

**Recognition of Prior Learning, Benefits and Social Justice in the
Policing Sector**

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Abstract

Conceptualised within Habermasian critical theory, the conceptual framework includes concepts such as domination, emancipation and emancipatory education, and frames RPL as emancipation. Recognition of prior learning is promoted by the South African government as an instrument for access and redress. This research paper focuses on an investigation into the benefits of the implementation of RPL policies and practices in the policing sector. Findings reveal that the participants in the study who are employed in the policing sector enjoyed a wide range of emancipatory benefits, including access to formal academic programmes. Furthermore, these programmes enabled historically disadvantaged staff to gain formal qualifications which in turn provided access to higher salaries and promotions. Explaining the latter as redress, I argue that RPL is a form of emancipation that has liberated disadvantaged staff from apartheid discrimination and domination.

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Declaration

I declare that the research paper Recognition of Prior Learning, Benefits and Social Justice in the Policing Sector is my own work, and has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other University. I am submitting this paper in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters in Adult Education and Global Change at the University of the Western Cape. All the sources I have used or quoted from have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Bradley Lackay

Signed



Glossary

RPL – Recognition of prior learning

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

SAQA- South African Qualifications Authority

SETA- South African Training Authority

ETD – Education Training and Development

ORP – Organisational Realignment Process

COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions

UNESCO– United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization



Glossary of Terms

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING: Is the process whereby a candidate's informal learning is assessed and matched to specific formal standards and crediting the candidate's skills and experience for either access too or for credit into a qualification.

ACCESS: Entry into a Learning Program or Employment

REDRESS: The empowerment of people who were unfairly discriminated against in the past with respect to education and employment opportunities and are now allowed access to these opportunities.

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK: It is a nationally recognised framework that allows for Acknowledgement, Accrual and the transfer of credits from one qualification to another within the framework.

INFORMAL LEARNING: Learning through experience in the workplace, church, with your family and friends.

FORMAL LEARNING: Learning acknowledged through formal standards, like learning that took place in a recognised institution.

ASSESSMENT: Is the process of gathering information on the performance of an individual or group of individuals and evaluating it using set methods.

DESIGNATED EMPLOYER: An employer with 50 or more employees, a municipality as referred to in chapter 7 of the constitution, organs of state excluding the Defence Force , National Intelligence Agency and the South African Secret Service or an employer bound by collective agreement in terms of section 23 or 31 of the Labour Relations Act.

DESIGNATED GROUPS: Is Women, Black People, and People with Disabilities.

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SECTION 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The legacy of apartheid left the vast majority of South Africans with large gaps in their education, training and development, leading to inequality of opportunity, illiteracy and a lack of employment opportunity. Despite an ‘explicit political and moral commitment to address inequalities, skills development outcomes in South Africa are not encouraging 20 years after the democratic elections’ (Groener, 2014, p. 734).

Such persistent transformation challenges sparked my interest in RPL as a vehicle for access and redress equalities. Until 2003, a policing agency still recruited and employed people with a Grade 10 qualification. Prior to 2003 municipal police were not required to obtain further education and training to progress in their career. Various post-1994 policy changes and the implementation of new ‘job benchmarks’ negatively affected older employees due to the inclusion of various educational requirements. This excluded older employees from promotion opportunities or various specialist function career opportunities and salary incremental opportunities. These developments left behind older and less academically and traditionally qualified employees.

Since 2004, all employees employed in the municipal policing sector are required to have a minimum of a senior certificate and numerous promotion posts required either an NQF 5 certificate or a bachelor’s degree, leaving many of the older and more experienced employees unable to apply or compete for the post. This resulted in huge negativity amongst employees, because new and younger employees were applying for senior positions, and the older and more experienced employees lacked the qualifications to compete. This led to poor employee retention, a lack of trust between management and all employees and minimal transference of knowledge and skill. Given these challenges, in my position as a manager in the municipal policing sector, learning about RPL grabbed my attention.

I learnt about recognition of prior learning in 2006 while completing an occupationally directed education and training qualification. RPL was communicated to me as a governmental initiative to redress the past inequalities in education, by acknowledging the informal learning by individuals who have been working in their specific fields for many years. I later contributed to the quality management system of a Training Academy, which defined and acknowledged recognition of prior learning. Soon after learning about recognition of prior learning, I could anticipate the benefits that it could bring for both the

staff and my organisation, with regard to equality and redress issues that affected so many people who devoted many years of their life to the organisation.

The introduction of specific formal qualifications as a requirement for various promotion posts created for many staff members with long service years in the organisation a barrier for advancement. Being part of a Training Academy and part of a development team that ensures that learning material in the policing sector remains current, gave me a good understanding of the content and requirements of the curricular within police occupational studies. I also participated and gave input as a subject matter expert with the development and currency of various curricular within one of the diplomas in policing. Therefore, I recognised the wealth of police paraprofessionals' embedded occupational knowledge and saw the need for its recognition. In the municipal policing sector, the qualification that directly addresses municipal police educational requirements in terms of initial or further studies is the National Diploma in Policing or the National Traffic and Municipal Police Diploma. These are occupational qualifications, and education, training and development practitioners are constantly meeting with members of the industry in order to align these with the industry's needs. This being the case, employees employed in the policing sector for a number of years and who have gained their knowledge, skills, expertise and attributes through practice, should have the opportunity for the recognition of their prior learning knowledge and skills against exit level outcomes of the above mentioned qualifications.

I approached institutions to explore the possibilities for providing access to the occupational qualification for municipal police. I received a favourable response from an institution offering these occupational qualifications and we looked at various ways in which recognition of prior learning could be applied. Firstly, possible candidates would undergo a screening test at the Training Academy, which was in the form of an interview. Secondly, we applied the portfolio development method and conducted a 40- to 60-minute interview for the assessment of the portfolio. Discussions between employees as potential RPL candidates and facilitators are guided into portfolio development which starts with a 'screening phase and a pre-assessment phase' as described in the 'SAQA document, *Criteria and Guidelines for Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning*' (SAQA, 2004, p. 41). The outcome of the initial assessment is communicated to the RPL candidate, and support is provided with portfolio development and evidence gathering. Facilitators have a very good understanding of the environment of the RPL candidates, and therefore, provide guidance with regard to the portfolio of evidence for recognition of prior learning.

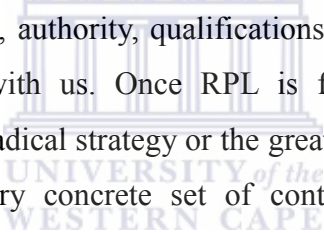
As RPL recognises prior learning, the Training Academy organisation decided to implement it on a large scale for all interested employees with more than 12 years' experience in the municipal police sector.

This research paper focuses on RPL as emancipatory benefits. RPL is formally recognised in the 'National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and South African Qualifications Authority' as a means to redress the inequalities of the past, 'facilitating mobility, progression and access within education, training and development career paths' (SAQA, 2013, p.6). SAQA describes RPL as a process whereby the knowledge, skills and experience of an individual, 'howsoever obtained, is matched and measured against the exit level outcomes and criteria of a qualification', thus leading to the acknowledgement and crediting of that person's 'knowledge, skills and experience gained in both formal and informal learning' that took place in that person's life (SAQA, 2002, p. 7). Inspired by Habermas and Sandberg's utilisation of the Theory of Communicative Action in his research on RPL, I conceptualise my study within a Critical Theory perspective and investigated the mutual understandings about RPL as emancipatory benefits that emerged in the conversations among municipal police after they heard about RPL and its benefits, and later, experienced it. During these conversations about RPL, employees discover that there are diverse ways of knowing and valuing knowledge which create confidence to apply for RPL.

Sandberg and Kubaik's research on RPL in respect of healthcare assistants and care workers is instructive to my investigation. Fredrik Sandberg and Kubaik (2011) refer to healthcare assistants and care workers as being paraprofessionals who are often relied upon to perform complex tasks, and there is a concern with ensuring appropriate skill level and opportunities for their development (Sandberg & Kubaik, 2011). Similarly to care workers, municipal police can also be considered paraprofessionals who are increasingly relied upon to perform complex tasks relating to the legal system. A number of formal and non-formal learning methods are used to further the aims for the development opportunities for paraprofessionals, though the considerable levels of skills developed through practice itself is increasingly acknowledged (Sandberg & Kubaik, 2011). According to Sandberg and Kubaik, thus, 'recognition of prior learning (RPL) has become a frequently employed approach to assess, recognise and formally certificate paraprofessional knowledge and competence' (Sandberg & Kubaik, 2011, p. 1).

It is my observation that many graduates within the organisation who have accessed qualifications through the traditional route do not believe that an RPL candidate has the same level of competency as normal graduates and, in many instances, RPL candidates would not receive the same recognition as other graduates who did not undergo RPL. In many instances, after the RPL candidate without a matric certificate graduated with a first degree or diploma, the organisation continues to request a matric certificate. This type of action within an organisation has a negative impact on the individual's self-confidence and intrinsic motivation.

Sandberg and Kubiak (2011) cite Somerville (2006), who states that people have criticised RPL for its potential to trivialise the complexity and depth of worker skill, and they cite Stevens (2010), who states that research suggests that RPL provides both educational benefits and self-confidence (Sandberg & Kubaik, 2011). However there are still some scepticism about RPL. Per Andersson, Andreas Fejes and Fredrik Sandberg, cite Michael Young (2006), who states:



Questions about knowledge, authority, qualifications and different types of learning will always be with us. Once RPL is freed from its largely rhetorical role as the great radical strategy or the great solution to inequality, it offers a unique and very concrete set of contexts for debating the fundamental educational issues that such questions give rise to, and for finding new ways of approaching them (Andersson , Fejes & Sandberg, 2013, p. 2).

Despite such scepticism, several scholars link RPL to emancipation and social justice. Relying on Harris (1999), Castle and Attwood (2001), Wheelanahan, Miller and Newton (2002) and Cleary et al. (2002) Jen Hamer states that:

The formal recognition of prior learning (RPL) has been pursued as a tool of social justice within education sectors across the world ... accredit skills and knowledge that have evolved from diverse, informal learning experiences and cultural locations and is thought by some to be a powerful tool for bringing people into the learning system (Jen Hamer, 2012, p. 113).

This highlights the fact that RPL is considered to be a powerful tool for creating access opportunities into education and, thus, is a powerful tool for social justice, emancipation and redress within education. Drawing on Burtch (2006), Susan Gair argues as follows:

Reflecting similarities to the core values of social work, it is claimed that RPL embodies emancipation and social justice, advantaging the excluded, illuminating and validating knowledges that previously have been invisible, and breaking down discriminatory barriers to education under a human rights agenda (Gair, 2013, p. 73).

Gair (2013) also draws on Cameron (2006) and states that, in Australia, a national framework of qualifications initiated in the early 1990s identified RPL as a key strategy and an entry pathway into tertiary education that promoted social inclusion.

She asserts that the principles of RPL reflect ‘UNESCO’s education for all Millennium Goals and the Closing the Gap (2009) campaign objectives’ (Gair, 2013, p. 73). Citing (Fox, 2005; Harris, 1997; Kemp, 2003), Gair draws attention to the value of RPL for women saying that:

RPL is said to endorse lifelong learning, recognise mature women’s contributions to the economy and the skilled labour market, enhance access to learning institutions, and help workers acquire ‘qualified’ status without being compelled to relearn what they already know (Gair, 2013, p. 73).

Dyson & Keating state that RPL is a strategy for ensuring that education becomes more accessible and could play a role with regard to closing the gap between disadvantaged and privileged learners (Dyson & Keating, 2005).

Informed by the debates in the literature, RPL play a valuable and crucial role with regard to access and redress in education training and development in South Africa. Drawing on critical theory, I investigate RPL for access and redress as emancipatory benefits in South Africa.

Recognition of prior learning in post-apartheid South Africa: access and redress

In their reflections on 20 years of democracy in respect of education, Badat and Sayed recall that ‘Colonialism and apartheid were predicated on a racially based system of inequality in which black South Africans were denied equal educational opportunities and outcomes.’ (Badat & Sayed, 2014, p. 128). This placed black South Africans at a distinct disadvantage with access to education, resulting in a lack of inclusion and negatively impacting on circumstances surrounding equity and emancipation. According to Badat and Sayed:

All these policies argued that substantive equality was not possible without an active political commitment to favour those who had been disadvantaged. A politics of equal recognition could not be blind to the effects of the legacies of colonialism and apartheid (Badat & Sayed, 2014, p. 131).

According to Saleem Badat and Yusuf Sayed (2014), 'it was precisely this reality that gave salience to the idea of redress and made it a fundamental and necessary dimension of educational and social transformation' (Badat & Sayed, 2014, p. 131). Badat and Sayed (2014) draw on the National Planning Commission (2011), which argues that it seeks to realise the promise of our future, as it is so aptly captured in the preamble to our Constitution, and to ensure that, 'by 2030, South Africans should have access to education and training of the highest quality, leading to significantly improved learning outcomes' (Badat & Sayed, 2014, p. 128).

According to the 'White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013), one of the first challenges for the post-school system as listed by the Green Paper was to substantially expand access to education and training over the next twenty years' (DHET, 2013, p. 6). This is to accommodate people who completed school as well as the people who did not finish school, and to create access to learning opportunities for older people and people who did not attend school to have a better life. This resonates with RPL, which creates an enabling environment for access to further education opportunities both vertically and horizontally on the NQF. Such access conveys emancipatory benefits by creating an enabling environment for a better life for both people who completed and did not complete school.

Access to education within post-education and training 'both vertically and horizontally, between different streams and levels' is encouraged by the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training and, 'wherever possible and throughout the education and training system, bridging arrangements must be made available to assist those who have some, but not all the competencies to enter a programme' (DHET, 2013, p. 6). Due to South Africa's history, RPL has been developed as a vehicle for access and redress.

RPL can be viewed as effective to the extent that it resonates with the hope of making a fairer, equitable and more compassionate world. It is, therefore, reasonable to concur that RPL can contribute to emancipation and building a society of justice and democracy. RPL promotes a democratic equitable society of fairness, compassion and justice that can emancipate the masses from mental and social slavery.

The draft policy for RPL also highlights the significance of access by stating ‘RPL carries specific significance, as it is central to an inclusive, democratic education and training system’ (SAQA, 2015, p. 9). Therefore, for inclusivity and social justice to be realised, barriers to access to education need to be broken down.

The NQF was to achieve relevance, credibility, legitimacy, portability and integration of education, and to enable access and progression, the recognition of prior learning and guidance of learners. According to Harris (1997), regarding these key ‘objectives of the NQF’:

For many in business, education and training and in the labour movement viewed this as a hallmark move away from the practices that characterised institutions in the apartheid era, and that is devised in collaboration with major stakeholders, making it a powerful call as a social project (Harris, 1997, p. 14).

Harris (1997) states that ‘RPL occupies a place in the South African education and training policy, as a main tenet of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)’ (Harris, 1997, p. 1). According to Harris, ‘RPL is positioned discursively as a pillar of the NQF’ (Harris, 1997, p. 15). The NQF discourse in South Africa holds two social goals in tension; one is social change, redress and equity, and national economic development is the other (Harris, 1997). Harris identifies the ‘distinctive features of the NQF as it embodies a mix of human capital, humanist and radical discourses’ (Harris, 1997, p. 15). With RPL being the main tenet of the NQF, it is expected that it would summarise three of the purposes of RPL as being social justice, where RPL is used to create access opportunities for subordinated groups, social change, to make knowledge visible and improve conditions for a changing society, and economic development, where RPL is used to improve productivity (Andersson, Fejes & Ahn, 2004).

According to Breier (2005), the critical theory perspective in relation to RPL ‘is associated with social movements such as trade union or feminist groups and critical emancipatory discourses which view education as a means to transform the individual and society’ (Breier, 2005, p. 56). This critical theory perspective is evident in Cooper’s research on RPL among workers in COSATU. According to Cooper, in South Africa, raising the skill level of workers was highlighted with a view to authenticating the ambition of workers by officially recognising workplace learning, not just fulfilling capitalist goals (Cooper, 1998). RPL as a tenet of the NQF is part of a redress imperative that resonates with earlier people’s education,

with the radical/opposition education tradition and labour movements socialism (Cooper, 1998). As part of a broader commitment to radical transformation of workers, the acknowledgement of experience was intended to empower people who have been disadvantaged with regard to learning opportunities (Cooper, 1998). According to Cooper, 'COSATU'S 1985 official resolutions on education placed emphasis on the role of education in building democratic participation: education should develop an understanding and capacity... that will allow maximum participation [and] decision-making power for workers both now and in the future society we wish to build' (Cooper, 1998, p. 147).

Cooper (1998) cites that the particular discourse on RPL has enormous appeal to workers with experience and no recognition. Harris states that this resonates with workers' (long-awaited) desire for recognition, more opportunities to progress as well as opportunities for respect and equity (Cooper, 1998, p.149). According to Cooper, in South Africa, 'COSATU'S education and training proposals' were adapted with a view to transformation by securing substantial gains for black workers (Cooper, 1998, p.149). These proposals proposed that 'workers should have access to lifelong education and training' and 'transferable skills ensuring horizontal and vertical mobility', ensuring the possibility of career pathways, and better job stability (Cooper, 1998, p.149). This resulted in a move to greater emphasis on RPL, whereby:

Recognition of prior learning is aimed at ensuring that the skills and the knowledge that workers have acquired through work and life experience rather than through formal education or training are recognised and accredited so that they can gain access to further learning and better job opportunities (Cooper, 1998, p. 149).

Cooper further says that 'COSATU'S education and training proposals have been strongly influenced by Australian and New Zealand models of competency based education and training, but have been adapted with the aim of winning substantial gains for black workers and increasing labourers' bargaining power' and 'these proposals suggest that workers should have access to lifelong education and training' (Cooper, 1998, p. 149). The South African RPL draft policy (2015) 'has drawn on international trends in recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning and work-based experiential learning, such as expressed in the research of International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning' (SAQA, 2015, p. 5).

