RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT OF ADULT LEARNERS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR THEORY, POLICY AND PRACTICE

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RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT OF ADULT LEARNERS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR THEORY, POLICY AND PRACTICE

by

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ABSTRACT

As part of the transformation agenda of education and training policy, the main thrust of Recognition and Prior Learning (RPL) in the South African policy context was to contribute to addressing social justice issues such as equity, redress and access of the majority of adult learners, who were historically denied access to formal learning. The study focuses on the following critical questions:

- **What are the official policy claims of the assessment and recognition of prior learning at the national and sectoral level?**
- **How do assessors mediate official policy in recognising and assessing prior learning of adult learners in an institutional context?**
- **What are the experiences and engagements of adult learners in having their prior learning assessed?**

This research responds to the **conceptual gaps** in the study of RPL policy and practice and the National Qualifications Framework. The study examines epistemological issues such as: what and whose knowledge is considered as valid; the relationship between knowledge and experience; the relationship between different types of knowledge and learning; and the relationship between knowledge and access to power.

The study also addresses a **contextual gap**: very limited research exists on the RPL experiences of societies in transition with similar transformational agendas as South Africa.

The present research study also examines the **implementation process** in a transitional context, exploring the gap that develops between intended policies and actual practice.

This is a qualitative study using the case study approach to examine the complexities of the assessment and recognition of prior learning process in a Technical College Institution located in the Further Education and Training Band.

The analysis of selected international case studies of RPL contributed to identifying and exploring conceptual gaps in RPL policy and practice. These conceptual issues provided the first set of preliminary lens for the production, description and analysis of data in the research study. The preliminary lens were then re-interpreted and elaborated in relation to Bernstein's theory (1996) of symbolic control and cultural production, reproduction and change. The synthesised conceptual framework

provided a theoretical vocabulary to redescribe and reinterpret data at deeper levels of abstraction.

The key findings of the research were as follows:
- The undertheorisation of RPL in policy circles and the ways in which policy has tended to gloss over issues such as "equivalence". "integrated competence", knowledge-power dynamics and the differences between mainstream and outsider knowledge;
- The gap between policy rhetoric and sectoral practice. The sector advocated a technicist approach to RPL that was preoccupied with matching adult experiential learning against prescribed standards. The sector practice marginalized or even excluded adult learners who had acquired their knowledge and learning in non-formal and informal contexts;
- Nevertheless, assessors who were socially and culturally sensitive to the RPL process had an implicit understanding of the different types of knowledge and knowers. Their developmental approach to RPL provided an enabling environment for adult learners to demonstrate their learning and knowledge from experience;
- Adult learners without high levels of formal literacy were able to demonstrate their ability to reflect on their experiential learning to transfer their abstract and critical thought processes to solve new problems in the assessment context. The research highlights the commensurability between informal and formal knowledge and the ability of workers who have learnt their skills informally to demonstrate high levels of conceptual and transferable skills.

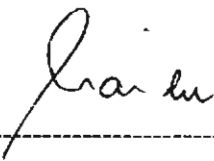The present research makes the following theoretical contributions:
Firstly, Bernstein's theory was extended to examine policy formulation and the policy process. Within the framework of **critical policy analysis**, a new construct: **"relations outside"** was created as an analytical tool to examine the nuances of the macro-contexts (historical, political, social, economic) which shape the meaning and significance of policy.
Secondly, the research study produces a new conceptual framework to analyse the complex and dynamic nature of RPL policy and practice in a transformational context.

The present study advocates a **critical and holistic approach to RPL** that interrogates how power-relations within and across contextual, epistemological and pedagogical issues reproduce or challenge the existing patterns of inequalities in society.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctorate in Education in the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

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----1 4th----- day of -----October-----,2004

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
APEL	Assessment of Prior and Experiential Learning
AQF	Australian Qualification Framework
BITB	Building Industries Training Board
CAEL	Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
CAPLA	Canadian Association for Prior Learning
CETA	Construction Sector Education and Training Authority
CLFDB	Canadian Labour Force Development Board
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance
FET	Further Education Training
FETC	Further Education and Training Certificate
FNTI	First Nations Technical Institute
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistributive Programme
GET	General Education and Training
GNU	The Government of National Unity
HET	Higher Education and Training
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
NSB	National Standards Bodies
NP	National Party

NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NTB	National Training Board
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
PLA	Prior Learning Assessment
PLAR	Prior Learning and Recognition
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SANQF	South African National Qualifications Framework
SAQA	South African Qualifications Act
SGB	Standards Generating Bodies
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
VSC	Vermont State College

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter sets the scene for the present research. Firstly, the chapter describes the nature and direction of the South African post apartheid transitional state. Secondly, it examines how recognition of prior learning (RPL) emerged as a critical issue in the new education and training policy agenda. Thirdly, the chapter indicates how competing and contradictory pressures influenced the positioning of RPL as part of the education and training policy agenda. The tensions between the political issue of social justice in the form of equity, access and redress and economic pressures of globalisation to participate meaningfully in competitive economies are examined. Fourthly, the chapter discusses the rationale, purpose and critical foci of the research. This chapter concludes by providing an overview of the forthcoming chapters, and by defining the construct of RPL that will be used in the study.

1.1 Contextual background

The immediate priority for the emerging democratic South African state (post-1994) was to deal with the reconstruction and developmental challenges that faced the country. The new state was faced with addressing the needs of the vast majority of citizens that were previously denied social justice that faced poverty, unemployment and the growing threat of HIV/AIDS. At the same time the new state had to meet the demands of globalisation such as to develop a competitive economy with increased levels of productivity. The contextual background examines how these issues impacted on education and training policy agenda, in particular the recognition of prior learning.

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1.1.1 Nature and direction of the post-apartheid state

The election of the first democratic government (the Government of National Unity - GNU) in South Africa on 27 April 1994 marked the end of a period of long struggle for freedom and the beginning of a new struggle to transform South African society. The immediate challenge facing the new democratic state was to deal with the problems inherited from the apartheid era. One of the first priorities for the State was to reconstruct and develop all aspects of South African society. A series of legislations, rooted in the new democratic constitution, were passed to transform South African society and economy (the legislations relevant to the study have been discussed in Chapter 2). These legislations were translated into a number of policies that set the framework for the behaviour of the new state and major social institutions.

The politics of reconciliation and consensus building of the early 1990s also provided a framework for the new policy developments. The guiding principle of the new policy developments was based on forging a common purpose among different ideological leanings representing various sectors of South African society. The development of legislations took place in the context of the Government of National Unity that included three large parties: the African National Congress (ANC), the National Party (NP), and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). The form of the negotiated political settlement was based on compromises, which enabled the opposing parties and interests to reach consensus about the nature of transition from apartheid.

The reviews of various legislations relevant to the study, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, have highlighted critical issues related to the nature and direction of the post Apartheid State. Firstly, the legislations

have positioned the State to intervene and mediate in the interest of the majority and give effect to the directives of the Constitution and other legislations. The State's primary role is to pursue and safeguard the directives enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa.

Secondly, the politics of reconciliation and consensus had the effect of compromising the developmental agenda of the State by finding ways to appease particularly the conservative sectors of society and economy. De Clercq (1997:134) argues that this moderate politics based dialogue, negotiation and consensus as adopted by the GNU preserved the interests of the privileged minority.

Thirdly, the legislations represented the struggle for the new state to address both the humanistic elements and issues that are more narrowly concerned with economic development. This tension will be illustrated by citing two recent legislations. The humanistic and democratising goals of education are strongly emphasised in the education legislation like the South African Qualifications Act (RSA, 1995a). Whilst the legislation related to the human resource development, for example the South African Skills Act (RSA, 1997e) is primarily concerned with developing human resource needs to improve productivity and economic growth.

The contradictions within the policy process impacted on the State's implementation of education and training policies. The contradictory impulses of the various legislations on the new state's ability to implement policy can be illustrated by examining the Constitution; Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP); and the Growth, Employment and Redistributive Programme (GEAR). The policies collectively exemplify the tensions that pervade the interpretations of the intentions of the post-apartheid state. The focus of GEAR as the State's

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macro-economic strategy is on fiscal austerity which subsequently contradicts with the ideas of the Constitution and the RDP that are based on an expansionary economic model (Motala and Singh, 2001: 7).

The new state in its development and implementation of policies had to respond to the contradictory impulses found in the different legislations. This study examines to what extent the contradictory impulses in the form of the humanistic and democratising goals of education and the narrow economic intentions of policy, influenced RPL policy and practice.

1.1.2 The emerging education and training policy landscape

The context in which education and training transformation was taking place will be briefly described. The purpose of this description will be to illustrate the complexities, contradictions, constraints and opportunities within which change process was occurring. The education and training system had inherited a racially divided and ethnically fragmented education and training system. There were vast disparities and inequities between black education and training provision and white education and training provision. Some of the features of the apartheid education system were poor and uneven performance, low access, poor progression, low participation and separate certification structures. Industrial training system on the other hand was archaic, reflecting the accumulated indifferences and neglect of a social class that had sustained itself for generations on the basis of cheap unskilled labour. Job reservations meant that majority of workers were competent to perform jobs for which they were not recognised or adequately paid (Ensor, 2003: 327).

Despite the advances in democracy and developments since 1994, the structural inequalities in South Africa still persisted. The Population Census of 1998 illustrated some of the social and economic inequalities that remain despite the rhetoric of change made by policy makers. According to the census 19.3% of South Africa aged 20 years or more have no formal education at all, 24.2% have some or have completed primary education, 33.9% have some secondary education, 16.4% have completed Standard 10, and only 6% have post-school qualifications. Of persons over the age of 20 who have no education at all, 58% are women and 42% are men (Statistics SA, 1998). In addition to this South Africa has one of the world's most distorted distributions of personal income. Inward investment and economic growth are low despite macro-economic and fiscal stability. Middle and high-level skills are scarce. Unemployment is high and rising as the structure of the workforce is adjusted under the pressures of globalisation. Endemic poverty and disease (especially HIV/AIDS) are driving down life expectancy at birth and driving up infant mortality, as well as sapping labour force productivity and severely impairing educational progress in the community (Education Review, 2002: 8). South Africa is therefore characterised by the two worlds: the majority living within developing context and a minority living within developed context.

It was against this divergent context of inherited and present inequalities that a number of education and training legislations and policies were passed. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was seen as one of the major vehicle for the transformation of education and training and was seen as "pivotal" to the national human resources development strategy of the country. Both capital and labour welcomed the NQF since it promised to overcome problems of both education and training simultaneously. The principal legislations of education and training

acknowledged the centrality of the NQF. The main goal of the NQF was "to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements" (SAQA Act, 1995). This meant the linking of education qualifications to training qualifications in a single qualification seamless framework from general education and training (GET) to higher education and training (HET). This policy vision of an integrated approach to education and training includes different types of learning at different levels from GET through to HET.

The other four goals envisage the NQF contributing to the processes that are central to the agenda of education and training generally, by

- Facilitating access, mobility and progression in education, training and career paths;
- Enhancing the quality of education and training;
- Accelerating redress in learning and employment opportunities; and
- Contributing to the full potential and national and social and economic development.

The NQF Study Team (DoE/DoL, 2002b: 65) clarified the role of the NQF in stating that the latter "is a major vehicle - but not the only one - for the transformation of education and training". There are other complementary and equally important elements that contribute to the transformation of education and training process. This will include elements such as curriculum development and the building of human capacity throughout the system.

The political intentions of the new education and training system aimed to broaden access and participation as well as improve quality learning and its relevance to the world of work. It also aimed to produce the high

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quality, high-skill education output that will assist economic growth and social equality.

The implementation of education and training policies posed serious challenges for the new state. The challenges of implementation went beyond the factors such as the lack of human resources capacity and lack of infrastructure (although these factors were important) to examining the policy formulation process and policy itself. There have been many critical assessments of South Africa macro-education and training policy framework. For example, the White Paper on Education and Training (DoE, 1995b) was criticised for its major departure from the pre-1994 radical socio-political demands reflected in the ANC Education and Training Policy Framework (Chisholm and Fuller, 1996; Kraak, 1994). It was argued that education and training policies have been designed instead to answer the human resource demands of the economy rather than provide broader educational access and opportunities for the majority of learners who have been previously (and presently) being discriminated. Some critics argued that the initial policy developments (post-1994 to 1998) could in retrospect be seen as a symbolic phase (Jansen, 1999) designed to reassure all stakeholders particularly the conservative elements of society and business and to compensate for the lack of delivery by the State.

Due to criticisms of the implementation of the macro-education and training policy framework there have been a number policy reviews initiated by government. The review of the National Qualifications Framework (April 2002) being a recent example. The review of the macro-policy framework indicated the contestations among the different role-players in education and training.

This study is framed within the broader context of policy contestations and policy reviews. The present study will attempt to shift the focus from the political discourse that deals primarily with strategic choices about implementation, to critically engaging with the theoretical issues underpinning RPL policy and practice. The study will contribute to the current theoretical debates related to the National Qualifications Framework and its implementation. The present study also examines to what extent the policy and practice of recognition of prior learning as one element of the macro-education and training agenda facilitated or impeded the goals of social justice such as equity, access and redress.

1.1.3 The positioning of recognition of prior learning in the South African education and training policy agenda

The notion of RPL entered the mainstream of education and training policy discourse in the early 1990s. The trade union movement was amongst the key actors who played an influential role in placing RPL as part of the education and training policy discourse in the 1990s. The trade union movement, Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was the key advocate of a National Qualifications Framework. Recognition of prior learning was an integral part of the new qualification framework. For the unionists an integrated qualifications framework provided a structure for recognising (through the recognition of prior learning) the skills and knowledge of many historically disadvantaged workers who were skilled and doing skilled jobs but were neither qualified nor compensated as skilled workers. RPL was seen as a means to accredit work/experience based learning, thus facilitating the progress of learners from the non-formal to formal education and training system. The crucial element of these proposals was the linking of grades and

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wages to National Qualifications Framework. The purpose of linking grades to wages was:

- firstly, an attempt to improve wages;
- secondly, an attempt to reduce disparities of high and low skilled workers; and
- thirdly, increase career and training opportunities.

The recognition of prior learning policy was framed in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework. Unlike similar initiatives in other countries, RPL in South Africa was viewed as one of the means to realise the political goals of social justice. Its main purpose was to contribute to education and training transformation by providing access and redress to those who were discriminated in the past.

In addressing the issues of social justice the South African state had to simultaneously respond to the pressures of globalisation. The new emerging state had to ensure that the country had to participate meaningfully in the competitive international economic climate. These competing pressures on positioning RPL policy and practice as part of the macro-education and training policy agenda will now briefly be described.

The re-entry of South Africa in 1994 into the global scene after years of apartheid isolation has challenged the new democratic government to understand the emerging form and function of globalisation, and to locate itself as a competitive economy within this international context. RPL policy and practice had to respond to meeting the needs of the global market forces by training and re-skilling workers for a competitive economy. International economies are characterised by the need for highly skilled labour force as well as all rounded and diverse skills to

respond to unpredictable and volatile economy and rapid technological changes. South Africa as a developing economy is faced with the similar challenges to the international economies of training workers, re-skilling and re-training workers in response to the changing economy. In order to meet the needs of the changing economy RPL was viewed by policy makers and those who implement RPL as a mechanism to re-tool and re-skill adult learners to respond to changing market conditions; and to prepare individuals for jobs or improving their skills to become economically productive.

But the ideological underpinnings of globalisation stand in opposition to developmental agenda of South Africa. Globalisation agendas are constituted in the interests of serving the hegemonic interests of the developed nations. The developing countries are urged to adopt structural adjustments which reduce the State's control of the economy and encourage short-term speculative investments and a export-led policies, in favour of developed capitalist nations. The global agenda defines development in terms of international competitiveness, export drive, high-level skills and productivity. In this view the purpose of education and training, and recognition of prior learning is mainly to enable South Africa to engage with and participate in a highly competitive global economy. Although providing workers with skills for the growing South African economy is necessary, the preoccupation with an economically orientated paradigm will only be a partial response to the needs of the country. This deterministic discourse of development is more appropriate and will serve the interests of the modern developed economies than the South Africa context. South Africa has inherited a deeply divided social order. On one hand, there is a relatively advanced, globally interconnected political economy and social order dominated by the white minority and an emerging black middle class; on the other hand

there is the relatively poor, mainly black majority. In the South African context development should focus on addressing the issues of inequalities (in terms of class, race and gender); poverty and unemployment faced by the majority of the citizens. The issues of inequality, poverty and unemployment cannot be addressed through a path of development that uncritically emulates the modern developed economies. The study will examine how RPL policy in a developing context like South Africa responds to the ambivalent and contradictory attempt to reconcile the competing interests - that attempt to respond to global pressures and simultaneously the attempt to address local social needs.

