principles. Blom (2007) investigated the extent to which the South African education and training system reflected in its principles, perceptions and practices the ideal of an integrated National Qualifications Framework "through a number of lenses including policy symbolism, pragmatic and technical approaches that embody the philosophies underpinning the system" (p. 3). Blom (2007) refers to policy symbolism as policies are drawn up but with insufficient resourcing or political will for them to be effectively implemented (p. 4).

2.3.1 RPL, Emancipation and Inclusion

Cooper (1998), from a critical social theory perspective considers the role of RPL within the union movement and critiques its implementation. Her paper focuses on changing approaches to worker education within the South African labour movement over the past twenty years. She identifies the distinctive features of this movement in its early years of development, and shows how these were linked to an "emancipatory educational discourse with particular notions of how knowledge is constructed" (p. 1); the role of experience in learning and the construction of particular forms of worker identity. Her study traces the role of the labour movement in the development of new education and training policies in the context of the transition to democracy in the 1990s and shows how newer training discourses have impacted on union education. Cooper notes the role of 'collective experience' in the labour movement and argues that this is important in RPL discourse (1998, p. 3).

Osman (2003) uses critical educational theory in a qualitative institutional case study to investigate the implementation of RPL at five higher education institutions. (2003, p. 3). Her findings concur with Cooper, Luckett, Castle, Harris and Blom, as she identifies the dichotomies that exist in RPL: academic knowledge versus experiential knowledge; access and redress versus the economic imperatives of capital; technicist approaches of RPL implementation versus the developmental / radical approach; behaviourist underpinnings versus the constructivist context; divisions between formal and informal knowledge and so on. Cooper argues for a developmental and radical approach which will allow for a socially inclusive form of RPL that may require curricular and institutional change so as to allow space for RPL to develop and integrate with institutional processes. She concludes that equity and redress intentions on their own have not been the levers for the implementation of RPL in higher education in South Africa (2003, p. 10).

Harris (2000) emphasises the need to see RPL as an educational and social practice in addition to an economic one, and emphasises the need for greater inclusivity. This call for inclusivity resonates with a number of authors on RPL including Cooper (1998). Inclusivity refers to RPL within a social practice framework where the focus is on social justice and not just industry imperatives (p. 21).

2.3.2 RPL, Experiential Learning and Transformation

Michaelson (1996) considers the complexities associated with the assessment of experiential learning (p. 185). She holds that current approaches to the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) are consistent with, and in some respects, trapped within enlightenment theories of knowledge. She contends that alternative epistemologies offered by post-modernist, feminist, and anti-racist theory suggest a different conceptual underpinning for APEL, reinscribed within an epistemology of situated knowledge (2006, p. 187).

Contrary to claims that RPL may potentially contribute to social equity and transformation, Michaelson laments the complicity of the dominant practices of RPL "with inequality of economic and institutional power" (1996, p. 144). Regarding current RPL practice, Michaelson argues that since vocational skills are generally defined by management, they are "reproducing and reinforcing the old divisions in the labour market that are the basis of inequality" (p. 145).

Luckett (1999), using social learning theory considers the role of RPL for rural development workers and proposes methods for the inclusion of experience. Luckett uses a small scale pilot study to highlight some of the complexities involved in recognizing prior learning in the South African context. First she describes the cultural, cognitive and epistemic gap that lies between potential RPL learners and a (historically white) university. She then concludes by making suggestions for a contextually specific implementation of RPL.

Situated Theories of Learning (Lave, 1988 and Lave & Wenger, 1991; Fox, 1998) have been developed through researching the learning that takes place by 'common folk' in everyday activities. Situated learning theorists propose a radical model of experiential learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 17). These theories emphasise that learning is a social rather than an individual activity that happens within a community of practice. It is not necessary to transform this experience into knowledge for it to be recognised as learning. Learning is thus a way of "acting in the world" (1991, p. 18).

Harris (2000) contends that the theory and practice of experiential learning are based on a commitment to experience as a foundation of learning and knowledge production. These pedagogies are concerned with transforming experience, and experience with reflection results in learning and knowledge occurring. Harris (2000, p. 19) comments on the extent to which experience translates into learning and knowledge in so far as the learning processes become abstracted and neutralised from the learner using them. The discourse reconstructs experience which is situated, embedded and in a specific place and time, hence contestations around knowledge have a direct

impact on the nature of RPL, whether emancipatory and inclusive or instrumentalist and exclusive. Invariably this discourse impacts on the nature and extent to which the aims of social justice in term of access and redress can be applied.

In order for RPL to be transformational experiential learning needs to be recognized and validated

2.3.3 RPL, Access and Redress

According to the principles of the South African NQF, facilitating access includes access to education as well as training and employment opportunities. This is of special significance for those previously disadvantaged who did not gain access to educational opportunities. Accelerating redress includes enabling those who were unfairly discriminated against in the past, especially with respect to education and training and employment opportunities, to gain access to the above.

According to Blom (2007) the objectives of RPL can be interpreted in 3 ways based on the SAQA definition:

Firstly, redress RPL is often used by learners who do not wish to continue further education and training but feel that they are entitled to the recognition of their skills, either for personal reasons, promotion purposes or for social justice. Secondly, access RPL promotes the "fast tracking" of learners into learning programmes. If the candidate meets the requirements of the RPL assessment, credits are awarded towards further study. Thirdly, evidence RPL is required by learners who have exited formal education prematurely but who have attended numerous non-credit bearing short courses or non-formal workplace training. What is notable here is that though RPL within the NQF was emancipatory in nature through its access and redress objectives, its implementation was reformist (Harris, 2000, p. 16).

Harris (2000), using critical social theory, contends that RPL should address the context of social inclusion and economic needs but states that at the moment economic needs are dominating the debates around RPL which

impacts the way in which RPL might be applied (2000, p. 18).

An important aspect of RPL discourse within South Africa is the notion of social justice, seen in the framing of the objectives of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) on 'access' and 'redress'. Social justice refers to a concept of 'fairness' that is focused on exposing and ending social inequalities. (Rawls, 1996; Tripp, 1992)

Critical Theory writers on RPL including Harris (1996), Osman (1992), Hendricks (2001) are agreed that access, redress and social justice are important outcomes of RPL.

2.4 RPL and Sites of Practice

A review of the literature reveals that there are several sites of RPL practice within the South African landscape. These include the labour movement, higher education and further education and training colleges.

2.4.1 RPL and the Labour Movement

Cooper (1998) argues that RPL arose out of the union movement through an "emphasis on social justice and the emancipation of the working class" (Cooper, 1998, p. 1). However there is a dichotomy between the needs for access and redress and the economic imperatives of capital (Harris, 2000, p. 18). Cooper (1998) provides a historical overview of the development of RPL in SA from its birth in the union movement until its incorporation into the NQF. Within critical theory, the emancipatory discourse sees learning as emerging out of workers' collective experiences of oppression and exploitation and views the purpose of education as one of empowerment and social transformation (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1997). However RPL discourse increasingly became dominated by the new language of industry training based on human capital theory. In addition RPL assessment would be conducted against a predetermined set of competencies and would become more technicist in approach.

Cooper (1998, p. 1) notes that internationally, worker education has been clustered around two dominant approaches: a radical, 'transformative' approach to worker education which emphasises the building of class consciousness and can be located in a long-standing radical or socialist tradition; and an alternative 'instrumental' approach which can be located within a reformist tradition of trade unionism and which prioritises training for organisation-building and to facilitating the conduct of union business.

2.4.2 RPL and Higher Education

Hendricks (2001) illustrates in a case study, RPL implementation at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and investigates the extent to which RPL at UWC has promoted social transformation. One of his key findings was that RPL is transformative only if linked to other strategies and policies which promote social equity. He also found that the support provided by the senior administrative staff for the RPL programme was a key element in the implementation process. Hendricks (2001) argues that RPL at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) took place within a particular historical and social context. First, the location of RPL within the discourse of lifelong learning contributed to its transformative potential due to its promise of social inclusion. Second, the rapid decline of student numbers threatened the university's survival and finally the national education legislative and regulatory environment supported and encouraged RPL implementation (Hendricks N, 2001, p. 22). The goals of social transformation were advanced by assessing and admitting learners from marginalised communities.

Hendricks and Ralphs (2003) argue that "the assessment of quality in respect of RPL routes into Higher Education cannot be divorced from the historical, conceptual and curriculum frameworks that constitute the discourse of equity and social justice in an institution" (2003, p. 2). They argue for a form of hybridity of RPL models that best suit the institution. They continue that "the quality of the RPL programme at UWC is located in a discourse which continues to attract and support the struggle of non-traditional learners to seek access to tertiary level studies at UWC" (2003, p. 5).

The adoption in South Africa of an Outcomes Based Education (OBE) curriculum based on Unit Standards also provided new challenges for RPL. Cretchley & Castle (2001) from a critical theory perspective trace the role of RPL and OBE within the South African Higher Education (HE) environment. They begin by analysing the definitions and evolution of OBE within South Africa from its behaviourist and later constructivist modes and how these eventually framed RPL (Cretchley and Castle, 2001, p. 488). They also trace how OBE began to define RPL processes. As with Cooper, Cretchley and Castle expose the dichotomous relationship between the democratic, andrological model of RPL emphasising a process or development-orientated approach, and the traditional content, behavourist approach required by HE. They also note "that RPL is associated not only with issues of individual and social justice, but also with issues of redress" (2001, p. 488).

Luckett (1999) considers the role of RPL in the setting of rural development workers and proposes methods for the inclusion of experience in RPL. She emphasises that learning is a social rather than an individual activity that happens within a community of practice. It is not necessary to transform this experience into knowledge for it to be recognised as learning. She notes that learning is thus a way of 'acting in the world'. She notes that the lack of take-up of RPL may be due to "the expense and difficulties involved in designing appropriate assessment procedures and a lack of assessment expertise in the country; to the fact that the onus lies with the learners to provide evidence for prior learning; and perhaps to the fact that skills development and certification has not yet been adequately linked to career pathways and workplace restructuring, so that the incentives for learners to embark on RPL processes remain unclear" (1999, p. 4).

Parallels with HE occur in the FET College policy implementation environment where government funding is challenging the traditional autonomy of South African educational institutions to embrace new agendas. This reflects the plurality of interests where cooperative and coordinating structures are

required.

2.4.3 RPL and the FET College Sector

There is limited literature on RPL in the South African FET College sector. This paper attempts to contribute to this body of knowledge.

Harris defines RPL as follows.

> The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to the practices developed within education and training to identify and recognise adults' previous learning. The broad principle is that previous learning - acquired informally, non-formally, experientially or formally – can and should be recognised within formal education and training frameworks. (Harris, 2000, p. 1)

Hence RPL is about assessment within a certain context, the starting point being the knowledge and skill of the candidate rather than that of the formal education and training framework.

Harris (2000, p. 58) notes that policy documents (DOE White Paper 1998, the SAQA Act 1995) take a broad view of FET in several significant ways. First, there is a strongly espoused commitment to personal, social, civic and economic development needs. Second there is a commitment to correcting the social and economic divisions of the past. Third, there is a commitment to the integration of education and training. These policy endorsements have very strong resonance with the social objectives of access and redress. Before 1995 vocational education and training within South Africa was very formally organised and would be challenged by the new policy imperatives (2000, p. 58).

Sooklal (2004), from a critical theory paradigm, investigated the structural and cultural constraints of policy implementation within the context of the merging and transformation of Public FET Colleges from 200 technical colleges to 50 FET colleges. Sooklal noted that education institutions were changing in the face of economic pressures, increasing budgetary constraints and the need for skills development, as they began to move away from offering only

traditional courses. It is within this context that these institutions could not focus on RPL except for that which already existed within the colleges

Although there is limited literature on RPL within FET colleges, there are several policy documents which are available. These include:

a) The SAQA RPL criteria and guidelines document (1998)

b) The Skills Development Act (1998)

c) SETA RPL system implementation guide (2003)

d) SETA Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Criteria (2005)

e) FET College RPL policy and assessment guidelines documents

These policies ultimately shaped the manner in which RPL was implemented in the colleges.

There is extensive international literature on RPL within the Vocational, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Community College sector. As part of this literature review the researcher will focus on policies and implementation of RPL in the United Kingdom (UK), Canada and Australia.
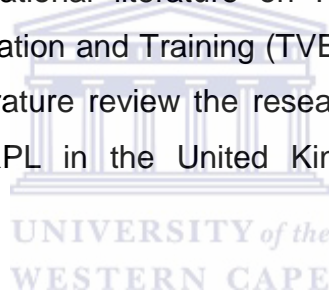
The United Kingdom

Recognition of prior learning in Britain is commonly referred to as the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) or sometimes the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) to distinguish it from the recognition of previous certificated/accredited learning. Wheelahan (2003, p. 48) contends that APL/APEL seems to be more widespread in the Higher Education (HE) sector than in the training sector. The European Union (EU) Project National Report on England states that APEL was used in Further Education (FE) in England in the mid-90s for entry, accreditation and advanced standing, but is used less now, principally because of the costs involved (Merrill, 2001, p 6). The authors of the EU National Report on Scotland suggest that "it may be that the practice of APEL is operating at a very informal level and not being recorded in ways which make it easily identifiable" in FE (Cleary, Whittacker *et al.* 2001: 7). However, they said they had no evidence that this was the case. Wheelahan (2003, p. 49) found this apparent lack of APEL in FE puzzling,

given that the FE system is based on competency-based training (CBT). They contented that CBT in theory should lend itself to RPL, as the focus is on the competency outcomes, and enabling people to be assessed on the basis of competence whenever and however it is acquired, and not by time served in formal learning programs.

Major APL projects were conducted in Scotland in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the FE sector, and as a consequence the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) included APL as an acceptable assessment approach that could be used in qualifications, verifiers were trained and supplied guidance for assessors and internal verifiers in colleges as to how to handle APL evidence. APL centres were established with and APL co-ordinators (SCOTVEC, 1992). However, even though a national framework was put in place, it does not seem to have been implemented by providers to any great extent, because of the cost of implementation.

The Scottish projects conceived of APL as being one way of being assessed for a qualification, alongside many other processes of assessment. APL was different to other forms of assessment because it used information and testimony from a person's previous experience, instead of the 'normal' assessment activity. It was portfolio-based, but was nonetheless fundamentally a process of assessment. APL was found to be a reasonable assessment technique, but the problem lay in the process. Wheelahan (2003, p. 50) notes that most APL candidates needed support in learning how to construct a portfolio, particularly those who had not been through the qualification system. Group processes were used to support candidates, but when it came down to matching individual learning and experience to individual qualifications and competencies, personal support was often required. The process was labour and resource intensive.

The Scottish projects specifically distinguished between APL and assessment on demand. APL was portfolio-based, whereas assessment on demand involved assessing students using the 'normal' assessments for assessing students' competence within courses. Both have in common the principle that

students may not necessarily go through a learning program because they are already competent, but where they differ is in the assessment process. APL was overtaken by the introduction of the Scottish Vocational Qualifications as Irving (2002, p. 10) explains that: "When this competency based system was introduced, candidates could demonstrate their competence through workplace demonstrations". This process is referred to as accelerated assessment. The cost of the process is also much lower. This does not resolve the problem for those who are not in work and hence do not have a work environment in which to demonstrate competence, nor does it solve the problem for those whose prior learning has been outside the workplace, and in broader community contexts. In these instances, students will need to use APEL.