According to Breier & Ralphs, in tertiary systems in South Africa, RPL was promoted as a ‘form of educational redress’ for individuals excluded from entering formal education under apartheid (Breier & Ralphs, 2009, p. 482). Harris firmly located RPL in a political context, stating that, if educators were serious about social redress, they would want to highlight and encourage recognition of forms of experiential learning that come from specific social conditions, that is, to acknowledge social and political experience and give it the support required for success in education (Harris, 1997, 1999).

According to Breier, ‘RPL is seen as a strategy for social redress, a means whereby subjugated or marginalised groups or forms of knowledge can gain access to the academy and challenge the authority of hegemonic discourses’ (Breier, 2005, p. 56). According to Harris, South Africa’s higher education context as a whole is conducive to RPL, with regard to the privileging of access for previously disadvantaged learners, curriculum shifts, moves to outcomes and growth in lower level qualification (Harris, 1997). However, Harris also states that there are many constraining factors for RPL in current higher education discourse, such as inflexible entry requirements, the maintenance of strong boundaries in reality, financial constraints on the system as a whole and barriers with regard to the needs of adult learners (Harris, 1997). Harris further states that these barriers to learning as cited above could substantially undermine the opportunities for the development of RPL policies (Harris, 1997).

Harris, who has done ‘extensive writing on RPL in South Africa, offers a Trojan horse model of RPL, which she describes as aspirational and in the making, suggesting that it should become part of an inquiry into social construction of knowledge and curricular’ (Harris, 1999, p. 136). In ‘this model, there would be bold attempts to value prior learning in and of itself rather than solely in terms of its degree of fit with existing standards or curricular or with the cognitive capacities deemed necessary to succeed in traditional terms’ (Harris, 1999, p. 136). Michelson (1996a), similarly to Harris (1999), ‘argues that, in current RPL procedures only experience can be exceptional, knowledge has to be presented as similar to that of others and recognisable in terms set by universalised academic norms’ (Michelson, 1996a, p. 189). Michelson ‘suggests a different underpinning for RPL that sees knowledge as situated and grants visibility in the academic environment to outsider knowledge that is valuable for its divergence from academic ways of knowing, not only its similarity, and rewrites the relationship between experiential learning and academic authority’ (Michelson, 1996a, p. 189).

Harris (2000) 'suggests an alternative vision of higher education that aims at optimal social inclusion' (Harris, 2000, p. 76). 'Here, adult education would be valued, but also seen as socially constructed' (Harris, 2000, p. 76). According to Harris:

Its location in unequal power relations would need to be opened up, challenged and explored (in terms of the specificity and/or commonality of experiences, for example). There would be a more equal and two-way relationship between theory and learning from experience, the latter in critical dialogue with the former (Harris, 2000, p. 76-77).

Rationale

A diploma or a degree in policing is an occupational-specific qualification, whereby experts in the industry often work on the literature to ensure currency with what is required in policing practice. Experienced staff working in this specific area of expertise gain valuable knowledge through dialogue and informal means that can be linked to the exit level outcomes of a policing diploma or degree. There are various perspectives and approaches to adult education that values this informal learning; however, there are different views on whether RPL is beneficial or not and it is important to confirm its benefit to the **policing sector** to continue with the programme in this sector.

Research Problem

Informal learning in everyday life and in the workplace is often not valued. RPL is an important vehicle to validate such learning in ways that can provide access to qualifications and redress inequalities related to employment opportunities and income.

Research Aims

- To investigate the benefits of RPL for RPL candidates.
- To investigate the communication of RPL benefits among candidates within the organisation.

Research Questions

Main Research Question

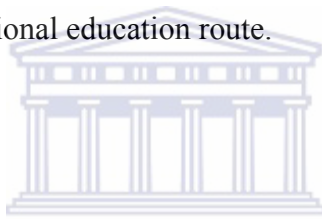
- What are the benefits of RPL in the policing sector?

Sub-questions

- How did RPL benefit employees?
- How are the benefits of RPL communicated among the successful candidates?
- How are the benefits of RPL communicated by the organisation?

Purposes of Research

The purpose of the research is to reveal whether RPL has a positive impact on the organisation as well as for the individual. The findings of the research paper could influence policy on RPL in ways that can facilitate greater success of the organisation's policies. This research is important to reveal that RPL may have a positive impact on an organisation by retaining experienced staff, and that the quality of an RPL candidate is of the same value as a candidate who followed the traditional education route.



Limitations

The research will focus on one municipal police agency and not the policing agencies in the entire province. The research will, therefore, only be representative on a small scale of a municipality.

Anticipated Findings

- Evidence of intrinsic motivation in RPL participants who achieved a diploma or a degree through the RPL route.
- There will be evidence of staff retention.
- The inequality of people who previously did not have the opportunity to further their education will now have the opportunity to obtain qualifications, resulting in social inclusion.
- People who previously were not eligible for promotion opportunities regardless of their experience are now eligible.

In Section 2, I review the literature relevant to my study, and develop a conceptual framework to frame my investigation.

In Section 3, I discuss and describe how South African policies communicate RPL as emancipatory benefits.

In Section 4, I outline the research design and methodology that guides my investigation.

In Section 5, I analyse the data that I gathered through my investigation.

In Section 6, I present a summary, findings and recommendations.



SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In Section 2, I review the literature relevant to my study, and develop a conceptual framework to frame my investigation.

Introduction

Even though RPL is entrenched in South African legislation, and, furthermore, is a global phenomenon, it is not broadly implemented or understood. The literature on RPL offers various perspectives as depicted in the writing of various writers.

This overview provides a starting-point for my discussion of the following perspectives on RPL: the situative perspective, the constructivist perspective and the discipline-specific approach.

Situative Perspective of Recognition of Prior Learning

According to Tara Fenwick, a situative perspective highlights the connection between individuals and their community of practice with a description on experiential learning (Fenwick, 2001). I think that this is an important perspective when looking at RPL, as it forms the praxis of experiential learning and knowledge accumulation in a community of practice. People learn by doing and interacting and transferring knowledge informally with others in a 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.18). Lave and Wenger (1991) introduce a situated theory that has been developed through researching learning that takes place informally through normal work activities. Situated theories 'view learning as a social rather than an individual activity that takes place in a community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 18). Cooper also highlights a 'view of learning in a social rather than an individual activity' by noting the importance of 'collective experience' in the labour movement in RPL discourse. Cooper states the 'identity of the labour movement, it's social rather than that of individual advancement' whereby 'knowledge was perceived as arising out of collective experience, to be used and shared by other workers' (Cooper, 1998, p. 145). According to Harris: 'Learning would be explored as a social/collective practice and process, rather than only an individual, cognitive one and pedagogy would be 'hybrid', working across theory and practice and doing justice to both.' (Harris, 2000, p. 78)

Harris (2000), Cooper (1998) and Lave and Wenger (1991) identify learning as a ‘social rather than an individual activity’ that happens in a community of practice. It is often this knowledge and experiential learning that is assessed and validated during RPL.

Constructivist Perspective of Recognition of Prior Learning

According to Andreas Fejes and Per Andersson, ‘a constructivist perspective helps us to understand learning as an active individual process of meaning making, where experience is the starting point for, and part of, a reflective learning process’ (Fejes & Andersson, 2009, p. 3). This resonates with ‘constructivist perspectives such as Kolb’s’, which views ‘learning as the result of reflected experiences’ (Fejes & Andersson, 2009, p. 12). This ties in with RPL, which borders around the framework of experiential learning and, in the case of the policing sector, whereby formal qualifications directly linked to the sector are occupational qualifications linked to workplace learning, experience and reflection.

Andreas and Per Andersson (2009) cite Kolb, who refers to ‘Dewey in his writing on the learning cycle, whereby work learning is seen as’:

A process from concrete experience to reflection, in order to abstract generalisation, to active experimenting, and then back to experience ... Brookfield (1987) points to how critical reflection about one’s experience can contribute to developing our understanding of different phenomena’ and ‘critical reflection is also central to Mezirow (1991) and his theory of transformative learning in knowledge construction (Fejes & Andersson, 2009, p. 4).

Andreas and Per Andersson (2009) further draw on ‘Dewey (1929) and state that his ideas about problem-solving are seminal for understanding the importance of experience in adult learning and have been an inspiration for many researchers working with theories on experiential learning’ (Fejes & Andersson, 2009, p. 4).

A central theme among the various authors mentioned with a constructivist perspective ‘is that they view knowledge production as constructions made by the individual that involve critical reflection’ (Fejes & Andersson, 2009, p. 4). ‘A constructivist perspective on RPL helps us to understand learning as an active individual process of meaning making, where experience is the starting point for, and part of a reflective learning process’ (Fejes & Andersson, 2009, p. 3) This is important when looking at RPL, as experiential learning is

central to the practice and outcome of RPL and reflecting on what prior knowledge has been gained is important for assessing what knowledge should be recognised.

If knowledge production is a construction made by the individual, in terms of RPL and recognising the prior learning of an individual in this learning cycle, one will have to look at issues of power in practices of learning. According to Andreas F and Per Andersson, 'constructivist theories of learning neglect issues of power' (Fejes & Andersson, 2009, p. 15). This statement supports Michelson (1996), who states 'that a focus on reflection about experience' 'disregards relations of power' and that, with the process of prior learning assessment, 'reflection and experience are seen as two separate processes' (Fejes & Andersson, 2009, p. 15). Fejes and Anderson draws on Fenwick who further supports this statement by stating that 'experience and reflection are construed as separate processes', but further states that 'reflection itself is experienced and experience itself cannot be separated from our imaginative interpretation and reinterpretation of the event' (Fejes & Andersson, 2009, p. 15).

Fejes and Andersson, as well as Fenwick, agree 'that one cannot separate experience from reflection and knowledge', as 'all aspects of the life experience are integrated into the process of real life' (Fejes & Andersson, 2009, p. 15). With this said, one should consider the effects of power relations on life experience and recognition of prior learning.

Instrumentalism and RPL for Accreditation and the prospects for Emancipation

Welton (1991) states that 'critical theory enables us to understand how a global society dominated by technocratic or instrumental rationality constrains enlightenment, empowerment and transformative action' (Welton, 1991, p. 23). I highlight RPL and instrumentalism because, in the policing sector, RPL is applied by assessing a portfolio of evidence, often referencing institutional knowledge and an interview for both access and for credit as directed by South African policy discourse on RPL. It could, therefore, be perceived to be more of an instrumentalist nature and, therefore, be perceived as, in fact, constraining enlightenment and transformative action and, in so doing, constraining true emancipation.

My intention is to highlight the various strategies used to acknowledge prior learning and the fact that, even though in certain instances RPL was acknowledged for credit, it did not constrain enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation.

An important aspect of RPL and most official education processes includes the valuation' of the knowledge of the student. When using RPL with the view of emancipating workers by recognising workplace knowledge for credit and redress, the manner in which the individual knowledge is recognised has a more technical human capital nature that follows an instrumentalist approach. Breier (2005) highlights the fact that skills and past informal learning of benefit to the economy is matched against standardised outcomes and views students as consumers whose educational path to 'further education must be facilitated via modularization and credit frameworks' (Breier, 2005, p. 55).

From a 'Habermasian point of view, there are a range of consequences that arise when tests are made the main target of education' (Sandberg, 2012, p.353). When people do not 'engage in mutual learning processes, there is risk of education becoming an instrumental rather than a communicative experience' (Sandberg, 2012, p.353). Sandberg draws on Brown (2001, 2002), who states that 'there are various methods and strategies used to recognise prior learning (Sandberg, 2012, p.356).

RPL for accreditation, a form of RPL that will be discussed below, has been criticised for its instrumentalism. 'Gouthro and Holloway (2010) argue that an instrumental rational view of education, following Habermas (1987), is increasingly becoming the standard' (Sandberg, 2012, p.352). 'Means end results and competency based educational approaches are given more attention' (Sandberg, 2012, p.352). 'RPL for accreditation could be seen as following this path of rationalisation' (Sandberg, 2012, p.352). RPL has been characterised 'as instrumental in promoting a more technical view of education in which end results, essential skills and competency based education are emphasised' (Sandberg, 2014, p. 683). This resonates with Sandberg (2012), who states that 'it might be argued that prior experiential learning turns into something similar to money used in the education market, to buy course credits' (Sandberg, 2012, p.352). Drawing on Sandberg's statement, it reminds me of the portfolio-building exercise whereby candidates pocket and present their experience in the field of policing in a portfolio in an attempt to qualify for course credits in formal education. Sandberg states that 'Spencer (2005), like Gouthro, argues that formal education is becoming more and more focussed on the credential' (Sandberg, 2012, p. 352). If this is the case, learning will no longer be the primary focus. In 'this more instrumental form of RPL, the course credits become the means end goal of the process and prior learning is, thus, not used as a starting point for further learning' (Sandberg, 2012, p.352). As stated by Welton (1991), this practice constrains enlightenment and transformation and, therefore, constrains

emancipation. Sandberg states that ‘this concept can easily be linked to Habermas’ thesis of a colonisation of the life world’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 683). When dealing with RPL for accreditation purposes it is important to address the relationship between the life world and the system’ (Sandberg, 2012, p.353). Sandberg (2012) states that it is here where one can ‘argue that RPL for accreditation becomes a process where the system, through assessment, ‘assimilates’ and reorders prior experiential grounded life world experiences so that they fit the curricular (system)’ (Sandberg, 2012,p.353).

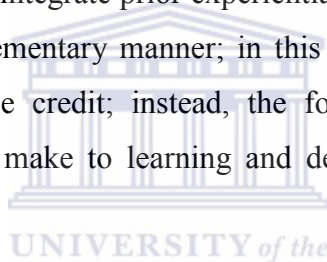
‘RPL is often seen as more positive and less instrumental when it is integrated into formal learning processes, where students’ prior learning is used as a starting point for new learning opportunities’ (Sandberg, 2012, p. 62). This is when RPL is used for access into a qualification whereby a student previously did not traditionally qualify for access into that qualification. An example would be a traffic officer who did not complete a traditional senior certificate for access into a diploma course in municipal policing, but has been working in the field for a number of years.

Sandberg (2014) states that this ‘implies that education and qualifications are more than the sum of their parts’ and that ‘students should have the ability to make connections between different experiences, ways of knowing and between tacit and explicit or theoretical and practical knowledge’ and ‘if students obtain their degrees through assessments of informal, previous learning experiences, they may not have these abilities’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 683). According to Sandberg (2014), in this context, communicative action ‘offers ways to analyse RPL more positively, focussing on learning and development, than prior research on RPL that often focuses on instrumentality’ and ‘offers positive exchanges of, in this case, learning conversations in the RPL placement, more nuanced discussion on RPL for accreditation’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 686). Sandberg states that ‘an analysis of the potential for critical learning and change can provide evidence as to what is worth striving for in RPL for accreditation’(Sandberg, 2014, p. 686). Sandberg argues that, when ‘RPL is set in a worthwhile setting learning experience and conducted through mutual understanding, critical learning and change can potentially be achieved’ and ‘RPL for accreditation could, therefore, be more than merely an instrumental tool, but also be seen as a process that legitimately, although critically, reproduces the life world of work’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 686). When RPL for accreditation is set in the correct setting and conducted through mutual understanding, it could result in enlightenment and emancipation.

This means that prior learning should not just be acknowledged for accreditation without proper criteria, quality assurance processes or validation. According to Sandberg, ‘critical learning occurs when validity claims are not taken for granted’ and ‘critical learning can occur when prior learning experiences and knowledge of participants are used to critically reflect on situations they encounter in the RPL placement’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 687). Sandberg (2014) states that, when a situation is mutually clearly defined and discussed whereby the tutors and participants mutually agree on what is an illegitimate way of performing a task, then this would lead to other more legitimate ways of performing the task being discussed and promoted (Sandberg, 2014).

Sandberg (2014) draws on Brown (2001, 2002) and states that ‘RPL integrated into course programmes indicates a form of RPL that is less technical and instrumental’ and further draws on Scott (2007) and states that:

Portfolios might be used to integrate prior experiential learning with course-based learning in a complementary manner; in this approach, the primary focus is not on the course credit; instead, the focus would be on the contribution that RPL can make to learning and development (Sandberg, 2014, p. 684).



I am of the opinion that, when one does an analysis on the process of using a portfolio of evidence to integrate prior experiential learning into course-based learning, this would involve mutual engagement between the lecturer and the student with the goal of reaching a mutual understanding and consensus of how that prior learning relates to and can be integrated into the course-based material. I believe this mutual engagement and learning to be emancipatory in nature. This resonates with the mutual engagement that takes place between the facilitator and the RPL applicant during the RPL process as they work through the portfolio of evidence.

Fredrik Sandberg (2014) argues that, ‘when RPL for accreditation is viewed from an angle of communicative action, RPL for accreditation that is founded within worthwhile learning experiences and conducted through mutual understanding can result in critical learning and change being achieved’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 682). Therefore, ‘RPL can then be something more than a process of instrumentalism’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 682).

Conceptual Framework: Critical Theory Perspectives of Recognition of Prior Learning and Emancipation

Recognition of prior learning is embedded in South African education and training policy and has been focussed on the development and promotion of equality, access and redress. SAQA document (2002), states that the ‘key objectives of the NQF relevant to RPL are facilitating access to, and mobility and progression within ETD and career paths and to accelerate redress of past unfair discrimination in ETD and employment opportunities’ (SAQA, 2002, p. 8). SAQA’s policy on RPL makes special reference to the fact that ‘RPL in South Africa, unlike similar initiatives in other countries, is a very specific agenda. RPL is meant to support the transformation of the education and training system of the country’ (SAQA, 2002, p. 11). Recognition of prior learning is important for transformation and emancipation within education, because it ‘carries specific significance, as it is central to an inclusive, democratic education and training system’ (SAQA, 2015, p. 9). In the deliberate way, I link these transformation policy objectives to Critical Theory as an ‘emancipatory project’ with particular reference to Habermas. Welton explains the significance of this Theory as follows: The ‘critical theoretical tradition from Marx to Habermas can provide the foundation for an emancipatory educational practice’ and, even though the ‘theory of emancipatory education was always present in the Marxist tradition, it is only with Habermas that we begin to see the learning theory become explicit and self-conscious’ (Welton, 1991, p. 22). According to Held, a Habermasian description for emancipation entails ‘not only overcoming constraints of nature, like scarcity, but also dissolving systems of distorted communication’ (Held, 1980, p. 276). In order to break down the barriers of distorted communication, one would be required to be self-aware, reflect and understand what is actually taking place. This suggests that Habermas, by making reference to ‘dissolving systems of distorted communication’, explicitly views learning, reflection, self-awareness and mutual understanding as part of emancipation (Held, 1980, p. 276).