The danger of viewing RPL exclusively in terms of narrow global market forces has the risk of sacrificing the potential of RPL, as a means of contributing to the reconstruction and development needs of the country. Alternatively RPL could be positioned to contribute to achieving the reconstruction and development needs of the country. South African RPL policy and practice has to be informed by a much broader range of socially defined and political, cultural and humanising goals. Motala (2003:10) made the appeal for a developmental approach to RPL policy and practice in his keynote address at the RPL Conference (July 2003) when he stated:

> "Unless the goals of education and training enhance the broader principles, aims and ends of development they might actually be counterproductive. In a society like ours, education and training could indeed become an agent for the reproduction of social division, for enhancing the privileges of a minority and for laying the basis of an unjust and unequal society. On the other hand, adopting a genuinely developmental approach to education and training would realise its real value in broadening the range of

opportunities it makes available to the poor, entrenching the principles of democracy, providing the possibilities for participation and engagement in society and responding to the quest for knowledge in individuals, families, communities, organisations and society as a whole."

In analysing the keynote address one could view RPL as a means to either enhance the inequalities inherited from the apartheid past or RPL could be used as a tool to consolidate the process of development in the country. In taking a developmental approach, RPL could be a means to prepare learners to contribute to the development of individuals and communities. By recognising the skills, perspectives, value and knowledge of adult learners in historically disadvantaged communities, it is hoped that these adults will contribute to the sustainability of their communities. The knowledge and skills of adult learners acquired through experience could formally be recognised and thereby be given access to further education and training. Through RPL these adults could be given an opportunity to acquire life skills that could address problems such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation, rural development, changes in production and consumption patterns (UNESCO, 2001 and 2002).

But one has to caution that RPL cannot be viewed as the panacea to all education and training problems, but only as one of the mechanism to facilitate the process of transformation in education and training. This is reflected by the recent review of the NQF. Wherein it is stated that:

"Of all the expectations placed on the NQF, the aspiration for a system of recognition of prior learning (RPL) was perhaps the most significant. On its own, it is not a solution to either

inequalities or unemployment, but it is an important strategy to address access to education and training for those previously excluded. As such, RPL should be seen as a key development strategy – both for the system and for individuals wanting to receive recognition for their learning achieved of formal institutions" (DoE and DoL, 2002b).

The present study will attempt to analyse how national RPL policy, sectoral RPL procedures and institutional assessment practices deal with the competing and contradictory pressures of addressing developmental issues of social equity and simultaneously addressing the pressures of globalisation on the country to create a competitive economy.

1.2   Rationale for the study

In order to examine the normative position I adopted about education and its role in creating conditions for social change in this research, aspects of my personal biography will need to be described. The key moments of my biography shaped my values and influenced the choice of the research topic and the perspectives taken in the research.

As a South African Indian male-aged 43 I grew up in small village of Mount Edgecombe along the North Coast of Kwa-Zulu Natal in South Africa. My family was descendants of the third generation of indentured labourers who were imported from India into the country in the 1890s to work on the sugar farms. Many of these labourers came as skilful artisans and craftsman and their knowledge and skills were passed orally and through apprenticeships to their children. My grandparents and parents acquired valuable knowledge and skills from their ancestors. They were like most workers who did menial jobs throughout their working life with

limited or no opportunity to change their jobs. Their knowledge and skills that they had acquired through experience were not recognised by their employers.

My childhood in the small village during the 1960s and 1970s allowed me to observe people from our communities who worked as labourers gradually entering into trades such as bricklaying, carpentry, motor mechanics, and plumbing to operators of highly sophisticated machinery. Unfortunately, their knowledge and skills, and learning from experience were not officially recognised. Further, they were given no opportunity to formal education or training.

Having completed my schooling and graduating as a teacher from an exclusively Indian education system in the 1982, I taught at a secondary school for sixteen years in a predominantly Indian township of Phoenix in Kwa-Zulu Natal, which included short stints of being seconded as a teacher educator to Springfield College of Education (a tertiary education institution). As a lecturer tutoring adult learners doing their in-service, I observed experienced teachers getting frustrated by being subjected to a teacher education curriculum that forced them to repeat what they already knew and could do.

Due to the pressures for change both externally and internally in the late 1980s to democratise its policies, the apartheid government was forced to recognise the trade union movement. I joined the South African Democratic Teachers Union and became a union activist championing the cause of democratising the education system. One of the demands of the union movement was to introduce an equitable education system that recognises the knowledge and skills of unqualified and under qualified

teachers who had a number of years of experience but had no formal qualification.

I became interested in a research area that examined how the prior learning of adult learners could be recognised. I believed that the recognition of prior learning could provide the psychological healing to adult learners who were discriminated previously. The affirmation of the prior leaning of these adult learners could instil in them self-confidence that were eroded by the discriminatory practices of apartheid. Further prior learning could provide them with opportunities to access further learning. I conceptualised education and training as a moral idea linked to the concerns of social justice.

I resigned as an educator in 1998 and was employed by Technikon Witwatersrand in Gauteng as the Curriculum Specialist. In this new position I was charged with the responsibility to develop an orientation and support programme for academic staff with regards the National Qualifications Framework and to guide the re-designing of all the Technikon qualifications using the South African Qualifications Authority regulatory principles for interim registration. One of the requirements for the interim registration of qualification was for providers of education to describe the provision for recognition of prior learning. Most Technikons responded technically by describing the procedures for incorporating RPL within the qualifications. One of the immediate challenges for the Technikons and Higher education sector generally was to develop policy and procedures to recognise the prior learning of adult learners who were previously excluded from the formal education system. There was no national or institutional RPL policy within Higher Education sector generally. At that moment in time I

focused my research interest on examining the indicators that could inform the development of National RPL policy.

Having served the Technikon for one year I moved to SAQA to be the National Co-ordinator of one of the National Standards Body. This position provided me with an insider perspective to the process of the national RPL policy formulation. This position also enabled me to network more widely with those institutions that were engaging in the process of developing national RPL policy. When the national RPL policy was officially formulated in 2002, the immediate challenge for education and training institutions was to translate the official national RPL policies into institutional policy and procedures. I opted to analyse the national RPL policy. One has to note that in examining the discrepancy relationship between intended policies and implemented practices, most analysis attribute the problem to factors such as to the lack of institutional and resource capacity, but never seriously question the appropriateness of the policy for meeting the broad education and training goals associated with it (De Clercq, 1997: 129). This prompted me to direct my research focus to critically analyse the national RPL policy.

During a National RPL Conference held 2002 in Johannesburg, I came across a RPL project piloted by the Construction Sector Education and Training Authority (CETA). Being the first RPL project initiated by a Sector Education and Authority in the Further Education and Training Band made this project the ideal choice as an area for research. The location of the CETA RPL project within the FET College sector further enhanced my interest to investigate the CETA project. The research focused on examining the role of the much neglected FET College Sector in implementing progressive polices and instruments such as RPL. The

setting up of the new FET sector poses a number of challenges to college sector generally. The policy goals that are set in the FET Act (DoE, 1998d) and the attributes outlined for the FET colleges in the Landscape document (DoE, 2001e) pose significant new challenges to the sector.

The implementation site at Attridgeville in Gauteng North was selected as the sample for the research. The RPL project was located within the Building and Construction Department of the College and the programme existed as a project outside the mainstream curriculum of the institution under the leadership of a Project Manager. Attridgeville College was selected since its locality was closest to my place of residence.

The present research attempts to problematise the implementation process to explore the gap that develops between intended practice and actual practice. According to Mclaughlin (1987: 171-8) implementation is not about automatic transmission but is a process of bargaining and negotiation between the various local and national actors. According to him the implementing bureaucrats will always put their own interpretations and meanings to the intended policies and in the process will use their power and discretion to subvert or transform the original goals of the policy makers. The present study will examine how assessors as implementing agents within institutions translate the visions of policy into practical reality. This research examines how assessors within an educational institution mediate official RPL policies and procedures in assessing and recognising prior learning of adult learners. The research also examines the experiences and engagement of adult learners for whom policy is intended.

This research responds to the conceptual gap that exist in the study of RPL in particular and the National Qualifications Framework generally

by probing the epistemological issues by examining what and whose knowledge is considered as valid, what is the relationship between knowledge and experience, the relationship between different types of knowledge (disciplinary and work-based knowledge and learning), and the relationship between knowledge and access to power. The Study Team appointed by the Ministers of Education and Labour (2002) to facilitate the implementation of the NQF pointed out that RPL had made little progress in providing opportunities for adult learners and proposed a sequence of remedial measures.

The review of international case studies of RPL policy and practice (Blower, 2000; Evans, 1998, 2000; Flowers and Hawke, 2000; Forsyth, 2002; Michelson, 1996, 1997, 2000) have shown that institutions have challenged the traditional academic assumptions of the source of knowledge production by assessing and recognising knowledge gained outside formal settings like the workplace and the community. But the international studies have pointed out that institutions have only partially challenged the substance of the knowledge production. The present study examines how RPL policy and institutional practice deal with the different forms of knowledge and learning in the assessment context.

The present research also responds to the contextual gap in that there is very limited research on the RPL experiences in societies in transition with similar transformational agenda as South Africa. The present research attempts to contribute to understanding the policy formulation and implementation of the RPL in a context of transition, transformation and development.

1.3   Purpose and critical foci of the research

The purpose of the study is to examine how assessors mediate official policies in assessing and recognising prior learning of adult learners in an institutional context; and how adult learners' experience and engage with the assessment and recognition process.

At a macro level this research attempts to examine to what extent and how education and training policies contribute effectively or act as a barrier in meeting the aspirations and expectations of adult learners. At the meso-level the study examines to what extent the sector procedures contributed to achieving its purpose of providing opportunities for redress to adult learners. The target group of adult learners ranged from skilled employed to semi-skilled unemployed learners in the construction industry. At the institutional level the study examines how assessors as agents responsible for translating policy into practice mediated sector procedures. At the institutional level the present study also examines the adult learners' engagements and recollections of their experience with the RPL process.

A typical example of the aspirations of adult learner is described in the recollection from one of the research participants of this study:

> "I am forty years old and am married with four children. I completed standard two and had to leave school to start work at a very early age. I worked as handy man on contract basis for many construction companies. I am a bricklayer and worked mostly on a part-time basis. I have built five houses in my lifetime. I worked for many building-contracting companies who did not pay me well. I came to the College with the hope that I will get RPL

certificate. With the certificate I hope to I will be able to earn better wages. After I get the certificate I will like to do more courses so that I could learn more. "

The present research examines how and to what extent national RPL policy, sector procedures and institutional practices contribute to marginalising, privileging, or subverting the aspirations and expectations of adult learners described above.

The study focuses on three critical questions, namely:

- What are the official claims of the assessment and recognition of prior learning at the national and sectoral level?

- How do assessors mediate official policy in recognising and assessing prior learning of adult learners in an institutional context?

- What are the experiences and engagements of adult learners in having their prior learning assessed and recognised in the assessment process?

The research will examine the relationship between national RPL policy vision and actual implementation and felt experiences of the adult learners.

1.4   Value of the research

This study is intended to be useful to:

- Policy makers, to review national standards with the intention of dealing with the epistemological issues by acknowledging and addressing the different forms of knowledge and learning acquired from informal and non-formal contexts. Sector Education and

Training Authorities to critically review sector and institutional RPL policies;

- Standards-writers, who are responsible to define knowledge to shift their assumption about the standards writing process as a technical exercise. In defining knowledge they need to identify and understand the complexities in writing standards. They need to be conscious of issues such as the socio-cultural context in which knowledge and learning is produced, what knowledge is seen as valid, what is the relationship between knowledge and access to power;

- Providers of Education and Training, to provide them with a conceptual guide to inform their formulation of institutional policy and also to evaluate and transform current practice of RPL.

- Assessors, to critically reflect on their assumptions and practices in order to shift their practices from an formulaic approach of assessing learners to adopt a more critical approach that challenges the conditions that promote inequalities in society.

1.5   Construct of RPL used in the study

In terms of the NSB regulation (RSA, 1988h) RPL is understood to be

> "the giving of credit to what learners already know and can do regardless of whether this learning was achieved formally, informally or non-formally". The awarding of credits is done by comparing "previous learning and experience against learning outcomes for a specific qualification" (RSA, 1988h: 3).

According to the regulation, RPL is viewed as a form of assessment for adult learners to measure their competence in knowledge, skills and values against approved national standards. RPL is defined as a

systematic process that involves the identification, documentation, assessment and recognition of learning. Prior learning is acquired through formal, informal, non-formal means and/or experience. This could prove the basis for access to further education and training or mobility within across workplace or credits towards a formal unit standard and/or qualification or advanced standing towards a learning programme.

In the RPL process the assessment and recognition of learner's knowledge and skills acquired through prior learning is measured against learning outcomes in either a qualification or a unit standard. A qualification represents a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose and which is intended to provide the learner with applied competence and a basis for further learning. (DoE, 1998h:3). A unit standard is registered statements of learning outcomes and the associated assessment criteria. Unit standards contribute towards a qualification (DoE, 1998h:3).

The above definition will be the frame of reference in this research.

1.6   Overview of the study

The present research is divided into three parts. The first part of the research orientates the reader to the broad context in which the study is located (Chapter 1); describes and analyses the international and national RPL policy and practice to identify trends, gaps and limitations and to develop the first set of preliminary lens for the analysis of data (Chapter 2); develops the conceptual framework as a second set of preliminary lens for analysis (Chapter 3); and describes the research methodology (Chapter 4).

The second part of the research attempts to address the critical foci of research by firstly, examining the official claims of RPL policies at the national level (Chapter 5); secondly, by examining the sectoral procedures and the standards that were used by assessors to assess adult learners (Chapter 6); thirdly, by examining how assessors assess and recognise the prior experience of adult learners (Chapter 7); and fourthly, examining the experiences and engagements of adult learners in the assessment process (Chapter 8).

The third part of the research firstly, develops a synthesis of the main issues the emerged in the analysis; and secondly, examines the findings and considerations for theory, policy and practice (Chapter 9).

Each chapter will now be briefly described below:

Chapter 1: This introductory chapter provides the broad content to the research. The chapter examines the emergence and positioning of RPL in the context of competing and contradictory pressures of reconstruction and development and pressures of globalisation. The purpose, critical foci, rationale and value of the study are described.

Chapter 2: In this chapter both international and national case studies are selected to firstly, identify conceptual issues by examining RPL policies and practice in different contexts; and secondly, to identify the key lessons for the developing South African context. The experiences of United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada are selected for their illustrative value. This is followed by the brief examination of the development of national RPL policy and selected case study. The survey of literature was not exhaustive and therefore the findings are not generalisable within the institutions or country. The

purpose of the review of literature was to identify critical conceptual issues in RPL policy and practice. The following conceptual gaps emerged from the review of literature:

- The contextual issues that inform RPL policy and practice;
- The nature, value and purpose of RPL;
- The different views of knowledge in the context of assessment;
- The relationship between knowledge, learning and experience; and
- The relationships between the assessor and adult learners.

The above conceptual issues formed the first set of preliminary lens for the description and analysis of data.

Chapter 3: This chapter attempts to construct a dialogue between the Bernstein's theoretical concepts of classification and framing, power and control, and recognition rules and realisation rules, with critical issues that emerged from the literature review in (Chapter 2). The intersection between theory and the categories that emerge from the literature review will produce a second set of conceptual framework for the description and analysis of data.

Chapter 4: The chapter will outline the theoretical perspectives on the research design, the research procedure followed in the study and kind of choices that were made about the research methodology.

Chapter 5: The purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyse the official claims of RPL from the perspective of the national policy. At the first level of analysis the main claims of the national RPL policy document will be described. The categories that emerged from the literature review will frame the second level of analysis. At the third level

of analysis the data in each instance will be described and analysed using the conceptual language of Bernstein's theory.

Chapter 6: This chapter analyses sectoral procedures and the unit standards in construction carpentry and building that were selected by the Construction Education and Training Authority for the assessment of adult learners' prior knowledge and learning. The procedures and unit standards will be analysed in terms of appropriate categories. The data will be described and analysed using the concepts of Bernstein's theory.

Chapter 7: The chapter will illuminate and analyse the RPL practice through the lens of the assessors who play a critical role in mediating official RPL policies at the institutional level. The data will be described and analysed through the theoretical constructs of classification and framing, power and control, and recognition and realisation rules.

Chapter 8: The chapter reconstructs the experiences of four adult learners who were assessed through the RPL process. The first level of analysis examines the emerging pattern across the "stories". The second level of analysis the responses of the adult learners to the assessment process will describe and analyse using the concepts of classification and framing, power and control, and recognition rules and realization rules.

Chapter 9: The final chapter firstly, attempts to develop a synthesis of the main issues to address the critical questions; secondly, develops a meta-narrative by viewing the emerging findings through the theoretical lens and creating an inter-textual discourse between the findings, theory and the literature review and thirdly, examines the considerations of the emerging findings for policy, theory and practice.

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The next chapter will review the international and national case studies of RPL policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL
CASE STUDIES OF RPL POLICY AND PRACTICE

The previous chapter examined how recognition of prior learning emerged as a critical issue in the new education and training policy agenda. The critical argument of how the emerging democratic South African state could conceptualise RPL policy and practice was described. The rationale, purpose and critical foci of the research study were also discussed.