Canada

British Columbia has invested extensive time and resources in developing RPL policies and an infrastructure to support its implementation. RPL is known in Canada as Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) or Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition (PLAR). British Columbia has 28 differentiated, publicly funded post-secondary institutions, which include universities as well as community colleges. These colleges offer two year associate degrees that are a pathway to four year degrees in the universities, or an exit in their own right. They also offer adult basic education; developmental education; apprenticeship training; career, technical, and vocational training (Wheelahan, 2003, p. 52)

In a report from the Centre for Curriculum Transfer and Technology, (2001) it was found that most PLA respondents (82%) were enrolled in courses that were career/occupational or vocational in nature, with 18% enrolled in academic courses. Much literature has focused on the potential of RPL/APL in newly emerging industries, where there is a time lag between the emergence of the industry and courses to cater for that industry.

British Columbia is creating a vision for PLA for the 21st century, which places PLA as a key strategy in achieving a learning province. They have "a strong

cadre of able assessors, advisors and administrators committed to supporting the expansion and development of PLA and related services", resources, and guidelines "to support the articulation and transferability of credits earned through PLA" (Simosko, 2000, p. 4). Their challenges are to develop common understandings of PLA across institutions, embed PLA into mainstream institutional life, increase the take-up of PLA, publicise PLA and increase the extent to which PLA assessments are accepted in all post-secondary institutions (Barker, 2001). They have undertaken research to identify the obstacles and facilitating mechanisms and these include the complexity and difficulty of PLA processes; the cost of implementing it, and the cost to the student; inadequate resources; negative attitudes by students, teaching staff, and business; differential access because of variance in philosophy and practice in post-secondary institutions; and, 'shifting power' which refers to "systemic discrimination and balance of power" (Barker, 2001, p. 7). In addition Barker notes the 'cultural outsideness' experienced by First Nations students, "visible minorities and other non-traditional students" (ibid, p. 8). Hence PLA can act as a mechanism of exclusion when it legitimises "knowledge and skills that reassembles the academic norm and which extends the academy's traditional gate-keeping function of barring alternative cultures of knowledge and calibrates the legitimacy of students' knowledge according to sameness and correspondence" (Barker, 2001, p. 9).

Australia

Initially, when RPL was first implemented in Australia it focused on the portfolio approach, but work in recent years has extended the concept to include *all* forms of assessment of prior learning, and not just portfolios. RPL refers to assessment processes used to assess an individual's prior learning – not just one form of assessment. The Australian TVET System for FE system is based on competency-based training, and RPL is given prominence.

Australian Training Packages is the equivalent of Vocational Qualifications and RPL forms an integral part of this qualification. There is however a renewed focus on e-portfolio for RPL assessment which would address some of the challenges that traditional paper portfolios have caused including costs,

complexity and resource intensiveness. (E-portfolios for RPL assessment report, 2009, p. 2)

Knight (2006) investigated the use of RPL in Australia's TVET system. He noted the challenges facing RPL both in terms of costs and validity, and the difficulties it poses for conventional models of publicly funded TVET which in turn has led to the take-up of RPL not meeting expectations. As in South Africa, RPL in Australia is applied to pre-assessment to determine whether the candidate meets the requirements of the relevant subjects and is included within the provisions of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). Assessment issues affecting RPL include complexity and cost. Knight (2006, pp. 5-6) notes these challenges. He argues for the need for assessment to take place in a work **or** simulated environment results in logistical problems. He states that standardised tests cannot be developed/ administered because of the need for a realistic context while RPL assessment depends heavily on supporting evidence which places a daunting burden on applicants to prepare for and assessors to evaluate it. Knight notes that successful implementation can lead to non-viable class sizes with not all learners being at the same stage and the dangers which credit accumulation and transfer places on the ATQF and the excessive amount of documentation and administration required. Finally Knight (2006) argues that the availability of RPL expertise, especially assessors, within certain requisite fields is low or insufficient.

Within the literature cost and complexity are highlighted as important components when looking at barriers to RPL implementation. Challenges faced in the UK, Canada and Australia are similar when it comes to implementing RPL. In the literature it is also argued that political and institutional buy-in at all levels is vital to ensure that RPL is systemically located within education and training.

2.5 Policy Implementation and RPL
Policy debates on RPL have their origins in conflicting definitions of RPL and differing practices within a changing global context. The literature on policy

implementation reveals that although policies are implemented, dominant discourses may undermine their original intent.

McLaughlin (1998, p. 171-173) states succinctly that policies tend to be implemented with "much difficulty". She also notes that policy cannot always mandate outcomes at the local level. She notes that the most promising policy initiatives depend on what happens as individuals throughout the system interpret and act on them. Sabatier (1999) refers to these participants as 'street level bureaucrats'. He notes that implementation challenges include environmental stability, competing centres of authority, contending priorities or pressures and other aspects of the socio-political milieu that can influence the implementer's willingness profoundly. Hence the need to balance the pressure on the implementer and support offered (1999, p. 173).

A key point that McLaughlin raises is individuals' responses to carrying out policy, acting not only on institutional incentives but also from professional and personal motivation. This needs to be taken in account when reviewing policy or studying policy implementation. Hendricks (2001) confirms this need for support by noting that "the support provided by the senior administrative staff for the RPL programme was decisive since staff, in general, especially academic staff were reluctant to support and at times were even antagonistic towards RPL implementation at UWC" (2001, p. 2). This is further confimed by Sooklal (2004, p. 3) who contends that successful change has more to do with the professional values, beliefs and assumptions held by implementers than with the adoption of the reform, irrespective of whether it is developed or mandated at the national or provincial levels. She contends that implementers choose practices and changes that fit with their pre-existing beliefs and which are consistent with their organisations' culture. This view is also supported by McLaughlin (1998, p. 171-173).

Cretchley and Castle note that Competency Based Education (CBE) implementation requires substantial, long term commitment. However, if inadequately supported, it will almost certainly mean inferior CBE systems and policies. These resource and structural constraints impinge on the rate

and efficacy of policy implementation (Cretchley G, and Castle J, 2001, p. 497).

Cretchley and Castle (2001, p. 489) further argue that RPL implementation relies on the expertise and political will of institution-based assessment and programme teams to validate the learning and admit the candidate to further learning experiences. They note that implementation is often constrained or accelerated by the availability and control of resources. In addition the influence of external environmental factors particularly socio-economic factors and conflicts with programme objectives and strategies can impinge on implementation.

Hence the importance of the implementers, in this case, the RPL practitioners cannot be overstated. The literature emphasizes that policy needs to engage and be user-friendly for the practitioner, in order for it to be effectively implemented.

The literature further reveals that the social justice objectives of access and redress were limited by the way in which RPL was implemented. Hendricks notes that although RPL has often been discussed as transformational, its implementation has been slow and fragmented within institutions (2001, p. 22). He further argues that RPL challenges the privileged position of academic learning, in that socially useful learning is not reserved for formal educational institutions.

Hendricks (2001) contends that the location of the RPL in the educational discourse will affect its implementation. He notes the role of neo-liberalism and Human Capital Theory in privileging 'core' knowledge and how RPL, which functions on the 'periphery', had to negotiate with the hegemonic theories and classes to allow for access. He argues that formal education is used as an instrument to advance the interests of the hegemonic class through integrating the subservient classes into its way of seeing the world i.e. it becomes the key tool which presents capitalist economic and social

relationships as 'normal' (2001, p. 25).

International Literature on policy implementation supports the positions espoused above. According to Knight (2006), the policy emphasis given to RPL throughout the 1990's and the inclusion of RPL requirements in the standards of Registered Training Organisations led to an increase in the take up among students, at least in the public TVET system in Australia (p. 2).

Furthermore, Ryan (1996) notes key elements with regard to successful policy implementation. This includes the impact of policy formulation on implementation. The central determinant of implementation outcomes is what is developed during policy formulation. A key aspect here is the clarity and consistency of policy and/or policy directives. Appropriate programmes require structures with adequate resources. The control of these resources is just as important as the availability of resources and needs to be provided within a coherent delivery system (p. 43).

The relationships between implementing actors (lecturers) and politics (institutional systems) are characterized by commitment and conflict. Ryan (1996) argues that the vigilance of these groups with respect to implementation is important to achieving programme objectives. He further looks at the importance of coalition building and coordination and argues that 'disharmony' between these groupings will result in poor implementation (p. 39).

This confirms Ryan's (1996) contention that the influence of external environmental factors such as the impact of conflicting or discontinous socio-economic factors, conflicts with programme objectives and strategies which negate previous assumptions or causal relationships. The role of policy is thus to provide leverage to access resources, acceptance and development (p. 40).

However a review of the literature reveals that writers acknowledge that policies are key drivers of social projects and can be enhanced by ensuring

that adequate resources and time are available for them to achieve their mandated goals. The same will apply to RPL implementation within the FET sector.

2.6 Theoretical perspectives and RPL

Within the context of this literature review on RPL, the writers I have referenced offer different theoretical lenses. Three overarching theoretical perspectives from the literature on RPL dominate: Human Capital Theory, Liberal Humanism and Critical Theory. Osman (2003) uses critical education theory as her theoretical frame. She expands on the three dominant theoretical perspectives of Human Capital Theory, Liberal Humanism and Critical Theory with her three conceptual models of RPL, namely the Credit Exchange model (Technical Paradigm), the Developmental model (Practical Paradigm) and the Radical/ Transformational model (Critical Paradigm).

2.6.1 Human Capital Perspective and RPL

Human Capital Theory (Shultz, 1971; Sakamoto and Powers 1975 et al) emphasises how education increases the productivity and efficiency of workers by "increasing the level of cognitive stock of economically productive human capability which is a product of innate abilities and investment in human beings" (Olaniyan and Okemakinde, 2008, p. 158). This theory views expenditure on education and training as a costly exercise and as such can be viewed as an investment. In his seminal work, Becker (1964) argues that employers will not be willing to invest in general training when labour markets are competitive. However, they would be willing to invest in specific training because it cannot be transferred to outside firms.

Critiquing Human Capital Theory as its developmental base, Osman (2003, p. 55) notes that the Credit Exchange Model (CE) incorporates elements of behaviourism where a strong emphasis is placed on the development of skills and knowledge as a "tradeable commodity". This model views knowledge as universal, neutral and uncontested while experience is seen as asocial and apolitical and places emphasis on method and efficiency. What makes the CE

model attractive to administrators is that it is controllable, measurable and cost effective. In addition it provides a swift and less invasive way of conducting RPL (2003, p. 54).   However the CE model neglects social inequality while privileging academic knowledge, and assumes easy transference of knowledge and skills. It offers little contribution to equity and redress in South Africa and is technicist, instrumental and conservative in reducing Adult Education to skills development and skills assessment for economic prosperity. This model tends to follow a format that includes letters of application, testimonials and transcripts and evidence of qualifications and achievement.   Within the CE model assessments tend to be standardised tests, examinations and performance-based (2003, p. 57).

2.6.2 Liberal Humanist Perspective and RPL

Liberal Humanist Theory (Kant, 1784; Hegel, 1807) denotes the ruling assumptions, values and meanings of the modern era. Liberal humanism, laying claim to be both natural and universal, was produced in the interests of the bourgeois class which came to power in the second half of the seventeenth century (Kellner and Lewis, 2007). Both Human Capital Theory and Liberal Humanism concern maintaining the status quo, hence the link with RPL as educational attainment de-linked from remuneration (Osman, 2003; Becker, 1964).

Osman (2003) describes and critiques the Developmental Model (DM). This model, utilising Liberal Humanism as its theoretical frame, aims to actualize human potential. Students are required to assess and evaluate their prior learning acquired through experience (2003, p. 60). This model recognizes that experience is individual and hence emphasis is placed on individual reflection on experience which is then reconfigured into knowledge. The key strength of this model is the emphasis on learner-centredness and human development. However key weaknesses include, inter alia, separating 'knowing' by decontextualising and distancing experience from knowledge, hence stripping the historical context from the person (2003, p. 61). This deprives candidates of 'voice' in assessment and alienates them from the experience, which tends to promote a behaviourist model of RPL starting out

as student-centred, but ending up as assessment-centred. Here assessment takes the form of interviews, reflective writing tasks, portfolio of learning, portfolio development courses and reflective essays (2003, p. 62).

2.6.3 Critical Theory and RPL

There are theorists who use critical theory in the analysis of RPL. Notable amongst these in this literature review are Osman (2003), Harris (2000), Michaelson (1996) and Luckett (1999).

A Critical Theory lens is applied to this study in view of the social justice intentions stated in early government policies on RPL. Brookfield (2005, p. 7) attempts to put critical back into critical theory by emphasising how thinking critically is an inherently political process. Thinking critically, he holds, is mostly defined as the process of unearthing, and then researching, the assumptions one operates under, primarily by taking different perspectives of familiar, taken-for-granted beliefs and behaviours. He notes that critical theory "attempts to understand this state of affairs in highly unequal societies in which economic inequality, racism and class discrimination operate as a necessary prelude to changing it". (2005, p. 8). In choosing critical theory and observing the strengths noted by Brookfield, Foster (1989) reminds one that theories do not solve problems in the world, people do. He goes on to say that they nevertheless, …"can help alert us to problems, remind us of what we care about, or prompt our insights into cases we confront" (p. 12).

Within the critical theory discourse there are varying positions and opinions regarding the nature and effect of RPL.

Osman (2003) uses critical education theory as her theoretical frame. She notes that "Critical Education Theory is well placed to provide the theoretical basis for this study pertaining to RPL" (2003, p. 10). She further states that:

> "It focuses on the learning of individuals and groups who have been excluded from formal education and draws on the rich traditions of student-centredness for its pedagogical underpinning while questioning the dominant forms of knowledge." (2003, p 10)

The Radical/ Transformative model (RTM) (Osman, 2003, p. 66), with its roots in Critical Theory acknowledges the diversity and richness of individual and collective experience while questioning power, class and conceptions of knowledge. RTM foregrounds the politics of difference in the struggle for legitimate knowledge while emphasizing that all knowledges are equal. Important strengths of this model are that it challenges conventions and encourages critical thought. It also proposes curricula which are sensitive to the experiential world (2003, p. 66). Critical weaknesses of this model are, inter-alia, that it does not have the capacity to challenge dominant discourses and can inadvertently re-inscribe academic ways of doing and knowing. It can also become a regime of truth and lose its capacity for empowerment. Within RTM assessment takes the form of focus groups, collages, debate, dialogue, narrative and life histories. Sharing and reciprocity also play an important role (2003, p. 68). Premised on Osman, a critical theory perspective as an analytical framework is used for this paper.

Critical theorists argue that goals of social justice and transformation can only be achieved through emancipation whereby the oppressed and exploited become empowered to transform their circumstances for themselves and by themselves. They consider the route to emancipation to be developing a critical frame of reference which problematises social relations, particularly those within discursive practices of power (Nuyen, 1998, p. 27).

However, Critical theory has been critiqued by Kellner (1989) in that "it tends to problematize all social relations and thus misses some important social perspectives" (1989, p. 3). However Kellner holds that critical theory of the Frankfurt school continues to provide theoretical and political resources to draw upon to create theories and politics adequate to the current era of uncertainty, crises and the openings of social transformation (1989, p. 3).

Building on these critical theory perspectives a critical theory perspective on RPL is elaborated on in order to analyse RPL practices within the FET sector.

2.6.4 Critical Theory, Habermas and RPL

Jurgen Habermas developed an emancipatory theory of society and elaborated a far-reaching critique on the methods of domination in modern society. (Roderick,1986). In one of his seminal works, *Theory of Communicative Action* (TCA) (Habermas, 1981 translated into English in 1984) considers that language is a medium of communication, but communication is a broader concept, and the "communicative action designates a type of interaction that is coordinated through speech acts as well as the effect of power through communicative and strategic action has upon the situation of discourse and therefore knowledge". (1984, p. 101). Within this theory Habermas considers two important concepts. One is the role of "emancipation" and second is what he refers to as "lifeworld" which takes into account the need for social inclusion.