Life World, System, Communicative Action, Mutual Understandings and Recognition of Prior Learning.

For his research on RPL, Fredrick Sandberg (2014) uses ‘Habermas’s theory of communicative action and concepts such as life world, system, and rationality’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 682). Relying on the latter, Sandberg investigates mutual understandings about RPL

which developed among healthcare assistants and their tutors. Following Sandberg I also draw on Habermas's theories to investigate the mutual understandings about the benefits of RPL as emancipation which evolved among paraprofessionals in education contexts and beyond, within the policing sector.

Sandberg states that 'Habermas highlights education and family as a place where the life world is developed' and 'the reproduction of the life world is crucial to maintain culturally valid knowledge, solidarity and to shape individual identities' (2014, p. 685). Habermas's definition of 'life world is 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). In layperson's terms, the life world is the sum of all experiences that is communicated in the daily life of an individual. Habermas (1987) states the life world is made up of experiences, and communicative action takes place within those experiences and that the life world is limited by changes that takes place within society. According to Habermas, 'communicative action is important to reproduce the life world from and to maintain a healthy society; communicative action provides the medium for reproduction of the life worlds' (Habermas, 1981, p. 337). Alerting to the importance of 'social integration' he asserts that the life world is developed when people interact in social settings, for example like in a family environment and civil society settings. Habermas (1984) argues that rationalisation of the life world is the way in which social change and emancipation occurs and that rationality is significant to both emancipation and domination.

In terms of communicative rationality, Habermas argues 'that we must conceive of societies simultaneously as systems and life worlds' (Habermas, 1987, p. 118). Gouthro (2006) states that 'critics of Habermas are doubtful of his attempts to construct a universalistic theory in a changing world' characterised by difference and that:

His analysis of the system/life world divide has tended to emphasise social class and power differences linked with the development of the market economy, but have been challenged for not addressing adequately other axes of power linked with gender, race, culture, sexual orientation and ability (Gouthro, 2006, p. 17).

According to Sandberg, 'the system can be found in market bureaucracy and economy and is reproduced by means of money and power' (Sandberg, 2012, p. 352). Gouthro similar to Sandberg states that 'the system is characterized by instrumental rationality that ensures the smooth functioning of the system, but increasingly threatens the viability of the life world'

(Gouthro, 2006, p.9). In layperson's terms the system can be viewed as an existing structure whereby everyday life is coordinated through money and power. Instrumental rationality provides the basis of what is considered normal and what behaviour and beliefs are acceptable within the context of each society. This statement resonates with Habermas, who states 'thus, they lend support to a moral authority of validity of basic norms' (Habermas, 1987, p. 56).

On a macro level, Sandberg states that 'Habermas's concern is that the symbolic reproduction of the life world is threatened with colonisation by systems' (Sandberg, 2012, p. 352). Gouthro (2006) states that Habermas 'traces the emergence of the system and life world, assesses the problematic disjuncture between them created by increasing social complexity and rationalisation of the life world, and explores the potential of communicative theory to address these challenges' (Gouthro, 2006, p. 9). In this regard Sandberg found in his research, that 'the essential connection between RPL and communicative action is that RPL reveals the tension between the life world of work and system of education' (Sandberg, 2014. p. 686). Sandberg references Habermas and further states 'it is through mutual understanding and communicative action that the life world is reproduced' and thereby reducing the threat by system (Sandberg, 2014, p. 686).

Patricia Gouthro echoed Habermas by citing Michael Collins (1998), who argued that adult educators needs to be cognisant of the oppressive influence of the system, but at the same time he draws upon Habermas's cautious optimism to argue that communicative action can be used to effect change (Gouthro, 2006, p. 14). Collins (1998) states that, 'even though institutional spheres are dominated by system imperatives, there are opportunities for bringing in democratic initiatives for change through discourse' (Gouthro, 2006, p.15).

Regardless of the seriousness of the statements made by these 'critics, Habermasian theory still provide a comprehensive analysis of modern society that continues to inform critical discourses in adult education' (Gouthro, 2006, p.18). Welton states that adult educators can sustain and defend the life world by fostering communicative action (Welton, 1995). Gouthro (2006) states that Cohen (1995), in assessing the work of Habermas, 'argues that even Habermas's most determined feminist critics are unwilling to dispense with key categories of his thought: they make use of the concepts of communicative action, public space, democratic legitimacy, dialogic ethics, discourse and critical social theory' (Gouthro, 2006, p. 18).

Through communicative action that takes place in the life world of education shared common understandings develop. Fredrick Sandberg draws on ‘Habermas’s theory of communicative action’ (1984, 1987) stating ‘that the theory of communicative action is an eclectic theory that was developed with reference to several subject areas, but primarily influenced by philosophy and sociology’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 685). Sandberg states that ‘if we consider the suggestions of Habermas, it is possible to more clearly distinguish the norm of communicative action’ and ‘communicative action involves at least two actors that focus on reaching mutual understanding’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 686).

Habermas (1987) states that:

In communicative action participants pursue their plans cooperatively on the basis of a shared definition of the situation. If a shared definition of the situation has first to be negotiated, or if efforts to come to some agreement within the framework of shared definitions fail, the attainment of consensus, which is normally a condition for pursuing goals, can itself become an end (Habermas 1987 p. 126).

Sandberg (2014) highlights the usefulness of ‘communicative action for analysing RPL’ by stating ‘the theory of communicative action facilitates an analysis that can determine whether actions are oriented towards mutual understanding or individual success and what divergent outcomes these scenarios provide’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 686). According to Sandberg (2014), Habermas’s ‘theory of communicative action’ provides ways to understand what consequences ‘communication and actions’ have for RPL candidates understanding of their prior learning and knowledge (Sandberg, 2014, p. 695). His utilisation of Habermas’s theory of communicative action has relevance for my research as I investigated the mutual understandings about the benefits of RPL as emancipatory benefits that emerged during conversations among paraprofessionals in the policing sector. Of particular relevance for my investigation is Sandberg’s connection between RPL and communicative action. In his research Sandberg found that ‘when such mutual discussions occur the possibility for legitimately reproducing the lifeworld of caring practice by means of the RPL placement, can be successful’ (Sandberg, 2014, p.690).

Communication and mutual understanding as elements of communicative action are imperative in education, since they have an essential purpose in the development of the life

world. Habermas states that ‘communicative action is important for the socialisation and development of each individual and serves as the medium for reproduction of life worlds’ (Habermas, 1987, p. 337). Communicative action is, therefore, instrumental to critically understanding the life world and the learning that is taking place daily, thus making communication a potentially-critical factor in RPL. This is illustrated by Sandberg’s research in his analysis of his findings, he states that many of the participants involved in the RPL process experienced the ‘tutor – participant’ relationship in the placement process as positive, the two main reasons why this relationship works is the ‘tutor and candidate are able to orient their actions towards mutual understanding, and individuals supervising RPL placement are well informed about its purpose and are able to construct a schedule that allows for productive conversations’(Sandberg, 2014, p.690).

I perceive RPL in South Africa as a democratic initiative that is bringing about change through discourse, to a dominant discriminatory system that previously denied people access to further learning opportunities. With the view to RPL as emancipation, it is the communication and mutual understandings of RPL as an emancipatory discourse that could promote social integration in the life world and thus facilitate social inclusion and emancipation. In my view, emancipation could be facilitated through learning about how society is organised and how it can be changed, because this is how one learns how to transform one’s reality for the better. I refer to this as ‘emancipatory learning’. I consider the life world as a space for emancipatory learning, enlightenment and emancipation, because one needs to critically understand what takes place in one’s life world in order to change or reproduce it. Emancipation is therefore embedded in the reproduction of the life world as one frees oneself from domination.

With regard to RPL and emancipatory learning in South Africa, knowledge about improving one’s ‘historical situation’ is transferred through interaction and communication in the life world and creates a process of self-awareness with regard to further learning opportunities, ways to question a dominant ideology, to develop and improve themselves and, thus, emancipate themselves from their historical oppression. This self-awareness and understanding brought about by RPL as an emancipatory discourse is emancipatory learning, and gaining access to ‘previously denied’ further learning opportunities in the system is emancipation in action.

Communicative action, Dialogue and Mutual Understandings

To explain the significance of the 'theory of communicative action' and dialogue for his research Sandberg cites Habermas (1984) who asserts that 'in communicative action, actors harmonise their individual goals through consensus' and 'Habermas (1987) who argues that by raising truth claims and claims of normative rightness and truthfulness, thus referring to the objective, social and subjective worlds, individuals can engage in dialogue and successfully harmonise their plans for action' (Sandberg, 2014, p. 685). Sandberg uses Habermas's argument that 'reality can be divided into three worlds: the objective, social and subjective' (Sandberg, 2012, p. 253). Sandberg suggests:

The objective world is the totality of all entities about which true statements are possible, the social world is the totality of all legitimately regulated interpersonal relationships and the subjective world is the totality of the experiences of a person, to which he/she has privileged access (Sandberg, 2012, p. 253).

It is within these three worlds – the objective world, social world and subjective world – that people engage in dialogue and successfully harmonise actions (Habermas, 1987). When people engage in dialogue and harmonise their actions, it implies that a mutual understanding has been reached. This is illustrated by Sandberg who investigated the RPL process of health care assistants through which they learnt about their experience and prior learning through dialogue with and observation by tutors to determine their credits. He refers to a participant who reached mutual understanding of her situation to determine the credits for her prior learning because of frequent conversations with her tutor. Sandberg states that the participant 'Juno found that she and her tutor could orient their actions towards mutual understanding and where thus able to relate mutually to one another's experiences, which they shared during frequent conversations' (Sandberg, 2014, p.690).

Gouthro (2002) stated 'through dialogue new meanings and interpretations of the world emerge, leading to a transformation of individual perspectives' (Gouthro, 2002, p.3). This resonates with Sandberg's research findings which reveal that conversations took place between tutors and participants and the 'dialogue that took place transcended the boundaries of this more formal assignment to include more general discussions of the current status of caring practice', 'the last aspect potentially supports change' (Sandberg, 2014, p.690).

Drawing on Habermas, Freire asserts that: ‘Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it, through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don’t know; we can then act critically to transform reality’ (Shor & Freire, 1987, pp. 98-99). Like Sandberg (2014), Shor and Freire (1987) draw on Habermas as they highlight the importance of communication and dialogue as human beings develop and transform their reality. With a view to communicative action about RPL, one can see how communication and dialogue about one’s current situation can enable one to change it. Mezirow, influenced by Habermas, evaluated the role of dialogue in learning and like Freire and Shor (1987), considered that dialogue is important in creating new meanings and understanding of the world and for changing individual viewpoints (Sandberg, 2012). One can, therefore, see the potential importance of communication and dialogue in emancipatory learning with respect to RPL.

Sandberg’s analogy of an ideal communicative action-focussed RPL process resonates with processes through which paraprofessionals in the policing sector engage in dialogue about RPL prompting them to reflect on their work, prior learning experiences and knowledge, as they develop mutual understandings about its benefits.

Communicative action, reflection and mutual understandings

Sandberg identifies communication and reflection as elements of communicative-action in relation to RPL, stating that:

In an ideal communicative action-focussed RPL process, student and assessor would agree mutually on goals of the RPL process, reach mutual understanding on how the students should reflect on their prior experiences, and students would also be able to express thoughts and feelings subjectively; if RPL processes are based on mutual definitions of situation and mutual understanding in general, it could make the prior experiences more visible and thus easier for an assessor to accept as sufficient to apply for course credit (Sandberg, 2012, p. 354).

This mutual engagement and understanding is emancipative in itself, as it creates an enabling environment for people to change their circumstances for the better. This resonates with Sandberg, who draws on Brown (2001, 2002), stating that ‘work on the portfolio is one example of how prior experiential learning can be integrated in course-based learning’ and contribute to the learning process (Sandberg, 2012, p.356). Prior learning in this scenario is

considered to be a contributory factor in the learning process, as it involves communication and reflection. Sandberg (2010) highlights the significance of both communication and reflection in recognition of prior learning, and states that RPL procedures that have extra communication and reflection could provide an essential part for emancipating and enlightening healthcare assistants, and further states that educators working with RPL must assume a caring methodology that is more critical and communicative (Sandberg, 2010).

Similar to healthcare assistants, paraprofessionals within the policing sector are also engaged in occupational learning daily through communication and reflection and, as with the healthcare assistants, a further method of communication and reflection could play an essential part in their enlightenment and emancipation. This process of communication and reflection on RPL could lead to emancipatory learning, as this learning and understanding results in an emancipatory act of access to further learning or acknowledgement in the form of credit for their prior learning. In his investigation he found that ‘critical learning occurs when validity claims are not taken for granted’, and ‘when prior learning, experiences and knowledge of participants are used to critically reflect on situations they encounter in the RPL placement’(Sandberg, 2014, p. 687).

Recognition of prior learning, Emancipatory Learning and Emancipation

Emancipatory political and policy changes in South Africa have prompted many conversations among citizens in a variety of contexts. These communications present possibilities for emancipatory learning. The potential for emancipatory learning that prevails among paraprofessionals in the policing sector in their conversations about RPL as emancipatory benefits, are underestimated. Although such learning is largely informal, I was surprised to discover in my investigation, the meaningful insights among paraprofessionals in the policing sector, about RPL as emancipatory benefits that emerged in these conversations. Building on the discussions in the previous section, I discuss further in the next section, Habermas’s perspectives on emancipatory learning. This sets the stage for the later discussion about RPL for access and redress as emancipatory benefits.

Despite some significant criticisms, the German theorist and philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, has influenced educators to engage critically with their ideas and research on adult learning and education in a larger socio context. According to Brian Connelly, ‘current adult education theory within the Western world is increasingly influenced by the writings of Jurgen Habermas’ (Connelly, 1996, p. 241). Writers such as Brian Connelly (1996), Mezirow (1981,

1997), Welton (1991, 1995), Sandberg (2010, 2011, 2013, 2014) as well as Brookfield (2001, 2005) have utilized Habermas when analysing adult learning.

Welton (1991) states that ‘Habermas places learning processes at the centre of his critical project’ and ‘consciously works towards the development of critical theory with emancipatory intent’ (Welton, 1991, p. 36). Adult learning processes that consciously empower emancipatory intent resonate with adult learning, which often results in reflection and enlightenment. According to Michael Welton (1991), ‘in recent years, adult education theorists have turned to Habermasian critical theory to reconstruct the discipline and provide direction for emancipatory practice’ (Welton, 1991, p. 21). Welton (1991) states that the ‘critical theoretical tradition from Marx to Habermas can provide the foundation for an emancipatory educational practice’ and that, even though the ‘theory of emancipatory education was always present in the Marxist tradition, it is only with Habermas that we begin to see the learning theory become explicit and self-conscious’ (Welton, 1991, p. 22). The statement by Welton (1991) resonates with Ewert (1991), who states that ‘critical theory is identified by an emphasis on emancipation that requires both enlightenment and action’ (Ewert, 1991, p. 346).

According to Held (1980), Habermas ‘argues that if emancipation from domination is to remain a project of humanity, it is essential to counter this tendency and to reaffirm the necessity of self-reflection for self-understanding’ (Held, 1980, p. 254). Emancipation is an express goal of Habermas, who desires to help people understand their personal situations that they live in through self-reflection and self-understanding in order to change it for the better. Held states that it is:

Habermas’ contention that, in every communicative situation in which a consensus is established under coercion or under other similar types of condition, we are likely to be confronting instances of systematically distorted communication, the process of emancipation then entails the transcendence of such systems of distorted communication (Held, 1980, p. 256).

This process ‘requires engaging in critical reflection and critique, as it is through reflection that domination in its various forms can be revealed’ (Held, 1980, p. 256). This critical engagement and reflection result in emancipatory learning.

Gerry Ewert (1991) states that the ‘grounding of Habermas’s thought in critical theory indicates the linkage among knowledge, interest and ideology’ (Ewert, 1991, p. 345). ‘Critical theory starts from a critique of ideology, defined as distorted knowledge, to enable individuals to become self-consciously aware of knowledge distortions’ (Ewert, 1991, p. 346). I view becoming self-consciously aware of knowledge distortions as enlightenment and a benefit of emancipatory learning. Ewert states that:

Self-consciousness and awareness of knowledge distortion is enlightenment and a precondition for individual freedom ... the individual becomes emancipated when, on the basis of his enlightenment, he or she takes freeing action that changes the social system to permit the realisation of his or her human potential (Ewert, 1991, p. 346).

When reflecting on Ewert (1991), I view this enlightenment as communication, self-reflection, self-awareness and understanding that occurs when paraprofessionals in the policing sector, engage in emancipatory learning about the RPL benefits of ‘access and redress’. Ewert draws on Roderick (1986), who summarises Habermas’ position as: ‘the human species has three cognitive interests: technical, practical and emancipatory’ (Ewert, 1991, p. 347). Ewert (1991) cites Bullough & Goldstein (1984) by stating ‘people’s emancipatory interest is reflected in our drive to transcend, to grow and to develop’ (Ewert, 1991, p. 354). Ewert (1991) remarks that:

Mezirow provides the clearest comprehensive statement on emancipatory interest’ and adds that ‘emancipation is from institutional or environmental forces which limit our options and rational control over our lives, but have been taken for granted as beyond human control ... insights gained through self-awareness are emancipatory in the sense that one can recognise the correct reasons for his or her problems (Ewert, 1991, p. 354).