The first part of this chapter examines selected international case studies. International RPL experience of United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), Australia and Canada were selected for this research. The selected case studies were chosen for their illustrative value, rather than their value to represent the general trends in the respective institution or country. The case studies illuminate important conceptual trends in RPL policies and practices. The conceptual trends cited in the research only partly reflect the dynamic movement in international RPL policy and practice.

The second part of the chapter describes and evaluates the post apartheid policy developments with particular reference to RPL. The key lessons learnt in the implementation of RPL in different sectors in the national contexts will be briefly described.

The review of international and national policy and practice is intended to expose some of the critical conceptual gaps and silences that will be addressed in this research study. The conceptual issues will inform the

design of the research instruments and will provide the initial lens that will be used for the analysis and interpretation of data.

2.1   International case studies of RPL

The experiences of USA, UK, Australia and Canada were selected to identify key conceptual issues form international RPL experience in policy and practice. The international case studies will be compared with each other in terms of purpose, policy and practice. The international case studies were chosen for their illustrative value, rather than their value to represent the general trends in the respective institutions and country. USA was selected since it was one of the pioneering countries that developed assessment of prior and experiential learning. Further in the USA, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) had taken the lead in advocating and developing Assessment of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL) policies and practice (Evans, 1988). The provision of the assessment of experiential learning in the UK was selected to highlight a variety of aims and outcomes in diverse settings and institutions; namely, guidance and counselling, orientation and access to further study and advanced academic or professional standing (Evans, 1988). Australia provided a useful example of a National Qualifications Framework (Australian Qualifications Framework - AQF) with RPL as a means to gain access and credit towards a qualification (cited in the DoE/DoL, 2002b). Canada's Prior Learning and Recognition (PLAR) model of the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) in Ontario represented an innovation in addressing equity and redress issues of the aboriginal and minority learners (Aatrs et al., 1999). The individual cases will be surveyed to identify key conceptual issues.

2.1.1 Comparative analysis of the international case studies of RPL

The comparative analysis of international case studies namely USA, UK, Canada and Australia will focus on comparing the purpose; policies and implementation of RPL in different contexts. In this section the key conceptual issues relating to the strengths, limitations and gaps in RPL policy and practice will be illustrated by using selected examples. The analysis will provide some important lessons for South African RPL policy and practice.

2.1.1.1 Purpose of RPL

In the international case studies examined (Aarts, 1999; Bowler, 2000; Evans, 1998, 2000; Flowers and Hawke, 2000; Forsyth, 2002; Michelson, 1996, 1997 and 2000; Wittaker, 1989) the assessment and recognition of prior learning was driven by the combination of the following key factors:

- The need for education and training institutions to increase the participation rates through widening access;
- The need for re-skilling workers facing unemployment or retrenchment;
- The economic necessity of boosting vocational skills; and
- To provide access to further learning, particularly to higher education.

The purposes outlined above reflect the tension between the social justice concerns of equity with economic concerns of efficiency and productivity. The pressure of securing funding, have forced providers of tertiary education to collaborate with industry. The collaboration had led institutions to re-define RPL in terms of corporate requirements at the expense of holistic development of workers.

What seems apparent across the cases surveyed is that RPL was more widely accepted by labour and employees. RPL was more widely used by the vocational sector since assessment of vocational and technical skills and knowledge acquired through prior learning and experience was more easily demonstrable and measurable. For example in the USA the federal agencies such as the Department of Labour supported APEL. Federal agencies viewed APEL has as a mechanism to train or retrain workers in order to provide the productive labour in response to the demands of the growing economy (Evans, 1988). There was a tendency across the case studies to concentrate RPL on skills recognition and assessing and valuing of "practical" competencies rather than assessing "theoretical competencies". In the vocational sector the assessment and recognition of knowledge and learning was inferred from the demonstration and questioning of candidates. On the other hand, the assessment of theoretical knowledge acquired from experience was more complex.

This study will examine the use of RPL in the vocational and technical sector and will raise critical theoretical concerns (see Chapter 9) about the difference between different types of knowledge and learning.

In the case studies examined, the purpose of RPL was seen as providing individuals from less privileged social group's alternative access and promotion. There was a gradual move towards viewing assessment and recognition of prior learning as a means of promoting greater equity and social mobility in international contexts. In the USA, CAEL put the concerns of equity at the heart of their activities (Evans, 2000). In Canada, the efforts of the First Nations Technical Institute, the Canadian Association for Prior Learning and the Canadian Labour Force Development Board have placed equity as priority for PLAR (Aatrs et al., 1999). In the UK, the National Council for Vocational Qualifications

has committed itself to a lack of discrimination in both standardised performance criteria and in specifying competencies (Michelson, 1997: 142). In Australia equity was one of the prime reason for interest in APEL (Flowers and Hawke, 2000: 151).

One of the limitations in the selected case studies was the assumption that the naming and crediting socially useful knowledge was a neutral and value-free activity. Michelson (1997: 143) aptly agues that:

> "RPL is inevitably deeply embedded in how a society apportions status and visibility. It can't help but be a site, in which the social order is mediated, in which differentially powerful groups and institutions struggle towards a vision of human society".

The case studies have illustrated that institutions have not engaged sufficiently with the social justice concerns of providing education and training for the marginalised and poor. A more radical view of RPL, for example, will challenge the monopoly of knowledge held by the academy and question the knowledge power relations embedded in the standards.

In my study, I will examine to what extent South African RPL policy and practice was driven by the conservative practice of providing credits for knowledge and learning gained from experience; or a radical practice of acknowledging different types of knowledge produced from different sites of learning.

2.1.1.2 Policies, procedures and principles

In this section the conceptual trends identified in the case studies pertaining to policy, procedures and principles will be examined. The following conceptual issues were identified in the cases surveyed as critical in the ensuring effective implementation of RPL:

- The standards used in assessing learners;
- The location of RPL within the educational and training structure; and
- The epistemological issues relating to RPL.

The above issues will now be further elaborated.

The standards produced by Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) (Wittaker, 1989), formed the basis for the policy and procedures of RPL practice in certain institutions in the USA. Although the standards provided useful minimum guidelines for the policy and practice of RPL for institutions, they have serious gaps and limitations. Firstly, the standards were too general and technical, and focused predominantly on organisational issues. They failed to address the complexities of the RPL process. The contextual factors that influenced RPL policy and practice were ignored. The power relations between the different agents within the assessment process were not identified and addressed. Secondly, the standards failed to deal with serious epistemological issues such as addressing the relationship between academic knowledge and everyday knowledge gained from experience; the relationship between academic knowledge and other forms of knowledge such as indigenous and local knowledge; and, the relationship between knowledge, skills and values. Thirdly, the issue of the relationship between learning and learning from experience was not addressed. Finally, the standards focused exclusively on assessment of prior learning in the academic context and failed to provide guidelines for the vocational sector.

The present study attempts to address the gaps by examining the epistemological issues such as the relationship between knowledge, experience and learning in the assessment of prior learning of adult learners.

The location of RPL within the educational and training structure was a critical factor that determined the success of the implementation of RPL in the case studies surveyed. The location of the RPL in the USA, UK and Canada had posed serious challenges for the implementation of RPL. The decentralisation of the educational jurisdiction in the USA, Canada and UK meant that each individual state had the responsibility to develop its own RPL policies and procedures. Thus the greatest challenge facing the implementation of assessment of prior learning in USA, Canada and UK relate to transferability, portability and assuring the quality of qualification between states (Blower, 2000: 84-85). The Australian Qualifications Authority that provides an agreed national framework for the designing, developing and issuing of recognised qualifications within Australia, attempts to address the issues such as articulation and progression (AQF, Implementation Handbook: 1 cited in DoE/DoL, 2002b: 53). In the South African context the positioning of the NQF at a central level attempts to address the structural constraints experienced by decentralised education systems. But, the implementation of the South African NQF is faced with more complex epistemological issues elaborated below.

The cases examined indicated that effective implementation of RPL policy and practice occurred in countries that addressed the epistemological challenges in dealing with different types of knowledge and learning. The Australian Qualifications Framework provides a good

example of how Australia dealt with the relationship between different knowledge and learning for policy makers and practitioners (AQF, Implementation Handbook: 1 cited in DoE/DoL, 2002b). The Framework comprises of twelve qualifications, from Senior Secondary Certificate through to doctoral degree. They are grouped in three sectors: schools; Vocational Education and Training; and Higher Education. The AQF recognises that the three sectors have different industry and institutional linkages. There are:

"No standardised rankings or equivalences between different qualifications issued in the different sectors, as these qualifications reflected different types of learning reflecting the distinctive educational responsibilities of each sector. Where the same qualifications are issued in more than one sector but authorised differently by each sector (i.e. Diploma, Advanced Diploma) they are equivalent qualifications, although sector-differentiated" (AQF, Implementation Handbook: 1 cited in DoE/DoL, 2002b: 53).

The AQF acknowledges the different types of knowledge and learning located in the different sectors. The AQF did not strive to search for equivalence between the different knowledge and learning on the qualifications framework. However, sector and institutions negotiated equivalent but "sector-differentiated" qualifications. The critical lesson for South Africa is that the effective implementation of AQF was due to the autonomy given to sectors to negotiate the relationship between the different types of knowledge and learning with each other.

The present study will examine how the South African Qualifications Framework dealt with learning and knowledge at the different levels and

sectors using the "principle of difference" and "principle of equivalence" (DoE/DoL, 2002b).

Another epistemological concern was the issue of how RPL policy and procedures construct knowledge. The policy and procedure of the assessment process in the case studies surveyed indicated that institutions viewed knowledge in the standards as absolute and neutral. For example, the use of the standards produced by CAEL in the UK promoted a technical matching of prior learning of learners to the assessment criteria in the national standards. RPL assessment process was based on the principle of direct equivalence between knowledge and skills gained in prior learning to the standard. The danger of viewing knowledge in the standards as fixed and absolute was that it created conditions that filtered out the authentic ways of knowing and learning.

The present study will respond to the epistemological gaps identified, by examining how knowledge was constructed by policy and different agents within the institutional context. The present study will also examine how policy deals with the relationship between different types of knowledge and learning.

2.1.1.3 Implementation

This section is structured in two parts: firstly, the conceptual gaps will be described and secondly the innovative practices in the implementation of RPL across the cases will be examined.

I will now examine the following conceptual gaps identified across the international case studies:

- The politics of knowledge production in the RPL assessment process; and

- The views, roles and responsibilities of agents within the assessment process.

The RPL practice at the Empire State College (a tertiary institution) in New York highlights some important issues related to implementation of RPL. RPL within Empire State College was chosen since it served as a departure from traditional assessment of prior learning and represents a far more progressive approach to RPL than other US institutions. Within the college prior learning of an adult learner was assessed for credit in relation to a particular degree programme. The articulation and assessment of prior learning took place within an Academic Planning Programme, which was located within each Faculty. Students had the opportunity to connect past learning with future interests, identify prior college level learning and gaps in their learning, and finally plan a degree programme. The programme was individually or group based. Credit was given for college transcripts standardised exams and portfolios.

In evaluating RPL practices in the Empire State College, Michelson (2000) asserted that the RPL practice did not challenge the traditional assumptions that the academy was a privileged site of knowledge production. The institution failed to challenge the politics of knowledge production, which could have been addressed by asking questions such as:

- How is knowledge produced?
- Who produces the knowledge?
- What counts as knowledge?

The key issue in Michelson's (2000) evaluation of the RPL practice in Empire State College was that the institution had not directly challenged the politics of knowledge production. The findings with regards to Empire State College illustrates the conceptual issues in certain RPL practices and therefore not generalisable for all programmes within the institution.

The present research study will attempt to examine how RPL policy and practice dealt with issues such as what are the different sites of knowledge production and what counts as knowledge in the assessment context.

The views, roles and responsibilities of the agents involved in the assessment process will be examined across the case studies to identify limitations and gaps. In the cases examined the key actors in the implementation process were candidates, the counsellor or advisor and the assessor with clearly defined roles and identities. The candidate was viewed as the learner or the employee whose experience was to be assessed against standards. The role of councillor or advisor was undertaken in some instances by administrators. These administrators relied on manuals and guidelines to prepare candidates for the assessment process. This usually involves the advisor familiarising the candidates with the standards, against which the prior learning will be assessed, and preparing and supporting the candidate to gather evidence towards a portfolio. The assessors were the subject specialists whose main role was to assure that the evidence presented correlates directly with the knowledge and skills in the standards. The standards against which learners were assessed were a product of stakeholder negotiation, although both in the UK and Australia the employer's discourses were dominant (Harris, 2000:26).

The development of a portfolio of evidence was the most common method of assessment of prior learning in most international contexts. However, there were other complementary forms of assessment, for example, the use of interviews to assess knowledge. The portfolios contained "direct" evidence such as products and samples of work and "indirect" evidence such as testimonials, certificates and references.

In examining the RPL practice it was evident that in most case studies the aspirations of candidates or employees and their involvement in assessment process were not adequately considered. The relationship between the assessor and candidate were not interrogated. The question of who should legitimately participate in the act of assessment was rarely raised in the assessment of prior learning - it was typically thought of as a judgment made by the assessor on the assessed. The systems of beliefs, values and purposes in which the agents involved were rarely discussed. In this way, traditional assessment practices implicitly endorsed society's dominant ideologies without questioning them (Delandshere, 2001). Further the views of the different agents with regards to the epistemological issues such as their views on knowledge; learning and experience were not interrogated. The gathering of evidence towards a portfolio was not challenged since it could be a barrier to candidates from contexts outside formal learning who have limited literacy skills.

Michelson (1997: 144-145) highlights another conservative feature of RPL as currently practiced in the sampled case study. She argues that the RPL process places emphasis on the ideology of the individual. According to Michelson the emphasis placed on the individual reproduces the

> "traditional Western assumption that both experience and knowledge are individual products, that cognitive development is

tied to personal autonomy, and that knowledge is to be used for individual advancement and individualistic goals".

In focusing the assessment of individual knowledge and learning, RPL ignores the relationship between the historical experience of the community and the personal experience of the individual.

The present study will respond to the above gaps by examining the RPL as a socially located process. The present study will examine experiences and engagements of candidates in the assessment process, the relationship between the assessor and the candidates and their views towards the issues of knowledge, learning and experience.

Some of the innovative approaches across different case studies for effective RPL policy and practice will now be highlighted. These following innovative practices have been identified below as follows:

- RPL as a mechanism in addressing issues of social equity and redress;
- The collaboration between the vocational and academic sector in recognising worker knowledge and skills; and
- The inclusive RPL model that challenged the behaviourist approach by affirming adult learners' experience.

The Prior Learning and Recognition (PLAR) model of the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) in Ontario represented an interesting innovation in addressing social equity and redress issues of aboriginal and minority learners (Aarts et al., 1999). The FNTI is an aboriginal - owned and operated technical college established in 1985 and situated in Ontario. A local Higher Education Institution has partnered with the college to accredit its programmes. This is a holistic model that combines education

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and training with human health and healing. In its proactive approach to redress for formerly oppressed peoples, FNTI focuses on incorporating culture into the learning process, with an understanding that previously disadvantaged adults who embark on learning often encounter personal pain and memories that might stand in the way both of their ability to recognise and value their own existing learning, and their ability to further their own education.

Some of the key lessons from the FNTI case study for RPL policy and practice are as follows:

- RPL component was linked to the curriculum that emphasised learners' existing knowledge;
- A holistic model that combined education and training with issues of social justice such as improving health and healing;
- RPL processes that incorporated learners' language and cultures; and
- RPL that was sensitive to learners' contexts.

The present study will examine how policy and practice address the above critical issues, such as learners' socio- cultural context, equity and redress.

Secondly, the collaboration between vocational and academic sectors in assessing and recognising workers' knowledge and skills as an innovative example will be examined. A global natural resource company based in Australia formed a partnership with the University of Newcastle, to provide workers facing retrenchments to acquire new skills to find employment as schoolteachers (Forsyth, 2002). This study highlights the following key issues:

- Articulation of knowledge and skills acquired in the vocational skills were able to be recognised by the academic sector;
- Holistic assessment of adult learners that included the formal qualification, knowledge acquired through experience, technological skills and interpersonal skills;
- Recognition rules provided by the academic institution to support learners. This took the form of support for learners to understand the culture of participating in a formal academic program, the hidden curriculum associated with being a student and the culture of the school.

The present study will examine how policy and practice dealt with issues of articulation of knowledge and skills between the vocational and general academic sectors.

Finally, the Making Experience Count module in the Thames Polytechnic in the UK can be selected for its illustrative value to highlight the deductive approach that affirmed knowledge and skills gained from experience (Evans, 1988: 159-164). Thames Polytechnic offers a Making Experience Count course to provide opportunity for adult learners to conduct a systematic reflection upon their experiences to build confidence and to enable the learners to make more informed choices about their futures. This is a 33-week long course, running for two hours a week. The participants of the course are predominantly women, some of whom are unemployed. None of the participants have formal requirements for entry into degree courses. The learners develop a portfolio of learning that contains description of key experiences, statements of what they claim to have learned from those experience, and evidence to support those claims. Learners can use their portfolios to support evidence for entry to degree-level courses and for employment.