For Habermas, emancipation means "independence from all that is outside the individual" and the "practical intention" which can be described as "the self-emancipation of men from the constraints of unnecessary domination in all its forms" (1984, p. 16). Nuyen (1998, p. 27) states that Habermas believed a key strategy for emancipation to occur was to reassert the authority of reason to sort out what he calls correct thinking from distorted thinking. According to Habermas emancipation will happen when "interpretive accomplishments on which cooperative processes of interpretation are based represent an mechanism for coordinated action" (Habermas 1984, p. 101).

Habermas defines lifeworld to be "….shared common understandings, including values, that develop through face to face contacts over time in various social groups, from families to communities" (Habermas, 1984, p. 12). "Lifeworld" is an inclusive dimension and refers to the background resources, contexts, and dimensions of social action that enable actors to cooperate on the basis of mutual understanding, shared cultural systems of meaning, institutional orders that stabilize patterns of action, and personality structures acquired in family, church, neighbourhood and school (Bohman and Rehg, 2007, p. 10).

Habermas argues that the rationalisation of the lifeworld is the path by which social change, including emancipatory possibility, is said to occur through what he stresses to be an "ideal speech situation" in which citizens are able to raise moral and political concerns and defend them. He distinguishes these processes of rationality through what he calls "communicative action" oriented toward**s** understanding in which actors coordinate their behaviours on the basis of consensus and "strategic action" oriented towards based on the rational choice, to achieve one's personal goal (Borman and Rehg, 2007, p. 3).

Habermas further uses the concepts of "rationality" and "system", where rationality consists not so much in the possession of particular knowledge, but rather in "how speaking and acting subjects acquire and use knowledge" (*TCA*, 1: 11). Any such account is "pragmatic" because it shares a number of distinctive features with other views that see interpreters as competent and knowledgeable agents. Most importantly, a pragmatic approach develops an account of practical knowledge from the point of view of a competent actor. A theory of rationality thus attempts to reconstruct the practical knowledge necessary for being a knowledgeable social actor among other knowledgeable social actors. Habermas' reconstruction attempts to articulate invariant structures of communication, and so qualifies as a "formal pragmatics." This theory indicates how particular knowledges become formalised. For Habermas (1984) rationality is the key to both domination and emancipation. He argues that the rationalisation of the lifeworld is the path by which social change including emancipatory possibility is said to occur.

Habermas distinguishes the "system" as those predefined situations, or modes of coordination, in which the demands of communicative action are within legally specified limits. The prime examples of systemic coordination are markets and bureaucracies. In these systemically structured contexts, coordinating actions proceeds on the basis of money and institutional power—thus relieving actors of the demands of action (1984, p. 105).

How does Habermas' Critical Theory perspective assist in creating a theoretical framework to form the lens for RPL? In previous definitions within this paper, RPL is, in effect, the process of recognising past learning and experiences. These experiences are contained and communicated within the medium of language to reach understanding and consensus. Through his Theory of Communicative Action (1984), Habermas foregrounds the use of language through communicative action as a means for emancipation, and lifeworld which allows for the bridging of the person towards strategic action and the world of work (Borman and Rehg, 2007). He states that "If communicative action is our paradigm, the decentered subject remains as a participant in social interaction mediated by language." (1984, p. 16). This transformation could happen in ways Michaelson (1996) suggests, where RPL becomes a site in which 'outsider knowledge' is articulated and allowed to dialogue with academic knowledge. Ultimately, this approach could destabilize the cultural and epistemological foundations of the institutions and "invite a sharing of epistemological authority". (1996, p. 15). This will challenge the "system" dominance by elevating "lifeworld" through the process of "rationality" conveyed through the medium of language (Borman and Rehg, 2007, p. 2). This represents the conditionalities required for Habermas' communicative action and emancipation to occur. In this process the inequalities of knowledge are challenged and the discourses placed on equal terms. Though Habermas does not speak of RPL specifically, his writings on lifeworld, system, rationality and emancipation bring valuable insights into the nature of different forms of knowledge and how these can lead to the emancipation or exclusion of people. Consideration will also be given to how the concepts of "lifeworld" and "system" affect the lecturer's conception and practice of RPL.

Hendricks (2009) contends that language is not only a medium through which people communicate but language is also the medium through which the culture of people is transmitted. Phillipson (1992, p. 55) accuses the English Language of being imperialistic since English is used for "effecting and maintaining an unequal allocation of power and resources". For example, within a pedagogic relationship, the use of English may have major

consequences for learning if the indigenous language of the learners is ignored (Phillipson, 1992, p. 55). It is important that language becomes an emancipatory medium in the process of RPL particularly around experiential learning obtained in the "lifeworld" of candidates. Otherwise there is a risk that the transformative possibilities of RPL will be lost. Within the context of this paper, the focus of the "lifeworld" and "system" will be investigated in relation to the lifeworld of the lecturer (RPL practitioner) and their relationship to the system of the FET College policy environment and how this enhances or inhibits the RPL objectives of social justice.

Superimposing Luckett's Habermasian perspective on Osman's (2003) three RPL models, Luckett (1999) applying Habermas' theory of knowledge-constitutive interests (1972) to education, identifies three different educational paradigms based on different uses and understandings of knowledge. Firstly Luckett introduces the "Technical Paradigm" within which Osman frames the Credit Exchange Model (Osman 2003). This model develops knowledge primarily to control. It generates instrumental knowledge usually in the form of causal explanation, e.g. the empirical-analytical sciences. In this paradigm the curriculum tends to be understood as a product, as teaching inputs as learning outcomes. Secondly Luckett is instrumental for introducing the "Practical or Hermeneutic Paradigm" in which Osman (2003) frames the Developmental Model which develops knowledge to understand human social action. Within this paradigm knowledge is used to build mutual understanding and wise action within a framework of values. Finally, Luckett notes the "Critical Paradigm" which frames Osman's Radical Transformative Model (2003) which extends the hermeneutic paradigm to include critical reflection on the social and historical shaping of our ideas, actions and institutions (ideology critique) with a view to emancipating ourselves from past irrationality and injustice (1999, pp. 9 - 11).

It will therefore be important to see which models are applied within two FET colleges and how language is used as a means to develop and validate knowledge. Situated within a critical theory perspective, this paper will consider RPL practices within FET colleges.

2.7 Concluding remarks

Each of the theories commented on, in their own way adds to the discussion on the purpose and nature of RPL. On the one hand there is Human Capital Theory that looks at the relationship between education and training and the needs of industry. On the other there is the Critical Theory view on the nature of knowledge, power and hegemony, and the need for social justice to challenge and transform these. Between these two poles there is Liberal Humanism which considers the development of human potential and how this can be validated to serve the needs of the economy. Powell and Moody (2003) noted that rationality, freedom and justice are not just theoretical issues to be explored and debated, but for Habermas they are practical tasks that demand commitment and achievement (2003, p. 5). A critical theory perspective of the RPL practices within FET colleges will be further developed within this paper.

The literature review has highlighted that there are various models and practices of RPL implementation. Tensions and dichotomies exist in RPL implementation in the FET sector and policy requires agency in order to be successfully implemented. The literature has also highlighted that formulating policy requires a historical perspective of the contextual realities. Successful policy implementation requires political will and adequate resourcing, capital and human and structure and agency need to reinforce policy imperatives in order to result in successful implementation.

Using the critical theory frame of Habermas (1984) et al and focusing in social justice, this literature review reveals that RPL has been studied in a variety of contexts. For example these contexts include Trade Unions (Cooper 2003), Further Education (Harris, 2000); Higher Education (Hendricks et al, 2001) and from various perspectives, Theoretical (Osman 2003), Institutional (Sooklal, 2001), International (Neal 1996; Knight 2006, Wheelahan, 2003). A review of the literature reveals that critical theory, though problematising social relations within discursive practices of power, does allow for an analysis of the practice of social justice particularly around access and redress which

this study attempts to investigate.

The literature review found that the broad theoretical frames of Human Capital Theory, Liberal Humanism and Critical Theory underpin three models of RPL espoused by Osman (2003) namely the Credit Exchange, Developmental and Radical Transformative. These models relate loosely to different assessment practices, for example Instrumentalist (Standardised Tests), Liberal (Portfolio Development) and Radical (Communities of Practice/ group learning).

The data gathered about RPL practices in two FET colleges will be analysed against the backdrop of the literature reviewed. It will also investigate practices against social justice imperatives of access and redress contained within RPL policy, viewed from a critical theory perspective.

In Section 3 which follows, the research design and methodology will be discussed.

SECTION 3:   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research investigates the implementation of RPL policies in two FET colleges within the Western Cape Province of South Africa to assess how the access and redress ideals of RPL are being addressed.

Seale (2004) notes the contestations that occur within the research field between quantitative and qualitative, naturalist and interpretivist and detachment (required by science) versus emotion (which drives research) approaches to research. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach with FET college personnel involved in RPL practices as the primary unit of analysis. A qualitative approach was chosen as it is the most appropriate tool for this investigation. This approach allows the researcher to see how RPL is implemented from the lecturers' point of view. Merriam (2009) argues that in qualitative research the focus is on process, meaning and understanding. She further notes that the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. She further notes that a qualitative methodology is inductive (p. 266). In addition to the qualitative approach the case study method used can be described as "empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context…" (Myers 1997; Yin 1994).

A Critical Theory lens is applied to this study in view of the social justice intentions stated in early government policies on RPL. In his work Brookfield (2005) notes that to think critically is the process of unearthing, and then researching, the assumptions one is operating under, primarily by taking different perspectives of familiar, taken-for-granted beliefs and behaviours. He notes that critical theory "attempts to understand this state of affairs in highly unequal societies in which economic inequality, racism, class discrimination operate as a necessary prelude to changing it" (2005, p. 8).

Similarly, Myers (2001) argues that the critical paradigm assumes 'that social reality is historically constituted and that it is produced by people" (p. 5). However, whilst people can change their social and economic reality, social

change is normally accompanied by social conflict because change is constrained by social, cultural and political domination.

Myers (2001, p. 5) identifies 'social critique' as the main task for critical researchers:

> …. whereby the restrictive and alienating conditions of the status quo are brought to light. Critical research focuses on the oppositions, conflicts and contradictions on contemporary society and seeks to be emancipated, i.e. it should help to eliminate the causes of alienation and domination.

The ideological concern of critical theorists is to identify and analyse societal factors that impede the establishment and or maintenance of a just society (Brookfield, 2005, p. 8).

Kincheloe (2001) contends that critical theory analyses competing power interests among groups and individuals within a society, identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations. Privileged groups, critical analysts argue, often have an interest in supporting the status quo to protect their advantages. The dynamics of such efforts often become a central focus of critical study.

Of particular interest to this work is how to challenge inequality through the notion of inclusion and emancipation within the context of critical theory and how this ties in with RPL aims of access and redress, discussed later herein. Tripp (1992) elucidates the use of critical theory in educational research:

> …."Socially – critical research is informed by the principles of social justice… In practical terms it is not simply a matter of challenging the existing practices of the system, but seeking to understand what makes the system the way it is and challenging that, whilst remaining conscious that one's own sense of justice and equality are themselves open to question." (1992, p. 1)

A critical theory perspective provides a useful analytical tool for **analysing** the initial underpinnings and social drivers of RPL and contains analytical

elements that allow one to investigate, question and problematise social relations, particularly those within discursive practices of power (Osman 2003, p. 10). However social justice is an important lens through which to understand the initial access and redress aims of RPL.

3.2 Research Approach

This research is a qualitative study into the RPL policies and practices in two urban FET colleges with a province of South Africa.

Myers (2001) argues that the qualitative research methodology is an appropriate research methodology for the study of social and cultural phenomena (p. 2). One of the main strengths of the qualitative research methodology is that it gives the researcher insight into how social, environmental and cultural contexts influence human behavior. When investigating cultural or social phenomena, the quantitative research methodology may have major limitations since the quantification of textual data results in the loss of the particular social and institutional contexts within which the social phenomenon takes place (Myers, 2001 p. 2).

This research relies on first hand experiences obtained from interviewees and locates the data within the critical theoretical construct. It is important for the researcher to be aware of his/her own biases or theoretical standpoints as our "self cannot be left behind when doing research" (Seale, 2004, p. 16) when working in their field and when using critical theory.

3.3 Research Questions

The main research question which this research paper investigates is "How do Further Education and Training Colleges understand and implement RPL?" Sub-questions are as follows:

- How do two colleges understand RPL?
- What RPL practices exist within two FET colleges?
- What RPL policies exist within two FET colleges and how are they implemented?

- How do these policies and practice relate to the RPL social justice intentions of access and redress?

It was hoped that these questions would allow the researcher to investigate to what extent the RPL aims of access and redress are used as well as the gaps that exist between policy formulation and implementation.

3.4 Data Gathering Techniques

A research questionnaire was developed from the research questions of this paper. A scoping exercise was done and contacts were made with potential respondents to assess their willingness to participate in the research. Individual interviews were held with identified personnel who were once again informed of the nature of the research and the assurance of confidentiality.

Eleven interviews were conducted. This comprised one Provincial Education Department official, two Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) representatives and eight college personnel (four per college) involved in RPL. College personnel were chosen on the basis of their involvement with RPL and their teaching on the programmes or courses identified by the researcher. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, while field notes supplemented such transcripts.

The choice of SETAs was based on the economic sectors in which trade testing, apprenticeship and learnerships were evident at both the selected FET colleges. The SETAs were also selected because their RPL policies were adopted by the colleges. Desktop research investigated definitions and understandings of RPL while RPL policies both at a macro (national) and micro (college) level were analysed. Drawing on the research questions and sub-questions, interview questions were developed and piloted. The primary focus of the questions was to assess what RPL practices were occurring within FET colleges.

As part of this study two public Further Education and Training (FET) colleges were sampled, namely Mountain College[2] and Sea College[2]. Two campuses of each college were visited as part of this research and are noted as Campus 1 and Campus 2.

Mountain College was formed out of the amalgamation of 8 technical colleges. The eight college campuses are located mostly within the boundaries of a large metropolitan city. Most of the college campuses are found within the previous coloured and african residential areas. From the research sample, Mountain College Campus 1 is located within a previously designated coloured area, while Mountain College Campus 2 is located within a previously white Afrikaans area. Interviews were conducted with 4 Mountain College staff members. All were middle-aged men. Two members in the sample were Trade Test (TT) officials and Competence Based Modular Training (CBMT) lecturers who had experience ranging from 7 – 25 years. They had been in the original technical college environment and many of them were also involved in learnership and skills programmes. The two other members are involved in the learnerships. The TT officials, Learnership Coordinators and CBMT Lecturers interviewed conducted RPL within their particular learning areas.

Sea College consists of 8 campuses spread across the suburbs of the same large metropolitan city and serves a broad variety of communities. Sea College Campus 1 and 2 referred to in the research are located within two township areas that were previously designated coloured during the apartheid era. The sample from Sea College also consisted of 4 male staff members, three were older trade test (TT) officials and one CBMT lecturer who had experience ranging from 2 – 20 years. They had been in the original technical college environment and three of them are also involved in learnership and skills programmes. The TT officials, Learnership Coordinators and CBMT Lecturers interviewed conducted RPL within their particular learning areas.

---

[2] Pseudonyms to protect college identity

3.5 Data Analysis

All interviews[3] were taped and transcribed with the permission of participants who all had access to the transcripts. In addition field notes were also made during the interview process. The data was coded according to the following central themes:

- RPL policies both national and local
- RPL practices, implementation and extent
- Conceptions of RPL within FET colleges
- Meeting the social justice intentions of access and redress
- Improving RPL policy and practice

Key findings arose by analyzing the research data with the Habermasian notion of "Lifeworld" and "System" (Habermas 1984) as well as the literature on RPL and policy implementation.