As discussed earlier, conversations among participants about RPL as emancipatory benefits create opportunities for emancipatory learning. During these conversations, the possibility of gaining access to education to which they were previously denied access, people become consciously aware of their own learning histories through reflection which leads to self-awareness that increases their emancipatory interests in education, which, in turn, leads to emancipatory learning. This learning in itself is emancipatory, as it creates self-awareness and provides the possibility of growth and development. The access to opportunity for

education through the RPL route that was previously denied to them is also an act of emancipation, as it allows people to free themselves from a dominant system that previously denied them access to higher education and development. Relying on Habermas, and the given context of post-1994 transformation, I interpret these as emancipatory benefits of RPL.

SECTION 3 – SOUTH AFRICAN POLICIES, COMMUNICATION, RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING, ACCESS AND REDRESS AS EMANCIPATORY BENEFITS

In this section I discuss and describe relevant South African policies' communication of access and redress as RPL's emancipatory benefits. This discussion is based on a systematic study of policy documents, which could be considered similar to the research method known as 'document analysis'.

RPL is still in its infant stage in South Africa, especially with regard to its approach and its application, and is still developing. It is also clear, according to the SAQA RPL policy document, 'from both local and international experiences of RPL, the principles of equity, access and redress are objectives that need explicit translation into practice if they are to be met' (SAQA, 2002, p. 8). It is, therefore, critical that definitions on RPL within policy be clear and unambiguous in order to achieve a systematic approach to the development and implementation of RPL. SAQA is the body responsible the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), a key initiative of the NQF is RPL (SAQA, 2002). 'Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is defined in the National Standards Bodies Regulations (No. 18787 of 28 March 1998, issued in terms of SAQA Act 58 of 1995)' as follows:

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 specific qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements (SAQA, 2002, p. 7).

This definition 'issued in terms of SAQA Act 58 of 1995' gives us clarity on the principles of development of RPL, which is that learning occurs 'formally, informally and non-formally' (SAQA, 2002, p. 7). 'Measurement takes place against specific outcomes' and learners are credited for learning that meets those requirements (SAQA, 2002, p. 7). This means that, according to SAQA 1995, 'the process of recognising prior learning is about':

Identifying what the candidate knows and can do, matching the candidate's skills, knowledge and experience to specific standards and the associated assessment criteria against those standards, assessing the candidates against those standards, and crediting the candidate for skills, knowledge and experience built up through formal, informal and non-formal learning that occurred in the past (SAQA, 2002, p. 8).

'In practice, this basically means that a learner or employee's non-traditional or non-formal experience and learning can be recognised' for either access to or advance standing into a qualification (SAQA, 2002, p. 7).

Key objectives of the NQF and SAQA relevant to RPL are facilitating 'access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths and accelerating redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities' (SAQA, 2002, p.8). The South African Qualifications Authority, 'National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning', defines RPL as: 'The principles and processes through which the prior skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development' (SAQA, 2013, p. 5).

The definition of RPL from various South African policies and Acts from 1995 to 2015 remained consistent with its original principles of acknowledgement of prior experiential learning.

The objectives of the NQF have become synonymous with the radical goals of transformation and empowerment. This is clearly visible in the SAQA document (2002), which states that the 'key objectives of the NQF relevant to RPL are facilitating access to, and mobility and progression within ETD and career paths and to accelerate redress of past unfair discrimination in ETD and employment opportunities' (SAQA, 2002, p. 8). RPL policy and practices, according to SAQA, should explicitly address all the barriers to learning and assessment, thus promoting a credible vehicle for lifelong learning (SAQA, 2002). Emancipation is embedded within the access and redress initiative within education and training policies.

RPL could address social justice issues by giving recognition to a knowledge base embedded within a work force that was previously not acknowledged, creating access to further learning and allowing them to emancipate and free themselves of discrimination.

Even though it is accepted that transformation of education policy is not to be achieved by RPL alone, it is within the setting of the RPL policy that transformation captures a universal methodology to assessment, a workable and developmental approach to the implementation of RPL, redressing the injustices of the past, making access to education available and acknowledging the nature of knowledge construction and the different settings in which RPL will be implemented (SAQA, 2002).

The two main ‘objectives of recognition of prior learning in context of the NQF are to facilitate access and accelerate redress of past unfair discrimination’ (SAQA, 2013, p. 6).

A significant characteristic of RPL discourse in South Africa is the concept of social justice, this can be seen in ‘the National Qualifications Framework objectives to facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education and training and to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education training and employment opportunities’ (SAQA, 2013, p. 6). Facilitating access refers to access to education as well as employment opportunities, previously disadvantaged groups did not easily gain access to education opportunities. Accelerating redress refers to empowering those disadvantaged categories of people who were unfairly discriminated against with regard to employment and education opportunities.

The South African Government maintained its commitment to redress the unfair discrimination in education and training through its policies; this is evident in the draft policy for RPL (2015), where it states that ‘it seeks to provide a firm policy statement to ensure the objectives of the NQF are met, especially to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities’ and ‘facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education and training and career paths’ (SAQA, 2015, p. 4).

The draft RPL policy (2015) ‘is based on the report and proposals from the ministerial task team on a national strategy for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and White Paper for Post-School Education and Training’, ‘it also recognises a range of RPL-related initiatives that have been underway for a number of years and those that are planned for the future as part of an integrated strategy for implementation’ (SAQA, 2015, p. 4).

The ‘main policy objectives of the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training is that the Department of Higher Education and Training improves the capacity of the post-school education and training system to meet the needs of the country’ (DHET, 2013, p. 5).

The ‘White Paper for Post-School Education clearly states that recognition of prior learning (RPL) remains the key approach to redressing the past injustices and recognising competence gained through practical workplace learning and experience’ (DHET, 2013, p. 73).

The ‘Quality Council for Trade and Occupations (QCTO) was established in 2010 in terms of section 26G of the Skills Development Act of 1998’ (QCTO, 2014, p.6). The ‘QCTO acknowledges RPL as a fundamental tenet of the NQF and provides for access, progression, support and career guidance for learners at all levels in formal education and training as well as the workplace’ (QCTO , 2014, p. 6). The QCTO ‘policy for Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) draws on the White Paper for Post-School Education’ (November 2013) and ‘further states that RPL will be applied more widely, especially for young adults who wish to access programmes in colleges’ (QCTO, 2014, p. 6).

This White Paper guides the DHET to:

Build a vibrant democracy and sets out a vision for a post-school system that can assist in building a fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa, a single, co-ordinated post-school education and training system, expanded access, improved quality and increased diversity of provision, a stronger and more co-operative relationship between education and training institutions and the workplace, a post-school education and training system that is responsive to the needs of individual citizens and of employers in both public and private sectors, as well as broader societal and developmental objectives (DHET, 2013, p. 5).

It is ‘policies such as the recognition of prior learning policy’ that ‘provides an enabling environment for further development and implementation of RPL across the post-school education and training system, and across all levels of the NQF’ (SAQA, 2015, p. 4).

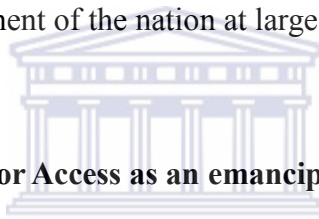
The ‘South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) was mandated by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008 to develop a national policy for RPL’ (SAQA, 2013, p. 2). SAQA oversees the NQF and ‘embraces inclusivity and social justice’ and has ‘a specific mandate for RPL’ in achieving the objectives of the NQF, ‘resources and opportunities must be provided for equitable access to RPL programmes and services in a manner that is consistent with government’s commitment to redress imbalances that exist in our greatly unequal society and specifically our labour market’ (SAQA, 2013, p. 7).

According to the ‘National Policy for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning, the idea of RPL is aligned to main elements of South African national policy discourse since 1994: transformation, accreditation, lifelong learning and the NQF’ (SAQA, 2013, p. 5).

The reviewed ‘policy for RPL provides for the implementation of RPL within the context of the NQF Act 67 of 2008, to position RPL in relation to principles and priorities of the NQF in South Africa’ (SAQA, 2013, p. 3).

RPL is supported by the South African NQF Act 67 of 2008 whose key objectives in terms of RPL is to ‘facilitate access within education, training and career paths’ and ‘accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities’ (SAQA, 2013, p. 7).

The emancipatory benefits of RPL for an individual are embedded in the objectives of the NQF, which is ‘designed to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large’ (SAQA, 2013, p. 7).



Recognition of Prior Learning for Access as an emancipatory benefit

The Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998 prescribes that every employer recognised as a ‘designated employer must take steps to promote equal opportunity in the workplace by eliminating discrimination in any employment policy or practice’ (Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, p. 1). For the purposes of this research paper, which focuses on municipal law enforcement, I mention that the municipality is a designated employer as referred to in ‘Chapter 7 of the constitution and a designated group of people refers to black people, women and people with disabilities’ (Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, p. 3). The ‘Employment Equity Act’ makes provision for ‘ensuring the equitable representation of suitably qualified people from designated groups in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce’ (Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, p. 9).

This Act also states that it ‘will not be unfair discrimination to exclude any person if they do not have the inherent requirements of the job’ (Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, p. 7). To create equal opportunity in the workplace, disadvantaged groups of people need to gain access to education, training and development opportunities. There are explicit:

...Duties placed on designated employers with the view to achieving employment equity; affirmative action measures need to be implemented for designated groups of people, people from designated groups need to be developed by implementing appropriate training, including measures in terms of an Act of Parliament providing for skills development (Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, p. 9).

This provides a clear link between the Employment Equity Act and other acts relating to education training and development. An Act of Parliament providing for skills development refers to Acts such as the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008 to name a few (Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998). Similarly to the 'Employment Equity Act, the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 refers to designated groups as black people, women and people with disabilities' (Skills Development Act 97, 1998, p. 5).

The purposes of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 are:

To develop the skills of the South African workforce, to improve the quality of life of workers, their prospects of labour mobility, to increase the levels of investment in education and training, to encourage employers to use the workplace as an active learning environment and to encourage workers to participate in learning programmes (Skills Development Act 97, 1998, p. 10).

Chapter 6 of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 prescribes that the functions of the Department of Labour and employment services that can be linked to RPL is to assist the workforce and designated groups with access into learning programmes and finding placement opportunities (Skills Development Act 97, 1998). The Skills Development Act provides for the establishment of skills development institutes that may advise on skills development matters, recognition of prior learning and support any prescribed function to develop and promote skills development (Skills Development Act 97, 1998).

John Brennan and Rajani Naidoo (2008) draw on Thomas (2001) when highlighting barriers to access to education by stating that the 'barriers to widening participation that might need to be addressed include the cost of participation, entry requirements, a lack of flexible learning opportunities (including curricula), limited availability of support services and an institutional culture' (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008, p. 293).

Similarly to John Brennan and Rajani Naidoo (2008), SAQA confirms that implementation:

Will be achieved by recognising the barriers to implementation, such as: limited incentives, lack of resources to develop and sustain services at affordable prices, lack of trained RPL personnel, inadequate supporting systems such as administrative systems without robust alternative access routes, and institutional resistance and lack of capacity must be addressed (SAQA, 2013, p. 3).

Some of the national policy objectives on RPL implementation are to ensure development on RPL implementation, recognise the roles of various role players and stakeholders with regard to RPL within education and training, ‘support national co-ordination by SAQA, promote shared understanding on RPL within the context of lifelong learning and support possible applicants to gain recognition for their knowledge and skills that is needed for their individual development’ (SAQA, 2013, p. 4).

Recognition of Prior Learning for Redress as an emancipatory benefit

The Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998 was formulated to address employment equity matters. This Act recognises that:

As a result of apartheid and other discriminatory laws and practices, there are disparities in employment, occupation and income within the national labour market, and that those disparities create such pronounced disadvantages for certain categories of people that they cannot be redressed simply by repealing discriminatory laws (Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, p. 1).

Some of the objectives of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 are ‘to develop the skills of the South African workforce, their prospects and to improve employment prospects of persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those disadvantaged through training and education’ (Skills Development Act 97, 1998, p. 5). Skills development goals such as these could be fulfilled through RPL and achieved through a framework comprising of a number of stakeholders and by encouraging both private and public sectors of the economy to work together in turning the workplace into a learning environment (Skills Development Act 97, 1998).

Workers often perform various tasks in the workplace, but, because this informal knowledge is not officially recognised, this knowledge does not result in promotion or salary increases. In the policing sector, experienced staff members with no formal education are often

overlooked for management promotion opportunities in favour of others with formal qualifications. The irony of this practice is that, in my experience, in many cases these overlooked experienced people have to provide support and guidance to the people who have been promoted.

In my experience with the union movement and in the workplace, the objectives of social justice and emancipation can only be achieved when the exploited become empowered to change their circumstances and this can be achieved through RPL. The union has always argued for the recognition and knowledge that workers have acquired through years of experience in the workplace and communities of practice. RPL is vital for the acknowledgement of worker skill, so that it can be recognised formally, and in so doing benefit the individual worker and support the implementation of employment equity. RPL processes can, therefore, assist in ensuring employment equity in the workplace and social justice in society. This is in line with government's commitment to redress the imbalances in our labour market.

RPL could provide more than just access to a qualification, but also possibly lower the cost of a qualification, thus possibly eliminating a cost barrier to education, creating a greater opportunity for the spread of education and training and thus creating an enabling environment for redress. This would make access to education more possible for those disadvantaged individuals who previously could not obtain an education due to the cost barrier. Through its emancipatory nature, RPL would, therefore, support the objectives of the Employment Equity Act and social justice by providing opportunities for those disadvantaged groups who were previously denied opportunities and breaking down inequalities in society by formally acknowledging people's informal knowledge.

When reading the literature above, one can see that there is a relationship between RPL, employment equity, benefits to the individual, emancipation and social justice. Based on the literature above, one can see that RPL definitely has a role to play in delivering on government's objectives of access and redress.

SECTION 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this section I outline the research design and methodology that guides my investigation.

Merriam states that ‘in critical inquiry, the goal is to critique, challenge and empower and to transform’ (Merriam, 2009, p. 10). I have framed this research within a critical theory framework that focusses on inclusivity, social justice, emancipation and social transformation as conveyed by early South African government policies. Merriam further identifies a critical framework to emancipate and engage the distribution of power in society: ‘Those who engage in critical research frame their questions in terms of power – who has it, how’s it negotiated, what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power, and so on’ (Merriam, 2009, p. 10).

Research Question

What are the benefits of RPL in the policing sector?

Research Approach

I have investigated the benefits of RPL within a Policing agency within a Municipality. I have adopted a qualitative approach with participants who have chosen the RPL option to gain access to a qualification. This qualitative approach has allowed me to investigate the benefits of RPL in the policing sector from the viewpoints of people in policing involved in RPL. Merriam notes that the ‘researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis and that, in qualitative research, the focus is on meaning, process and understanding’ (Merriam, 2009, p.4). Merriam (2009) cites Patton, who argues ‘that when one examines and judges accomplishments and effectiveness, one is engaged in evaluation. When this examination of effectiveness is conducted systematically and empirically through data collection and thoughtful analysis, one is engaged in evaluation research’ (Merriam, 2009, p. 4).

Qualitative research is entrenched in social settings and highlights words instead of quantification in collecting and analysing data (Bryman, 2008). Collected data would be explained by using deductive logic methodology. This implies that collected data would be explained by using existing theories of learning (Bryman, 2008, p. 24). According to Bryman, the ontological position asserts that ‘the social world is regarded as something external to social actors or something that people are in the process of fashioning’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 19). It implies that the social world is not in control of social action and ‘that they are in a

constant state of revision based on practices and through small innovations in how things are done' (Bryman, 2008, p. 6). Bryman is, therefore, suggesting that people are constructing meaning through social interaction with one another (Bryman, 2008). The construction of meaning within these social settings was the foundation for the investigation of RPL. A qualitative research approach was implemented to investigate the benefits of this prior learning within the policing sector as a social setting.

Research Site

My research site was a Training Academy that was established in 2008 to deliver accredited basic training. The Training Academy also delivers continuous training programmes. The training academy is made up of an in-service training department responsible for continuous training, a basic training department responsible for accredited training and a quality assurance and skills development department responsible for monitoring and evaluation and skills development, which includes RPL. This makes the training academy the access point for all law enforcers to undergo most of their formal training, funded by the municipality. The training academy employs educators and other staff to provide additional accredited soft skill training.

Research Participants and Selection

The participants were women and men employees who have more than 12 years' experience and have participated in the academy's RPL opportunities. The age group of participants ranges from 32 years to 60 years. These are employees who have completed the course for which they have gained access through RPL. For the selection, I accessed the contact details of potential participants from the academy's database. I selected participants using purposive sampling, which enabled me to select 50% males and 50% females. Once I had selected the men and women respectfully, I selected 10 women and 10 men using random selection. This method of selection reduced the chances of bias, as an equal number of men and women were selected. The largest number of participants that gained access to a qualification through RPL came from law enforcement services. I sampled participants from law enforcement services who have chosen the RPL option to gain access to a qualification.

Research Instrument

I chose an interview guide to gather the data (see Appendix 1). The interview guide included a combination of closed and open-ended questions. If an interview guide is used, 'it should not be too structured in its application and should allow some flexibility in the asking of questions' (Bryman, 2008, p. 498).

The idea of an interview guide is less specific than an interview schedule, which is very specific (Bryman, 2008). According to Bryman, an interview guide 'allows the interviewer to glean the ways in which research participants view their social worlds and allows for flexibility to conduct the interviews' (Bryman, 2008, p. 473).

The questions in my interview guide were, however, standardised to ensure that all participants would respond to all the questions. This standardisation ensures that each participant is asked exactly the same question; thus, 'each participant receives exactly the same interview stimulus' (Bryman, 2008, p. 210). The aim of ensuring that the questions in the interview guide are the same for each participant 'is to ensure that the participants responses can be aggregated': 'This can only be achieved reliably if participant responses are in response to identical cues.' (Bryman, 2008, p. 210)

The interview guide is beneficial because of its flexibility, as it has both closed and open-ended questions, where the open-ended questions complement the closed questions (Bryman, 2008). According to Bryman, a disadvantage of only using closed questions is that there may be a loss of spontaneity in participant answers. A solution to this problem is to use an open-ended question to generate the categories (Bryman, 2008).