The key issues of this module will be highlighted. The innovative practice:

- Affirmed the authentic knowledge and skills of learners by giving them and opportunity to systematically reflect upon their experiences;
- Built the confidence and self esteem of adult learners to enable them to make more informed choices about their futures; and
- Provided access to formal learning without a predetermined set of standards acting as a barrier.

The present study will examine to what extent RPL policy and practice encourage and affirm different types of knowledge and knowers.

2.1.2 Summary of key issues from international case studies

The following key issues from selected international case studies surveyed could inform South African RPL policy and practice. These issues will be summarised below:

- The location of RPL as part of the national qualifications framework like the Australian Qualification Framework has a powerful impact on the ensuring the success of the implementation of RPL and address the issues of transferability, portability, credibility, assuring qualify of standards across the different education and training institutions;

- The need for adequate funding and resources is required for quality RPL implementation and for sustainability of the RPL project;

- The need to provide quality assurance in our practice if PLAR is to be widely acceptable;

- The need for a nationally co-ordinated body to provide leadership and co-ordination of the efforts across the different sectors and institutions;

- The need for support from outside agencies such as CAEL for institutions implementing PLAR;

- The need for a holistic RPL model that combines education and training with issues of redress (like the FNTI model);

- The need to address the epistemological issue of dealing with the different knowledge and learning generated by the different sectors;

- The need for assessment methods to be flexible, innovative, learner centred and culturally grounded;

- The need for partnerships between education and training institutions and other interested parties like local businesses, similar to the partnerships in USA.

The above issues will feature in the analysis of the data of policy and practice in the present study. International case studies provide South Africa with useful lessons to inform RPL policy and practice. What seems to be similar between the international case-studies surveyed and RPL in South Africa, is that RPL is posited as a win-win situation whereby all "stakeholders" benefit through "consensus". The power-relations between the "stakeholders" are ignored. Further, in both contexts there was a tendency amongst policy makers to merge goals of social justice with the goal of economic development.

However, there are a number of contextual differences. Most of the case studies examined were selected from the first world countries that have not faced with issues relating to South Africa or the African continent. Given the historical legacy of unequal provision of education, fragmented education and training system, mass unemployment and poverty, the context of the emergence of the developments of RPL in South Africa is different from the international case studies. The origins of RPL in South African could be associated to the liberation struggle and South African RPL is driven by a macro- political agenda to transform society.

Thus far the review of literature described and analysed the examples of RPL policies and practices internationally. What now follows is an examination of the most recent developments that promoted RPL in South Africa.

2.2   South African national experience

This section will firstly trace the origins of RPL in South Africa. Secondly, review the recent policy developments related to RPL. Thirdly,

highlight the critical issues related to the implementation of RPL in the workplace and in the Higher-Education sector.

2.2.1 Origins of RPL in South Africa

The introduction of RPL activities could be traced to the initiatives of Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) in the 1980s, when COSATU negotiated agreements with business with regards to adult basic education and workforce development. RPL was seen by COSATU as a mechanism:

- To provide increase access for workers to higher education;
- To re-skill workers in the face of retrenchments and capital-intensive investment; and
- To facilitate the reconstructive and developmental agenda, thus bridging the gap between those who had traditionally had access to higher education and working class African workers who were denied access.

The notion of RPL entered the mainstream education and training discourse with the pre-1994 education and policy discussions, and more intensely after the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework and the post-1994 education and training policy framework.

2.2.2 Policy developments related to RPL

The following legislations with particular reference to RPL have been reviewed and analysed in order to identify the coherence and contradictions of legislations and its implication for RPL policy formulation and its implementation:

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996, RSA1995a);

- The National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996);
- Education White Paper 3 (1997);
- The Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997);
- The Further Education and Training Act (Act 98 of 1998);
- Employment Equity Act (Act 55 0f 1998); and
- The Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1999).

The reference made to RPL in each of the above Act will be described; followed by a detail critical analysis in section 2.2.4.

2.2.2.1 The constitution of the Republic of South Africa

The aims of the Constitution form the bedrock of all education and training legislations. These aims are highlighted below:
- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person;
- Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law; and
- Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations (Constitution of 1996, RSA1995a).

The constitution foregrounds the socio-political and humanistic discourse that drives education and training transformation in the country. The socio-political discourse focuses on establishing democratic values, social justice, and human rights; whilst the humanistic discourse focus on improving the quality of life in driving transformation of education and

training. The present research study will examine to what extent the National RPL policy and institutional practice advance the humanistic and socio-political discourses entrenched in the constitution.

2.2.2.2 National Education Policy Act

The National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996) provides the Minister of Education with policy framework to determine national education policy. The Act was passed to enable the Minister of Education to:

> "facilitate the democratic transformation of the national system of education into one which serves the needs and interests of all the people of South Africa and upholds their fundamental rights".

There are particular clauses in National Education Policy Act (RSA, 1996b) that has reference to recognition of prior learning. The policy and practice of RPL needs to consider the following rights. The right to:

- "basic education and equal access to education institutions;
- achieving equitable education opportunities and redress of past inequalities in education provision;
- providing opportunities for and encouraging lifelong learning; and
- recognition the aptitudes, abilities, interests, prior knowledge and experience of students".

The Act acknowledges the place of RPL as a tool in achieving providing equity in educational provisioning in the form of access and redress.

2.2.2.3 Education White Paper 3

The following clauses in Chapter 2 of the Education White Papers 3 (1997) make direct reference to RPL as alternative means to access Further Education and Training, and Higher Education and Training.

The following clause under the section "admission and selection procedures" in the White Paper points out that:

> "The ministry is committed to ensuring that the minimum statutory requirement for entry into all higher education programmes will in future be a pass in the proposed Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC). Institutions will continue to have the right to determine entry requirements beyond statutory minimum. However, in exercising this right, they should ensure that selection criteria are sensitive to the educational backgrounds of potential learners, and incorporate the recognition of prior learning, which is an essential concept in the elaboration of the NQF".

In terms of the White Paper recognition of prior learning is seen as an alternative form of entry into higher education institutions

2.2.2.4 The Higher Education Act

The following clause of the Act (101 of 1997) relate directly to RPL. The Act stipulates that:

> "The NQF provides for different routes – formal schooling, adult basic education and training and recognition of prior learning, or a combination of these, for obtaining the proposed FETC. However,

many able, mature applications for standards entry and open learning programmes may not have had the chance to fulfil all the requirements for the FETC. The Ministry strongly supports developmental work and projects pilot that will help institutions to develop criteria to assess applicants' prior learning and experience, so that those with clear potential to succeed in higher education can be admitted."

The white paper offers a radical challenge to institutions of learning to use recognition of prior learning as a means of providing alternative entry into higher education institutions and also to use assessment of prior learning for advance standing towards the FET certificate qualification.

2.2.2.5 Further Education and Training Act

The Act (No. 98 of 1998) aims to regulate Further Education and Training. The preamble of the Act makes the following reference to RPL by stating that:
- "redress past discrimination and ensure representivity and equal access;
- ensure access to further education and training and the workplace by persons who have been marginalized in the past, such as women, the disabled and the disadvantaged" (Act No. 98 of 1998).

2.2.2.6 Employment Equity Act

The Employment Equity Act is an act that deals with providing redress to historically discriminated workers. The purpose of this Act (Act 55 0f 1998) is to achieve equity in the workplace by promoting equal

opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination.

The Act makes the following reference to RPL. According to the Act a person may be suitably qualified for a job as a result of any one of, or any combination of that person's

- formal qualifications;
- prior learning;
- relevant experience; or
- capacity to acquire, within a reasonable time, the ability to do the job.

2.2.2.7 Skills Development Act

The purpose of the Act (Act 97 of 1999) is:

> "to provide an institutional framework to devise and implement national, sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the South African workplace; to integrate those strategies within the National Qualifications Framework contemplated in the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995; to provide learnerships[1] that lead to occupational qualifications..." (Act 97 of 1998:1).

According to the Act RPL could used as a means to provide access to or credits towards learnerships and skills programmes[2].

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[1] A learnership consists of a structured learning programme and a practical work experience of a specified nature and duration. The learnership leads to an occupational qualification registered on the National Qualifications Framework.

[2] Skills programmes is an occupational based training intervention that constitutes a credit towards a qualification registered on the NQF

Next, the South African Qualifications Authority Act will be discussed and critiqued in this chapter, since SAQA is responsible for firstly, the formulation of national RPL policy, and secondly for the quality assurance of the implementation of RPL by each sector. The national RPL policy will be analysed in detail in chapter 5.

2.2.3   The South African Qualifications Authority Act

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA Act, 1995) was mandated by government to develop and implement the NQF. The objectives of the National Qualifications Framework form the basis for education and training transformation in the country (see Chapter 1). Figure 2.1 below illustrates the level bands and qualification map as realised by the NQF.

Figure 2.1: South African National Qualifications Framework

NQF LEVEL	BAND	QUALIFICATION TYPE	
HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING BAND			
8	HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING	Post-doctoral research degrees Doctorates Master's degree	
7		Professional qualifications Honours degree	
6		National first degree Higher diploma	
5		National diplomas National certificates	
FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING CERTIFICATE			
4	FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING	National Certificate	
3			
2			
GENERAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING			
1	GENERAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING	Grade 9	ABET Level
		National certificates	

SAQA has adopted an eight-level framework that incorporates three bands (GET, FET and HET). The qualifications framework includes both vocational and academic qualifications at the different qualification levels. The principles embedded in the objectives of the NQF such, as integration, access, quality, redress and personal development, should inform the development of RPL policy and implementation. SAQA has developed national RPL policy guidelines for the implementation of the RPL (see Chapter 5 for the analysis of National RPL policy).

The role of SAQA as a facilitating body will be illustrated by means of a diagram (see Figure 2.2). The roles and responsibilities of each component with particular reference to RPL will be described below.

Figure 2.2 SAQA Organogram
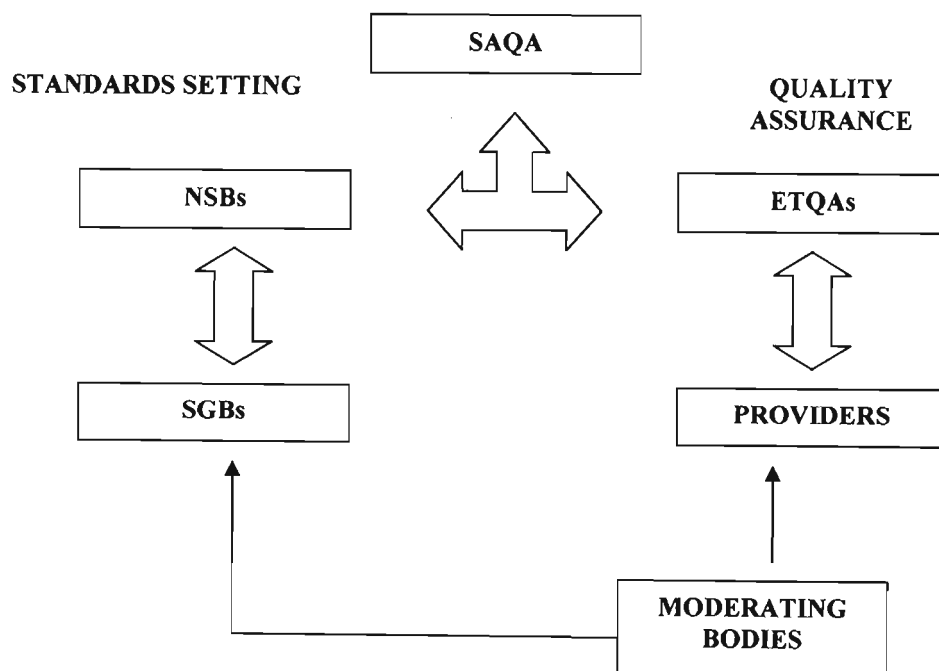
In terms of the SAQA Act (1998), SAQA has two major functions; namely, standards setting function and quality assurance function. The

regulations (NSB Regulations, 1998) governing standards setting makes provision for the establishment of National Standards Bodies (NSB) and Standards Generating Bodies (SGB). National Standards Bodies[3] are responsible for making recommendation for registration of standards and qualifications. Standards Generating Bodies generate standards and forwards them to the NSBs. Both NSBs and SGB are to make provision for the recognition of prior learning in the standards that they generate and recommend to SAQA. One of the requirements for the registration of a qualification is described by the NSB regulation as:

> "a qualification shall indicate the rules governing the award of the qualification that the qualification may be achieved in whole or in part through the recognition of prior learning, which concept includes but not limited to learning outcomes achieved through formal, informal learning or work experience" (NSB Regulation, DoE,1998h:3).

This means that learners could be awarded credits towards a qualification or even be awarded a whole qualification if their prior knowledge and skills gained in informal and non-formal contexts is recognised. The learner's knowledge and skills will have to match the knowledge and skills embedded in the learning outcomes. The awarding of credits based on the recognition of prior learning towards a qualification is referred to as advance standing.

In structuring a qualification the SGB has to include, amongst other requirements the "assumption of learning already in place before the programme leading to the qualification is commenced" (NSB Regulation,

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[3] There are 12 NSBs, one for each organising field of learning. The present research is located in NSB 12: Physical Planning and Construction.

DoEh, 1998:3). This description of the learning assumed to be in place for each qualification will enable providers to provide access to learners. The assessment of prior learning will enable learners to enter learning programme leading to a qualification without formal certification.

The regulation governing quality assurance (ETQA Regulations, DoEi, 1998) makes provision for the establishment of Education and Training Authority (ETQA). The ETQA's main responsibility is to assure quality delivery and assessment of registered standards and qualifications amongst providers of education and training. SAQA also appoints moderating bodies to ensure that assessment of the outcomes described in the NQF standards and qualifications is fair, valid and reliable. As part of its function of evaluating assessment of providers the ETQA has the responsibility to develop policies, procedures and models for RPL. RPL is another form of assessment to either provide learners advance standing towards a qualification or access to a learning programme. In terms of the criteria for accreditation of providers set out by SAQA in the ETQA Regulations (RSA, 1998a) Education and Training Providers need to have in place "policies and practices for [amongst other things] learner entry". This implies that RPL as a mechanism for access or entry into learning could be an element of such policies and practices.

There were many difficulties in the implementing of the NQF. The difficulties in the implementing the NQF led to the Ministers of Education and Labour to appoint a Study Team to review the NQF. The review was a result of a number of stakeholders being disgruntled with the slow pace of implementation especially in respect of access, progression and redress. The mains problems identified by the NQF review in implementing the NQF will be briefly outlined (NQF Review Report, DoE/DoL 2002b):

- The complex nature of the NQF architecture;
- The uncertainty over the respective roles and responsibilities of SAQA, the Department of Education and the Department of Labour;
- The lack of strategic leadership and co-ordination of SAQA and Department of Labour and Department of Education; and
- The proliferation of bodies responsible for the standards setting and quality assurance.

The main task of the Study Team was to recommend ways in which the NQF could be "streamlined and accelerated". The Study Team's Report of the NQF framework with particular reference to RPL will be highlighted. The Study Team has recommended that:

> "RPL implementation should be accorded priority, provided with appropriate incentives and targets; speeded up through the simplification of standards setting and quality assurance arrangement; based on the recognition that the assessment process for RPL do not differ significantly from "normal" assessment process; undertaken in the developmental context with the appropriate guidance infrastructure and training of assessors" (DoE/DoL, 2002b).

In critiquing the report of the Study Team the following issues can be raised:
- the recommendations of the Study Team focussed primarily on accelerating implementation of RPL;
- the questions related to the appropriateness of the NQF in achieving the transformative goals of social equity, access and redress are not principally addressed; and

- The epistemological issue of how the articulation of vocational and academic knowledge could take place through RPL is not addressed.

The Study Team Report has been challenged by the Department of Education (DoE) and Department of Labour (DoL). The proposal by the DoE and DoL must be seen in the context of perceived threats the new structures pose to the two departments. The DoL fears that the band ETQA is seeking undue influence over career focussed training. The DoE on the other hand fears the financial powers of the SETA is unduly influencing providers to adopt a units standards-based qualifications without regard to the national policies and plans of he Ministry of Education (DoE/DoL, 2002). The two departments have formulated a consultative document as a response, which provides a new perspective on the problems of implementing the NQF and a new set of proposals for the NQF architecture. The Task team concurs with the Study Team in concluding that the implementation of the NQF has been associated with "tensions and difficulties caused by its early conceptualisation." (DoE/DoL, 2003c).

In attempting to put forward a simpler NQF structure the joint report puts forward proposals for three powerful new bodies, to be known as Qualifications and Quality Assurance Councils (QCs) to replace the existing NSB/SGB/ETQA structure. It recommends that SAQA takes on a more facilitating role and less operational role. The three types of learning pathway are combined with the existing three qualification bands to generate a new three-by-three framework structure, which is described in Figure 2.3.