From the interview transcripts, key themes were developed which broadly included biographical details in order to assess the respondents' experience at the college; a description of the roles they play at the Mountain College and their understanding of RPL. Additional themes consider the RPL candidates, institutional RPL practices and policy. A final and key theme considers the role of RPL and social justice within the context of the FET colleges.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Seale (2004) notes the importance of ethical considerations when conducting research. The University of the Western Cape subscribes to an ethical standard for all research. All interviews were treated confidentially and interviewees were given access to their transcriptions.

3.7 Limitations of the Study

This research paper focuses on three relatively small programmes that are offered by two large departments within two FET colleges. These are Trade Tests, Competency Based Modular Training and Learnerships. Within these

---

[3] Refer to Appendices on page 90

programmes two industry sectors were identified and on that basis, two Sector Education and Training Authorities who had existing RPL policies were approached. Hence there is a lack of generalizability of the findings and further research will be necessary to validate these.

The study did not investigate the RPL assessment tools as its primary aim is the investigation of RPL practices within the two FET colleges. The researcher did however see a sample of tools and these provided key insights into the arguments that made later in the study.

As far as could be ascertain there were no records of RPL candidates in the official records of the college. In addition, due to the nature and scope of the research, only implementing personnel in the college, SETA and Provincial Education Department staff were interviewed. This excluded students and private providers of education and training. This study also excludes new developments around RPL within the colleges as the data gathering process was concluded in October 2008. Hence the analysis of the data, the findings and conclusions reached need to be seen in the very defined scope of this paper.

The following section sets out the analysis of the research data and its key findings.

SECTION 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND KEY FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Underpinning the data analysis are the critical RPL policy objectives of access and redress and an investigation of how these were implemented in FET colleges. Key research findings of the data analysis are presented and discussed. Individuals were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

4.2 Themes in the data

Themes arising from the qualitative interviews form the basis for further analysis in terms of the conceptual frame, literature review and research questions of this paper. Two sources of data were used, namely relevant policies in the sector and qualitative interviews to ascertain practices.

4.2.1 National and Institutional RPL policies

In order to understand RPL practices within FET colleges a review of policies within the public domain was conducted. The research examined particularly the social justice aims of access and redress and the role of RPL practitioners in achieving this.

Six policy documents were perused namely:

a) The SAQA RPL criteria and guidelines document (1998)

b) The Skills Development Act (1998)

c) SETA 1 RPL system implementation guide (2003)

d) SETA 2 Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Criteria (2005)

e) Mountain College Assessment Guidelines document (2008)

f) Sea College Recognition of Prior Learning Policy (2006)

These policies were intended to guide the manner in which RPL was implemented in the colleges.

These documents reveal a number of themes.

Historical context of RPL policy development

Some discussion of the historical policy landscape is provided in order to contextualise the data-analysis that follows. As previously stated herein, the initial concept of RPL was driven and spearheaded by the union movement.

Under the SAQA Act of 1995 and the establishment of the NQF, formal qualifications included clauses that make RPL an integral component of the definition of any qualification. Accordingly, the exclusion of RPL from any qualification needs to be justified and motivated since the exclusion of RPL in gaining a qualification deviates from the intention of the regulation that follows. Under the heading "Requirements for the registration of qualifications", clause 8(1)(h) of Chapter 2 of the Regulations under the SAQA Act, promulgated as Notice R452 in Government Gazette 18787 of 28 March 1998 states that :

> A qualification shall- [….]
> h. indicate in the rules governing award of a qualification that the qualification achieved in whole or in part through the recognition of prior learning, which may include, but is not limited to learning outcomes achieved through formal, informal and non formal learning and workplace experience. (1998, p. 2)

Following the SAQA regulations, a raft of skills development legislation was passed between 1998 - 2000 that moved RPL into the ambit of skills development, encapsulated in the Skills Development Act (SDA) in Government Gazette 19420 of 1998, that views RPL as a strategy to:

> improve the employment prospects of persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those disadvantages through training and education; (1998, paragraph e. 4)

The above statement suggests that beside the pedagogical considerations associated with RPL, the redress and equity intentions are important.

A key development of the SDA was the establishment of the Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), which in many instances were constituted from the old Industrial Training Boards (ITB). SETAs benefited from the historical infrastructure of the earlier ITBs which included Trade Tests and the Technical Colleges (now FET Colleges). A requirement for SETAs to be accredited as Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs) by SAQA was that their policies complied with the requirements of

SAQA, including mechanisms allowing for access and redress, such as RPL, as can be seen from SETA 2's RPL policy document.

> RPL assessment is also recognised as a mechanism that will provide the learner access to education and training opportunities based on the achievement of prior knowledge (2005, p. 4).

As ITBs became SETAs in terms of the SDA, technical colleges were reconstituted and merged into 50 new FET colleges via the FET Act (1998). Though Trade Testing was still an integral tool for recognising prior learning within the FET colleges, all colleges did not have RPL policies at the time. With the development of learnerships and skills programmes RPL policy became a requirement for registration as an accredited provider.

SETA 2's Policy document notes that "[i]t is a pre-condition for [education and training] providers to have their RPL and quality system policies and procedures approved by the ETQA" (2005, p. 4).

The consequence of non-compliance by FET colleges could be exclusion from the benefits of being a SETA-accredited provider of learnerships and skills programmes. The provincial education department as the public provider in the province, of which colleges are sites of delivery therefore initiated a workshop process whereby colleges could develop a common RPL policy, which could then either be adopted or amended as part of the individual college context. This was to mirror the requirements of the SETA policy which was in turn, aligned with the SDA and SAQA regulations. Access, redress and acknowledgement of knowledge and skills were important principles throughout the above processes.

SETA RPL Policies

SETA 1's RPL policy (2003) had been funded as a pilot by an international donor and the insights gained during the pilot were encapsulated within that SETAs policy. Their RPL documents of SETA 1 acknowledged the social justice imperatives of access and redress as indicated in the SAQA RPL

document. Guidelines covering the role and function of key personnel, policy and procedure, Quality Management System, assessment methods and processes were detailed (p. 3).

SETA 2's RPL policy (2005) is more generic and does not offer specific guidelines though these may be set out in other Quality Management System documents which this study did not investigate. However, persons involved in the RPL process, such as evidence facilitators, assessors and moderators, are mentioned but their responsibilities are not stipulated (pp 4-7). These appear to be left to the provider.

Mention is made of access and redress within the policy framework. The policy states that "Provider RPL policies and procedures shall clearly articulate the following: An explicit commitment to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion" (2005, p. 4).

Mention is made of "transformation" (2005 p 3) as defined by SAQA but does not suggest how this will be achieved. SETA RPL Policy indicates its social justice intentions namely:

> To improve the employment prospects of persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those disadvantages through training and education (SETA 1, 1998, p. 8).

It should be noted that this is adopted verbatim from the SDA. However one needs to question whether the social justice imperative is a principled concern by the SETA or whether social justice is included in the policy because it is viewed as an issue of compliance.

SETA 1 and 2 policies state the role of RPL as a means of promoting redress, access and inclusion, however the policies are not explicit about how these will be achieved. Although guidelines are offered within the RPL documents of SETA 1, it is left to the provider to decide how to apply these recommendations.

Provincial Education Department involvement

The provincial education department was instrumental in assisting the colleges to develop their own RPL policies. To this end a series of workshops was held throughout the province. The department assisted colleges to comply with the requirements of the SETAs and to include access and redress within the policy formulation process (Mr. Amoo, p. 39). The education department does however not quality assure or monitor RPL implementation, and the researcher was unable to obtain RPL guidelines from the Department of Education RPL policy document.

An education department official noted that:

> that the new NCV programmes do not accommodate RPL at this stage since Unit Standards are not funded by the Provincial Education Department therefore RPL will have to be funded by the colleges. The Department has hosted interventions in order to promote RPL within the colleges (Mr. Amoo, p. 39).

The mention that the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) does not accommodate RPL contradicts the intention of the SAQA Act (1995) which requires that RPL possibilities be included in all qualifications. This might suggest a lack of both political will and leadership; insufficient knowledge on the purposes of RPL; as well as inadequate resourcing for RPL implementation. The literature reveals that without these components RPL will not occupy the space provided for in the policy (Michaelson, 1996 and Hendricks, 2001).

The official explained further that,

> access in itself may not be sufficient in order to bring about social justice – RPL should be the instrument / mechanism that ensures that learners who have already gained access will succeed in receiving credit for their particular competencies. And, assisted further with any additional development needs they might have pertaining to the relevant qualification (Mr. Amoo, p. 41).

It was evident that though interviewees had a conception of what social justice is, this was confined to a narrow instrumentalist view of how it could be

applied to RPL within the college context. Once again one sees how the student has to "fit into the system" rather than the other way around. The interviewees also do not discuss RPL as legitimate teaching and learning practice. This limits the transformational possibilities of RPL.

College RPL Policies

The study the RPL policies of two FET colleges namely Mountain College and Sea College were examined. Mountain College does not have a separate RPL policy but the policy is incorporated in the <u>Assessment Guide</u> of its *Quality Management System* (QMS) document. RPL falls within the "Guide to Assessment, Moderation, RPL and Verification Procedures" (2008, p.1) of which the section on RPL covers just one page.

A lecturer from Mountain College confirmed:

> Actually when we looked in to offering learnerships a requirement was that we had to have RPL policies and QMS processes that were built into the assessment process (Mr. Julie, p. 58).

The Assessment Guide does not clarify the support and guidance for RPL candidates which is important to the RPL process. It is only under key activities that the Orientation Process includes, "Interview, advise and clarify the expectations of candidates" (2008, p. 6).

Social justice intentions are captured within the Purpose and Scope of the document which states that:

> There will be no unfair discrimination against learners in terms of gender, disability, race, nationality or ethnic origin, language, sexual orientation, religion, social class, age or situations of diversity (learning styles, levels of literacy, values, experience) (2008, p. 1).

RPL in Mountain College is seen as part of assessment and is therefore written into the college Quality Management System. It includes assessment regimes and processes. The policies provide a generic framework of what is required in terms of SETA and Education Department guidelines. The

assessment policy fails to provide a detailed implementation plan though it does outline the RPL process within the institution.

Mountain College's Assessment policy states under Assessment Methodology, that:

> There will be no fundamental difference between the assessment for previously acquired skills and knowledge and assessment of skills and knowledge achieved though a current learning programme (2008, p. 5).

Sea College's RPL policy was more generic, allowing some flexibility for implementation of RPL. Sea College had a separate RPL policy which was not integrated into the Assessment policy as in the case of Mountain College. No mention is made of the learning areas in which RPL will be applied.

Sea College's policy captures the notion of redress in the following manner:

> ….motivation for implementing the practice of RPL at our institution comes from our social obligation to serve the community and the greater South African drive to upliftment. RPL offers an opportunity to redress past educational inequalities, where a society exists that has acquired certain skills, abilities and knowledge through experience for which it has received no formal training, recognition or credit. Awarding currency to these competencies has numerous advantages for a variety of stakeholders (2006, p. 1).

A roll-out process was outlined to be completed during the course of 2003 so that Sea College would be ready for implementing RPL at the start of 2004.

From a study of the policy documents and the intentions of national and provincial institutions', RPL and social justice intentions are seen as integral to promoting access, redress and transformation.

4.2.2 Conceptions of RPL within FET colleges

Two public Further Education and Training (FET) colleges, Mountain College and Sea College were visited and interviews conducted at two campuses of each college.

Profile of interviewees

Interviews were conducted with 4 staff members of Mountain College.

Mr. Heerden[4], with 10 years' experience, is the Learnership coordinator for Campus 1. He also conducts Trade Tests. Though based at Campus 1, Mr. Heerden spends a lot of his time at Campus 2 due to capacity shortages at this campus. Mr. Julie is a workshop senior lecturer at Campus 1 who also does Trade Testing. He has nine years' experience in his current position.

Mr. Green is the Programme Manager at Campus 2 of Mountain College with 27 years' experience while Mr. Akoojee is a Learnership coordinator with 7 years' experience for the same campus. Mr. Akoojee is also responsible for CBMT at campus 1 and has seven years' experience in the field.

The sample from Sea College also consisted of 4 staff members.

Mr. Jansen is a designated TT (Trade Test) official and also helps in learnerships. He has 4 years' experience at the Mountain Collegen and comes from industry. Mr. Small is also a TT official who assists with learnerships. He is close to retirement and has 20 years' experience. Both Mr. Jansen and Mr. Small work at Campus 1 of Sea College. Mr. Maart is a Learnership Coordinator at Campus 2 of Sea College. He has recently been appointed to the position (his 8th month at the time of writing) and his role is mostly managerial. He coordinates the learnerships and establishes and maintains the relationships with industry, the learnership candidates, the SETA and the college. He also teaches classes. Finally Mr. Sylvester is both a Learnership Coordinator and the CBMT Manager at Campus 2. He has 10 years' experience in his current position.

Conceptions of RPL

Data gathered from Mountain College revealed that conceptions of RPL are based on ideas of equity and instrumentalist in its application. Respondents from Mountain College mentioned that RPL was the measuring of candidates

---

[4] Pseudonyms to protect lecturer identity

skills against set standards. The following extracts show various understandings of RPL from Mountain College lecturers:

A lecturer noted that:

> As the word says, it is about recognizing previous learning. People out there could only do certain aspects but have experience over 6 – 7 years. They produced quality work but they don't get paid. Though many of them can't write down their name, they can do the job. Certification is important for them and many just require top-up training (Mr. Akoojee, p. 47).

Another lecturer explained that RPL was to:

> Assess a person to put him in ….to see what past experience he has. Any informal training was not considered as being experienced. Now with the advent of learnerships, RPL is also taken into account. We can draw up a test / assessment – test for you. It will be Unit Standard linked – we can credit you on the basis of this assessment (Mr. Julie, p. 56).

Mr. Akoojee and Mr. Julie note that many can in fact do the job and just require the certificate. They suggest that a candidate should not be disadvantaged if she/ he can do the job competently and should be remunerated for this competence.

A perceived advantage of RPL stated by Mr. Akoojee was that it allowed the learners to progress though the CBMT (Competency Based Modular Training) course faster (p. 51). RPL was also used as a diagnostic tool in the pre-trade tests which allowed skills gaps to be identified and corrective measures to be taken.

A lecturer explained:

> Man, the only advantage is training part of it (RPL), identify the skills gaps via Trade Tests (Mr. Green, p. 30).

Mr. Small has a similar view, where RPL is:

> To see if the person has the capabilities then to assess these, so that the person can be slotted into industry (p.5).

There were some financial benefits to college campuses which have Trade Testing venues, but most were not covering their costs. In some cases there were increased enrolments in skills programmes, particularly for those candidates who had not been successful in their Trade Tests and those in whom skills gaps had been identified in their pre-trade test were needed.

A respondent noted:

> There are financial advantages. We are a training institution – we make a contribution to bring down the skills shortage (Mr. Akoojee, p. 53)

Most of the respondents from Sea College mentioned that RPL was the measuring of the candidates' skills against set standards. They however noted that there was 'not a lot of RPL happening' (Mr. Maart, p. 13).

The following extracts from Sea College illustrate lecturer understandings of RPL:

> It depends on the individual who comes here. In the past we had some guys who were illiterate and things (sic) but they can perform the skill in the practical sense of the word. It is the taking of the person's skills and assessing it (Mr. Jansen, p. 1).

> My understanding of RPL is […] to identify what skills a learner's has acquired prior to him attending an institution such as ours and trying to document that so that it assists him in achieving a qualification in the future. That is basically what I would say what RPL is about (Mr. Maart, p. 12).