Some basic elements of my interview guide that I employed were to create order within topic areas to ensure a flow in my questions and I formulated interview questions on the topic in a way that would help me to answer my research questions, and used language that is understandable and relevant to the research participants who I was interviewing.

I probed the following focus areas in the interview guide:

- 1) Profile and Qualifications – This gave me an indication of the gender and age, as well as the designations of the participants. It also gave an indication of the amount of years' experience the candidate has in his/her current position of work.

2) Employment History and Assessment of Redress Training Needs – This gave me an indication of the various jobs the candidate previously occupied, which also gave an indication of the various types of experience the candidate acquired over the years as well as what qualifications the candidate acquired since he started working in his life.

3) RPL Qualifications through a Police Training Academy – Showed the qualifications the candidate was currently studying and why the candidate chose the RPL option. This also showed what benefits the candidate expected before undergoing the RPL option as well what method of assessment took place during the RPL process.

4) Communication, RPL and Benefits – Showed what the most important benefits of RPL were for the individual candidate. It also showed how the benefits of RPL were communicated between them and what their understanding of RPL was. It also showed how they further communicated their understanding of RPL and its benefits to others after they experienced it.

5) RPL Benefits and Social Justice – Showed the effects RPL had on the individual candidates both in the workplace and outside of work. It showed how the individual viewed the benefits of RPL for themselves.

6) RPL Acknowledgment and Equity – The questions focused on the effects of the benefits of RPL on the individual and how the individual viewed them in relation to a person who underwent the traditional route of study. It also indicated how managers viewed people who underwent RPL in relation to people who underwent the traditional route of study.

Research Method

I used an interview as a research method. A research method is a system for gathering information, which could include an instrument such as a structured interview, self-completion questionnaire, participant observation or an interview guide (Bryman, 2008). According to Bryman, ‘interviews in qualitative research are typically of the unstructured or semi-structured kind’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 498). Interviews are particularly useful for understanding a person’s experiences, as the interviewer can discuss specific topics with the participant (McNamara, 1999).

I conducted an interview using an interview guide as described earlier. I have conducted face-to-face interviews and clarity on the questions could be provided immediately, ensuring a faster process. Therefore, I did not anticipate problems with the successful collection of data.

I distributed a participant information sheet and a participant consent form to 20 candidates who gained access to a qualification through RPL. This detailed my intention to conduct the research, my request to conduct the interview as well as what it was about. Participants were representative from all areas and came from junior and middle management as well as senior management.

A total of 12 agreed to participate in the research.

I set up appointments and interviews with the individual participants at a time that was convenient to them. To maximise participation, I provided all participants with an information letter and a consent form, informing them what the research is about and that participation is voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. I conducted all interviews ethically, as explained later under the research ethics statement.

According to Bryman, you must 'be familiar with the setting in which the interviews will take place' (Bryman, 2008, p. 497). This helped me to understand what he/she is saying in the interviewees' own terms (Bryman, 2008).

Data Gathering

In order to gather the data, I first applied for consent from the Executive Director of Safety and Security to conduct the research on the benefits of RPL. After consent was granted, I conducted purposive sampling, gathering 10 males and 10 females in order to conduct the research. I sent out 20 emails to prospective candidates and set up interviews. Securing an interview with all 20 posed a few unexpected challenges. Five participants who originally accepted to do the interview did not participate. One participant, Patricia, went on maternity leave and wasn't available anymore. One other participant, Cathy, even after I assured her that everything will remain confidential, later cancelled, as she did not feel comfortable with the idea of a recording device and wanted me to conduct the interview without it. Zainup, Dion and Pedro kept changing the agreed interview date due to either shift work or family commitments, and the other four participants never responded to my emails or telephone messages. I accepted the fact that not everyone wanted to partake in the interviews, as it was entirely voluntary, and proceeded to conduct the interviews with the willing participants. As stated by Bryman (2008), it is important that ethical issues such as risk of harm, voluntary participation, anonymity, informed consent and confidentiality must be taken into account when conducting research. Therefore, I did not want any of the participants to feel pressured in any way to partake in the interviews. I conducted the interviews during the period from

March to May 2015. Each participant signed the consent form on the day before the interview was conducted, 10 people were interviewed in an empty office at the Ndabene fitness centre, one interview was held at a coffee shop in Observatory and one interview was conducted at an office in the Muizenberg Pavilion. To ensure that relationships of power did not affect the interviews, I wore civilian clothing during every interview and did not use any Metropolitan Police facility to conduct the interviews. This resonates with Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, who state that ‘concepts of relationships and power between researchers and participants are embedded in qualitative research’ (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001, p. 93).

Data Capturing

I recorded all interviews using an audio recorder and downloaded it to a computer file. I also made handwritten notes. I was aware of the potential threats of electronic devices and technical problems with regard to losing data; therefore, I stored data in various forms, such as disc, USB flash drive and on the audio recorder as well as hardcopy handwritten notes.

I left the audio recorder switched on even after the interview was completed, as the interviewee sometimes shared further information after the formal interview had been completed. This was as suggested by Bryman, who asserts it is a good idea to keep the audio recorder switched on even after the interview is completed, as important issues can come to the fold after the interview is completed (Bryman, 2008).

Research Ethics Statement

With regard to ‘ethical principles in social research or perhaps transgressions of them, tend to revolve around certain issues such as whether there is harm to participants, whether there is a lack of formal consent, whether there is an invasion of privacy or whether deception is involved’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 135). Harm could entail physical harm, loss of self-esteem or stress due to research and this is considered by most people to be unacceptable (Bryman, 2008). According to Clive Seale, ‘it is important that no harm, physical or psychological, will come to anyone taking part in your research’ (Seale, 1998, p. 119).

Ethical standards promote the integrity of the research. Whenever research is conducted on people, the well-being of the research participants must be on top of the researcher’s priority list. Ethical issues that need to be considered when conducting research include risk of harm, voluntary participation, anonymity, informed consent and confidentiality (Bryman, 2008). In view of the ethical issues discussed, I conducted my research in ethical ways that would not

harm the participants. I provided all participants with an information letter that provides details about me, the research project and the purpose of the research, so that they could make an informed decision as to whether or not they would like to participate in the research (see Appendix 3). I explained to each participant that participation is voluntary and that their consent would be required before I conducted the interview. I also explained that the participant has the right to withdraw at any time during the course of the interview.

To secure the participant's consent, I drafted a consent form that was signed by each participant (see Appendix 4). The consent form explained that an interview would take place and that it would be audio recorded. A space was provided on the consent form for the participant's signature, date of the interview and the place of the interview. I requested consent from all participants and they were requested to complete the consent forms before any interviews took place. I requested consent from the organisation that I have selected as my research site. To secure such consent, I submitted a letter to the Executive Director of Safety and Security (see Appendix 2).

Conducting research in an organisation where I am employed could have presented some challenges. According to Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 'Concepts of relationships and power between researchers and participants are embedded in qualitative research' (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001, p. 93). Some of the participants were my junior and peer colleagues as well as equals in my organisation. I was aware that, as a senior, my power influence could affect their responses. To address this, I identified myself as a researcher and wore casual clothes for the interviews. I occasionally made use of a boardroom at the fitness centre in Ndabene that is open for bookings by anyone in the city and later made use of empty office space at the Ndabene fitness centre and a coffee shop in Observatory to conduct the interviews. I once also had an interview at Muizenberg Pavilion. This way, I maintained the anonymity of the participants and created a more relaxed atmosphere for the interview.

Maintaining confidentiality is important in preventing harm to participants (Bryman, 2008, p. 136). According to Clive Seale, 'ethical issues in social research are not always clear cut, but a key one is the preservation of confidentiality and the privacy of people involved' (Seale, 1998, p. 119). I maintained the confidentiality of all participants. Due to the fact that I gathered data that included personal information about participants, I maintained confidentiality in the following ways: I did not share any information with any person and I kept all completed consent forms, interview guides and audio recordings in a secure place

during the course of the research. All participants were informed in the consent form about a code of confidentiality with regard to all participants.

Respecting anonymity in the dissemination of research findings and results is important in protecting research participants. As suggested by Clive Seale, 'I need to consider how I will ensure that individual students will not be identifiable when I present my findings' (Seale, 1998, p. 119). I ensured that all the data was treated confidentially, separated from identifiable individuals and stored the code linking data to individuals securely as indicated by Bryman (2008). This ensured the anonymity of individual participants. I further ensured confidentiality and anonymity of the participants by conducting the interviews one at a time with each participant at different times at a venue that does not form part of the Metropolitan Police Department or the training academy. To further protect the identities of the participants, I provided pseudonyms to substitute the real names of participants, the research site and the organisation before the thesis became public domain.

I will keep all records relating to the research in a secure facility for five years. Unauthorised access will not be allowed.



SECTION 5: DATA ANALYSIS

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDINGS, RPL BENEFITS FOR EMANCIPATION: ACCESS AND REDRESS

In Section 5, I analyse the data that I gathered through my investigation.

The aim of this study was to investigate the benefits of RPL for RPL candidates, to develop new theoretical perspectives on the implementation of RPL in the workplace and to influence policy development on RPL in the workplace.

I used an interview guide and gathered specific information on the benefits of RPL for RPL candidates and how RPL has been communicated to them, as well as social justice, emancipation and equality.

The data analysis stage is ‘fundamentally about data reduction – that is concerned with reducing the large corpus of information that the researchers has gathered, so that he or she can make sense of it’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 13). I transcribed the interviews and I identified the themes that emerged in the transcripts. I identified four themes that emerged from the data: benefits of RPL, RPL equity and social justice, understanding of RPL, and RPL and communication.

I assigned a code to each of the themes. This code was used in a coding schedule, making it easy to analyse data. This made data more manageable ‘than just listening and relistening to the recording’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 13).

According to Clive Seale, ‘reliability and validity are important; the principle is basically ensuring consistency and accuracy in the way data is collected and analysed’ (Seale, 1998, p. 118). Raw data had to be worked, this meant that I had to review the data to see if there were any noticeable errors. For example, interviews are usually audio recorded and then transcribed, this means ‘I will have to be alert to possible hearing mistakes that might affect the meaning of people’s replies’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 13).

According to Bryman, with the analysis of qualitative data, ‘coding is a process whereby the data is broken down into their component parts and those parts are given labels’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 13). I labelled the data according to the identified themes.

The data was then managed by searching for recurrences of those sequences of coded themes within the cases and also links between the codes. ‘In the case of qualitative data, when not

grouped into categories like themes, it will be impossible to interpret the material' (Bryman, 2008, p. 13).

In this way, I was able to make sense of the data through coding the themes. I could then relate the data to the research questions. Once the data was organised, I wrote up the data analysis, which I used to generate findings and make recommendations.

According to Bryman, 'complete objectivity is impossible in social research' (Bryman, 2008, p. 379). Due to my involvement in RPL in the workplace, my objectivity in terms of the study could be called into question. The purpose of this study is to confirm the benefits of RPL in the policing sector; I have, however, not allowed my personal beliefs to impact on the research or its findings.

Demographic Information

I sent out 20 invitations by email to potential participants who accessed a qualification through RPL to participate in the investigation and avail themselves for an interview. I explained the purpose and confidentiality to them as well as the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. During the months of March and May, 12 candidates accepted the invitation and availed themselves for the interview.

The data revealed that participants represented all levels within law enforcement, namely junior, middle management and senior management. This was a good representation of participants representing all levels of exposure to RPL.

There were more men than women who participated; of the 12 participants, four were women and eight were men. The gender balance of 50% women and 50% men was not met. The age groups varied between 30 and 60 years old. Participants were between the ages of 30 and 40, 40 and 50, and 50 and 60. The oldest student was 60 years old.

Communicative action and mutual understandings of RPL as emancipatory benefits: access and redress

The theory of communicative action enables me to analyse the ways in which mutual understandings about RPL as emancipatory benefits prompted municipal police in the policing sector to pursue RPL. Here it is important to re-iterate a definition of communicative action,

In communicative action participants pursue their plans cooperatively on the basis of a shared definition of the situation. If a shared definition of the situation has first to be negotiated, or if efforts to come to some agreement within the framework of a shared definitions fail, the attainment of consensus, which is normally a condition for pursuing goals, can itself become an end (Habermas, 1987 ,p. 126).

In this investigation the actors involved in communicative action were the ‘Training Academy’ and the participants in their various roles as ‘management’, ‘colleagues’, and ‘friends’.

The Training Academy: Communicating the benefits of RPL as emancipation

As an actor, the Training Academy played an instrumental role in creating and publicising information about RPL, and its benefits. The Training Academy communicated information about RPL and its benefits to participants. The Training Academy planned to implement RPL processes for all qualifying participants within the directorate. Charles Parker described RPL as it is described and endorsed by the quality policy manual of the Training Academy.

Charles Parker at the Training Academy described RPL to participants as:

An assessment process through which learners may be awarded credits for learning that they have already obtained through work experience or some form of prior learning. During this assessment, they have to show that they meet the learning outcomes in the learning standards for a particular qualification through demonstration what they know and are able to do. It is possible to obtain a whole qualification, or part qualification, through RPL.

The Training Academy is a place of adult education which I locate in the life world and is managed by adult educators. As the data reveals, the Training Academy facilitated communicative action in respect of RPL and its benefits. The fact that adult educators played such a huge role in communicating information about RPL to participants resonates with Welton (1995), who, similarly to Habermas, states that adult educators can sustain and defend the life world by fostering communicative action (Welton, 1995). Concurring with Welton is Gouthro (2002), who draws on Habermas and states that ‘communicative action is necessary

to maintain a healthy and productive society’, and the ‘role of adult educators, then, would be to assess ways to foster communicative action, and in so doing, sustain the lifeworld’ (Gouthro, 2002, p.2).

Communication is an important component of communicative action, because communication is a pre-requisite for the development of mutual understandings. Several participants confirmed that the Training Academy communicated information about RPL to them and invited them to present a portfolio of evidence and to attend a formal interview in order to be assessed for the recognition of their prior learning for access to formal qualifications. Some participants said that this information was disseminated at presentations by the Training Academy, some said that they found out about RPL at an information session and presentation, and others said that they received emails about RPL information sessions taking place.

The Training Academy sent out E-mails informing people about RPL presentations and communication sessions that were taking place at the Training Academy. Participants shared the following:

I think an email was sent, requesting all staff interested in RPL to come to the academy (Frank).

Mr Charles Parker sent a mail asking who was interested in studying further and improving themselves (Gerard).

A mail was sent to all areas to get their documents together and come for a road show and interview at the academy in Observatory (Todd).

Participants were informed at a presentation held at the Training Academy by Charles Parker, the quality assurance and skills development manager. They said:

I was informed through information sessions at the training academy (Samantha).

RPL was communicated by Charles Parker (Candice).

I was formally invited via the Training Academy to attend an information session where RPL was communicated (Kevin).

Originally, we were informed by Charles Parker (Paul).

I was informed by Charles Parker (Fred).

I was informed by Charles Parker to go for RPL to see what I need to study further (Cindy).

I was informed by the Training Academy (Carlo).

Cindy said that RPL was communicated to her by Charles Parker as well as through discussions with her colleagues, who were all interested in getting involved with RPL (Cindy).

I found out about RPL through a college road show and presentation in the boardroom (Jillian).

Participants also said that they were made aware of RPL informally by their colleagues and friends:

One of my colleagues informed me about it (Brent).

It was mentioned by my colleagues that the college were holding RPL sessions (Mark).

Charles Parker informed me about it while having a chat and conversation about RPL, and convinced me to look at it. We never knew about RPL before, Charles made it available at the time, otherwise, I would not have known, really. Our experience and knowledge and all the courses we did will be recognised. Later other people from the college spoke more things that broadened my horizon.

I had an expectation to achieve my goals (Candice).

Candice further states that, during the mutual discussions on RPL, a mutual understanding was reached on the value of RPL and she was convinced to undergo RPL. The statement from Candice below reinforces this statement and implies the process of communicative action, because, in order to convince someone, there must be mutual engagement with a specific purpose of achieving an outcome and the parties must have reached consensus. The statements made by Candice highlight the fact that communication on RPL and its benefits were taking place, the fact that Candice states that her horizon was broadened shows that mutual understandings on RPL and its benefits were reached among the participants. This resonates with Fredrik Sandberg (2014) who states that 'if we consider the suggestions of Habermas, it is possible to more clearly distinguish the norm of communicative action' and

‘communicative action involves at least two actors who focus on reaching mutual understanding’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 686).

Mutual understandings / shared definitions about RPL as emancipatory benefits: Consensus

As the shared definitions of RPL and its benefits were negotiated several participants gained confidence, applied for RPL and were accepted into the formal qualifications. They said that they expected to be promoted and encouraged others to study as well.

Carlo said that he was one of the first to experience RPL and, at the time, many did not know about it. He further states:

I think I was actually one of the first, so I could speak to other colleagues really. I encouraged other people to study through RPL, many of them are better off now, they got promoted. I just wanted to know why you did not come up with this long ago. This should have been implemented like 10 years ago (Carlo).

Carlo’s eagerness to develop and improve his situation resonates with Ewert (1991), who cites Bullough & Goldstein (1984), by stating ‘people’s emancipatory interest is reflected in our drive to transcend, to grow and to develop’ (Ewert, 1991, p.354).

I think I was one of the first guys to successfully get through the RPL process and actually get promoted (Gerard).

At first people didn’t want to learn as there was no incentive. They felt that you had a job and you were in the same position not moving for 15 years. With the advent of RPL, I think it’s an Act and with the learning institutions coming on board and making it accessible to us, well, actually to people like Mr Parker, who in turn fed it to us and in so doing changed our personal and professional lives for the better.

I expected to improve my prospects for promotion. I’ve completed my qualification and I was promoted (Kevin).

The statements made by Kevin highlight the fact that communication on RPL and its benefits were taking place, the fact that Kevin expected to improve his personal life as well

as his prospects for promotion shows that mutual understandings on RPL and its benefits were reached among the participants.

Prompted by the Training Academy's dissemination of the information about RPL, animated conversations about RPL and its benefits spread like wild fire through the policing sector.