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Figure: 2.3 Proposed revised National Qualifications Framework

NQF band	General pathway	Articulation column	General vocational/Career-focused pathway	Articulation column	Trade, occupational and professional pathway
Higher education and training	Discipline-based qualifications	Articulation credits	Career-focused qualifications	Articulation credits	Occupational recognition or context-based qualifications unique to the workplace
Further education and training	Discipline-based qualifications	Articulation credits	General vocational qualifications	Articulation credits	
General education	General education qualifications (with ABET defined separately)				

The Document recognises the differences between different types of learning. These are referred to as institution-based and work-based. The Document recognises three types of learning which also describe the three broad learning pathways. They are the general, general/vocational and occupational pathways. The Document emphases the importance of articulation between the pathways but says very little about how the process of articulation might work. The Document does not deal with the more substantive issues of assessment and RPL.

Young (2003:3) critiques the document by emphasising that it fails to think through the implications of the tension between the "principle of equivalence" and the "principle of difference" of different types of knowledge and different types of learning. This is evident in the proposed framework which assumes that it possible to treat all qualifications and learning equally within the framework, despite

recognising their differences. Young argues that there are real epistemological differences between the different types of knowledge and learning. If this not considered, then the problems related to articulation between and progression will not be addressed. As a result the new proposals are unlikely to overcome the implementation problems of the NQF.

The present study is conducted in the context of contestations with the NQF by different stakeholders and the review of the role and responsibility of SAQA. The present study as part of the evolving critique of the NQF will examine how national RPL policy (Chapter 5), Sector Education and Training Authority RPL procedures (Chapter 6) and institutional RPL practice (Chapter 7) dealt with vocational and technical type of knowledge and learning and its articulation with general education. The study will make recommendations as to how the integration between vocational and general education can take place within the single qualification framework (see Chapter 9).

2.2.4 Coherence of legislative framework and its consideration for present study

Having reviewed and analysed the legislations relevant to RPL (see 2.2.2), the following key conclusions have been drawn and its considerations for the present study will be examined below.

Firstly, the legislations position the state to play an intervention and mediation role. The state is obliged to act in the interest of the majority and give effect to the directives of the Constitution and other legislations. The State has to act to pursue and safeguard the directives in the Constitution. The aims of the constitution foregrounds the

socio-political and humanistic discourses in driving education and training transformation in the country. The socio-political discourse focus on establishing democratic values, social justice, and human rights; whilst the humanistic discourse focuses on improving the quality of life, in driving transformation of education and training. The present research study will examine to what extent the National RPL policy and institutional practices advance the humanistic and socio-political discourses entrenched in the constitution.

Secondly, the politics of reconciliation and consensus provided a framework for drafting the different legislations. The underlying purpose for reconciliation and consensus was to forge a common purpose among different ideological leanings. This had the effect of compromising on the developmental agenda of the state by finding ways to appease particularly the conservative sectors of society and economy. The present study will examine how RPL policy development represented a "political settlement" of different sectors, each representing their own interest and ideology.

Thirdly, the legislations surveyed represent the struggle to address on one hand the humanistic elements; and, on the other hand the issues that are more narrowly concerned with economic development. The education related legislations such as The National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996); Education White Paper 3 (1997); The Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997); and the Further Education and Training Act (Act 98 of 1998); are more fully developed towards meeting the humanistic values of the Constitution. On the other hand, the legislations related to the human resource development (DoL, 1997a; 2001b), for example the South African Skills Act (Act 97 of 1997) are primarily concerned with improving productivity and economic growth.

The contradictory impulses between legislations were further illustrated by examining the Constitution; Reconstruction and Development Programme; and the Growth, Employment and Redistributive Programme (GEAR). These policies collectively exemplify the tensions that pervade in the interpretations of the intentions of the post-apartheid state. The focus of GEAR as the state's macro economic strategy is on fiscal austerity. GEAR directs policies that contradict with the ideas of the Constitution and the developmental thrust of RDP (Motala and Singh, 2001: 7). The present study will examine to what extent the purposes of RPL policy and practices are driven by competing discourses: on the one hand, the need to meet the narrow instrumental goals of the economy; and on the other hand, to meet the goals of social justice.

Fourth, the economic discourse underpinned most labour legislations. The economic discourse is related to the human capital theory. According to the human capital theory, the improvement in the quality of education and training will lead to South Africa becoming internationally competitive. Another hypothesis related to the human capital theory was that investment in education and training will lead to economic growth (Mahomed, 2001:117-120). In arguing for a relationship between education and training and economic growth, labour legislations (for example, the Skills Development Act) in particular prioritised the goal of economic growth over the goal of social justice. The economic goals of the Skills Development Act such as to improve productivity and competitiveness of workers were privileged in the Act. The labour legislations uncritically assumed that increased investment in education and training with result in economic growth. The present study will examine to what extent RPL policy and practice are driven by the need to respond to the narrow instrumental goals of the economy.

Fifth, the education and training legislations aim to prepare individuals to work in post-Fordist[4] conditions, by providing them with generic and flexible knowledge and skills. This is intended to enable workers to adapt to the changing conditions of work and technology. But, in most respects the South African economy that is characterised by the inherited racial divisions of labour and the "substantial structural and institutional constraints that limit transition from taking place" (Kraak, 1992: 413), is based on Fordist conditions of work. The South African legislations profess to address Post- Fordist conceptions, but the present economy is based on Fordist notions of work. This will mean that the education and training legislations will aim to produce highly skilled and flexible workforce for the modern economy who will find it difficult to find jobs in the economy that is still characterised by racial divisions of labour.

The present study will examine how RPL policy and practice responds to the contradictory impulses found in the different legislations.

2.2.5 Lessons from the implementation of RPL

The implementation of RPL in the South African context is still in the early stages of development. First, the pilot projects initiated by COSATU in the workplace (Ballim et al., 2000; Lugg, et al., 1998) that highlight some of the problems in the implementation of RPL, will be briefly examined. Second, issues related to RPL policy and practice for the Higher Education sector (Griesel, 2001; Ralph and Motala, 2000) will

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[4] Post Fordist condition is seen as a new economic epoch. This new economic condition is characterised by the advent of technology, globalisation of finance capital, innovative work organisation principles. According to the model of Post-Fordism the new demands made by the economic changes will require workers to acquire new generic and flexible knowledge and skills.

be also outlined. The selected case studies highlight some important conceptual issues and does not attempt to generalise within the sector.

2.2.5.1 RPL and workforce development

The pilot RPL project conducted by the Building Industries Training Board (BITB) under the auspices of the National Training Board (NTB) will be briefly described (Ballim et al., 2000; Lugg, et al., 1998). The implementation plan focussed on three main activity areas: the development of an RPL framework; the training and certification of key RPL practitioners; and the implementation of RPL process and certification of skilled workers.

Out of 315 workers who were originally screened, most of whom had never previously undertaken institutional training or been informed of the national standards relating to the skills tests, 259 (82%) completed the advisory stage; only 182 (58%) were assessed, and only 38 admitted to a qualifying trade test. The result of the project was that 42 percent were excluded from the assessment altogether, 132 gained some certification of skill, whilst less than 20 percent of those who were assessed managed to secure full trade certification (Ballim et al., 2000: 182).

The implementation of the above pilot project indicates that:
• The critical issues of what standards were used to assess workers; how and by whom these standards were produced were not questioned. Instead the standards that were used to assess workers' knowledge were taken for granted by agents in the assessment context. This approach privileged the standard and the assessment techniques whilst workers' knowledge and their ways of knowing were discounted.

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- The method of direct equivalence of technically matching the candidates' knowledge with that knowledge in the prescribed standard filtered out the authentic ways of knowing and learning at the different phases of assessment. The workers were "filtered out" during the pre-assessment phases of screening and advise stage, and those who entered the assessment phase were further "filtered out";

- Workers were not orientated into the practices and discourses that were present in the assessment context to enable them to gain access and succeed; and

- The policy makers and practitioners did not question the theoretical assumptions that underpin RPL policy and practice. Issues such as the assumptions that underpin knowledge, the relationship between knowledge in the standard and the knowledge gained from experience were ignored.

The present study attempts to address some of the conceptual issues which emerged from the above study by, firstly analysing the standards used in the assessment of workers in the construction industry; and, secondly examining the theoretical assumptions of policy and practice that underpin the issues of knowledge; the relationship between knowledge in the standards and knowledge acquired from experience.

Another example of the contested nature of RPL practice was research commissioned by the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) (Ballim, et al., 2000). This was a retrospective study of RPL process in which the union participated. In the case of NUMSA, the automotive industry assessed workers against Australian unit standards, which bore little resemblance to the South Africa realities. In the case of the mining industry, the RPL process advantaged those workers who had more advanced levels of

numeracy and literacy. The assessment process was also problematic, in that many workers had no advanced warning of either the timing or the method to be used in the RPL process. They were thus completely unprepared for what they were supposed to be doing. Another problem that was identified by the research was the different purposes and understanding of management and unions entered into the RPL process. Whilst management wanted a skills audit, the union saw the exercise as an attempt to move towards improved job grading and wages for workers. Once the RPL process was completed there was no way in which the opposing expectations were reconciled (Ballim, et al., 2000: 189).

The pilot project conducted by the union highlight some the following problems that could undermine the implementation of RPL:

- The different purposes and expectations of the different agents for the RPL activity;

- The workers were disillusioned since the information relating to RPL procedures and assessment tools were not readily available; some assessment tools used were inappropriate; many workers were given no opportunity to prepare for their assessment; workers did not have access to the standards against which they were to be assessed; many workers disregarded the outcome of their assessment as the grading system was not explained and no verbal feedback was given;

- Workers who had previous exposure to formal learning in the form of having the necessary numeracy and language skills were more likely to succeed and benefit from the RPL process. In this way the target group who had been previously discriminated for formal learning are more likely to be excluded, thus reproducing the existing social inequalities; and

- The standards were contextually irrelevant to the workers' lives and experiences.

The present study will respond to the conceptual issues that emerged from the above study by examining the influence of the context on the RPL policy and practice; and, the competing purposes that underpin RPL practices. Further, the study will examine whether the target group for whom RPL policy was intended benefited from the RPL practices.

2.2.5.2 RPL and Higher Education Sector

The implementation of RPL within the Higher Education Sector is still in the early stages of development. Griesel (2001) highlighted the following elements in RPL policy and practice for the Higher Education sector. Similar issues were identified by Ralph and Motala (2000) in evaluating lessons learnt from projects implemented in different contexts in the past five years across the different band. The main issues highlighted were:

- The degree to which RPL can be used as a mechanism in contributing to the achievement of HE policy goals of equity and redress, broadened access and increased participation;

- The role of RPL in addressing the political imperative of rendering formal educational opportunities accessible to those previously denied access;

- The typical profile/s of envisaged target group/s that will benefit from RPL;

- The development of appropriate guidelines and framework for the implementation of RPL;

- The complexities involved in determining equivalence between different kind and sites of learning, and consequently different forms of knowledge and competencies;

- The development of appropriate forms of assessment and curriculum responsiveness; and,

- The need for institutional policy decisions about optimal structural location of RPL initiatives.

The key issues identified above highlight firstly, the contextual differences that exist between the international case studies and South African experience with regards to RPL policy and practice. Given the historical legacy the purpose of RPL in South Africa was seen as a mechanism to address the issues of social justice such as equity, access and redress. Another issue identified by the above analysis was the epistemological challenges posed by the adoption of a single qualifications framework that incorporated both academic and vocational qualifications that incorporates all three bands of education and training.

2.3   Conceptual issues emerging from literature

The literature review of both international and national case studies; and the analysis of the policy and legislative context indicated the need for further exploration of the following conceptual issues that relate to RPL policy and practice. These critical issues are:
- Contextual issues that influence RPL policy and practice;
- The purpose and value of different agents within the RPL process;
- The competing views and types of knowledge and knowledge-power relations;
- The relationship between knowledge, learning and experience in the context of assessment;
- The relationships between the assessor and the learners in the assessment context;

The conceptual framework (refer to Figure 2.4), firstly illustrates the relationship between the different concepts. Secondly, the issues that

emerged from the review and critique of literature are formulated into
questions under each category.

Figure 2.4 Conceptual Frameworks 1:
Relationship between concept that emerged from literature review
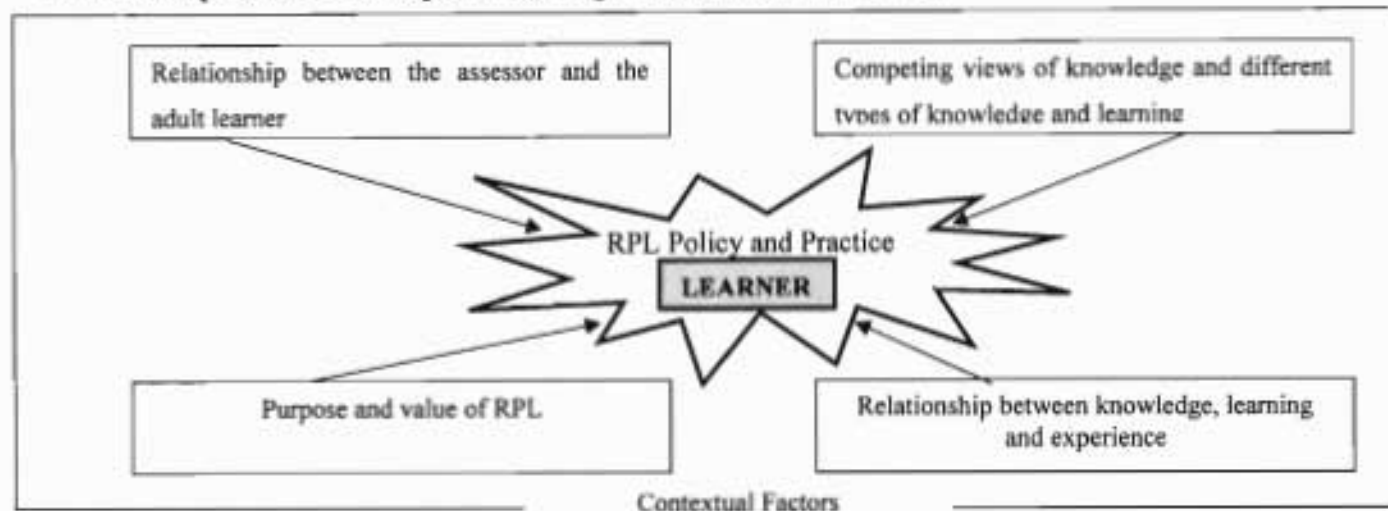
Contextual factors that influence RPL policy and practice
- How do global trends characterised by technological and socio-economic changes influence South African RPL policy and practice?
- How do the political transformative needs of social justice such as equity, access and redress influence RPL policy and practice?
- How does policy consider the dynamics of change experienced by education and training institutions?
- How does policy consider the local contextual realities such as socio-cultural and language issues?

The purposes and value of RPL
- How and to what extent official RPL policies and practice respond and promote the competing discourses (described below)?
- How does the socio-political discourse that focuses on establishing democratic values, social justice and human rights; drive RPL policy and practice?
- How does the economic discourse that focuses on creating productive workers to meet the needs of a competitive, fast growing economy influence RPL policy and practice?
- How does the humanistic discourse that focuses on building the self-esteem and self worth and provides opportunities for life long learning; influence RPL policy and practice?
- How does institutional discourse that focuses on providing learners alternative method of entry for those who don't meet the formal entry requirements drive RPL policy and practice?

Competing views of knowledge and different types of knowledge and knowledge power-relations
- What are the different views of knowledge by policy and different agents within the assessment context?
- What knowledge is seen as valid in RPL policy and practice?
- Who generates the knowledge in the standards and how are they generated and controlled?
- How do adult learners get access to the knowledge in the standards and under what conditions?
- What is the relationship between prior learning and knowledge in relations to other types of learning and knowledge?

The relationship between learning, knowledge and experience
- What approach to learning is promoted by RPL policy and practice?
- How does RPL policy and practice deal with the relationship between knowledge, experience and learning?
- How did policy deal with the different types of knowledge and leaning in assessing adult learners?

Relationships between the assessor and the learners
- What is the nature of the relationship between the assessor and the candidate?
- Is there mutual respect that relates to a concern for other's aims, interests and points and view?
- Are there any presence of coercion in the form of threats and penalties in the assessment process?
- Are there any support for democratic values and institutions?

2.4   Concluding remarks

The main issues of this chapter will be summarised.

The review of international and national in policy and practice contributed to identifying key conceptual gaps. The present study will address the conceptual gaps in an attempt to build a radical and progressive RPL approach. The conceptual gaps identified do not reflect a general trend both internationally and nationally. A far more extensive survey is needed to generalise the findings from the selected case studies. However, the case studies highlight the key conceptual issues that will be addressed by the present study:

- Contextual issues that influence RPL policy and practice;
- The purpose and value of different agents within the RPL process;
- The competing views of knowledge, the different types of knowledge and knowledge-power relations;
- The relationship between knowledge, learning and experience in the context of assessment;
- The relationships between the assessor and the learners in the assessment context;

The present study will examine how the above conceptual issues influence RPL policy and practice to either marginalise/privilege, include/exclude the knowledge, learning and experience of adult learners. These conceptual questions will also be used to inform the design of the research instruments, and will be used as a first set of analytical tools to categorise and analyse data to address the research questions.