Another lecturer stated:
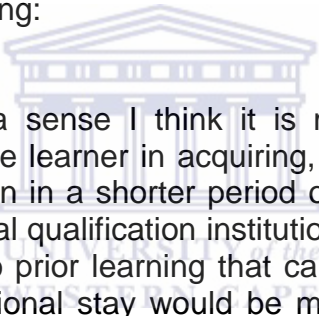
> In CBMT, [..] A guy can do the welding so why train the person if he already knows what he is doing. We write that off against his name now what actually happens there is there is on-the-job training and off-the-job training (Mr. Sylvester, p.17).

From the above statements it can be concluded that the conception of RPL amongst college lectures differs from lecturer to lecturer. Some view RPL as the assessment of specific skills acquired outside the institutional contexts and assessed against predetermined unit standards (Mr. Julie; Mr. Sylvester).

Others such as Mr. Maart view RPL as an audit of a person's knowledge and skills in order that "it assists him in achieving a qualification in the future" (p.12). RPL in this view is about giving one credit within a qualification. Another conception perceives RPL as a form of diagnostic assessment (Mr. Green). This form of RPL is frequently used as a strategy to provide access to a qualification rather than giving credit within a qualification.

RPL was also conceived of in terms of what it can do for candidates. One of the advantages of RPL noted by the interviewees was that it is also used as a diagnostic tool for, example in the pre-trade tests learners' skills gaps were identified and corrective measures were offered (Mr. Sylvester, p. 17). Though financial benefits to Sea College campuses which have Trade Testing venues were noted, most felt that the advantages accrued to the students more than the institution, as the following:

> For the college in a sense I think it is more for the learner because it assists the learner in acquiring, it could allow him to acquire a qualification in a shorter period of time for arguments sake. Where a normal qualification institutional training would be 23 weeks but due to prior learning that can actually be halved, so his actual institutional stay would be much less (Mr. Maart, p.14)

> Well look there is monetary advantages and then exposure to the industry. We get calls from industry so we can look for learners to be placed in their companies. The benefit for the learner is much more than we benefit. Because he gets the recognition for the work that he has been doing all the years but has never really been paid accordingly. (Mr. Sylvester, p.19).

Despite the variation in lecturer conceptions of RPL, these do not critique the pedagogical validity of the practice. Accordingly, it can be argued that College lecturers' conceptions of RPL are limited to their specific practices rather than the educational philosophy that underpins RPL practices. These practices reflect an intrumentalist conception of RPL and closely resemble the Credit Exchange Model (Osman, 2003). It is evident that the Human Capital Theory conception of learning dominates current RPL Practices within both the trade tests and Competency Based Modular Training within both colleges.

An analysis of the data suggests that financial and resource costs may be why RPL is peripheral to the main business of the Mountain Colleges' managers do not see a financial benefit to the institution.

Awareness of Institutional RPL Policies

The respondents involved in TT and CBMT were not aware of the college RPL policy but were aware of the SETA RPL policies which they used.

Mr. Jansen stated:

> I am not aware of the college RPL policy. I use the SETA policy
> as that is what the Trade Test is based on (p. 3).

The fact that lecturers are not aware of institutional RPL policies signals that the FET colleges have not done enough to advocate their RPL policies amongst academic staff nor have they provided systematic training to introduce the different aspects of the RPL practices to lecturers. This lack of institutional support and training results in policies that are not effectively implemented resulting in policy symbolism (Blom 2007).

4.2.3 Institutional RPL Practices

From the interviews conducted, Mountain College did not seem to have implemented RPL as extensively as Sea College. This could be as a result of Mountain College not having a TT venue at the time of writing though they were in discussions with SETA 1 to look at establishing a Trade Test Center at one their campuses.

It was noted that at both colleges RPL assessments in CBMT and Learnerships applied both the theoretical as well as the practical components of the courses and/or programmes.

Mr. Heerden explained:

> [Within our RPL Practice].. We would look at test, observation,
> theory, practical and on site evaluation (p. 35).

RPL in Sea College is located in 3 areas. In "pre-trade" tests, skills gaps are assessed and candidates are prepared for the Trade Test (TT); in Competency-Based Modular Training (CBMT) students are given credit for a particular module in which they demonstrate competence; and in Learnerships candidates are admitted via RPL, but this is limited. Access to different courses is also controlled. For example, Trade Test candidates required 18 months on site experience. Artisan candidates doing the Competency Based Modular Training are appointed from industry. Learnership candidates have to possess the requisite experience or Grade 9/ ABET Level 4.

The new National Certificate Vocational (NCV) programmes do not as yet allow for RPL, however a screening/ placement assessment has recently been implemented to assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills due to high failure rates in the first year of NCV level 2 implementation. It should be noted that the NCV did not form part of this research paper as it was a new three year qualification only introduced in 2007.

The research found that different forms of assessment were done in the courses at Sea College. Within TT there were practical and observation assessments only.

A lecturer reported that:

> [RPL] is all practical only. The assessment/ practical is set up by the SETA they have a task, in this case……. We don't actually set up the task combination it is done by the SETA. We just facilitate while they are doing this. They supply us with the marksheet etc that we use. What I assess [the candidate on] depends on his task combination (Mr. Jansen, p.3).

Within Learnerships and CBMT it is a combination of practical and theory, as another lecturer explained:

> … it is a combination of demonstration and if the learner has done a specific work (Mr. Maart, p.13).

It seems though that RPL is more readily done within pre- Trade Test and CBMT because the administration is managed by the SETA as opposed to the part of the learnership which is handled by the college (Mr Cemp, p. 22). The argument for not incorporating RPL into the programmes managed by the FET colleges is that RPL is perceived as "more costly and time-consuming for the institution" (Mr. Maart, p. 13).

The research reveals that Trade Tests are similar to forms of RPL described by Osman (2003) in the Credit Exchange model. However there are some differences with the CBMT where learners are not allowed to progress though the module quicker on the basis of their prior learning. The Pre-Trade Test does however reflect a developmental component where learning gaps are identified, however very little support is given and candidates have to acquire these skills before attempting the Trade Test again. Though Learnerships allow for portfolio development which reflects the Developmental model of RPL (Osman 2003) candidates are still assessed in an instrumentalist way by undergoing placement assessments. The research reveals that RPL is used mainly as a form of screening of candidates into programmes rather than awarding credit for knowledge.

RPL Candidates

As mentioned previously, a limitation of this research was that the exact number of RPL candidates could not be quantified as no records were kept of candidates.

Responding to a question related to the profile of RPL candidates at the Mountain College, a respondent noted that RPL activities were limited to CBMT programmes that were linked to industry. In terms of RPL candidates he notes that "I think there was only one woman this year" and "African foreigners" (Mr. Akoojee, p. 49).

At Sea College, interviewees found it difficult to quantify the number of candidates given RPL assessments as they did not have the data. In addition, learners who are given access into programmes via RPL are not recorded as

such. Most of the respondents estimated that between 1 – 8% of learners entering into certain TT/ CBMT and learnership programmes did so through RPL. Respondents noted that they tried to avoid "RPL Stigma" (Mr. Cemp, p. 22) as it could be seen as being potentially discriminatory to have 'RPL' written next to the candidates name. Interviewees noted that RPL candidates were mostly older males and comprised a small number of a course intake.

For example:

> Look at this point in time in the engineering Learnerships I think we have close to about 90 students. Of these, as I said, [RPL candidates] is very few, [they are] about 1% maybe less (Mr. Maart, p.12).

Without a strategic process to target and accommodate marginalized communities, the RPL social justice objective of redress will not be achieved as noted by Harris (2000) and Hendricks (2001).

Challenges facing the Colleges in implementing RPL

Challenges faced by Mountain College included time and cost constraints. Several of the interviewees said that the costs to maintain the trade-testing often exceeded the revenue generated. In addition the cost of setting up a Trade Test center was prohibitively expensive, hence the lack of TT venues at campuses.

A lecturer explained:

> …..Use of manpower. (RPL) is not an ongoing process. It is dependent on learnerships as we do not yet have a TT centre. TT is also very expensive operation. You also have to depend on firms to send TT candidates. Who will do this? If you don't have a learnership it is not viable to do RPL (Mr. Heerden, p.36).

The nature of the assessment requires the development of portfolios of evidence which took a considerable time, expertise and cost which at colleges were not readily available:

> Resources, resources, resources which need money and time. Filing and admin. Capacity, costs and resources (Mr. Green, p. 30).

Mr. Green also noted that financial gain is not derived from RPL and TT per se but by the training that coincides with it:

> That is where we make our money, because at the end of the day there is no money in that [TT]. The resources that you are applying in terms of infrastructure and manpower, and the timeframe is not cost effective. The only way we can make something is when we can do the training side of it….. (p. 31).

He further indicates the unfairness of the education department's requirements if these are not supported with the necessary infrastructure perhaps including capacity building.

> We need capacity building, and money to cover costs and resources. Policy is laid down, all the big criteria but they got no clear guidelines as how we are to get and resource the people [involved in RPL] (Mr. Green, p.31).

When asked what Sea College found challenging about implementing RPL interviewees also stated capacity and cost constraints.

However, one respondent noted the challenges faced by workers.

> Sometimes we do RPL assessment on the site while he is working but then you can only assess him on the things he is busy with (Mr. Small p. 8).

Another lecturer mentioned the administration required for RPL assessment:

> At times it comes down to […] the documented proof of the learner of his prior learning and to say that "look I have done this, I have done that" and being able to verify that before getting into the RPL process. So documentary proof of prior learning is difficult to obtain and verify (Mr. Maart, p. 14).

There was a lack of detailed criteria and guidelines in policy. Although the SETAs in the study had RPL documents available for use, respondents expressed the need for a workable model to be demonstrated:

> No guidelines or use of a suitable model – No one can come up with a suitable model and that is one of the problems that we have. That is where the researchers should come in. Looking at finding a suitable model then look at way of how that can be implemented though policy. If the education department builds it within theory policies then they must provide the necessary infrastructure to implement (Mr. Green, p. 30).

This is supported by the works of Ryan (1996) and Mclaughlin (1998) who emphasise the need for clear policy directives to ensure effective implementation.

The above evidence suggests that limited capacity is a significant challenge at institution level inhibiting RPL implementation. This resource constraint includes knowledge about the process of how to administer RPL. The respondents stated that they will need systematic training, support and guidance both at an institutional level as well as at education department level.

4.2.4 RPL Implementation - Common themes

After reviewing the data certain common themes were found between the Mountain College and Sea College.

Pathways for RPL candidates

At the colleges in the study candidates who underwent RPL were able to proceed down one of three avenues. Firstly, they could complete the trade test and exit into the world of work with their Trade Test (TT) certificate.

Mr. Jansen stated:

> The Trade Test shows that he is qualified but it does not give the candidate access to the college, only the workplace. The Trade test assessment allows access to the world of work only and not for further study. The Qualification is awarded by the SETA. The qualification is offered at NQF level 5 but it is only the practical (p. 2).

Secondly, within Competency Based Modular Training (CBMT) they could be given credit for certain modules and could move through educational programmes faster.

A lecturer explained:

> So we will also do an RPL in that case and give them the credit if they sort of meet the standard so we don't do the training but we will do the RPL and say OK right you know that module so we will write that module off against your name and then carry on with the next module (Mr. Sylvester, p. 17).

Thirdly they could gain access to programmes like learnerships.

Mr. Maart noted:

> They can complete the learnerships. You have to go through the process (p. 13).

Candidates who were not successful with the pre-trade tests would be encouraged to return to the workplace to further their skills development while others would be encouraged to do a skills programme.

This was confirmed by Mr. Green:

> For unsuccessful learners [….] they can do training and go back to the workplace. In other words, it works in a cycle. Identify the weaknesses, do the training, go out and get the experience and then come back and join the queue. The only current way we are doing now. If you have a proper assessment process and see what the person is doing. The only thing is if you can keep his file (p. 29).

Generally the RPL process within public FET Colleges can be graphically represented as figure 1 below:

Figure 1
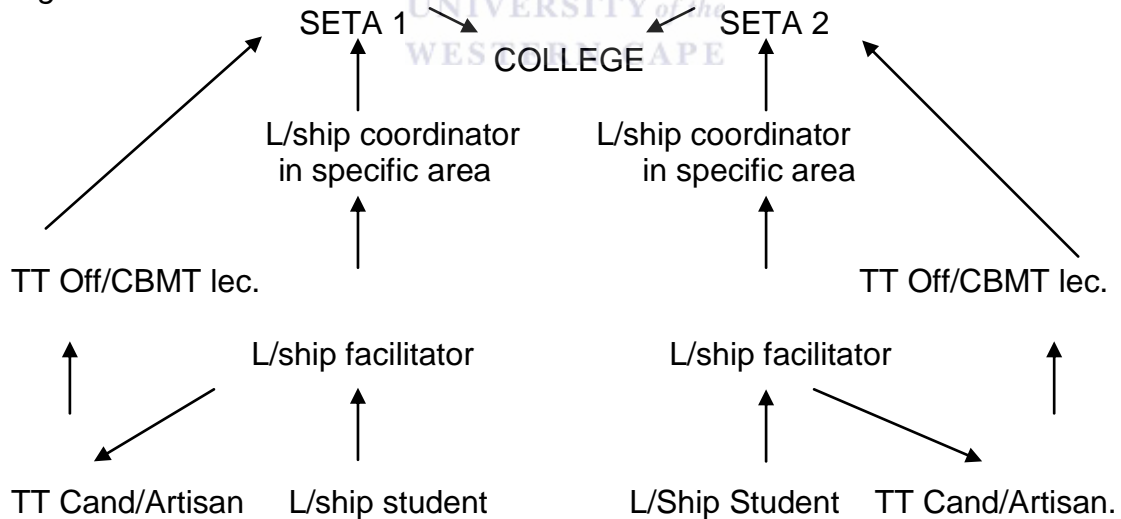
The upper section of the diagram reflects the reporting/ management structures. Learnership coordinators (L/Ship Coordinators), CBMT Lecturers (CBMT Lec) and Trade Test officials (TT Off) report directly to the relevant SETAs who have accredited the college to conduct the assessments.

A learnership student (L/ship student) could be placed through an RPL assessment onto a course by a learnership facilitator (L/ship facilitator). The learnership facilitator would then report to the learnership coordinator, who in turn would report to the ETQA official from the SETA. At the colleges visited, only industry-based candidates would be taken onto learnerships as cost recovery would be less problematic than for unemployed candidates. A successful learnership candidate could do a "Pre-trade test" to identify skills gaps and then do a section 28 Trade Test.

An artisan student (Artisan) doing a Competency Based Modular Training (CBMT) course is credited, through a RPL process, for modules in which they have experience. This is done by the CBMT lecturer. CBMT students are mostly referred to the College by industry.

Finally, section 28 Trade Test Candidate (TT Cand) could do a pre-trade test which is diagnostic and identifies skills gaps. Trade Test candidates are only referred to the College by the SETA. On this basis candidates can either be counseled and where possible referred for further training, or they are allowed to complete their trade test.

This is further elucidated in the table (Figure 2) below:

Figure 2	Artisan Training	Leanerships	Sect 28 T/Tests
Course	CMBT	Learnership	Trade Tests
Duration	120 weeks	23 weeks – 1 year	2.5 days
Costs*	Level +/- R 3000 Per Level – 4 level	R14 500 company. R150 Admin	R1300
Entry	Industry referral	Grade 9	Grade 9 / 18 months experience
Approx no of RPL Candidates	Sector 1:N/A** Sector 2: 10 / 100	Sector 1: N/A** Sector 2: 3 / 300	Sector 1: 10/ 85 Sector 2: 3/ 30
Form of RPL	Theory & Prac.	Prac./ Theory/ POE	Practical
Advantages	Reduced time	More Students	Reduced costs Increased revenue
Challenges	Declining numbers of students	Cost/ Admin Setting up systems	Cost of TT centres Cost to Candidates Low No. of Centres
Improvements	Awareness Programes	Improve transparency College wide Implementation Policy	Updates & support from SETAs

It is evident that the three options available as an RPL route have cost and time implications.