Consensus about the understandings of RPL as emancipatory benefits is evident in the statement made by Carlo:

I was made aware about RPL at a discussion with Charles Parker at the training school. I also spoke with other colleagues there about RPL and everyone was praising it. I immediately went to Gregory afterwards to encourage him because I recognised the benefits for him. I encouraged him because with his service years and experience, RPL will give him a better chance, actually I encouraged many others. I am pleasantly surprised to see how many colleagues are going for it now. Many people that I encouraged passed me and got promoted (Carlo).

The fact that Carlo recognised the benefits not only for himself but also for others and immediately went and encouraged a colleague, shows that he mutually understood the way the benefits of RPL were communicated to him and agreed with the benefits described by the Academy. The fact that Carlo himself experienced RPL and graduated with his diploma and the fact that others were encouraged by Carlo and went to study through RPL, shows that communicative action was embedded in the discussions that took place.

I told them when you study you will get recognition for all your prior learning, you will get acknowledged (Cindy).

Fred a senior manager said that he was made aware of RPL by Charles Parker at the Training Academy and saw its benefits:

I see the benefits of RPL, the bigger picture, this doesn't only benefit me or the other candidates but the community I serve. At my level we all understood the benefits of RPL, maybe the person won't experience the benefit right away but in the long term definitely. I always tell people that you need to see the bigger picture of RPL and

the benefits of education overall. Here your experience will be acknowledged for your studies. The guys through the years became despondent with things not materialising at work. They don't want to take risks or come out of the comfort zone anymore. I always tell them what I achieved out of RPL and what they can achieve out of RPL. When guys tell me they are comfortable, I tell them you must not be comfortable, put your faith up on top and go for it. RPL made my knowledge sharper. Education taught me to utilise my staff better and direct my knowledge better within my job. I am 57 and I don't want to retire, because I know I have so much to offer now, I even went to study further in Training and Development after I completed my qualification with RPL. They must put themselves out there. I tell them all the time that when you improve yourself everyone dependent on you improves, because the quality of life improves. You become a better product, more professional, it's all about the brand. Carlo, Gerard and Paul also completed their diplomas now. I told Carlo, I look at myself and ask why all this stuff is only happening now that I am older. I just want to help the youngsters better themselves with these benefits (Fred).

Fred states that he saw the benefits of RPL after being made aware by Charles Parker, and spoke to people all the time about the benefits of RPL and often used his own experiences to highlight the benefits. When people told him that they were comfortable the way things are he would encourage them by telling them how they could improve themselves. He said that he saw the benefits of RPL and started sharing this with others. He says Carlo, Paul and Gerard has also completed their qualification through RPL and this proves that communication on RPL took place with the specific purpose of highlighting the benefits of RPL and that it was understood as participants persevered to complete their qualifications.

Most of the participants said their management was very positive about the exercise and that the benefits of RPL were communicated to them through mutual discussions, especially the prospects of possible promotion opportunities both within and outside their department. This is evident in the responses of the following participants. Paul said that his manager was Fred, who also gained access into his qualification through RPL, and 'Fred communicated RPL' to

him and 'hailed it as an advantageous product' that will assist people who required a tertiary qualification for their current positions as well as to obtain future promotions.

I was fortunate, my assistant chief was enrolled in the programme and hailed it as one of the advantageous products. The chiefs registered into the programme did not have qualifications and their position required them to have a tertiary qualification. RPL helped them (Paul).

Management were very positive about RPL and encouraged people to attend discussions and sessions on RPL, because they said that it has been communicated to them, that RPL was an opportunity and can be used as a vehicle to improve qualifications and prospects both inside and outside of your professional lives.

People who previously could not study can now gain access and credit for their experience. Everyone was all very excited (Kevin).

The data showed that most of the participants felt that they were encouraged by their managers through work discussions, to go for RPL and to apply themselves to make a success of it. Communication in the life world is made up of communicative action and social interaction in the workplace, at home, church and among friends and colleagues. Communicative action on the benefits of RPL was taking place among friends and colleagues and at work.

The data showed that people, who were engaged in discussions directly with management on RPL at the training academy, communicated a more positive sentiment on RPL in further discussions that they had with other employees and friends, and encouraged others to give it their best. Gerard said that Paul motivated him by saying, 'let's go for it, Gerard, the other older guys were given a chance to study, we can do it'.

Reflection and mutual understandings about RPL as emancipatory benefits:

Consensus

Gerard reflected on his past learning during his conversations and told people that his experiences as well as all the training he underwent were compiled into a portfolio and were assessed. The result was that he gained access into a qualification in policing, was credited for three modules and had to study hard to get through the rest.

Personally, it takes you back in council, where you started and how you started, because you had to relive and think of all the things you gained over the years and experience that you tend to forget that you gained (Gerard).

Yes, I did prepare a portfolio and did three subjects. I told people to go for it, RPL is an opportunity to improve your knowledge, and nobody can take knowledge away from you, I encouraged them and told them that the position I got was through RPL (Gerard).

It was not easy, the age I was affected me. I had to study and I separated myself from my family, explaining to them that it was for the betterment of the family (Gerard).

When reading above, one can see a pattern forming whereby Paul is motivated to undergo RPL by the training academy and his manager, he in turn motivates Gerard and Gerard in turn states that he shares the benefits of RPL by informing them of his promotion, knowledge gained and how he had to study to better his family. This shows how the mutual understanding of the benefits of RPL evolved among participants. The benefits of RPL were communicated through a process of communicative action.

Todd said that he shares information on the benefits of RPL to help his colleagues understand its benefits:

I share information on how RPL can benefit them. Yes a month ago an officer asked me where I saw myself, I want to progress. I asked him where he sees himself in law enforcement, I told him to equip himself and go for the necessary qualifications, if you don't have qualifications you won't get anywhere. My colleagues said that you can gain recognition for a diploma. RPL can make it possible, you can gain knowledge and get recognition for your own knowledge and previous qualifications. Don't get caught in a comfort zone and when you very old you want to start studying. Many of them enquire about further studies (Todd).

Kevin said that he discussed the benefits of RPL with others by saying:

It is quite evident that we have a number of people in our department that are studying now, many of them came to me and said 'look, I want to study further, but these are my shortcomings, I don't have Matric'. I have told

them about this process called RPL and how their informal learning and experience can be translated into formal knowledge in relation to the qualification. Many of them have enquired. I think many of them came to the college to enquire about similar RPL sessions like I underwent, due to our conversations (Kevin).

Everybody was all very excited because after many, many years their institutional knowledge was finally being recognised (Kevin).

Dialogue and mutual understandings about RPL as emancipatory benefits: Consensus

When people engage in dialogue and harmonise their actions, it implies that a mutual understanding has been reached. This is illustrated by Sandberg who investigated the RPL process of health care assistants through which they learnt about their experience and prior learning through dialogue with and observation by tutors to determine their credits. He refers to a participant who reached mutual understanding of his situation to determine the credits for his prior learning because of frequent conversations with his tutor. Sandberg states that the participant 'Juno found that she and her tutor could orient their actions towards mutual understanding and where thus able to relate mutually to one another's experiences, which they shared during frequent conversations' (Sandberg, 2014, p.690).

It is clear from these responses that dialogue took place among the participants, which Freire, relying on Habermas describes as:

'Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it, through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don't know; we can then act critically to transform reality' (Shor & Freire, 1987, pp. 98-99).

Dialogue is an important component of communicative action because when people engage in dialogue, an opportunity to reach mutual understanding is created, and when these people harmonise their actions, it implies that a mutual understanding has been reached.

The data showed that people like Gerard, Kevin, Fred, Carlo, Frank and Todd, who engaged directly with management and received first-hand information on RPL from the training academy presentations, communicated a much more positive message on RPL. These

participants would communicate RPL as an opportunity to overcome various barriers that people previously faced, be it financial barriers or the fact that there were people who did not meet the minimum entry requirements for the qualification. This resonates with Habermas, who argues ‘that communicative action provides the medium for reproduction of the life worlds’ (Habermas, 1981, p. 337.) According to Habermas, communicative action was important for maintaining a productive society.

The data collected from the participants revealed various viewpoints from the participants with regard to how their management communicated RPL and its benefits to them. There was a variation between the viewpoints of participants falling in the age category 36 to 60 years old and people who were younger. The older participants aged between 36 and 60 years old, felt that management supported them and encouraged them to go for the RPL route by discussing the benefits of RPL with them and how it could indirectly play a role in improving their private lives as well. The data revealed that, when Frank who is 60 years old, was asked what his management said after accessing his qualification through RPL, he said ‘I was congratulated’.

The response from Gerard about his manager reinforces the above:

Fred encouraged me to go for it; he also said we need to apply our minds, and it is not easy, we will have to give 150% to make a success of it, and I give thanks to the City Council and to Charles for helping me (Gerard).

The fact that Gerard states that he was encouraged to do RPL and ended up completing the RPL process and the fact that he was so thankful for it implies that the mutual engagement on RPL and its benefits, resulted in mutual understanding and consensus of the benefits of RPL. This response, therefore, implies communicative action on the benefits of RPL has taken place.

Todd revealed that, as RPL was communicated to him, it was his understanding that ‘management was in favour of this, to see their officers gain the experience and better them in the work environment’, ‘I would also say to equip officers to deal with work related issues’ (Todd). Todd further stated that his ‘personal understanding of RPL was that you can improve yourself with knowledge, and also in the near future gain from it’ (Todd).

I think we had [a] group [in which] we all think it was a benefit for us, but it may not be an immediate benefit, but in the long term we may benefit, because it will always be there, it is not something that they can take away from you (Fred, also a senior manager).

The fact that Fred makes reference to the words ‘group think’ suggests that everyone reached consensus on the benefits of RPL and reached a mutual understanding through conversations about the benefits of RPL. Sandberg cites Habermas (1984) and states ‘in communicative action, actors harmonise their individual goals through consensus’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 685).

The data collected showed that there were various responses communicated among colleagues and friends with regard to RPL, not all of the people really made an effort to understand what RPL was about. Gerard and Kevin said most of the potential candidates for RPL were excited when they discovered the possibilities and benefits of RPL. Paul, Gerard and Kevin’s response to what colleagues were saying about RPL led me to believe that communication about RPL prompted varying understandings of RPL.

Everybody was all very excited, because now after many years their institutional knowledge was finally being recognised (Kevin).

Firstly, everybody was geared up and excited, because here the older guys were given a way to study, maybe not do all the years and gain knowledge (Gerard).

Kevin and Gerard’s excitement is explained by Cooper (1998) who asserted that ‘the particular discourse on RPL has enormous appeal for workers with experience and no recognition and Harris who concurs, arguing that it is for workers ‘a (long-awaited) desire for recognition, more opportunities to progress as well as opportunities for respect and equity’ (Cooper, 1998, page 149).

Mutual understandings about RPL as emancipatory benefits: disagreements

The younger participants aged between 25 and 35 years old, did not share the same positive viewpoints as the older participants. They responded by saying that their management did not discuss any information about RPL, but they heard from other colleagues that RPL sessions were taking place. Jillian said that she did not get any information from her management

about RPL and further responded by saying: ‘To be honest, I did not want them to know, it was for me and I wanted to study, they did not need to know.’ With reference to Sandberg, the fact that Jillian states that she did not want her management to know, implies that communication was not performed cooperatively.

Sandberg adds ‘two aspects which are crucial to understanding the concepts of communicative action’:

i) The goal – oriented or teleological aspect of carrying out one’s plan of action and ii) interpreting a specific situation to enable reaching a mutual agreement. Communication must be performed cooperatively in a situation that has been defined in common. By doing this, there are two results or risks that actors try to avoid i) not coming to and understanding (i.e., misunderstanding or sometimes disagreement) and ii) failing to cooperatively carry out a plan for action. Mutual understanding and a common definition of a situation are here crucial if the process is to be performed through communicative action (Sandberg, 2012, p.35-36).

Mark said that he doesn’t think that his management really cares about RPL. The data shows that RPL is not communicated as positively by the younger participants with regard to the communication of their managers, as it was by the older participants.

Jillian who is 34 years old, further responded that, in her view, there was negative communication of RPL taking place among colleagues. She added:

I am going to be honest, people said it is a waste of time, it is not going to get you anywhere. There were a lot of negative comments, but I thought, let’s carry on. I wanted to further my knowledge, I felt that I was standing still at a certain position as a law enforcement officer, and the only way that I could go further was to study, and RPL gave me that opportunity (Jillian).

The data revealed that communication varied with regard to the viewpoints of many of the respondents, the older participants were more positive, whereas the younger participants were more negative with regard to how RPL was communicated to them by management. The older participants were positive and unlike the younger participants felt that they were

supported by management to undergo RPL. However, the data revealed that communication on RPL was taking place and this communication was important for the development of each individual. Carlo an older participant, further implies that the communication on RPL is good by making the statement:

Do you know how many people are going for it now, it is almost like every person you speak to. This is something excellent that should have been done a long time ago already (Carlo).

The fact that due to the communication, more people are getting opportunities to be developed through RPL resonates with a critical theorist, Gouthro (2002), who stated that communicative action is important for the development of each individual. Habermas believed that, by analysing channels of linguistic communication, we can learn about how society is organised and how it can be changed. Gouthro echoed Habermas by citing Michael Collins (1998), who argued that communicative action can be used to effect change (Gouthro, 2006, p. 1).

The data showed that, when the participants were asked if their managers saw them as equal to people who obtained their qualifications via the traditional route of study, there was a variation in the trend between participants aged 36 to 60 years old and participants 25 to 35 years old. Participants 36 years and older felt that there were no difference in the way their managers treated or acknowledged a person who followed the traditional route of study and those who underwent the RPL route. These participants felt that their managers encouraged them and were excited about their success.

I would say that there is no difference in the way they treat me, they treat me like they would treat someone who acquired a formal qualification via the normal study route (Kevin).

Frank responded by saying:

I was congratulated (Frank).

Participants 35 years and younger were not positive in their response when asked if their managers gave them equal recognition for their competence as members who obtained their qualifications via the traditional route. The data showed that the participants 35 years and younger felt that their managers did not care and that they were not treated equally to a person who completed the traditional route of study.

Jillian responded by saying management did not give her the same acknowledgement that they would give a person who obtained a qualification without following the RPL route and the fact that, even though she felt that there ‘was no difference between her competence and someone who obtained their qualification the traditional route’, she believed that management treated her differently and this ‘was demotivating’ for her.

No, they don’t acknowledge me, management does not want to see us go further, and they are not going to give you credit or acknowledgement for it. That is why I did not tell them in the first place, because they are going to demotivate a person (Jillian).

Mark felt that his managers did not treat him equally to others who followed the traditional route of study and, responding to a question on whether his management saw his qualification as having the same value, he answered:

No, they are not really bothered about it (Mark).

Mutual understandings about RPL as emancipatory benefits: misunderstandings

There were also participants who thought that RPL was something that would be given away freely and communicated this incorrect information to other colleagues through mutual engagement that resulted in those colleagues ending up with a false understanding of RPL and its benefits and not successfully completing their qualifications. Gerard reinforced this by making the statement that ‘some people saw this as an easy short cut’ and made reference to people ‘thinking that it was like getting a lollipop’ (Gerard).

Some participants expressed reservations about RPL.

Not everybody was as excited as I was at the time. Some thought it was another fly-by-night thing, without thinking of what the actual benefits can be, but I was surely very serious about it. I was informed that it is quite difficult doing something that you never done before, especially the field that I chose, the traffic field. I told them they should not worry, I will complete it, and I never did something and not complete it. I tell others they should empower themselves, this is a route to go to university. My Manager also hailed it as an advantageous product (Paul).

Samantha said that her colleagues were saying that ‘older colleagues got more benefits in terms of acknowledgement than younger colleagues’.

The data showed that there were participants who did not get first-hand information on RPL and ended up communicating their misunderstandings about the RPL opportunity, saying that it will never work and that it was not something to take seriously.

Mutual understandings about the benefits of RPL and Action

Gerard said that it was because of the initial communication from the training academy that he ended up preparing for and attending the RPL session and gaining access to his qualification, which eventually resulted in him graduating with his qualification. Gerard’s response reinforces the above statement:

It’s through the academy that I managed to get in and have an interview, and from there I could take it further. My previous experience over all my years was going to be recognised. The City and Mr Charles Parker made RPL possible, really, I think if it wasn’t for such great help I would never have graduated (Gerard).

The people who successfully completed their qualifications also communicated their experiences of RPL through numerous discussions with other people with the goal of creating an understanding of RPL processes and its benefits.

Gerard explained the communication among colleagues taking place by saying:

Firstly, everyone was geared up, excited, because the older guys were given a way to study and maybe not do all the years, but gain education and knowledge, it was really a great help to our older guys. I think Paul is the one who motivated me, he said ‘let’s go for it, Gerard’. Our years’ of experience in the job would be recognised and maybe we would not have to do all the subjects. We could get promoted. I wanted a promotion, I think I deserved it (Gerard).

The fact that Gerard felt that Paul motivated him implies that mutual discussions were taking place and that mutual understanding occurred, the fact that Gerard underwent RPL shows that consensus on the benefits of RPL was reached.

The mutual discussion on the benefits of RPL that took place between Gerard and Paul, that resulted in mutual understanding and consensus, resonates with Fredrik Sandberg (2014) who states that ‘if we consider the suggestions of Habermas, it is possible to more clearly distinguish the norm of communicative action’ and ‘communicative action involves at least two actors who focus on reaching mutual understanding’ (Sandberg, 2014, p. 686).

The actions of some participants, who participated in RPL, enabled them to experience its benefits. I shall discuss these in the next sections.

Mutual Understandings and Emancipatory Learning about RPL Benefits

Drawing from Habermas and with a view to RPL, informal emancipatory learning is embedded in informal conversations to achieve mutual understandings about RPL and its emancipatory benefits. People learnt how their prior skills and experience could be acknowledged for either access or credit for further learning, and this gave people the ability to redress their historical situations and emancipate themselves from their individual historical situations through learning.

Frank said that he communicated the benefits about RPL to his colleagues and subordinates by saying, ‘I look at them and see their experience and tell them why you don’t go for RPL because you can better yourself, knowledge is power’. Frank said that during the discussions he would motivate others who qualified with a certificate through RPL to continue studying, ‘one of the staff now have an NQF 5, I said to him don’t stop, his response was no, that is all I need, I told myself maybe he will change his mind , but he is old already’.