In the next chapter the intersection between the conceptual issues that emerged from literature review and Bernstein's (1996) theory will produce a second set of conceptual lens to analyse data.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the previous chapter selected international and national case studies of policy and practice were examined; and the conceptual gaps in RPL policy and practice were identified and were briefly explored. These conceptual issues provided the first set of preliminary lens for the production and analysis of data. They were inter alia, the influence of contextual factors on RPL policy and practice; the purpose and value of RPL; the different views of knowledge and the relationship between knowledge, experience and learning; and finally, the relationships between the assessor and the adult learners in the assessment context.

The critical conceptual issues from the first set of preliminary lens will be re-described, analysed and understood in relation to Bernstein's theory (1971, 1996) of symbolic control and cultural production, reproduction and change. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the intersection between the categories that emerged from the analysis of international and national case studies and Bernstein's theory. This dialogue will be used to create a conceptual frame that will act as a second set of preliminary lens. The conceptual language of Bernstein theory will be used to deepen the levels of description, analysis and interpretation of data.

3.1   Rationale for the use of Bernstein's theory in the research

The conceptual language used by Bernstein in developing his code theory has evolved, elaborated and contextualised since the last three decades. The concepts of classification and framing; power and control; and recognition and realisation rules from Bernstein's theory (1996) were

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seen as powerful and illuminating theoretical tools to describe, analyse, understand and interpret the conceptual issues that emerged from the literature review. Bernstein's theory was traditionally used to discuss the codes of pedagogic practice in terms of family and school. However, the conceptual language of the theory has evolved to be generic enough to describe any other pedagogic practice. In this research pedagogic practice will refer to the relationship between the assessor and the adult learner within the RPL assessment context.

Bernstein's theory was used as an analytical tool in the present study for the following reasons:

Firstly, the theory systematically encompasses and connects issues related to macro and micro contexts. The conceptual language of the theory in the present study will be used to analyse the relationship of RPL policy and practice from macro (national and sectoral policy) level to micro (institutional and personal) levels;

Secondly, the theory provides useful conceptual language to describe and analyse critical educational and sociological issues. In the present study the conceptual language will be used to analyse data that describes the agencies, contexts and practices through which assessors and adult learners have constructed themselves and others;

Thirdly, Bernstein theory provided useful tools and explanatory framework to understand and analyse contemporary changes occurring in work, in education and other regulatory institutions/practices and their consequences for identity construction. The present research examines how the explanatory framework could be used to analyse and understand educational change in South Africa, with particular reference to the use of

RPL as a mechanism to address issues of social justice such as equity, access and redress to learners who have been previously discriminated.

The following concepts used in the Bernstein's theory will be appropriated to describe and interpret data in the present study:
- Power and control;
- Classification and framing;
- Recognition and realisation rules

The above concepts will interface with the conceptual categories that emerged during the analysis of international and national policy and practice. This intersection will attempt to generate a list of conceptual questions for the analysis of data.

3.2   Power and Control

Bernstein starts his theory (1996: 19) with an analytical description of the concepts "power" and "control". At the broad level, Bernstein uses the concept of "power" to describe how it constructs "relations between" different categories of groups, gender, class, race, discourses and agents. In order to understand the construction of "relations between" categories the following questions need to be addressed:
- Who is responsible for initiating the categories?
- Why were the categories initiated?
- What is the nature of relationship between the two categories?
- Which category is privileged?
- What are the consequences of the creation of the categories?

In the context of the research the above questions will be addressed by firstly examining the relationship between the different categories of

discourses that underpin the purpose, values and beliefs of assessment. Secondly, the concept of power will also be used to examine the "relations between" different types of knowledge - academic and vocational knowledge, formal and informal knowledge. Thirdly, the concept of "power" will also be used to examine the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience.

At the interactional level, Bernstein used the concept of power to examine how the concept "power" controls the relations within given forms of interaction, for example the interaction of mentors and students. The concept of power was used to examine the relationships between different agents within the any pedagogical context. In the present study the concept of "power" will be used to examine the relationship between the assessor and the adult learners within the assessment context.

According to Bernstein the strength of the boundaries between categories creates "power relations" between different categories of groups, gender, class, race, different categories of discourse, and different categories of agents. For example, if the boundary between vocational discourse and academic discourse is strong, then power relations between these two discourses are strong. Those in power will define what is the accepted relationship between different knowledge areas in society; how accessible to different groups any knowledge is. At the macro-level, the present study will examine the power-relations between different types of knowledge - official knowledge in the standard and everyday knowledge gained through experience; and how these two categories "create boundaries, legitimise boundaries and reproduce boundaries". At the institutional level, the concept of "power relations" will also be used to examine how assessors use their position of authority to either reproduce or challenge the power relations between themselves and adult learners;

and the consequence of this for the adult learner and society. The use of the concept "power-relations" in the present study will translate into asking the following questions:

- Do assessors' assessment practices implicitly endorse, reproduce or challenge society's dominant ideologies?

- In this way do assessors' assessment practices include/exclude; privilege/marginalise the knowledge and learning of adult learners gained from experience?

Closely related to the concept of "power" is the concept of "control". In constructing "relations between" categories, power is used as a means to establish legitimate relations of control. According to Bernstein the concept of "control":

> "carries the boundary relations of power and socialises individuals into these relationships. Control establishes legitimate forms of communications appropriate to the different categories" (Bernstein, 1996:19).

For example in the assessment situation the position of power of the assessor allows the assessor to legitimise their control over the assessment process and the adult learners. In this way the assessors' control of the assessment situation allows them to firstly construct their role; and, secondly to determine the nature of relationship between themselves and the assessed. In the context of the present study the concept of "control" will be used to examine how assessors "establish legitimate relations of control" and construct their role and identity in relation to adult learners within the assessment context.

3.3 Classification

Closely related to the concept of "power" is the concept of "classification". According to the theory the concept "classification" refers to the "relations between" categories in a pedagogic context. The concept of "classification" could refer to the "relations between" different categories of groups, gender, class, race and discourses. In the case of this research the concept "classification" will be used to refer to the "relations between" two categories of knowledge within the assessment context. The official knowledge in the standards as one category, and everyday knowledge gained through experience and prior leaning of adult learners as the other. In terms of the theory

> "each category represents a discourse. Each discourse is insulated from one another. The insulation provides each discourse with its own space in which to develop its own unique identity. The space between one discourse and another creates the specialisation of the discourse. It is power that preserves and maintains the insulation between one category and another" (1996:20).

For example, the discourse of formal academic knowledge is separated from the discourse of vocational and technical knowledge. Each discourse has its own sets of rules that guide its organization and function. The gap between these two discourses are maintained and reproduced by those in power. In maintaining the boundary between academic knowledge and vocational knowledge, academic institutions and professional bodies could be seen as the vanguard in entrenching and reproducing the separation between academic and vocational discourses. In this way these institutions safeguard their vested interest in holding the power of the production of knowledge in society.

According to Bernstein we can distinguish between strong and weak classification in terms of the degrees of insulation between categories. Where classification is strong, each category is well insulated from each other. In the case of a strong classification,

"each category has its unique identity, its unique voice, and its specialised rules of internal relations" (Bernstein, 1996: 21).

Where classification is weak,

"there is reduced insulation between categories, for boundaries between categories are weak and blurred. In the case of weak boundaries, we have less specialised discourses, less specialised identities, less specialised voices" (Bernstein, 1996: 21).

The concepts of "vertical and horizontal discourses" will be used to illustrate the nature of the strength between categories. Vertical discourses are an example of strong classification. Vertical discourses

"take the form of a coherent, explicit, systematically principled structure, hierarchically organized. The context of vertical discourses is specialised knowledge of the natural sciences and social sciences, their technologies, and those of the humanities and the arts" (Bernstein, 1999: 22).

Horizontal discourses are an example of weak classification, on the other hand tend to have a more informal construction, include local and experiential knowledge - knowledge which is:

"segmental, context-dependent, tacit, multi-layered, often contradictory across contexts but not within contexts" (Bernstein, 1996: 22).

Vertical discourses are acquired through formal pedagogic relations and realised according to values and discourses of the context, whereas horizontal discourses are acquired through informal activity and associated discourse and values of the context. This will mean that vertical discourses relate to disciplinary knowledge and are acquired in formal institutional context; whilst horizontal discourses relate to informal or non-formal knowledge that are acquired from informal contexts.

In the context of the research the concept of "classification" will be used to examine the following issues:

- What classificatory principle underlies the official view of knowledge as stated in the national RPL policy?
- What classificatory principle underlies the view of knowledge held by agents within the assessment context?
- What are the consequences of weak or strong classification that underpins policy and practice for the adult learners?

 The present study will question the effectiveness of the RPL policy and practice in including mechanisms to value experiential knowledge and learning (horizontal discourses) of adult learners.

According to Bernstein any attempts to change degrees of insulation reveal the power relations on which classification is based and which it reproduces (Bernstein, 1996: 22). For example any attempts to weaken the classification between formal knowledge and informal knowledge

represents power relations between the different sectors in society. The academia as "custodians" of formal knowledge, for example, will challenge the vocational sector at any attempts to weaken the boundaries between formal knowledge and informal knowledge. In this way boundaries between different types of knowledge is maintained and reproduced. The present study will examine the power relations between different types of knowledge represented in the RPL policy document and in the institutional practice between assessors and adult learners.

3.4 Framing

According to Bernstein the concept "framing" refers to the "relation within" the pedagogic relationship. "Framing" refers to the form of context in which knowledge is transmitted and received (1996:26-28). Some examples of the context in which knowledge is transmitted and received are the relations within the classroom between the educators and learners or the relations within the shop floor between the mentor and the apprentice. "Framing" in the context of the research will refer the specific pedagogical relationship between the assessor and the adult learner within the assessment context.

According to Bernstein framing refers to:

> "the strength of boundary between what may be transmitted and what may not be transmitted in the pedagogical relationship. Where framing is strong, there is a sharp boundary between what may or may not be transmitted. Where framing is weak there is a blurred boundary between what may or may not be transmitted" (Bernstein, 1996: 27).

For example, in the assessment context strong framing will refer to the practice of assessors, characterised by their dogmatic approach. Assessors, in this instance will rely heavily on official procedures and protocols in assessing the knowledge and prior learning of adult learners. There will be sharp boundary between what the adult learner transmits and what the assessor expects. Weak framing, on the other hand, will refer to practices of assessors, characterised by a flexible approach. In this instance, the adult learner will be allowed to express and demonstrate their authentic knowledge and learning.

Bernstein links the concept of "framing" to the concept of "control". According to Bernstein

> "Framing regulates and legitimises communication in pedagogic relationships. Framing is about who controls what. Framing refers to the nature of control the transmitter and/or the acquirer has over the following area in a pedagogic relationship. These areas could be described as the selection of the communication; its sequencing; its pacing; the criteria; and, the control over the social base, which makes this transmission possible" (Bernstein 1996: 28).

For example, in the assessment context the concept of "framing" will refer to the relationship between the assessor and the adult learners. "Framing" will refer to the nature of control the assessor and/or the adult learner have over the language choice, methods or criteria used in the assessment process.

There could be varying degrees of "framing", ranging from strong to weak within the pedagogical context. Where framing is strong, the

transmitter has explicit control over the selection, sequencing, pacing and criteria and the social base. Where framing is weak, the acquirer has more apparent control over the communication and social base but limited control over other aspects of the discourse. It is possible for framing values to vary with respect to the elements of the practice; for example, you could have weak framing over the pacing but strong framing over the aspects of the discourse. In the context of the research the concept "framing" will be appropriated to examine firstly, the nature of "framing" advocated by policy; and secondly, the nature of "framing" practiced by assessors in the institutional context. The use of the concept "framing" in the analysis of policy and practice will refer to the range of options available to the assessor and the adult learner in the control of what is transmitted and received in the context of assessment relationship. Strong framing entails reduced options, and weak framing entails a range of options. The concept of "framing" will also refers to the degree of control assessor and the adult learner possess over the selection, organisation, pacing and timing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the assessment relationship.

Bernstein uses the conceptual language of framing to "describe moral regulation in a pedagogic interaction". The moral regulation refers to:

> "the controls on two embedded discourses: an instructional discourse transmitting skills and their relation to each other, and a regulative discourse transmitting rules of social order. Framing could be examined in respect of each discourse, separately. As a consequence, it is possible, in principle for framing of the instructional discourse to be different from the framing of the regulative discourse" (Bernstein, 1996:28).

The concepts "instructional discourse" and "regulative discourse" could be explained in relation to the assessment context. The assessor may have control over the "regulative discourse" by determining the nature of relation between himself and the adult learner. The assessor could either impose their authority by creating hierarchical relations with the adult learner or neutralise their authority by creating a more democratic relationship with the adult learners. The assessor may not have control over the "instructional discourse" since what counts as relevant knowledge and learning are prescribed for the assessor by the official documents.

In the present study the concepts "instructional and regulative discourses" will be appropriated to examine which discourse is dominant in the relations between assessor and the adult learner within the assessment context.

3.5   Recognition and realisation rules

Bernstein establishes relationship between the classificatory principle and the recognition rule. The recognition rule is used for identifying the specificity or similarity of contexts. As the concept "classification" constructs the "relations between" categories and creates "power relations" between the categories, then recognition rules confer power to those who lack them. According to Bernstein the classificatory principle, strong or weak, will indicate how one context differs from another. Bernstein argues that the classificatory principle,

> "at the level of the individual creates recognition rules whereby the subject can orientate to the special features, which distinguish the context. The classificatory principles regulate recognition

rules, recognition rules refer to power relations. Certain distribution of power gives rise to different social distribution of recognition rules. And without the recognition rules, contextually legitimate communication is not possible" (Bernstein, 1996:28).

The above description of the "recognition rule" could be explained with reference to the assessment context. Within the assessment context, if there is a strong classification between the formal knowledge prescribed in the standard and informal everyday knowledge of the adult learners then certain adult learners will not able to enter the assessment process. Strong classification within the assessment context could take the form of the complex and specialised language used in the instructions to adult learners. With strong classification the adult learners may not have an understanding of the instructions and therefore will not be able to access the assessment process.

Bernstein also establishes a close relationship between the framing principle and the realisation rule. Where framing is strong, the transmitter has explicit control over the selection, sequencing, pacing and criteria and the social base. With reference to the assessment context strong framing will require the adult learner to perform their assessment tasks in terms specified realisation rules. Where framing is weak, the adult learner has more apparent control over what is expected in terms of the realisation rule. However, the adult learners may have the recognition rules, which enable them to distinguish the special features of the context, but they may be unable to produce legitimate communication. For example, many adult learners from the marginalised communities may indeed have the recognition rules, but they can recognise the power relations they are involved in, and their position in them, but may not possess the realisation rules, they cannot then speak or produce the legitimate text. In

the assessment context the adult learners may recognise the expectations and their position in the assessment context, but may not be able to complete the assessment task in terms of the expected official requirements.

In the context of the present research study, the concepts of "recognition rules" and "realisation rules" will be appropriated to describe and analyse how the classificatory and framing principles are used to regulate recognition and realisation rules for the assessor and adult learners.

3.6   Synthesis of the key concepts used in the theory

The different components and the relationship between the components of Bernstein's theory that have been discussed such as power and control, classification and framing; and recognition and realisation rules will be illustrated by means of the model below (refer to Figure 3.1).

The model indicates how the distribution of power and principles of control are distributed. The distribution of power and control are translated into classification and framing principles. The classification and framing principles in turn regulate the recognition and realisation rules. The recognition and realisation rules organize meanings and their expression at the level of the individual in specific context.

In this way we could see the distribution of power and the principles of control translate into classification and framing values, which select out recognition and realisation rules to create contextually appropriate text. In the model, the pedagogic context is an interactive one.
The model indicates that the interactional practice is defined by classification and framing process. The classification and framing

procedures act selectively on the recognition rules and realisation rules. These recognition and realisation rules at the level of the acquirer enable the acquirer to construct the expected legitimate text. The definition of text is anything that attracts evaluation.

The text, which is produced can feedback on the interactional practice. There can be a dynamic relation between the text that is produced and the interactional practice. The text itself under certain conditions can change the interactional practice. The text could challenge the interactional practice and the classification and framing values upon which it is based.

3.7   Conceptual lens for the research study

The Figure 3.1 on the next page sums up the conceptual questions that emerged as a result of the dialogue between the Bernstein theoretical concepts of classification and framing, power and control; and recognition rules and realisation rules; and the literature review, namely the contextual, epistemological, pedagogical and paradigmatic issues.