From the research it appears that the RPL which is done is either diagnostic in nature (pre-trade tests) or credit is awarded for certain skills or modules (Learnerships and CBMT).

In cases where RPL has been applied, it is evident that RPL candidates benefit in that they gain their qualification in a shorter time, which in turn reduces their financial costs. A respondent noted:

> They would be able to get credit for their module and would be able to get more on site experience but still have to do the 2 yr learnership. As they would finish the module sooner their chances of getting a job improves. This was the first time we did the learnership so we will know how to fast-track next time (Mr. Heerden, p.34).

Another respondent involved in CBMT stated:

> So we will also do an RPL in that case and give them the credit if they sort of meet the standard…… we will do the RPL and say OK right you know that module so we will write that module off against your name and then carry on with the next module. That type of thing so there is this RPL taking place (Mr. Sylvester, p.31).

The implementation of RPL was limited at the two colleges in the study

As stated earlier under limitations, the researcher could not quantify the number of RPL candidates as their details were not recorded. The lack of institutional records seems to indicate that the RPL will not become a priority for colleges.

Despite the lack of institutional records related to RPL candidates, interviewees noted that a very small number of students did gain access to programmes through institutional RPL services. The respondents estimated

that approximately 1 to 8% of the student population within learnerships made use of RPL services (Mr. Maart, p. 12; Mr. Heerden, p. 34). It must be emphasised that these figures are estimates, as evident in the statement below:

> This is difficult to say but from the learnerships we had 85 students that we get I would say around 10 would be RPLed or 8% (Mr. Heerden, p. 34).

At the colleges, there were traditional RPL practices in Trade Testing (TT) and Competency Based Modular Training (CBMT). Trade Testing and CBMT had a historical link to Sea College as it had trade testing centres. Mountain College was in the process of seeking accreditation to establish a Trade Test Centre.

However, very little has changed in TT, CBMT and Learnerships as Mr. Green explained:

> The more things change the more they remain the same. This applies to Trade Testing…. the same old processes apply (p. 30).
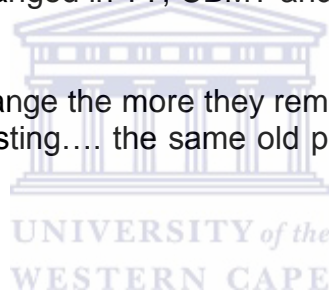
Mr. Julie added that

> ….but in one sense, when [there is] one has a one size fits all kind of assessment and questions, we often exclude other skills and knowledge (p. 58).

The view that nothing has changed, including the method of assessment, suggests that the RPL process used may not be transformative.

The evidence reinforces Blom's (2007) assertion of policy symbolism as well as McLaughlin's (1978) position that promising policy initiatives depend on what happens as individuals in the system interpret and act on them.

Loss of expertise in TT and CBMT

Even though the RPL capacity was generally low at FET colleges, the capacity was further eroded by the high staff turnover at colleges. Consequently there was a loss of RPL expertise which has also been the

experience in the SETAs. There has been a loss of key RPL expertise in some colleges as a result of restructuring, as this respondent explained:

> Well firstly as I have mentioned before, we have serious capacity problems (Mr. Cemp, p. 24).

As already mentioned the FET colleges do not have a strategy and/or plan to systematically train their staff involved in RPL. This together with the loss of existing RPL expertise will have a significant impact on the continued implementation of RPL at college level.

Cost of RPL

RPL carries a high cost to the institution. Most of the respondents mentioned that the cost of resourcing of testing centres and employing staff costs was high.

"[RPL] is a very expensive process" was the comment of several of the interviewees. The costs in both human and capital resources make RPL potentially "unsustainable". Mr. Sylvester noted that "We are struggling to cover our costs" (p. 20). Mr. Green noted that the high capital cost of setting up a TT venue was prohibitive and that he was in conversation with the SETA to find funding:

> Resources, resources, resources which need money and time. Filing and admin. Not completing the qualification. Capacity, costs and resources (p. 30).

Consequently there are prohibitive costs to learners. Other researchers including Luckett (1999) and Ryan (1996) have noted that learners carry significant costs when requesting RPL especially in the low skills segment of the economy. Many low skilled contract workers preferred to be Trade Tested as learnerships are viewed as burdensome because of their long duration and cost. RPL candidates would often not be supported by their employees and would lose a days' wages in traveling to the Trade Test venues, although some College Trade Test officials go to the work site to assess the learners: as stated by Mr. Small:

> …..but the problem is that they don't get any remuneration when they come for RPL. The companies don't pay them for that. Sometimes we do RPL assessment on the site while he is working but then you can only assess him on the things he is busy with (Mr. Small, p. 8).

There are two types of Trade Test Centres in South Africa. The Olifantsfontein Trade Test centre for example is state-subsidized as opposed the Public FET college TT centres which are more expensive. In addition, there are a limited number of learners per year at FET Colleges, which affects the viability of some of the centres.

 Mr. Cemp explained:

> The problem is that most of FET colleges are I would regard as being private. I mean they are being run like businesses with management structures. Therefore trade testing is more expensive (R1360). The strange thing is that Olifantsfontein which is public is cheaper (R200). But there is a downside as with anything public is that though it is cheaper, candidates have to find their way there and the waiting list and waiting time is long (p. 25).

This is consistent with the literature on RPL which suggests that the cost issue is arguably one of the primary reasons for the non take-up of RPL (Luckett 1999, Ryan 1996). This study has shown that the financial costs related to RPL implementation might contribute to FET colleges not offering RPL services.

4.2.5 RPL and Social Justice

There was little evidence of social justice intentions in college RPL practices. Mountain College respondents noted that they offered RPL to those referred to them by the SETAs for trade testing or they target those already employed in learnerships or they have CBMT artisans sent to them by industry. Though acknowledging the importance of social justice to redress past inequalities, the recruitment system and financial and time constraints prevented them from a targeted approach.

Mr. Green from Mountain College explained:

> The only thing is in terms of the redress issue RPL can only be applied if a person can't get into the process, it is not an issue in terms of colour. If he qualifies to get into the programme then it will be implemented. If only it was built into the programme (p. 32).

Another lecturer noted:

> We don't target coloureds and blacks. We are open to anyone who approaches our college (Mr. Julie, p. 59).

The respondents noted that the challenge to increase the social justice intentions of RPL was at the level of implementation.

Respondents from Sea College confirmed that though social justice imperatives were important, they took whoever was available and did not specifically target previously disadvantaged people. Resourcing was a key concern and without sufficient resources, achieving social justice would be difficult.

A respondent noted:

> We work with the hand we have been dealt. If a learner is competent in fulfilling a certain task we will RPL that person (Mr. Maart, p. 15).

Within the literature reviewed, writers, notably Harris (2000) as well as Ralphs and Hendricks (2001) and Luckett (1999), express social justice, as the need for inclusivity and redress. Neal (1996) emphasizes the needs for agency and lobbying in order to ensure the success of policy initiatives. In addition to ensuring that it exists in the policies, institutions also need to translate these objectives within the curriculum and assessment processes.

4.2.6 Improving RPL Policy and Practice

From the interviews a number of suggestions were offered to improve College RPL Policies and Practice. These can be grouped in four broad themes:

Firstly on policy, the respondents requested that a uniform set of RPL implementation guidelines be published. This would allow for consistent implementation of RPL across the colleges.

Mr. Akoojee explained:

A system of guidelines would help the system (p. 54).

Mr. Maart concured:

I think that we need to set up the criteria clearly where you can categorise certain things up front. This will allow for more transparency and learners would be guided as to what they require. This would make our job easier (p. 15).

Secondly on practice respondents requested more Trade Test Centres and Training in RPL.

On Trade Test Centres a respondent noted:

…Having a TT centre we can then really get into RPL and get candidates in learnerships quicker (Mr. Heerden, p. 36).

On access to more training an RPL practitioner noted that:

I wished that I could get update workshops from the SETAs when things changed (Mr. Jansen, p. 4).

Both of these areas are important to promote access to more people and by allowing lecturers to get training in new RPL methods.

Thirdly an analysis of the data reveals that though Social Justice is acknowledge by respondents as being important, many stated that it was difficult to implement. However respondents indicated that things had to change and new knowledges and skills needed to be recognized.

Mr. Julie noted that:

We must be careful of a one size fits all test. We must remember that it depends on what your candidate is graded on and what you are looking for. We also need to consider what the job market will be like a few years from now and not just next month (p. 58).

The Radical/Transformative Model (Osman 2003) proposes alternative views of what constitutes knowledge and how these can be assessed. One of these is the notion of group/ community learning and how this can be assessed. Though no evidence of this approach was found during the research, Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of communities of practice becomes an important catalyst in validating existing knowledge while encouraging improvement in RPL practice by the lecturers.

The potential for RPL to improve the social standing of the individual rather than industry was also noted.

Mr. Akoojee explained:

> RPL will definitely improve the person, there is a chance for the person to become qualified, it will lift his social standing and everything else from there (p. 54).

Finally some respondents suggested that the system could be encouraged to accommodate RPL candidates though vigorous promotion and partenerships.

Mr. Cemp noted:

> I think we need to publish and publicize RPL more widely. Every person has some skill and we need to award this. I also think that we need to address capacity and readiness issues of institutions, SETAs and companies to address and accept RPL (p. 25).

The above-mentioned responses highlight the need for RPL to be seen as an integral part of public knowledge, institutional identity and practice within colleges. Harris (2000) refers to a "Bolt-on-Approach" to RPL implementation whereby RPL is an add-on process, peripheral to other processes within the institution. The research confirms that this is the case but this approach needs to change in order for colleges to achieve the RPL objectives set out in their policies.

4.3 Discussion

The critical theory frame a which this investigation was framed allowed for a critical investigation of the state of RPL practices within FET Colleges, particularly as it relates to the social justice intentions of access and redress. Relating the research findings to Habermasian notions of System and Lifeworld reveals an interesting dialectic between the lecturers' "lifeworld" understandings of RPL and the institutional "system" implementation thereof. Though the lecturers acknowledged the social justice intentions of access and redress during the interviews they spoke of how the systemic issues, such as the lack of resources and time and administration constraints, were impinging on their ability achieve these outcomes.

Within the RPL discourse there has been a shift in the language used. The initial radical, emancipatory notions of RPL have shifted to neoliberal RPL conceptions of instrumentalism and deficit modeling both within policy and practice as been observed. Observation of a few of the RPL instruments used revealed that English was the only language used. In addition, all of the interviewed RPL practitioners being either English or Afrikaans speaking, would have presented challenges to RPL candidates who did not speak these languages yet were assessed in them. As language is the carrier of knowledge and skills, its use can either allow for the emancipation or the exclusion of the candidate who is perceived to have a knowledge/skills deficit.

Analysis of the research data found that although the social justice objectives of access (inclusiveness) and redress (emancipation) objectives were encapsulated within the college RPL policies, they were not being specifically addressed. The implementation process did not particularly target the previously disadvantaged, women or the disabled when recruiting RPL candidates.

Very little has changed in terms of RPL processes. The same assessment methods are being used by RPL practitioners who have been in the system for many years. This tends to result in instrumentalist approaches to RPL.

From the review of the RPL models researched by Osman (2003), the following has been found. The Credit Exchange model underpinned by Human Capital Theory characterises the practice of "Pre Trade" Testing and Competency Modular Based Training (CBMT) at FET colleges. However credit is given by allowing the successful pre-trade test candidate to sit for the Section 28 Trade Test. The CBMT allows for credit to be given for the completion of a module on the basis that the student already has the requisite knowledge and skills. Most RPL practices were instrumentalist. No evidence of the radical approach to RPL was found. This shows that disjuncture between the political RPL goals of access and redress in policy and the RPL practices which are implemented. This reflects what Blom 2007 refers to as "Policy Symbolism".

The Developmental Model underpinned by Liberal Humanism is presently adopted by learnerships and skills programmes within FET colleges, which includes an emphasis on portfolio development and assessment centredness. However administrative overload of the RPL processes, particularly in learnerships, is one of the challenges experienced in the colleges.

The Radical Transformative Model underpinned by Critical Theory where assessment takes the form of focus groups, collages, debate, dialogue, narrative and life histories, sharing and reciprocity also play an important role, is not evident within FET colleges. Its inclusion would promote a more holistic approach to RPL.

From the literature and the data it appears that RPL occurs along a continuum as reflected in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3

Placement Assessment		Assessment on Demand
Access RPL	Evidence RPL	Redress RPL

<--->

The challenge is to find the most feasible and cost effective ways to conduct RPL. In many FET colleges RPL is seen as a placement instrument (Access RPL) which is conducted at the beginning or end of an academic year or course. For CBMT and learnerships this may allow learners access to a course or may allow them to be given credit for a particular module. In trade-tests this is done via a "Pre-Trade Tests" to enable the assessor to identify gaps and allow candidates a chance to remedy these.

The evidence shows varying conceptions of RPL. These are based on the "lifeworld" of the RPL practitioner and on practices which were prevalent in the former Technical College "system" (Habermas 1984). This system was shaped by policies that were often not adequately resourced, hence constraining RPL practitioners in promoting a more radical approach to RPL. Though social justice objectives were acknowledged in the interviews, this did not often translate into practice.

In summary, the analysis of the RPL policies found that the RPL policies of both the SETAs and colleges are generic allowing for flexibility in implementation. With the exception of one SETA, there is not much detail in the implementation guidelines. Articulation and credit transfer guidelines in the policies are mentioned but not elaborated on. The promotion of social justice through access, redress and inclusion is mentioned in the policies but how it is to be implemented is not detailed. Finally, guidelines on how access will happen, or a model for implementation at college level, are not specified.

Qualitative data revealed the following RPL practices within the colleges. It was found that RPL is being implemented at colleges but on a limited basis within defined programmes such as Trade Tests, Competency Based Modular Training and Learnerships. RPL was applied in an instrumentalist way within FET colleges and exists on the periphery of the college focus rather than being integrated into its systems. It was found that RPL is linked to historical practices within the Trade Test and apprenticeship paradigm (CBMT) where much has remained the same over the years. No records are kept of candidates admitted to programmes via RPL. Practitioners cite high cost

barriers to the institution and learners. Some RPL practitioners have not seen or do not know of their college RPL policies. Finally, the social justice objectives of access and redress, are understood to comprise fast-tracking the candidate through the course and assisting the candidate to get a job.

The findings from the research have confirmed the positions on policy implementation noted in the literature. It was noted, for example that the policy debates on RPL have their origins in conflicting definitions of RPL and differing practices within a changing institutional context. The literature on policy implementation reveals that although policies are implemented, dominant discourses, such as human capital theory, may undermine their original intent. This is evident from the data that a human capital /instrumentalist approach to RPL is practiced in the colleges.

The research has highlighted the need for support in the implementation of RPL policy. This concurs with the position of McLaughlin (1998) and Sabatier (1999) that a vital component of the successful implementation of RPL is the support given to the RPL practitioners both institutionally, and within the policy environment, to adapt to changing programmes and socio economic conditions. This supports the arguments of Hendricks (2001), Sooklal (2004) and McLaughlin (1998).

The literature and research emphasizes that policy needs be user friendly in order for it to be effectively implemented. In addition it needs to be institutionally supported allowing for the convergence of the "lifeworld" of the practitioner and the "system" of the institution.

Research has also found that the social justice objectives of access and redress were limited in the way RPL was implemented at colleges and it functioned on the periphery of the colleges focus. This supports the view of Hendricks (2001) and Harris (2000) that the location of RPL within the educational discourse and institutional policies will affect its implementation.