The data showed that the individual understanding of RPL varied between participants. Most of the participants had a clear understanding of the RPL process, however, some did not really understand the RPL process and some participants had a very good understanding of what RPL entailed. Cindy described RPL as something that can ‘benefit you in the end with regard to all the things that you have done over the years’.

Paul’s personal understanding of RPL was to ‘decipher the acronym’. He believed ‘RPL to be the recognition of all the learning’ that he had done over the years, but ‘never had any formal recognition for and this would give him access into or credits for a qualification’. This would mean that he would not have to do the entire course. Paul also said that, if he should explain RPL to anyone, he will start by explaining the acronym. Gerard understood RPL as ‘a process

whereby your period of study for a qualification could be made shorter and, if you don't have money or much time, this is a good thing, all your prior learning could be recognised'. Kevin had a very good understanding of RPL and explained that he understood it to be an opportunity whereby his 'institutional knowledge as well as informal training will be acknowledged and measured against the requirements of the qualification, and this could provide either access into or credits for a qualification'. He further said that, if he should explain the RPL opportunity to someone else, he will inform them that 'all their work experience and both their formal and informal knowledge will be acknowledged for access into a qualification or for getting recognition for specific modules, which means you would do less modules at the end of the day'.

Kevin's response to what he understood about RPL was:

My understanding of RPL is a method whereby an individual's informal knowledge, informal training & institutional knowledge is evaluated and measured against a formal qualification. This informal learning is translated into formal learning. I think they call it unit standards, your knowledge is measured in line with that qualification to see how much more unit standards you require to get a full qualification. You can either be allowed access into or receive credit for the qualification. So it is a means of them adding what you have learnt in the past towards a formal qualification, which is the way I understand it (Kevin).

Most of the participants' understanding of RPL was reflected in line with the South African Qualifications Authority, National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning, which defines RPL as: 'The principles and processes through which the prior skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development' (SAQA, 2013, p. 5).

There was no pattern between participants from the various age groups when it came to the way individuals understood RPL, they either had a good understanding of what RPL was, or had a vague idea.

When Jillian was asked what her personal understanding of RPL was, she responded by saying: 'Furthering your career, your studies'.

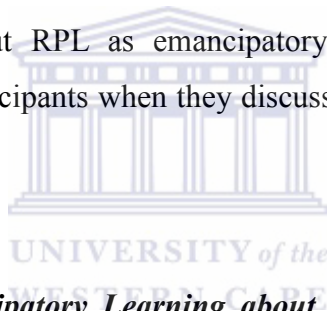
Carlo described RPL as a way 'to benefit from your personal experience, from your knowledge you have gained in life and other qualifications that you have also gained'.

Candice described RPL as something that 'could obviously impact on your future for the better , first of all', she further stated that she described it for one of the ladies by saying, 'use what you got, the experience, negotiating skills, the courses and bring that knowledge together for recognition'.

From the above statements, it can be deduced that conceptions of RPL differed among participants depending on the various conversations that took place among participants.

Mezirow, influenced by Habermas, also evaluated the role of dialogue in learning and stated the importance of dialogue in creating new meanings and understanding of the world and for changing individual viewpoints (Sandberg, 2012). Communication plays a critical role in understanding and transforming our reality and, therefore, is an instrumental factor in RPL.

As mutual understandings about RPL as emancipatory benefits evolved, emancipatory learning was evident among participants when they discussed RPL as access and redress and emancipation.



Mutual Understanding, Emancipatory Learning about RPL as Emancipatory Benefits: Access and Redress

The data showed that, when participants were asked what benefits they expected, most of the participants expected to improve themselves with promotions and salary increases.

Expectations of improving qualifications, promotion and salary increases

This was because all of the participants understood that a lack of qualifications was a barrier to promotion or future advancement. This is illustrated by Cooper (1998), who states that RPL is 'aimed at ensuring that the skills and knowledge that workers have acquired through work and life are recognised and accredited so that they can gain access to further learning and better job opportunities' (Cooper, 1998 , p.149).

This can be seen in the response from Kevin, Gerard and Cindy when asked what they expected from RPL:

Firstly, to improve my qualification and, therefore, my prospects for promotion within law enforcement (Kevin).

I expected to be promoted, definitely to a higher rank, and I deserved it and I think I could go to a regional (Gerard).

Cindy responded by saying:

I wanted to make a success and I knew I had to do something, and obviously to improve myself. I think when it came up we did not know anything about RPL in the beginning, when it came up we obviously saw an avenue where you can achieve something (Cindy).

When Mark was asked what he expected from RPL, he answered:

To further my knowledge in the career that I am in (Mark).

According to the data, a few participants just expected to improve their knowledge, have their knowledge recognised and acknowledged and also to obtain a qualification. The data showed that individual participants who previously faced barriers to obtaining a qualification expected to receive more respect and acknowledgment from others, and participants falling in the age category of 36 and older, expected that in successfully completing a qualification, they would leave a legacy of lifelong learning for their children and grandchildren. This is reinforced by a response from Todd, Paul and Gerard when asked what benefits they expected to achieve through recognition of prior learning.

I'm on senior inspector rank right now and I wanted to progress in law enforcement. I am 28 years here now and I wanted to better myself. Financially, you can also better yourself, you can get a promotion. At the end of the day, you've got responsibilities like a residence, you've got children, bills, maybe a child who wants to go study (Todd).

I expected to achieve it by getting the diploma so I can have something against my name and also try to prepare me for future advancement in law enforcement and not just law enforcement, but any sphere in safety and security (Paul).

The fact that Paul, Gerard, Cindy and Todd all expected to improve their lives through education shows they were enlightened by the fact that they could change their lives for the

better and took action by undergoing the RPL process. The actions of Paul, Gerard, Cindy and Todd resonate with Ewert (1991), who states that ‘critical theory is identified by an emphasis on emancipation that requires both enlightenment and action’ (Ewert, 1991, p.346).

Actual benefits: improve qualifications, promotion and salary increases

The union movement has always argued for the recognition of skills and knowledge that workers have gained through years of experience in the workplace.

The benefits of RPL in the policing sector strongly correspond with the benefits described by Cooper (1998) and Harris (1997), who state that RPL resonates with workers’ desire for recognition, more opportunities to progress as well as opportunities for respect and equity.

The data that I collected from the interviews on the benefits of RPL was the key feature of this study that focussed on the benefits of RPL in the policing sector.

The data collected showed that RPL provided many hidden benefits affecting participants both inside their work environment and within their personal lives. The data collected showed that all the participants in the policing sector described various kinds of benefits ranging between salary increases, promotion, increased levels of self-confidence, accessed higher education, improved family life and intrinsic motivation as a result of RPL.

The data showed that the participants of this study were all from various age categories. All of the participants expressed some form of benefit, often expressing both emotional and intrinsic benefits outside of the workplace, ranging from improved confidence to promotional and salary increases inside the workplace.

I have benefited. Firstly, I have been fortunate enough to receive a promotion, after I have completed my studies. So that is the first and most tangent improvement. Secondly, I have gained a lot of knowledge because of my studies, it has given me a lot of knowledge, particularly about my job, and a lot of this knowledge I could apply in the workplace, to the benefit of myself and also my employer. There are many benefits of RPL that a person won’t see right away, such as better confidence after completing your qualification (Kevin).

Firstly, when one sees a promotion, it has various effects, you are advanced in the workplace, your rank is higher, but you also receive a better salary.

That has an effect on your family's life and your life. So your financial situation improves and also your prospects in terms of retirement become a whole lot rosier (Kevin).

I told them the position I got is through RPL, if I never received an NQF5 qualification, I could not apply for a principal post, or later for a regional post. It is a real game changer and your family benefitted at the end of the day (Gerard).

Through promotion, I could afford a new car, cost of living is expensive, and I can now give my children a better education by sending them to varsity to improve themselves (Paul).

I am qualified to do the work that I am doing. I went to the ORP (organisational realignment process), and got regional, so I did elevate, I did go up into a higher rank. I am qualified to do the work (Frank).

I think I was one of first guys through RPL who actually got promoted. It was a big moment (Gerard).

Candice said that she benefited 'financially, of course, it came with a rank and with the rank comes money'.

All of the participants saw RPL as an opportunity to improve their own lives as well as their family's lives. The benefits described by Kevin, Paul, Frank, Gerard and Cindy resonates with the objectives of the White Paper which guides the DHET to:

Build a vibrant democracy and sets out a vision for a post-school system that can assist in building a fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa, a single, co-ordinated post-school education and training system, expanded access, improved quality and increased diversity of provision, a stronger and more co-operative relationship between education and training institutions and the workplace, a post-school education and training system that is responsive to the needs of individual citizens and of employers in both public and private sectors, as well as broader societal and developmental objectives (DHET, 2013, p. 5).

Those participants who were not promoted felt that the fact that they were now qualified to compete for future promotions was a benefit in itself.

Actual Benefits, Future Promotions, Knowledge and Access to Study Opportunities

Some saw the fact that they received an education as their most important benefit that they received out of the RPL process. Frank responded that ‘Carlo felt extremely frustrated due to not receiving a promotion after 36 years, but he recognised that he now has the qualification that he needs for the job that he wants to do’. Participants said that, even if they were not promoted yet, the fact that they saw the employer recognising others with this qualification already proved that they were better off with the qualification that they acquired through RPL.

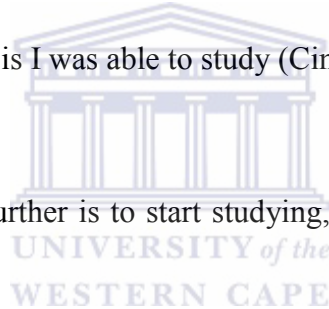
Yes, I benefited educationally, however, I am certain I will benefit in my job. It did not happen yet, but I am of the opinion it will happen soon (Paul).

It opened my mind a lot and increased my knowledge (Jillian).

The most important benefit is I was able to study (Cindy).

Jillian said:

The only way I could go further is to start studying, and RPL gave me the opportunity (Jillian).



The data showed that she intends to continue with further studies.

Mark responded that, basically, he gained the knowledge, ‘but, other than that, I can do my work confidently, it does benefit me in my daily duties’.

Well, the main benefit is that you are put on a level on which they assessed and recognised your prior learning and they say this is where we think you are. You can now look at that and say where I go from here (Frank).

Even though there were participants who were not promoted and who did not receive any salary increases, there were those who remained very positive about RPL and accessing higher learning and were certain that they would receive further benefits in terms of promotion and salary increases later as a result of obtaining a higher qualification through RPL. The participants were enlightened to the benefits that their active participation in RPL and further education would have on their lives.

The participant's enlightenment on the benefits of RPL resonates with Ewert (1991) who states that 'critical theory is identified by an emphasis on emancipation that requires both enlightenment and action' (Ewert, 1991, p.346).

The data collected from participants showed that the findings were in line with the national policy objectives of the SAQA National Policy for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning, with regard to promoting understanding on RPL within the context of lifelong learning and supporting possible applicants to have their knowledge and skills recognised for their individual development (SAQA, 2013).

The data showed that participants saw recognition of prior learning as a vital component for the acknowledgement of individual knowledge and skill in a formal capacity. Most of the participants who participated in the interview saw RPL as having a direct link to individual benefits in the workplace and social justice in society. This resonates with the statements of Susan Gair (2013), who states that 'it is claimed that RPL embodies emancipation and social justice, advantaging the excluded, illuminating and validating knowledge's that previously have been invisible, and breaking down discriminatory barriers to education under a human rights agenda' (Gair, 2013, p. 73).

Most of the participants responded further by saying that they saw themselves as individuals who are experienced in their field of study, whereas a person who followed the traditional route only has theoretical knowledge, much of which could probably be forgotten after they wrote their exams.

Frank said that a person studying 'the traditional route only has theoretical knowledge' and further stated that 'depending on the attention, I can get my whole degree and not remember a thing I learnt and it will be of no use to me in my work'.

Earlier in the data analysis it was quoted that the participants also said that the qualification was not given to them, they had to work hard at successfully completing the outstanding modules required for the qualification. The data showed that most of the participants responded by saying that this is an occupational qualification and they had years of practical experience in the field, and their knowledge was assessed and equated to the various outcomes and requirements of the qualification. This resonated with the discipline-specific approach, according to Breier (2005), this is consistent with the discipline-specific approach and the 'realist and social context approaches to the discipline specific fields' (Breier, 2005, p.59). According to Breier (2005), the 'liberal/humanist and critical/radical approaches' to

RPL reconsider 'pedagogy and curriculum of a course to accommodate the experience of students and, in so doing, levels the balance of power between lecturer and student for social transformatory purposes' (Breier, 2005, p. 62). Breier (2005), Harris (2000) and Bernstein (1996) acknowledge the value of the discipline-specific approach to recognising prior learning as it relates to a specific discipline or field.

All the participants felt that they were actually more competent than people who just followed the traditional route of obtaining a qualification, but just never received recognition for it, because their knowledge was not formally certified. Cindy reinforced the above statement by responding to the importance of certification by referring to it as knowledge on paper:

I now have the practical experience, coupled with the paper, so I should get the recognition for it. (Cindy)

Fred, like many of the participants, felt that they were better off than people who followed the traditional route and who never had as many years of experience in the field, because they 'had a good mix of both theoretical knowledge as well as practical experience in the field of policing, giving them a better overall understanding of their occupation, with the ability to mentor others'. The data showed that, even though these participants previously had all of the experience in their occupation, they only felt a sense of equality after their knowledge was certified in the form of a qualification. The data showed that the perception of others with regard to how they were viewed was important to them regardless of whether they had a strong sense of equality with regard to their competence and level of education.

The data that I collected on the effects of RPL on participants in a social justice context showed that most participants saw RPL as a means to assist them to reach their fullest potential, a means for them to improve their confidence levels and feel equal to others who traditionally held qualifications in various fields, by accessing higher education.

According to John Brennan and Rajani Naidoo (2008), 'it is important to participate in higher education, as it improves an individual's long-term life opportunities' and 'participation is an important part of higher education's role in the export of equity and social justice to the wider society' (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008, p. 293).

This is reinforced by the response from Candice, who said that, previously, she felt inferior to other professional people and used to 'withdraw a little bit and did not open up so easily

when discussing more advanced items in meetings'. After completing her qualification through RPL, Candice has a sense of equality and feels that others recognise her for knowledge now. Her response – 'you know they see you as a person who has done some studies' – reinforces the statement above (Candice).

The data showed that to have a sense of equality was important to all participants. It was important to all participants to receive the same recognition for their qualification as a person who followed the traditional route of obtaining a qualification. All of the participants responded, when asked whether they saw themselves as equal in competence to a person who followed the traditional route to obtain a qualification, by answering yes.

I don't think there is a difference, I think that what knowledge and experience I have gained by enrolling into this programme is the same as someone who enrolled at a university or a technikon traditionally (Paul).

Because of what I learnt prior to tackling the programme, it can be that I grasped it even better than somebody at another institution (Paul).

All those assignments and exams have given me a lot of knowledge that I can use and apply in the workplace. The other people who have obtained formal qualifications do exactly the same thing and I see no difference in the application (Kevin).

Cindy responded to a question on whether she thought that there was a difference in competence between her and a person who went the traditional route of education by answering:

No, I don't feel that there is a difference (Cindy).

Kevin, a participant with more than 25 years' experience in the field of law enforcement, expressed a huge boost in personal confidence and a sense of equality after completing a qualification through RPL, because, even though he always knew that he 'could hold his own in any conversation', the fact that he did not have a Matric affected him. It created a gap, because he felt that there was something missing and this affected his sense of equality with others more formally educated. This is supported by Kevin's response:

Sometimes even though people don't acknowledge it, you do feel inadequate if you have not acquired that benchmark. Matric is no longer as

important as it was all those years ago when acquiring work, but it is still something, you can see every year when people pass at the end of the year (scholars), we see it as a major benchmark in people's lives, and that was always missing for me, so this addresses that and really makes you feel so much better and gives you that extra confidence (Kevin).

This corresponds with a Habermasian description for emancipation, which 'entails not only overcoming constraints of nature, like scarcity, but also dissolving systems of distorted communication' (Held, 1980, p. 276). Participants in the RPL process after they completed their qualifications felt more confident and knowledgeable and saw themselves as equal to any person who followed the traditional route of study.

People 35 years and older had more service years and more experience in their occupation than people younger than 35, and, therefore, had more to benefit by having their knowledge and skills recognised for an occupational qualification.

You know if you are a youngster, you are in your first years of service, and there is not a lot of gain. As you get further on, say ten years or more, then you start to benefit in terms of your knowledge and experience of what's going on. The more knowledge you have the more benefit it becomes in terms of RPL (Frank).

The data showed that all the participants saw RPL as an opportunity to grow within the organisation and to access further tertiary educational opportunities. This corresponds with the SAQA RPL policy document (2002) that explicitly states that all the barriers to learning and assessment must be addressed.

The response from Kevin reinforces the earlier analysis about barriers to accessing tertiary education:

At that time, the fact that I did not have a Matric qualification was a stumbling block for me. It was actually a barrier for me to continue with tertiary education. The opportunity came up whereby our prior learning was recognised and was actually measured against a qualification, whereby your informal learning was measured against a recognised qualification. They

would take whatever they deemed work experience and translate it into formal knowledge in relation to the qualification (Kevin).

This resonates with Breier (2005), who stated that ‘within these traditions, RPL is seen as a strategy for social redress’ and that ‘RPL is a means whereby subjugated or marginalised groups can gain access to the academy and challenge the authority of hegemonic discourses’ (Breier, 2005, p. 56).

The data showed that participants especially older participants felt that they were denied promotion opportunities due to not having formal qualifications, regardless of their years of experience. They believed that they deserved to be promoted, but were kept behind within the organisation because of a lack of formal qualifications, even though many had more than twenty-five years’ service and knowledge and saw RPL as an opportunity to give them recognition to address this. The participants now meet the minimum formal criteria for the promotional posts and have the recognition of their knowledge that they felt they were denied.