Figure 3.1: Conceptual Framework 2: Intersection between the conceptual issues form literature and Bernstein's theory

PEDAGOGIC CONTEXT

Interactional Practice

MEANINGS

Power - Classification -
Recognition Rule

Control - Framing –
Realisation Rule

Between

Within

TEXT

Classification
- What classificatory principle underlies the official view of knowledge; the assessors' and adult learners' view of knowledge within the assessment context?
- What is the consequence of weak or strong classification that underpins policy and practice in terms of either including/ excluding or privileging/marginalising the knowledge and learning gained by experience?
- How effective is RPL policy and practice in including mechanisms to value knowledge and learning gained form experience (horizontal discourses) of adult learners?

Framing
- What is the nature of framing proposed by the official policy document between the assessor and the adult learners?
- What is the nature of framing between the assessor and the adult learners in the assessment context?
- What is the strength of framing between the instructional and regulative discourse in the assessment context?
- What effect does the strength of framing have on the adult learner in either including/ excluding or privileging / marginalising the knowledge and learning gained by experience?

Power and Control
- How does the concept of power construct the relations between different categories of discourses that underpin policy and practice?
- What is the power-relations between different forms of knowledge within the assessment context: academic and vocational knowledge and learning; formal and informal knowledge and learning; and, knowledge inscribed in the standards and knowledge from experience and prior learning?
- How do assessors "establishes legitimate relations of control" and construct their role and identity in relation to adult learners within the assessment context?
- How do assessors use their position of authority to either reproduce or challenge the power relations between themselves and adult learners to either to include/exclude, or to privilege/marginalize adult learners form the assessment process?

Recognition rules and Realisation rules
- How do the classificatory and framing principles regulate recognition and realisation rules for the assessor and adult learners?
- How do the recognition rules and realisation rules provide adult learners with the principles for the production of what counts as legitimate text?

3.8   Concluding remarks

In this chapter the key concepts and the relationship between the concepts in the Bernstein's theory were explained. The key concepts that were explained were:

- Power and control;
- Classification and framing; and
- Recognition and realisation rules.

The conceptual language of Bernstein's theory were appropriated to dialogue with the conceptual issues that emerged from the literature review namely,

- The influence of contextual factors on RPL influence policy and practice;
- The purpose and value of RPL;
- The different views of knowledge;
- The relationship between knowledge, experience and learning; and
- And finally, the relationships between the assessor and the adult learners in the assessment context.

The dialogue led to the construction of a conceptual framework that will serve as a second set of lens for the analysis and interpretation of the data for the research study.

I will now examine the strength, limitations and gaps of the Bernstein's theory as tools for analysis in the present study. The theory provides us with the conceptual language that could be used as an analytical tool to describe and interpret the interactional practice within the assessment context espoused by policy and the actual assessment context.   The classificatory principle will be used to describe and analyse the

epistemological issues. In this regard the classificatory principle could be used to describe the "relations between" prior learning and knowledge; the relationship between experience and learning from experience; relationship between the different kinds of knowledge that are valued. Closely, associated with concept of classification is the concept of power. The concept of power will be used to examine knowledge-power issues, such as who defines what is taken as knowledge in society; and how access to knowledge is controlled; and what are the accepted relationships between different knowledge areas.

The framing principle/realisation rule will be used to describe and analyse the "relations within" pedagogical relationship; namely the relationship between the assessor and adult learner within the assessment contexts. The principle of framing will also be used to analyse how the assessor uses his authority to control the relationship with adult learners in the assessment process.

Thus far Bernstein's sociological inquiry was limited to the study of official institutions such educational institutions (as medical, psychiatric, social service planning and informational agencies) and used to examine exclusively the influence of the local institutional contexts, agents and practices on social identity construction. The theory of cultural production, reproduction and symbolic control has concentrated on the "limited field of inquiry, limited to formal and local pedagogical modalities" (Bernstein and Soloman, 1999:269). In the present study conceptual language will be extended beyond its original parameters to examine to examine policy formulation and the policy process.

The relationship between the Bernstein's theory and the issues that emerge from the analysis and interpretation of data from this research

study will contribute to, in the first instance, to test the validity, authenticity and robustness of the conceptual language of the theory. In the second instance the dialogue between conceptual language and empirical data will lead to identifying "discursive gaps" in the Bernstein's theoretical model. In instances where the discursive gap arises between the conceptual language of the theory and data analysis, attempts will be made to extend Bernstein's theory. Finally, the dialogue between the conceptual language and data will contribute to developing a new conceptual model to understand RPL policy and practice in a transitional and developmental context (refer to 9.5).

In the next chapter will outline the theoretical perspectives that underpin the research design and the research procedure followed in the study.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will firstly outline the theoretical perspectives that underpin the research design; and secondly, explain the research procedure followed in the study and the kind of choices that were made about the research methodology. The chapter will describe the research design; research instruments employed; the procedure used in the collection and the production of data and the associated difficulties in gathering data; how the data was analysed; the mechanisms used to validate the research; and, finally the different forms in which data was represented.

4.1   The research design

Layders (1993: 71-101) research map provided a useful framework to structure the design of this research study into different layers and to bridge the divide between the macro and micro context.

The following is a schematic representation of Layders' research map.

Table 4.1 Research Map

Research Elements	Research Focus
Context	Macro social organisation Values, traditions, forms of social and economic organisation and power relations
Setting	Intermediate social organization
Situated Activity	Self activity
Self	Self- identity and individual social experience

The research map was used as a "sensitising device" that guided the plan of the design of the present research study. In the present research study the focus on macro issues examined how external and internal "contextual" factors impacted on the systemic transformation of the South African education and training system with particular reference to RPL policy formulation and practice. At the macro level the national and sectoral RPL polices and procedures were examined.

The "setting" refers to the already established character into which individuals may step, resist or adapt to. In the present study the setting was not be seen as a distinct category, but was seen as embedded in the analysis of the macro issues, and the micro institutional relationship between the assessor and the candidate.

The "situated activity" focuses on the relation between the different stakeholders in the study. In the present study the situated activity was studied through examining the relationship between the assessors and the candidates within the assessment process.

The "self" examines the identity construction of the respondents and their social experiences. The "self" in the present research examined how candidates and assessors construct their identity. In the present study the concept of "self" was used to specifically explore the experiences and engagements of adult learners with the assessment process.

4.2 The nature, scope and place of case study approach in the research

This research study has adopted a case study approach. Case study research design is a useful qualitative research method to understand the inner workings of a complex issue and can be used to either extend or validate previous research findings. Qualitative inquiry is marked by the following distinct characteristics:

- first, there are multiple construction of reality;

- second, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; and,

- third, the emphasis is on understanding the meaning of the social phenomena studied (Merriam, 2001:212).

Case study as part of the qualitative approach emphasises in depth contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. The case study has the following features namely, it focuses on a particular phenomenon, and ensures that the study is heuristic and inductive. The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with the view of establishing generalisations about the wider population to which the unit belongs. A special attribute of case study research is its ability to provide thick descriptions of one particular phenomenon. (Cohen and Manion, 1985:106-107).

There are several strengths in the use of this research approach. Case studies are valuable in that they give insights into specific instances, events and situations (Walker, 1980:33). Cohen and Manion (1981:41) point out that case study approach is an:

"in-depth study in a natural setting (which enables the) "holistic qualities of the unit to be taken into consideration... (it has the ability to) bring to light many variables, processes and interactions, and because of its heuristic nature, it provides the investigator with insights and hypothesis denied to workers adopting other approaches".

This research study used the case study approach to understand the context and to examine the complexities of the assessment and recognition of prior learning process in an educational and training institution. The study focused on a single institution as a means to discover its internal workings. Atteridgeville Technical College situated in West Pretoria in the Gauteng Province was chosen as a case study. The institution was selected since it managed one of first pilot project set up in the country by the Construction Sector and Education Authority. The choice was also based on the accessibility of the site by the researcher.

According to Yin (1984: 231) the strength of case study approach rests on the following factors:

"The first is the capability to deal with a diversity of evidence. The second is the ability to articulate research questions and theoretical propositions. The third is the production of the research design".

The relevance of these issues to the present study will be examined. The present study used multiple sources of evidence to be able to "converge lines of evidence" in the data to establish the case. This was done by asking the same questions from the different pieces of evidence such as interviews, observations and documents. Secondly, the research question

posed how and why questions in an attempt to explain events in a logical manner connecting variables and constructs. The research also developed a conceptual framework (refer to chapter 2.3 and 3.7) to frame the research questions and analyse the data. In meeting the qualities described by Yin, the present study can be located as an "explanatory case study".

Stake (1994) refers to the characteristics described by Yin as an instrumental case study. An instrumental case study is when the case study is secondary to the researcher's central objective. The purpose of the present study was to test the validity and robustness of the conceptual language of the theoretical framework upon which the study is based.

As with any research approach the use of case study has limitations. I will identify these limitations and provide strategies to address these limitations. First, that a small number of cases can offer no grounds for establishing reliability and generality. In this research a single case study was used to examine the subtleties and complexities of the assessment process. The deep grasp and thick descriptions of the single case yielded sufficient qualitative data to test the conceptual language of the theory and to make significant knowledge claims. The notion of reliability and generalisabily in relation to the research will be further examined in 4.8.3.

Second, the researcher's intense exposure to the study affects his/her conclusions reached. In order to minimise my subjectivity, I adopted a conscious reflexive position of my role and my voice in the research process, and engaged in a careful reporting process and used techniques of triangulation.

4.3 Data collection strategy

The following is a brief description of data source and research instruments that were used in the research:

Table 4.2: Data source and research instruments

Data Source	Research Instrument
Interview transcripts	Focus group interviews with assessors
Interview transcripts	Individual interviews with assessors, project managers Individual interviews with candidates
Observation reports	Observation of assessors and candidates in the assessment process
Unit standards, national RPL policy documents, sector RPL procedure, learner portfolios, assessors reports and verifiers report	Document analysis

Each of the research technique used in the research will be further described. Refer to annexure 1 for the research instruments used in the study.

4.3.1 Focus group interviews

The American sociologist David Morgan (1997:2) defines focus group interviews:

> "as a form of qualitative research, focus groups are basically group interviews, the reliance is on interaction within the groups, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher who typically takes the role of moderator. The hallmark of a focus group interview is the explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group".

The key issues of the above definition informed the focus group technique used in the study. Focus group technique was chosen as a technique to collect data from assessors since:

- This technique allowed the researcher to gain access to tacit, unmodified, experiential knowledge that may not otherwise be possible;
- The interaction between assessors helped to build a shared understanding of their experiences;
- Focus group neutralised the power relations between the researcher and the respondents. Respondents took control of the issues and the direction of the discussion;
- Group interview provided participants to collectively reflect on their experience to identify problems and strengths and provided opportunity to transform their practice.

Focus group interviews were complemented by a series of in-depth individual interviews.

4.3.2 Individual interviews

Cohen and Manion (1985) distinguish several types of interviews, from very structured, using a set of interview schedules, through less structured, but focused interviews, to non-directive interviews in which the researcher has very little control over the discussion topics and direction. The type of interviews used varied from very structured and focused to informal and semi-structured at different times for different purposes. The use of the structured and focused interviews with the assessor immediately after the focus group interviews was to clarify, probe and elaborate on the issues raised in the focus group meetings. At other times the interviews with the assessors and project managers were informal. The types of interview used with the candidates were informal and semi-structured. Agar (1980: 90 in Jacob 1987:15) notes that informal interviews can vary from causal discussion while participating in the activity, to open-ended interviews, to in-depth discussion with selected individuals. The informal interviews encouraged participants to talk, reflect and to share more of the own experiences of the RPL process.

4.3.3 Observations

Observation and the accompanying recording of observation could be a useful data gathering technique within case study approach. Observers can be either remote, adopting the view of the fly-on-the wall approach typified by King (1978), or can be a participant to a greater or lesser degree in the actions which they are observing. The approach used in this research varied depending on the different situations in the assessment process.

4.3.4 Questions that framed the research instruments

In reviewing literature the following conceptual issues emerged:

- How does the context influence the view of knowledge and assessment of prior learning?

- What are the beliefs, value and purposes of different role-players in assessment process of prior learning?

- What are the different conceptions of knowledge and the relationship between knowledge, experience and learning?

- What is the nature of relationships between the assessor and the learners in the different assessment contexts?

- What are the ethical and moral issues that should be considered in conceptualisation and practice of assessment of prior learning?

The above conceptual issues informed the design of all the research instruments used in the research. The present study asked the same questions from the different pieces of evidence such as interviews, observations and documents.

4.4 The role of theory in research

In the present study the conceptual language of the Bernstein's theory was used to examine how institutional practices and discourses either reproduce or challenge the social inequalities. This particular theory was selected since the key concepts of classification and framing; power and control; recognition and realisation rules were seen as powerful and illuminating theoretical tools to describe, analyse and understand data. The principle of classification and power was used to describe and analyse the relationship between knowledge acquired through formal and

informal/non-formal learning contexts, relationship between education and training. The principle of framing and control was be used to describe and analyse the relationship between the assessor and candidate within the assessment context. The theory examined how the distribution of power and the principles of control regulate the recognition and realisation rules to organise meanings and their expressions at the level of the individual in specific contexts.

The research study attempted to provide empirical relevance to test the robustness of the theory. Bernstein (1996) in arguing the role of theory in research, points that the interaction between theory and research is vital for the development of theory. According to Bernstein (1996:92-94)

> "The principles of description are the key principles in bringing about a dynamic relation between theoretical and empirical levels. Ideally the principles must have the potential of exhausting the possibilities of contextual display. This means that they have the potential of exhausting the possibilities not only of describing imputed regularities to display but also showing their diversities".

In the present study an attempt was made to explore the possibilities to develop the theory. The principles of Bernstein's model were used to recognise what data fell either within or outside the specification of the model. The data that fell outside the model led me to identify the discursive gaps in the theory. The discursive gaps were addressed by finding ways of extending the theoretical model.

4.5   Selection of the sample

I will describe first how the samples of assessors were selected for the focus group interviews and for the individual interviews. Then I will describe how I selected sample of candidates for the research study.

The research sample for the focus group interviews consisted of all eight assessors who were involved in the programme. All assessors were African males whose ages ranged from 35 to 50. All assessors had more than 5 years experience in their particular trade that they were assessing. The minimum qualification of assessors was a trade certificate. Assessors underwent a two weeks RPL assessment-training course that was funded by the Construction and Education and Training Authority. These assessors were the first batch of recently certified assessors in the institution. The most senior assessor in terms of his position as acting manager was chosen for a series of individual in depth interviews.

The candidates who were selected for the interviews were all recently assessed and given credits for their prior learning for building and construction unit standards. The samples of candidates were randomly selected. Candidates who were observed were in the process of being assessed were also randomly selected. The profile of the candidates who were interviewed will be described below:

The first adult learner was a 27-year-old African male who completed standard eight and entered into employment as carpenter. After four years of work experience the learner enrolled and completed a nine-week construction carpentry course in construction carpentry before enrolling for RPL assessment.

The second adult learner was a 45-year-old African female who completed her standard nine and has no work experience. She enrolled and completed the nine-week construction carpentry course before enrolling for RPL assessment.

The third adult learner was a 30-year-old African male who completed his post matric N3 diploma in carpentry and was employed by the South African Defense Force. He enrolled for the RPL assessment.

The fourth adult learner was a 50-year-old African male who had years of building experience but no formal education nor fixed employment. The candidate enrolled for the RPL assessment in construction building.

There was only one female candidate in the entire assessment programme that she was part of the sample. In the selection of the sample of candidates there was an attempt to get a balance representation of respondents who had formal education and those who did not; and those who were employed and those who were not employed. There was also an attempt to select candidates who attended the preparatory course before the RPL process and those who did not attend.

4.6   Data collection process
4.6.1   The pilot study

The pilot study was conducted firstly with a group of assessors using the focus group interview approach; and secondly with an individual interview with one candidate who was randomly selected and had been assessed recently.

The assessors were asked to recount their important lessons learnt in conducting the assessment of prior learning. The question was framed as:

"What were your important lessons that you learnt in the assessment of prior learning?"

With regards to individual interview the candidate was asked to recount key moments in the assessment of their prior learning.

The questions were deliberately open-ended to encourage assessors to share their experiences in the group. The following lessons both positive and negative learnt from the pilot informed the design of the research instruments and data gathering process in the research study.

The positive lessons will be briefly outlined. The focus group format enabled the participants to provide a multiple perspective to the same question. Participants also began to dialogue with each other, reaching consensus about the issues raised. The open-ended approach allowed the respondents to speak freely, moving from general to specific. In the main study the interview questions I decided to design were semi structured interview schedule to provide more structure to facilitate the group interview.

The negative lessons learnt during the pilot informed how the research study was conducted. First, the management of the participants in the focus group posed a serious challenge. Respondents were speaking at the same time and it was difficult to keep track of who said what. Participants directly attacked each other if they disagreed with the views expressed. In the main study I realised the need for recording the identity of the speakers. Participants were each given name tags and were told to introduce themselves before they made their contribution. I also learnt to

spell out ground rules for the group interview. Some of the rules were: participants had to get the permission of the researcher before they made their contribution; and participants were not allowed to interrupt the fellow colleagues and agreed to have differing views.