It is however acknowledged in the literature and in the research, that policies are key drivers of social projects and can ensure adequate resources and time are made available to projects for them to achieve their goals.

RPL practice cannot be seen in isolation. It reflects pre-existing conditions that have not changed for a variety of reasons, some of which are reflected in this paper. To change the practice to reflect the policy intentions of access and redress will require both the political will to recognise and support RPL and concomitant resourcing to achieve this required outcome.

4.4 Concluding remarks

Though policy makes provision for RPL there are several constraints that inhibit its implementation. These revolve mainly around capacity, cost and complexity, which invariably impact on the aims of the policies to promote social justice and allow for access and redress.

In the section 5 the findings and recommendations are discussed together with implications for further study.
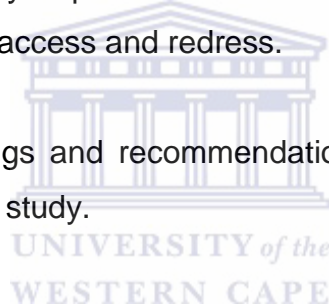
SECTION 5: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this section a summary of the key findings is presented. Recommendations for further research are proposed.

This research paper set out to investigate how two FET colleges understand and implement RPL in the light of the policy objectives of access and redress. Though these recommendations are drawn from the two FET colleges, further research is needed to ascertain whether these findings generalizable.

5.2 Findings: Policy, Practice and Social Justice

Using a critical theory frame and a Habermasian perspective in this research has revealed has revealed the following:

Within the ambit of RPL policy this study reveals that although social justice objectives are stated, implementation is inhibited by a variety of factors. While policy highlights the need for RPL as a vehicle for access and redress to those disadvantaged by apartheid, the means of implementation and how its resourced are lacking. College RPL policies were not specifically known to most of the respondents yet they framed institutionally the way RPL was implemented.

With regard to college practices, the study found that RPL was conducted in an instrumentalist fashion often through standardized tests which learners had to pass. This is concomitant with a Human Capital theoretical approach. The study also found that RPL implementation in the colleges is limited and based on old Technical College assessment methods that have not changed over the years. Functioning on a deficit model, RPL candidates are required to meet certain criteria in order to gain access or credit towards a qualification. From the research it appears that the respondents were not emancipated, as their lifeworld is linked to historical RPL practices reinforced by the college system. Emancipation from this according to Habermas will only occur when rationality is brought about by communicative action, based on an

understanding of the dynamics of language and knowledge. An enabling system would allow the lifeworld experience of the lecturer to be transformed and for new transformative RPL methodologies to be applied.

The study found that the social justice objectives of access and redress, though appearing in RPL policies, nationally and within the colleges, were not implemented effectively. Though respondents had an understanding of RPL as well as social justice intentions of access and redress, they acknowledged that they were constrained by a number of factors including resourcing. This reinforces the widely held belief that policy symbolism within RPL abounds. At present deficit modeling of RPL places the marginalised at a disadvantage, with access and redress impeded by inadequate resourcing.

5.3 Recommendations: Improving RPL implementation

From the analysis of the data the following policy suggestions on RPL were proposed by respondents:

Recommendation 1: Develop uniform RPL guidelines across colleges
Implement a college-wide policy that would allow colleges to implement RPL in a more standardized way. From an initial scoping exercise the study found that most colleges in the province either had RPL polices not in the public domain (2 colleges) or were in the process of completing their policies (4 colleges). The need for uniform and user-friendly policies is vital to ensure effective RPL implementation. (McLaughlin, 1998)

Recommendation 2: Integrate/ develop RPL articulation and credit awarding processes more explicitly within College assessment policies
From the research gathered, current RPL practice does not allow for formal credit awarding in respect of courses offered at the colleges. The study has found that the use of RPL within the selected colleges was only for access to particular courses. Ways need to be found to integrate RPL assessment within the assessment regime of the college to allow for access and recognition of the candidates skills and knowledge as well as the awarding of

credits. The study asserts the importance of this form of integration to avoid policy symbolism.

Recommendation 3: Move RPL from a peripheral exercise to one integrated into practices of the two colleges

Analysis of the interviews revealed that a key focus of the two colleges is the delivery of the new NCV curricula which are based on broad exit-level outcomes that make RPL difficult to implement. Occupational programmes, though important sources of income generation, are peripheral to the colleges' current mandate. Comments from RPL practitioners reveal that some unsuccessful Pre-Trade Test candidates often entered a skills programme at the colleges because they could then gain funding from the SETAs as a source of income. As mentioned previously, policy must allow for the integration of RPL within the institutional framework.

Recommendation 4: Encourage Public Private Partnerships (PPP) between the two FET colleges and private providers to address the shortage of skilled RPL assessors

Such partnerships could be further enhanced by creating synergies to address capacity constraints. For example, public FET colleges could focus on their key strengths in fundamentals and Trade Testing / CBMT and RPL these areas, while private providers could look at RPL in specialist technical areas. This would increase access to RPL services to a wider community at lower cost as economies of scale becomes achievable.

Recommendation 5: Integration of Social Justice beyond policy

Though respondents recognized the need for social justice and it is one of the stated purposes of RPL policy, it needs to be integrated in the institutional system of the two colleges. This integration will facilitate the implementation of the policy intentions of social justice. This finding supports the position on the need to have policy integrated within the institutional practice of educational institutions.

Analysis of the research data around practice suggests the following to improve RPL provision.

Recommendation 5: Recognise different forms of knowledge within RPL

There is an emergent view amongst some RPL practitioners that current RPL practices could not remain the same and that RPL processes within the colleges needed to take the candidates' knowledge, skills and language into account. The research concurs with the view that new conceptions of knowledge need to be taken into account for RPL to be transformative.

Recommendation 6: Reduce costs/ Increase resourcing

The access and redress intentions of RPL are affected by cost constraints. Interviews revealed that costs associated with RPL were high and often prohibitive for the two colleges and candidates. The interviewees noted that it was important that RPL processes become sustainable. Interviews conducted also revealed that there was only one state-sponsored Trade Test (TT) centre, in Olifantsfontein, while the rest were "privatized" in FET colleges. Candidates often had to pay for TT out of pocket and lose a day's wages to undergo the TT, hence the need to have increased funding for TT/RPL centres. Policy should provide leverage to access resources, acceptance and development of RPL.

Recommendation 7: Increase the number of TT/RPL centres.

At the time of writing there is only one accredited TT venue in the metropolitan area. Lecturers suggested that having more TT centers would allow more RPL candidates to be assessed. Resource and structural constraints impinge on the rate and efficacy of policy implementation and would need to be addressed. More centres would be one way of addressing this problem as they would allow for easier access by communities close by.

Recommendation 8: Reduce complexity.

One of the learnership coordinators mentioned the importance of informing potential candidates, in advance, of the requirements of RPL policy. This would allow potential candidates to be better prepared for the RPL process.

Recommendation 9: Train new RPL practitioners and upskill existing ones.

The two colleges in the study had capacity challenges. Some of the lecturers involved in RPL were close to retirement or had been recently appointed. This could lead to the loss of RPL expertise. In addition others were involved in learnerships, skills programmes, lecturing and trade testing which resulted in significant time pressures which could affect the number of RPL candidates that are assessed. Ways need to be found to train new lecturers in specialist fields so that they can conduct RPL. Established RPL practitioners need to be trained in assessing candidates in new fields/ methods. RPL implementation relies on the expertise and political will of institution-based assessment and programme teams to validate the learning and admit the candidate to further learning experiences.

Recommendation 10: Address RPL stigma

It was not possible to obtain exact figures from the two colleges and the SETAs as to how many RPL candidates they had admitted to courses, as information about RPL candidates is not recorded. One of the reasons given was that an "RPL stigma" that could lead to discrimination. An option could be that the credit awarded through successful RPL, is recorded. This would allow for better data to quantify the extent to which RPL is being applied and it would also serve to promote the access and redress objectives of RPL.

Recommendation 11: Recording and feedback

Though all colleges have a Quality Management System (QMS) that governs the assessment process, the research found that in the experience of a funded pilot, RPL process does not necessarily feed into the assessment system. The writing up of new RPL practices needs to be encouraged to feed best practice examples into the system and to develop RPL communities of practice.

Recommendation 12: Promote RPL through the SETAs and colleges

The SETAs and some of the lecturers noted that people did not know about RPL and that there was a need to advocate it.

5.4 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this research paper has both confirmed a few assumptions as well as raised unexpected findings. The acknowledgment and inclusion of the Habermasian "Lifeworld" experience of the RPL practitioner and their practice within the institutional and policy "System" is inextricably linked to how the emancipatory objectives and redress within RPL will be achieved. If the lifeworld of the RPL candidate and practitioner does not find expression within the system, domination of one form of knowledge and not emancipation from it, will occur.

The data reveals that support for RPL needs to extend beyond policy and needs to be done in a sustainable manner. This paper has argued that RPL holds much potential for addressing some of the current challenges but faces many stumbling blocks including political will, as well as financial and human resource capacity. In order for RPL to achieve the policy intentions of access and redress, implementation strategies need to be adequately resourced and funded so that RPL policies have their design objectives reflected in practice.

5.5 Implications for further study

The initial intention of this research paper was to investigate the RPL practices within two FET colleges and how these relate to RPL policies.

This research paper has found that within RPL there is a disjuncture between policy intentions and implemented practice. From a Habermasian lens it can be asked, what enhances or inhibits implementation and practice? Is it the "lifeworld" of the practitioner or the "system" of the policy environment and institutional structure? Though this paper has attempted to provide a sketch of these two environments it has not gone into a detailed analysis of the space between the "lifeworld" and "system" within the context of RPL to see how these environments can be shaped to promote and implement access and redress.

Four areas where further research can be conducted are suggested in this research.

First, this research paper shows that there are differing conceptions of RPL. Although there seems to be a generic conceptual understanding of what RPL is, as well as its social justice intentions of access and redress, the practice suggests something else. Further research could investigate how conceptual understanding impacts on practice.

Second, this research shows that policy intentions do not necessarily translate into practice. Policy intentions are often limited due to prevailing systemic conditions that are not fully understood and addressed in the policy development process. This often results in policy symbolism (Blom, 2007). Further research could focus on best practice of RPL policy development that has exemplified effective implementation within a public FET system.

Third, with respect to practice, FET colleges provide a potential platform for the massification of RPL implementation. Local and international models show that this requires political will and substantial support. Research could investigate how public-private partnership models, some of which exist as pilots within South Africa, have been implemented to take RPL projects to scale.

Finally, this research paper has not particularly investigated learner experiences of RPL. Further research could explore the learning experiences of learners admitted to programmes though RPL and how such admission has influenced his/her life-chances.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

African National Congress. Reconstruction and Development Programme; a Policy Framework (1994). African National Congress. Retrieved from http://www.anc.org.za/rdp/index.html (Downloaded March 2008)

Barker, K. (2001). *Sustainability and Efficiency of Prior Learning Assessment in British Columbia's Public Post-Secondary Education System,* British Columbia: Ministry of Advanced Education and the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology.

Blom R. (2007). *The Ideal of an Integrated National Qualifications Framework.* Doctoral Thesis. University of Pretoria. Retrieved from http://upetd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-06192007-123414/unrestricted/00front.pdf (Downloaded December 2007)

Bolton, R. E. (2005). *Habermas's Theory Of Communicative Action And The Theory Of Social Capital* (paper read at meeting of Association of American Geographers, Denver, Colorado, April 2005)

Borman, J., and Rehg, W. (2007). *Jurgen Habermas.* Stanford encyclopedia of Philosophy © Metaphysics Research Lab, CSLI, Stanford University (Downloaded February 2007)

Brookfield, S.D. (2005). *Power of Critical Theory: Liberating Adult Learning and Teaching.* Open University Press

CAEL Forum Conference (2007). Transformation through Life Long Learning. *http://www.cael.org/Conference_07/Presentations/Do%20you%20know%20your%20worth.pdf (*Downloaded 27 Feb 2008)

Centre for Curriculum Transfer and Technology (2001). *Prior Learning Assessment Performance in British Columbia 2000/2001 Annual Report,* Victoria: Centre for Curriculum Transfer and Technology and British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education.

Cleary, P., Whittacker, R. and Gallacher, J. (2001). *Social Inclusion through APEL: the Learners' Perspective. National Report for Scotland,* Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University.

Cooper, L. (1998). From Rolling Mass Action to RPL ' The Changing Discourse of experience and learning in the South African Labour Market, *Studies in Continuing Education* Vol. 27 No 1 p. 143 - 157

Congress for South African Trade Unions (2000). *Recognition of Prior learning. Learning and work series.* Johannesburg: COSATU, Supported by GTZ

COSATU. Z Vavi Speech at the ETDP SETA, (2006) http://www.cosatu.org.za/speeches/2006/zv20060914.htm

(Downloaded June 2008)

Cretchley, G., & Castle, J. (2001). OBE RPL and Adult Education. Good Bedfellows in HE in South Africa? *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 20(6): 497 Retrieved from http:// www.el.uct.ac.za 29 January 2004 (Downloaded 27 Feb 2008)

Department of Education (1995). South African Qualifications Authority Act No 58 of 1995 Government Gazette No.1521 http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=70978 (Downloaded January 2008)

Department of Education Government (1998). Regulations under the SAQA Act, promulgated as Notice R452. Government Gazette No. 18787, Pretoria, South Africa.

Department of Education (1998). Further Education and Training Act No. 98 of 1998. Government Gazette No. 19421. Retrieved from http:// www.info.gov.za/gazette/acts/2006/a16-06.pdf (Downloaded January 2008)

Department of Labour (1998). Skills Development Act No 97 of 1998 Government Gazette No. 19420 Retrieved from http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=70755 (Downloaded January 2008)

Department of Education, (2002). *Report of the Study Team on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework*. Pretoria: Department of Education and Department of Labour: Government Printer.

Department of the Treasury (1996). Growth Employment and Redistribution, A Macroeconomic Strategy. *South African Government Information.* Retrieved from http://www.treasury.gov.za/publications/other/gear/chapters.pdf (Downloaded June 2008)

Department of Education Employment and Work Relations (2009). E portfolios for RPL Assessment; Key Findings on current engagement in the VET sector, Final report Retrieved from http://pre2005.flexiblelearning.net.au/newsandevents/E-portfolios_for_RPL_Assessment_Final_190309.pdf (Downloaded May 2009)

Dryzek, J S. (1995). "Critical Theory As a Research Program," in Stephen K. White, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, 97-119. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fischer, F. (2007). *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis.* CRC Press

Fenwick, T. (2001). *Experiential Learning: A theoretical Critique from five Perspectives.* Information Series No. 385. University of Alberta.

Foster, J. (1989). *Planning in the face of power*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Friere, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum Books.

Giroux, H. (1997). *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture, and schooling.* Boulder, CO: Westview.

Groener, Z. (2000). The Political and Social Contexts of Adult Education and Training in South Africa in Indabawa, S. *et al* (eds.) *The State of Adult and Continuing Education in Africa.* Namibia: DVV/University of Namibia. pp. 161-172.

Habermas, J. (1984). *Reason and the Rationalization of Society, Volume 1 of The Theory of Communicative Action.* English translation by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press (originally published in German in 1981).

Habermas, J. (1987). *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason, Volume 2 of The Theory of Communicative Action.* English translation by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press (originally published in German in 1981).

Harris, J. (2000). *The Recognition of Prior Learning, Poverty, Pedagogy & Possibility*. HSRC Press.