Firstly, I wanted a promotion, I think I deserve it, but I lacked the qualifications, hence, the reason I studied to apply for a higher post (Gerard).

I want to get recognition. When the first assistant chief post was advertised, I went for that interview, and in that thing they brought up this subject of qualifications, what are your qualifications? I did not, however, pass that interview. Well, I wanted recognition for my knowledge (Frank).

Well, to tell you the truth, it was the easier option than to go study for years, they took into consideration my experience over the years, and that made a big difference, the study time was shorter (Gerard).

This corresponds with Cooper, who states that:

Greater emphasis on RPL, whereby recognition of prior learning is aimed at ensuring that the skills and the knowledge that workers have acquired through work and life experience rather than through formal education or training are recognised and accredited so that they can gain access to further learning and better job opportunities. (Cooper, 1998, p. 149)

The data revealed that the feeling of inequality between having completed a tertiary qualification and people who did not complete a qualification fuelled personal insecurities. A few participants older than 36 years old and who have more than 25 years' service with the organisation felt that they were recognised as individuals without qualifications and not individuals who are competent and experienced in their field of expertise. These participants believed that they were constantly overlooked for promotion, as it was automatically assumed that they do not meet the minimum criteria and they had to remind human resources of the fact that they now met the criteria and demanded to be acknowledged.

The following response by Todd reinforces this sense of redress and equality felt by people who successfully completed their qualifications after previously being overlooked and how they demanded acknowledgement in this regard:

It happened a couple of times before where management that is involved with recruitment never called me for a written assessment, they said they were not aware that I had the qualification that is their way of thinking. There was a couple of times that I had to pick up the phone to Mr Fritz Conner and say listen here, I have this qualification, why was I not phoned for a written assessment and I have done my application via the Safety and Security website ... Yes, I can remember after the senior inspector interviews, they asked for your qualifications after that, I could give it to them just so (Todd).

Often overlooked in Educational transformation are the psychological and emotional changes which people experience. Several participants revealed these changes when they articulated RPL as emancipatory benefits.

Mutual Understanding, Transformative Learning, RPL and Intrinsic Motivation

The data collected showed that all the participants, regardless of their position or age category, were intrinsically motivated after successfully completing their qualification through RPL. They all felt that they had a stronger perception of themselves after they completed their qualification through RPL. All participants felt that there was no difference in the competence levels of someone who underwent the traditional route of study and someone who accessed a qualification via the RPL route.

All of the participants felt that they had to study equally as hard as people who underwent the traditional route of study in the modules that they did not receive recognition for and those who did receive recognition were supplemented by a portfolio of evidence detailing years of practical exposure and implementation in the field of policing. This was reinforced by Gerard's statement on how hard he had to study:

You had to study to make a success of it, and believe me, I had to study (Gerard).

The participants also mentioned that there were those who underwent RPL to access a qualification, but never successfully exited the programme, because they thought the qualification would be given to them without having to earn it. The participants felt that they worked for it and earned it and this boosted their self-image. All of the participants felt a sense of achievement on completion of their qualifications, which made them more confident in applying for promotional posts, because they knew that they met the required criteria. The response from Gerard reinforces the notion that the participants felt that they worked hard and achieved something.

If you don't study, you're not going to pass, if you don't apply your mind, you are not going to make it. My staff went for RPL, and most of them had to pay money back because they thought this is like sweets, now, they realise they failed most of their subjects because they thought it was a walk in the park. You have to apply yourself in this, it is hard work and, at the end of the day, I benefitted from studying and applying my mind (Gerard).

All of the participants felt that their experience within the policing occupation placed them in a better position than people who just accessed the qualification the traditional route without having experience. The data showed that there was a variation in the degree of the self-perception displayed between people 36 years and older and 35 years and younger from the participants sampled for the interview. The data showed that people 36 years and older felt that their level of competence after completion of their qualification was of a much higher standard than that of people who followed the traditional route and who had less experience than they did. Frank, a participant with 33 years' service, said that you can't compare theoretical knowledge alone of the policing profession to someone who has 'both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, people learn by doing'. When theoretical knowledge stands on its own, the individual forgets a lot of what he or she has learnt. Paul, also a

participant with 30 years' service, responded by saying that his experience of the whole RPL process was that he felt that he could 'grasp the literature of the modules that he was required to do much easier than another person' without his expertise undergoing the traditional route of study.

The data showed that the levels of self-perception of participants varied. Participants who were younger than 35 felt that they were equal in competence to people who completed their qualification the traditional route, whereas the older and more experienced participants had a greater perception of themselves after the achievement of their qualifications through RPL. Participants such as Frank, Kevin, Paul, Gerard, Carlo and Fred, who were participants with more than 25 years' service, had a great perception of themselves and believed that they were, in fact, more competent than someone who just obtained their qualification the traditional route without following the RPL route. Frank felt that a 'qualification alone does not teach you the skills of life or how to deal with all aspects of policing', he believed only experience can prepare someone for that. Kevin felt that having 'a qualification made him feel so much better and that it definitely improved his confidence levels' when applying for promotional posts, because the fact that he 'obtained a formal qualification made his chances of being short listed excellent'. Paul said that 'completing a qualification through RPL definitely improved his perception of himself, because, firstly, he managed to complete a formal qualification, which is something he never did before' and, secondly, 'he received recognition' not only from his employer, but also from his 'family and friends'. Paul said his wife hung his diploma on the wall in their lounge and she runs a small business from home and everyone asks about it, she would tell them how proud she is of his achievement. Paul said he flew up to Pretoria to show his children and grandchildren what one can achieve through hard work. The following responses reinforce the above statements:

I flew to Pretoria to graduate so that my children and grandchildren can one day see what I achieved (Paul).

My wife runs a small business from home, my diploma hangs on the wall in the lounge, and everybody who comes in asks: what did your husband do? She would proudly tell them (Paul).

As a person, I feel good, I have got a qualification. People have the perception when you're in uniform that it is just a normal job that you can

do without any qualification. Members of the public think like that: that they are more qualified than you (Todd).

Carlo said that he can ‘openly say that he has a national diploma and this gives him a different perspective about life and himself’. The data showed that Gerard said that, ‘through constant perseverance, he proved that he could complete his qualification even though it has been so long since he attended formal schooling’, he feels extremely motivated.

The younger participants, such as Jillian and Mark, also felt that gaining a qualification through RPL changed their perception of themselves, they were intrinsically motivated. The data showed that Mark said he feels more knowledgeable and Jillian said she now feels motivated to study further after completing her first qualification.

This is the first thing I have studied in years. I have conquered the first one; if I can do it with one, I can for sure continue and end up like you one day, studying for my masters. I feel motivated (Jillian).

I am more knowledgeable in my work (Mark).

Emancipation, RPL as Emancipatory Benefits: Personal Development

Carlo responded that, previously, qualifications were ‘part of the advert when they advertised posts and he did not meet those requirements then’ and ‘if I had this qualification, I probably would have been one of the assistant chiefs, because that was all they wanted basically’.

Carlo further stated that:

At this moment, there are no promotional posts. I benefitted personally by being able to say that I have got a diploma. There’s been much documentation that I had to complete where they ask for your highest qualification and I can now gladly put there that I have a National Diploma (Carlo).

Participants from all age groups expressed happiness and intrinsic motivation and saw the value of completing a qualification through RPL.

Brent responded by saying:

I can say that I have received a qualification. I think the personal benefit for me is just that RPL gave me that final push in order to just go and study. I was never motivated to study because of politics before (Brent).

Carlo, with 36 years' service in law enforcement, responded by saying:

I always wanted to study further, and then this opportunity with the RPL came and I basically just grabbed it with both hands. It afforded me the opportunity to complete my diploma within one year as opposed to three years (Brent).

The data collected also showed that the candidates who underwent the RPL process became more confident by reflecting on the experience gained over the years and this in itself resulted in a learning experience. All of the participants said that they grew in knowledge by discovering the value of their own experiences, all of the participants were intrinsically motivated and experienced an increase in their confidence levels after completing their qualification. All of the participants felt more confident in the fact that their knowledge was now certified.

The experiences of the candidates above resonates with Sandberg who states that 'when RPL is set in a worthwhile setting learning experience and conducted through mutual understanding, critical learning and change can potentially be achieved' (Sandberg, 2014, p.686).

Candice responded to a question on whether she felt more confident after gaining a qualification through RPL by answering:

Yes, it gives you more confidence. When you speak to professional people and know that you have done some tertiary studies, you know they see you as a person who has done some studies (Candice).

Carlo responded by saying:

Yes, it gave me more confidence and I can now openly say I have a national diploma, it gives you a different perspective in life (Carlo).

It boils down to, when you better yourself academically, it helps you in your personal capacity, building personal confidence (Cindy).

As I said earlier, having the practical experience and formal recognition of the qualification, I now have the practical experience, coupled with the paper (Cindy).

Definitely more confident, you feel proud (Paul).

Yes, I'm more confident now. I don't have to prove anything to anybody, I don't have to prove anything. Before, I used to talk about experience, now, I've got the paper to follow that, and that gives me confidence in terms of that (Frank).

The statements of Frank, Paul, Carlo, Candice and Cindy resonate with Ewert (1991) who states:

Self-consciousness and awareness of knowledge distortion is enlightenment and a precondition for individual freedom ... the individual becomes emancipated when, on the basis of his enlightenment, he or she takes freeing action that changes the social system to permit the realisation of his or her human potential (Ewert, 1991, p. 346).

The data showed that the participants benefited by feeling more confident in their workplace and to continue furthering their studies in the form of lifelong learning after they completed their qualifications through RPL. Cindy's response reinforces the fact that the confidence levels has increased due to the RPL opportunity.

I am confident enough to actually go study further (Cindy).

SECTION 6: SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section I present a summary, findings and recommendations.

The research problem that this study addressed is the following: informal knowledge acquired in everyday life and in the workplace is being valued through recognition of prior learning. It is important to validate the benefits of RPL and its impact within the policing sector.

The aims of this study were to investigate the benefits of RPL for RPL candidates, to develop new theoretical perspectives on the implementation of RPL in the workplace and to influence policy development on RPL in the workplace.

I investigated the main research question as well as the sub-questions:

- Main research question – What are the benefits of RPL in the policing sector?
- Sub-questions – How did RPL benefit employees? How are the benefits of RPL communicated among the successful candidates? How are the benefits of RPL communicated by the organisation?

Using purposive sampling, I invited 20 participants to partake in the study. Only 12 accepted the invite. The participants were geographically placed within all the areas of municipal police. The purposive sampling contributed to the success of the study. All the participants successfully completed a qualification through RPL. In hindsight, I could have included participants who gained access to a qualification through RPL, but were still busy completing it and not just those who graduated.

I succeeded in investigating the benefits of RPL within the policing sector. I used an interview guide as a research method to gather data. I used an interview guide to gather data by conducting face to face interviews with participants. While keeping the research question as well as the research sub-questions in mind, I designed the questions in the interview guide around the following themes: the benefits of RPL, how RPL was communicated, individual understanding of RPL, and RPL, equity and social justice.

The data gave me a clear understanding of how the participants and the organisation have benefited from RPL. I found that there were still plenty of exploration possibilities with regard to the data. I have, however, succeeded in fulfilling the aims of the research.

Findings

- Through RPL experienced municipal police now planned for their advancements and promotions or further studies in policing.
- Municipal police who previously did not have the opportunity to further their education, gained access to academic study opportunities and obtained qualifications, and felt socially included.
- Municipal police who previously were not eligible for promotion were promoted.
- Municipal police previously were not eligible for promotion opportunities regardless of their experience are now eligible for promotion.
- Most of the older participants, after completing their qualification through RPL, had an improved sense of equality and felt that they were more competent than people who followed the traditional route of study and who did not have their experience.
- Municipal police who achieved a qualification through the RPL route were intrinsically motivated because of RPL.
- Municipal police experienced distinct benefits from RPL, citing benefits for both themselves and the organisation.
- Municipal police experienced RPL as an opportunity to improve their own lives as well as their family's lives.
- Municipal police experienced RPL as emancipatory benefits, ranging between salary increases, promotion, increased levels of self-confidence, improved family life and intrinsic motivation as a result of RPL.
- Municipal police, through RPL gained vast knowledge through the access to study opportunities, that they could apply in the workplace, to benefit themselves and the employer.

Unexpected Findings

The findings of this study generally revealed expected outcomes and reported similar outcomes as those in the literature I reviewed, especially in the research done by Sandberg (2012), Harris (1997), Breier (2005) and Habermas (1984), with the focus on RPL, emancipation and communication in adult education.

1) There was a variation in the way the benefits of RPL were described by participants 36 years and older and participants aged 35 years and younger.

2) Intrinsic motivation, Personal Development and personal transformation were not factored into the conceptual framework, yet they were revealed in the case of the investigation. This points to transformation gains of an emotional or psychological nature which are overlooked.

New theoretical perspectives and insights

My study builds on critical theory perspectives on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Framed within a critical theory perspective, drawing particularly on Habermas, my conceptual framework encompasses critical theory; theory of communicative action; communicative action, mutual understandings and emancipation. My conceptual framework enabled me to develop the following theoretical insights:

- (1) Habermas's concept of 'communicative action' is appropriate to explain and interpret mutual understandings, consensus and misunderstandings about RPL; and,
- (2) Habermas's concepts of 'communicative action' and 'emancipation' are relevant to explain, interpret and analyse mutual understandings, consensus and misunderstandings about RPL as emancipatory benefits.

In the South African context Habermas's theories generate new theoretical perspectives to conceptualise RPL as emancipatory benefits, specifically in respect of 'access and redress' to address the exclusion and marginalisation of disadvantaged people from educational opportunities under apartheid domination.

Implications for Further Study

The initial intention of this study was to investigate the benefits of RPL for municipal police in the policing sector. The research revealed a disjuncture between younger participants and older participants. They had varied viewpoints on how they believed managers communicated RPL as well as variations in the degree of benefit that they experienced through RPL. From a Habermasian viewpoint, questions can be raised on what creates this variation, is it the life world of the various age groups or the system with regard to junior staff and more senior staff in a uniformed environment or policing institutional structure? This research paper has investigated the benefits of RPL in the policing sector, and analysed these within the Habermasian perspective of the life world and the system, but has not distinguished between the age categories of participants 18 – 35 and 36 and older.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, I make the following recommendations for future RPL implementation.

- a) RPL information workshops should be held with management and not only possible candidates, so as to ensure that management receives first-hand information. This should result in better understanding of RPL and its benefits and communication among staff.
- b) There is a need for academic support to assist the municipal police transition and successful completion of tertiary studies.
- c) RPL should be integrated into municipal bursary and financial assistance policies so that a larger number of candidates can benefit from the bursary funding.

CONCLUSIONS

The study confirmed some assumptions and generated a few unexpected findings. The Habermasian concept of communicative action explains the ways that mutual understandings of RPL as emancipatory benefits developed and were communicated. Habermas's concept of emancipation explains how RPL achieves access and redress.

The study reveals that national policy objectives of access and redress were implemented and achieved through RPL as emancipatory benefits. The study also demonstrates that municipal police were emancipated and felt a sense of equality and social justice by receiving the recognition for their prior learning and knowledge that they felt that they long deserved.

Most importantly, RPL and the successful completion of their subsequent qualifications prompted a platform to pursue further studies which may be lifelong.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Profile

1. Name: _____

2. Surname: _____

3. Gender: _____

4. Age: 20 – 30 31 – 40 41 – 50

5. Marital Status: Married Single

6. Race: Black White Coloured Other

7. Occupation: _____

8. Designation: _____

9. Duration of work experience in current position: _____

Qualifications

10. Highest grade passed at school: _____

11. Highest tertiary qualifications/technical/other: _____

Employment History and Assessment of Redress Training Needs

12. What jobs have you occupied since you left high school?

13. What position did you hold in the jobs since you left school?

14. Why did you join municipal law enforcement?

15. What qualifications have you gained since you started working in your current position?

RPL, Qualifications through the Metropolitan Police Training Academy

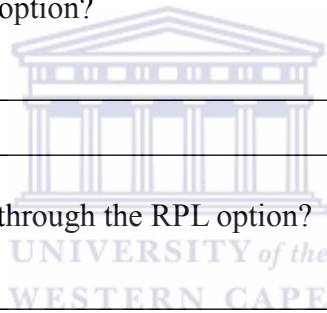
16. Are you studying for a qualification through the Metropolitan Police Training Academy?

17. If so, what?

18. Why did you decide to study for a qualification through the Metropolitan Police Training Academy?

19. Why did you choose the RPL option?

20. What benefits did you expect through the RPL option?



21. Did you prepare a portfolio of evidence?

22. Were you interviewed?

Communication, RPL and Benefits

23. If you think about your experiences of RPL, what would you consider the most important benefits?

24. How did you find out about RPL?

25. What did colleagues say about the benefits of RPL?

26. What did management say about the benefits of RPL?

27. What is your understanding of RPL?

28. If a colleague approaches you and asks you to explain RPL, how would you explain it?

29. Do you tell colleagues about the benefits of RPL?

30. If so, what do you tell colleagues about the benefits of RPL?

RPL, Benefits and Social Justice

31. Did your experience of gaining a qualification through RPL change your perception of yourself?

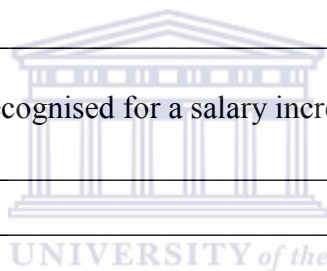
32. If yes, what are your new perceptions of yourself?

33. How have you benefited from RPL?

34. Has your qualification been recognised for promotion?

35. If so, what promotions?

36. Has your qualification been recognised for a salary increase?



37. Have the RPL opportunities benefited you personally outside of work?

38. If so, please explain how.

RPL, Acknowledgment and Equity

39. Do your managers give you the same acknowledgement as a person who completed a qualification without following the RPL route?

40. Do you think that there is a difference between your competence and a person who completed the qualification without following the RPL route?

41. If so, explain.

42. Do you feel more confident since you completed your qualification?

43. If so, why?