Hendricks, M.N. (2001). *The Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher education: the case of the University of the Western Cape.* M.Ed Dissertation. University of the Western Cape

Hendricks, M.N. (2009). *Rethinking transformative Recognition of Prior Learning: The need to reclaim and elevate everyday knowledge/s*. Seminar concept paper, University of the Western Cape. (September 2009)

Hendricks, M.N. & Ralphs, A. (2003). *RPL: Building A Quality Model For Access To Higher Education By Non-Traditional Learners In South Africa*. Paper was originally presented at the 15th International Conference on Assessing Quality in Higher Education, University of the Western Cape, South Africa, 14-16 July 2003.

Irving, G. (2002). Personal email communication 23 August, 2002, Deputy Principal, Edinburgh's Telford College, Crewe Toll, Edinburgh

Kellner, D. (1989). *Towards a Critical Theory of Education*
Retrieved from http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty /kellner/kellner.html
(Downloaded 2007)

Kellner, D. (1989). *Critical Theory Today: Revisiting the Classics*
Retrieved from http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty /kellner/kellner.html
(Downloaded 2007)

Kellner, D. and Lewis, T. (2007). *Liberal Humanism and the European Critical Tradition.* Sage Publications

Kincheloe, J.L. (2001) Critical Theory And The Moral Dimension: Emancipation, Complexity And Power. *Qualitative Inquiry* 7, 6, pp.679-92.

Knight, B. (2006)*. Assessment for recognition of prior learning in technical and vocational education and training in Australia: where to from here?* Brian Knight National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd 1. Retrieved from http://www.iaea2006.seab.gov.sg/conference/download/papers/.pdf (Downloaded March 2007)

Labour Force Survey (2007). Retrieved from http://www.statssa.gov.za/keyindicators/lfs.asp (Downloaded March 2008)

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Luckett, K. (1999). Ways of Recognising Prior Learning in rural development workers *South African Journal of Higher Education* Vol 13 No 2 pp 68-81 Retrieved from http://ahero.uwc.ac.za/index.php?module=cshe&action=downloadfile&fileid=8 1806115511749893398718 (Downloaded February 2008)

Mayet, A. (2006). *Strengthening Education for all South Africa through RPL.* JET Education Services. Retrieved from http://www.cael.org/Forum_and_News/recognition_prior_learning_south_afric a.htm (Downloaded February 2008)

Merriam, S. (2009). Qualitative Research: A guide to design and implementation pg 265 – 267. Retrieved from http://www.books.google.co.za/books?isbn=0470283548 (Downloaded March 2010)

McGrath, S. (2004). *Shifting Understandings of Skills in South Africa: Overcoming the historical imprint of a low skills regime.* McGrath,S., Badroodien, A., Kraak, A, & Unwin, L. (eds). Retrieved from http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/product.php?productid=2040&freedownload=1 (Downloaded February 2008)

McLaughlin, M.W. (1998). *Listening and Learning from the field: Tales of Policy implementation and Situated Practice.* In A. Hargreaves et al (eds), International handbook on educational change (Part One). Amsterdam. Kluwer Academic Publishers

Merrill, B. (2001). Social Inclusion Through APEL: The Learner's Perspective. *National Report for England,* Department of Continuing Education, University of Warwick.

Michelson, E. (1996). Beyond Galileo's Telescope: Situated Knowledge and the Assessment of Experiential Learning. *Adult Education Quarterly* 46, 185-196.

Moore, A. and Van Rooyen, L. (2002). Recognition of Prior Learning as an Integral Component of Competence –based Assessment in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education.* 22 (4)

Myers, M.D. (2001). Qualitative Research in information Systems*,* Retrieved from wysiwyg://15http://www2.auckland.ac.nz/msis/isworld*/.* (Downloaded Feb 2008)

Nuyen, A.T. (1998). The Politics of Emancipation: From Self to Society. *Kluwer Academic Publishers.*

Olaniyan, D.A., and Okemakinde, T., (2008). Human Capital Theory: Implications for Educational Development. *European Journal of Scientific research* (p. 157- 162)

Osman, R. (2003). *The recognition of prior learning (RPL): An emergent field of enquiry in South Africa.* Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Witwatersrand

Pandor, N. Address by the Minister of Education, at WCED FET Mountain Collegechiever Awards, Cape Town, 19 November 2007. Retrieved from http://www.education.gov.za/dynamic/dynamic.aspx?pageid=306&id=6882 (Downloaded December 2007)

Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic Imperialism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Powell, J.L. and Moody, H.R. (2003). The Challenge of Modernity: Habermas and Critical Theory Retrieved from http://theoryandscience.icaap.org/content/vol4.1/01_powell.html (Downloaded January 2008)

Rawls, J. (1996). *Political Liberalism*; Columbia University Press

Roderick, R. (1986). *Habermas and the Foundations of Critical Theory*, London: Macmillan

Ryan, N. (1996). A comparison of three approaches to programme implementation. International Journal of Public Sector Management, Vol. 9 No. 4 1996, pp. 34-41. © MCB University Press, 0951-3558. Retrieved from http://www.emeraldinsight.com/Insight/ViewContentServlet?Filename=Published/EmeraldFullTextArticle/Pdf/0420090404.pdf (Downloaded 2008)

Sabatier, P. (1999) *Theories of the Policy Process*. Westview Press.

Sakamoto, A., & Powers, D.A. (1995). Education and the dual labour market for Japanese men. *American Sociological Review*. 60 (2) pp. 222-246.

Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC), (1992). *Flexibility in Assessment: The Report of the Accreditation of Prior Learning II Project*, January, Glasgow: SCOTVEC.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) (2000). *Case Studies on Best Practice in Accreditation of Prior Learning*, Glasgow: SQA

Seale, C. (Ed.) (2004). *Researching Society and Culture*. London: Sage (Second Edition).

Simosko, S. (2000). Towards A Learning Province: Recognizing and Crediting Learning in British Columbia. A Vision for Prior Learning Assessment in the 21st century*, Victoria: Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology and the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology.*

Shultz, T.W. (1971). *Investment in Human Capital*. New York. The Free Press.

Sooklal, S.S. (2004). *The structural and cultural constraints of policy implementation: A Case study on FET colleges in South Africa*. The University of Pretoria

South African Government (2006). Accelerated and Shared Growth initiatve for South Africa (AsgiSA), *South African Government Information.* Retrieved from http://www.info.gov.za/asgisa/asgisa.htm (Downloaded December 2008)

South African Government (2006a). Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), *South African Government Information.* Retrieved from http://www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2006/jipsa.pdf (Downloaded March 2008)

South African Qualifications Authority (2002)*. The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework*. Policy Document. Pretoria: SAQA.

South African Qualifications Authority, (2004). *Criteria and Guideline for the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning* .Pretoria: SAQA.

Tripp, D.H. (1992). Critical theory and educational research. Issues in educational research, 2(1), p. 13-23

Wheelahan, L., Miller, P., Newton, D., Dennis, N., Firth, J., Pascoe, S. & Veenker, P., (2003). Recognition of Prior Learning: policy and practice in Australia, report to Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board. Available on http://epubs.scu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=gcm_pubs (Downloaded 2009)

APPENDICES
ANNEXTURE A: Interview Schedules

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (Learnership Coordinator)
Name: _____   Designation: _____   Date: _____

THEME1: ROLE
1) What is your Job Title?
_____
_____

2) How long have you been in this position?
_____
_____

3) Briefly describe what you do?
_____
_____

4) What role do you play in the process of people applying for learnerships?
_____
_____

5) Do you play a role in RPL?
_____
_____

THEME 2: CONCEPTIONS OF RPL
6) What is your understanding of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)?
_____
_____

7) In which learning area/s do you conduct RPL?
_____
_____

THEME 3: RPL CANDIDATES
8) On average how many RPL candidates do you assess per year within learnerships?
_____
_____

9) Can you give an approximate profile of these candidates? Age, gender, education level
_____
_____

10) What options are available for successful RPL candidates?

_____
_____

11) What options are there for RPL candidates who were not successful?
_____
_____

THEME 4: INSTITUTIONAL RPL PRACTICE
12) Who would be considered for RPL?
_____
_____

13) What does the prospective candidate need to have in order to be
considered for RPL?
_____
_____

14) Within the learnership what form does RPL take, in your learning area
e.g. Test, Portfolio, Demonstration, other?
_____
_____

15) What are the advantages of having RPL at your college?
_____
_____

16) What challenges do you/ the college face in implementing RPL?
_____
_____

THEME 5: INSTITUTIONAL RPL POLICY
17) Are you aware of the college policy on RPL? Do you know what it is
based on?
_____
_____

18) Did you find the policy easy or challenging to implement? Please explain.
_____
_____

19) How can RPL within learnerships be improved within colleges?
_____
_____

THEME 6: RPL & SOCIAL JUSTICE
20) To what extent do you think that learnerships have anything to do with
social justice and redressing inequalities by providing access and redress for

the poor, unemployed, disabled and women as well as those disadvantaged by apartheid?

_____
_____

21) To what extent does the RPL that you deal with address issues related to the redress of inequalities? For example access and redress for the poor, unemployed, women and those disadvantaged by apartheid.

_____
_____

22) What can be done to improve of RPL within Learnerships to redress inequalities?

_____
_____

INTERVIEW Schedule   (RPL Practitioner)
Name: _____   Designation: _____   Date: _____

THEME 1: ROLE
1) What is your Job Title?
_____
_____

2) How long have you been in this position?
_____
_____

3) Briefly describe what you do?
_____
_____

4) In which learning area/s within (TT/ CBMT/ Learnerships) are you involved in?
_____
_____

THEME 2: CONCEPTIONS OF RPL
5) What role do you play in TT/ CBMT/ Learnerships?
_____
_____

6) What is your understanding of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)?
_____
_____

THEME 3: RPL CANDIDATES
7) On average how many RPL candidates do you assess per year within TT/ CBMT/ Learnerships?
_____
_____

8) Can you give an approximate profile of these candidates? Age, gender, education level
_____
_____

9) What options are available for successful RPL candidates?
_____
_____

10) What options are there for RPL candidates who were not successful?
_____
_____

THEME 4: INSTITUTIONAL RPL PRACTICE

11) What does the prospective candidate need to have in order to be considered for TT/ CBMT/ Learnerships?.

_____
_____

12) How do you assist learners who do not fulfill these requirements?

_____
_____

13) What form does assessment take, in your learning area e.g. Test, Portfolio, Demonstration, other?

_____
_____

14) What are the advantages of having RPL at your college?

_____
_____

15) What challenges do you/ the college face in implementing RPL?

_____
_____

THEME 5: INSTITUTIONAL RPL POLICY

16) Are you aware of the college policy on RPL? Do you know what it is based on?

_____
_____

17) Did you find the policy easy or challenging to implement? Please explain.

_____
_____

18) How can RPL within colleges improved?

_____
_____

THEME6: RPL & SOCIAL JUSTICE

19) To what extent do you think that TT/CBMT/ learnerships have anything to do with social justiceand redressing inequalities by providing access and redress for the poor, unemployed, disabled and women as well as those disadvantaged by apartheid?

_____
_____

20) To what extent does the RPL that you deal with address issues related to the redress of inequalities? For example access and redress for the poor, unemployed, women and those disadvantaged by apartheid.

_____
_____

21) What can be done to improve of RPL within TT/CBMT/ Learnerships to redress inequalities?

_____

_____

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (SETA)
Name: _____   **Designation:** _____   **Date:** _____

THEME 1: ROLE
1) What is your Job Title?
_____
_____

2) How long have you been in this position?
_____
_____

3) Briefly describe what you do in this position?
_____
_____

THEME 2: CONCEPTIONS OF RPL
4) What is your understanding of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)?
_____
_____

5) In which learning area/s does your SETA conduct RPL in relation to Public
FET Colleges?
_____
_____

THEME 3: RPL CANDIDATES
6) On average how many RPL candidates do you assess per year within the
SETA?
_____
_____

7) Can you give an approximate profile of these candidates? Age, gender,
education level
_____
_____

8) What options are available for successful RPL candidates?
_____
_____

9) What options are there for RPL candidates who were not successful?
_____
_____

THEME 4: INSTITUTIONAL RPL PRACTICE
10) How do you select prospective candidates on Learnerships/Skills
Programmes/ TT?
_____
_____

11) How do you deal with candidates who do not qualify in terms of the entrance requirements?

_____
_____

12) What does the prospective candidate need to have in order to be considered for RPL?

_____
_____

13) Within the SETA what form of RPL is recognised e.g. Test, Portfolio, Demonstration, etc?

_____
_____

14) What are the advantages of having RPL within Your SETA?

_____
_____

15) What challenges do you/ your SETA face in implementing RPL?

_____
_____

THEME 5: INSTITUTIONAL RPL POLICY
16) Does your SETA have an ETQA policy. What it is based on?

_____
_____

17) Did you find the policy easy or challenging to implement? Please explain.

_____
_____

18) How can RPL within the SETA be improved?

_____
_____

THEME 6: RPL & SOCIAL JUSTICE
19) To what extent do you think that learnerships/skills programmes/ TT have anything to do with social justiceand redressing inequalities by providing access and redress for the poor, unemployed, disabled and women as well as those disadvantaged by apartheid?

_____
_____

20) To what extent does the RPL that you deal with address issues related to the redress of inequalities? For eg. access and redress for the poor, unemployed, women and those disadvantaged by apartheid.

_____
_____

21) What can be done to improve of RPL within Learnerships/ TT/ Skills
Programmes to redress inequalities?

_____
_____

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (Provincial Education Department)
Name: _____ **Designation:** _____ **Date:** _____

THEME 1: ROLE
1) What is your Job Title?
_____
_____

2) How long have you been in this position?
_____
_____

3) Briefly describe what you do?
_____
_____

THEME 2 CONCEPTIONS OF RPL
4) What is your understanding of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)?
_____
_____

THEME 3: RPL CANDIDATES
5) What, if any, is the WCED's involvement with RPL candidates within public
FET colleges? For example; Does the WCED keep a profile database of RPL
candidates? What referral system does the WCED have for potential,
successful or unsuccessful RPL candidates?
_____
_____

6) What advantages does the WCED see of having RPL within public FET
colleges?
_____
_____

THEME 4: INSTITUTIONAL RPL PRACTICE
7) What role does the WCED play with respect to RPL within public FET
colleges?
_____
_____

8) What does the prospective candidate need to have in order to be
considered for RPL?
_____
_____

9) Within the WCED what form of RPL is recognised e.g. Test, Portfolio,
Demonstration, etc?
_____
_____

10) Does the Department pay a role in the quality assurance of the RPL process?

_____
_____

THEME 5: INSTITUTIONAL RPL POLICY

11) What challenges did you/ the WCED face in formulating and implementing RPL Policy within FET colleges?

_____
_____

12) Does the WCED have a particular RPL policy for FET colleges? What it is based on?

_____
_____

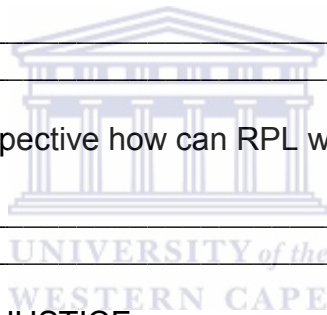13) Did you find the RPL policy easy or challenging to implement? Please explain.

_____
_____

14) From the WCED's perspective how can RPL within the colleges be improved?

_____
_____

THEME 6: RPL & SOCIAL JUSTICE

15) To what extent do you think that TT/CBMT/ learnerships have anything to do with social justice and redressing inequalities by providing access and redress for the poor, unemployed, disabled and women as well as those disadvantaged by apartheid?

_____
_____

16) To what extent does the RPL that you deal with address issues related to the redress of inequalities? For eg. access and redress for the poor, unemployed, women and those disadvantaged by apartheid.

_____
_____

17) What can be done to improve of RPL within the colleges to redress inequalities?

_____
_____