Second, the tendency of the researcher to dominate and interrupt the discussion, in the main study I became conscious of my role in the data gathering phase. My role was limited to that of a facilitator and I realised the need for a keen sense of timing during the interview. I knew when to be quiet and allow for silence to allow the respondents to formulate their thoughts. I used a series of questioning techniques to encourage participants to talk. I used the prompting technique to lead participants to talk. I probe participant's inputs to elicit a deeper response. At times I deliberately changed the direction of the responses to obtain other perspectives. At other moments I also learnt to record the non-verbal behaviour, to listen to what is implied and to be alert to the nuances provided by the context.

Third, the candidate interviewed in the pilot had difficulty to understand certain questions and found it difficult to articulate their thoughts, feelings and experiences in English. I realised the need to frame simple questions in a simple accessible way since candidates who were assessed spoke English as a second or third language. In a cases were candidates who preferred to communicate in an indigenous language, I negotiated to with the candidate for a translator to be present at the interview.

Finally, the unstructured interview technique did not yield data that addressed the research focus. In both the focus group interview with assessors and individual interview with the candidate the questions were not organised under clear categories. The responses from respondents

were messy and unfocussed. In modifying the research instruments the questions were categorised under clear and distinct headings and organised in a sequence, for example in the interview schedule for assessors the questions were classified under, before the assessment process, during the assessment process; and after the assessment process. The interview schedule was structured by asking "right" questions framed by the conceptual issues that emerged after the review of literature.

The lessons learnt in the pilot were used to inform the modification of the design of the research instruments and techniques used in the data gathering process.

4.6.2 The transcription of data

The tapes of the series of focused group interviews and individual candidates were clearly labelled and dated. Each tape was transcribed through the time consuming and tedious exercise of playing, replaying and replaying of the tapes.

Some features of the respondent's speech such as rapid changes in the pitch, volume, stress and pace were difficult to transcribe adequately. The tape was replayed to capture these changes. In instances where the respondent's speech was inaudible, I recollected and inferred what was said. This was done to so that there was continuity of thoughts in the interview transcript. The researcher's inference was bracketed and written in bold print.

The non-linguistic features of respondents such as gestures and expression of feelings were recorded in italics.

4.6.3   The process engaged in collecting data

I had to negotiate entry into the institution by agreeing with the head of the institution that the findings will be shared with the institution before they were published.   A research contract was agreed with the respondents, I promised participants that they would remain anonymous. The respondents were told of the purposes of the research.

The data was gathered using both the "declarative" and "collaborative" approaches. The "declarative" approach involved the researcher gathering data as an external observer assembling the data from evidence gleaned through a variety of techniques mentioned in 4.2 above. The "collaborative" approach involved a deliberate co-construction of the data that results as a consequence of both the researcher and the researched jointly engaged in the process of constructing what they considered important.

The researcher used data that occurred after the act of assessment; assessors and candidates recollected their experiences of the assessment process. Data was also collected at the time of assessment. Both candidates and assessors were interviewed during the act of assessment.

The data collection procedure will briefly describe and the use of particular research strategy to answer specific area of the research will be justified.

As the first step, a series of five focus groups interviews were held with a group of eight assessors over a period of three weeks. Each interview lasted for approximately two hours. The first two focus group interviews were semi-structured and very open ended. In these interviews I

encouraged assessors to talk about. Subsequent interviews were increasingly more structured and focused directly on themes that were emerging from the first two interviews.

In the focus group interviews the management of the group and facilitation of the interview was critical to yield qualitative data. I introduced the group to the background and purpose of the study, respondents were asked to introduce themselves. An informal pattern of open discussion ensued guided by broad guidelines in the agenda. Differences of opinions between members had to be carefully managed.

The second step was to conduct individual interviews with the most senior assessor. The individual interviews were structured and focused. Three two-hour interviews were held with the assessor. The purpose of the individual interviews was to seek clarity on issues that were raised in the focus group interviews. The issues raised from focus group interviews were followed up, probed, and elaborated in individual interviews with assessors.

The third step was to interview candidates. Candidates were interviewed for approximately two hours. Semi-structured interviews questions were used. A translator from the site who worked as an assistant to the candidate was chosen to translate the questions I asked into the home language of the candidates, and translate the responses of candidates into English. The choice of the translator from the site was helpful since candidates were comfortable to speak to someone familiar.

The fourth step was observation of the setting in which assessment took place and the different phases of the assessment practice. There were approximately five days of observation over a period of one month. The

project managers and assessors were notified of my visit. The visit was scheduled in such a manner that I was able to observe different phases of the assessment process.

The final step was the analysis of documents. Documents used and produced by assessors such as policy documents, learners' portfolios, assessors' reports and verifiers' report.

During the course of data collection I made deliberate attempt to develop rapport and trust with the respondents before, during and after the interview process. I spent some time telling the respondents of the background and purpose of the research and my role in the research before the actual interview. My empathetic approach in the interaction with respondents helped to ease the relationship between the respondents and myself and win the confidence of the respondents.

I was aware of my own biases and subjective perceptions and consciously did not allow this to interfere with the data collecting process. I allowed respondents to construct and interpret their own reality and take control of the interview.

4.7   Analysis and interpretation of data

I handled the analysis of the data alone and then shared parts of the draft analysis with the participants and their responses shaped the final analysis. My stance in the study moved from being declarative to collaborative.   The data analysis followed an iterative process that involved me to constantly move backwards and forwards in relation to the research context, the data source and the data themselves. The research instruments and techniques were constantly modified and

refined as the research progressed. The categories for the analysis were determined in advance of the data gathering process. The literature review informed the selection of categories for the designing the research instruments and the analysis of data. Refer to Table 4.3 that illustrates the different categories in which data was analysed.

Table 4.3 Categories in which data was analysed

	Official policy view		Institutional practice	
	National policy	Sector procedures	Assessors' views and engagement	Adult learners' views and engagement
Contextual issue				
Epistemological issue				
Pedagogical issue				
Paradigmatic issue				

On the vertical axis the following thematic categories were used for the analysis of the data:

- Contextual issues: refers to how the policies and practices were based on the understanding of different dimensions of the problems on the ground;

- Paradigmatic orientation: refers to the varying purposes of the RPL assessment process;

- Epistemological issues: refers to the views expressed in terms of the views of the nature of knowledge espoused by policy and practice throughout the RPL assessment process, the relationship between experience, learning and knowledge, the knowledge – power relations;

- Pedagogical issues: refers to the relationship between the assessor and candidates in the assessment context; and

- Moral and ethical issues: This category can not be seen in isolation but cuts across the above categories. It refers to the values inherent at the level of policy and expressed at the level of the assessment practice.

On the horizontal axis the data were analysed in following categories:

- Official RPL policy view: policy analysis focused on examining the national RPL policy and sectoral RPL procedures; and the analysis of standards used in assessing adult learners; and

- Institutional practice: The analysis of institutional practice focused on examining the observations of assessors' engagement with and their views of the RPL assessment process; and, views of their felt experiences and engagement of experiences of adult learners.

The data was described, analysed and interpreted at various levels (refer to Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Schematic representation of levels of analysis used in the study

Framework For The Analysis And Interpretation Of Data	
Level 1	Descriptive and explanatory analysis of data to address each critical question
Level 2	Interpretative analysis: The analysis will involve a dialogue between the data and the conceptual issues that emerged form review of literature, and Bernstein's theory
Level 3	Critical analysis: synthesis of key issues and analysis of emerging findings. The analysis will also involve comments on the "discursive gap" between the interaction between data, theory and literature, and attempts to address the gap
Level 4	Inter-textual analysis: The analysis will relate the interpretations to similar studies and other educational and sociological analysis

The first level of analysis was done at the descriptive and explanatory level using the conceptual questions that emerged from the review and critique of literature. The second level of analysis was re-description of data using the theoretical constructs of Bernstein's theory. The third level of analysis was a critical interpretation of data in terms of the relationship between the data, theory and literature. At the final stage of analysis (see Chapter 9) I attempted to relate the descriptions and interpretations, horizontally to similar studies and vertically to other levels of educational and sociological analysis, and attempted to explore possibilities of developing theory.

The study followed an iterative process that involved me as the researcher constantly going backwards and forward to the research context, the data themselves, the data source, the research instruments and techniques. The analysis unfolded as I assembled and reassembled the data with the goal of verifying the data.

The different levels of analysis described above were used to address the critical questions that framed the present research study. The use of policy analysis to examine national RPL policy and sectoral procedures (critical question one) will discussed next. This will be followed by the describing the use of the different levels of analysis in examining the policy process (critical questions two and three).

4.7.1 Policy analysis

Policy analysis was used as an analytical tool to address critical question one of the research. The important theoretical assumption of what constitutes policy and policy analysis will be briefly described. Thereafter the key questions that framed the policy analysis in the present study will be outlined.

Before I attempt to examine the above issues, one needs to foreground the purpose of policy analysis. The purpose of the analysis of policy in the present study at the broadest level was to determine to what extent official RPL policy claims facilitated the social justice agenda of equity, access and redress. At a more narrow level the purpose of the policy analysis was to establish to what extent actual practice of RPL at the sampled sector and institution met with the intended goals of policy.

The present study adopted Taylor's (et al. 1997: 22-35) notion of policy. Firstly, policy will be viewed as "text". "Policy as text" referred to the set of instructions or intentions in an official document. The analysis of policy as text included examining the contents of the policy and its conceptual coherence. In addition to policy as text, the notion of policy referred to the "process". "Policy as a process" referred to the politics involved in the recognition of the problem, through the formulation and implementation stages. The view of policy as process was based on a particular assumption of how society works. The notion of policy as process reflected the conflictual approach which sees society as consisting of competing groups having different values and access to power. In taking a conflictual approach to understand policy and policy analysis, each policy player was seen as representing their own perspective and values in formulating and implementing policy. Often there could be conflict and contradiction between the perspectives and values of those who are involved. Policy was seen to represent the political compromises between conflicting perspectives and values of how educational change should proceed.

The notion of policy as a process challenged the positivistic approach to knowledge that depends on applying scientific method to solve policy problems. Policy as process involves "the production of text, the text itself, ongoing modifications to the text and the process of implementation into practice" (Taylor, et al, 1997: 24-25). Knowledge from practice may feed into ongoing policy text, and the policy process is further complicated by the range of contextual factors at various levels of the bureaucracy.

The analysis of policy in the present study focused on the assessment of the RPL policy and the sector RPL procedures as text. In assessing policy as text the focus was on examining the conceptual coherence and content of policy. In responding to the broad questions regarding the conceptual coherence and content of policy, the analysis asked the following questions related to the present study:

- What contextual factors influence the policy and what assumptions does policy makes with regards to the context?

- What assumption does the policy make regarding the purposes, values and beliefs of RPL?

- What assumption does the policy make regarding knowledge experience; learning from experience?

- What assumption does policy make regarding the relationships between the candidate and the assessor?

- What assumption does policy make regarding moral and values?

Policy analysis also examined the gaps and silences inherent in the policy document.

At the next level of analysis the conceptual language from Bernstein's theory (concepts of classification and framing; power and control; recognition and realisation rules) was used in an attempt to deepen the level of abstraction and interpretation. Bernstein's theory and concepts as tools for analysis was evaluated in terms of their power to open up possibilities for interpretation.

4.7.2 Analysis of the policy process

In examining policy as process, the focus was on firstly examining how assessors' interpret and used RPL procedures to guide their assessment practice; and, secondly on how adult learners experienced and engaged with the assessment process. The intention of the present study was to inform policy makers with knowledge from actual practice, so that national RPL policy and sectoral procedures could be strengthened. The policy process was viewed as an ongoing and dynamic process.

The policy analysis in the present study involved examining the background and context of the RPL policy document, the analysis of the policy document as text, and examining the policy in practice at the sectoral and institutional levels.

4.8   Validity and reliability of research

The researcher used Yin's (1984:233) "Four Design Tests" framework (Table 4.5) to test the reliability and validity of this research.

Table 4.5 "Four Design Tests"

Tests	Case Study Tactic	Phase In The Research In Which Tactic Occurs
Construct validity	Use multiple sources of evidence	Data collection
	Establish claim of evidence	Data collection
	Have key informants review draft of the report	Data collection
Internal validity	Do pattern matching	Data analysis
	Do explanation matching	
	Do time series analysis	
	Do logic models	
External validity	Use rival theories within single cases	Research design
	Use replication logic in multiple case studies	Research design
Reliability	Use case study protocol	Data collection
	Develop case study database	Data collection

The above framework was used to test the validity and reliability of the research study.

4.8.1 Internal validity

Internal validity is concerned with the question of how the research findings match reality. One of the assumption underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multi-dimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered,

observed, and measured as in quantitative research. The researcher primary interest in qualitative research is to understand the constructions of reality of those involved in the study, to uncover the complexity of human behaviour in the contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening (Merriam, 2002: 202-203).

The data analysis and tentative interpretations were discussed with key participants during the course of the research study to check to what extent it captures their construction of reality. Participants were asked to comment on the plausibility of the results. The explanations of the participants were matched against the plausible findings and the comments of participants were incorporated in the final report.

Since the researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the researcher's biases - assumption, worldview and theoretical assumption were clarified at the outset of the study. There was triangulation of different data sources, such as observation field notes, audio taped transcription from focus group and individual interviews and documentary evidence.

4.8.2 External validity

External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. The issue of generalisation centres on whether it is possible to generalise from a single case, or from qualitative inquiry in general. In qualitative research the view of external validity differs from the use of the term in traditional research design. In this research, I opted for use Erickson (cited in Merriam, 2002: 202-203) concept of "concrete universals" "to reconceptualise the view of external validity". In the present study certain critical conceptual issues referred to

by Erickson as "concrete universals", could be to analyse and understand similar cases, or to test cases in different context and with larger sample size (refer to Figure 9.3).

4.8.3 Reliability

The notion of reliability in qualitative research will be associated with the issues of "dependability" and "consistency" of the results obtained from data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:288). The question is not whether the findings will found again in the traditional sense, but whether the results are consistent with the data collected. In the present study the researcher used the research protocol in terms of conducting a qualitative case study, during the research design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation to ensure "dependability" and "consistency" of the research analysis and findings.

4.9   Representation of data in the study

Data was represented differently for each critical question. The representation of data for each critical question will be described and the strengths and challenges will be briefly examined.

4.9.1   Representation of data in research question one

The data from national RPL policy; sectoral procedures and standards were represented at following levels. At the first level of presentation the main claims of the official policy was described. The second level of representation data was represented in the following categories:

- Contextual Issues;
- Paradigmatic issues: Purposes and values of RPL;

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- Epistemological issues: Knowledge; experience; and learning; and
- Pedagogical issues: Relationship between the adult learners and the assessor

4.9.2 Representation of data for research question two

The data represented from the interviews with assessors will be described below. The questions in the research instrument anticipated the categories to organise, classify and represent the data from interviews with assessors. But subsequent interaction with data and analysis of data the original categories were modified to accommodate and represent data under the following themes that emerged as prominent:

- Assessors' understanding of the purpose of the assessment process;
- The role of the assessor in the assessment process;
- The assessors' as coach;
- The assessors' role in monitoring the candidates;
- The assessors' role in recording the assessment;
- The relationship between knowledge, learning and experience;
- The assessors' conceptions of knowledge in the different phases of assessment; and
- The assessors' strategies to deal with the relationship between experience and knowledge

The data from interviews with assessors were represented under above themes. In each category data was interpreted and represented as general descriptive statements and an evaluative statement supported by the actual voice of the assessors. At the second level of analysis the data was redescribed using the concepts classification and framing. Finally, the main issues were summarised in the conclusion.

4.9.3 Representation of data for research question three

Data for research question three was represented in the form of "stories". The data from interview transcripts of four candidates were selected and was reconstituted into four stories. These stories that emerged from the data acted as a valuable mode of inquiry into the life experiences of candidates in the RPL process. The construction of "stories" from data can be located as part of much broader approaches within narrative theory "that invites us to think of all discourse as taking the form of story" (Knoespel cited by Gough, 1994: 48). The stories were written in a simple mechanical manner and in the first person to make the stories as authentic as possible and attempted to capture the voices of candidates. From a moral perspective, the stories provide a window into the lived experience of candidates and beg us to ask the question: to extent policy address their espoused claims of redress and equity?

The stories were structured in the following way: firstly, the candidate's biography was briefly described; secondly, the reasons why the candidates wanted their prior learning assessed, thirdly, the candidates experiences during the different stages of the assessment process; fourthly, the relationship with the assessor; and finally, the aspirations of the candidates. In an attempt to consciously display the narrative structures, the researcher attempt to act reflexively in constructing the stories.

The active production and construction of stories from data raises a number of methodological questions. First challenge is the issue of the dialectic of truth/reality and deception/fiction. If we assume that educational research is primarily concerned with documenting "facts"

without distortion, the critical question is whether the construction of data into "stories"" is a justifiable mode for educational enquiry.

Barone (1992a cited by Gough 1994: 50) argues that one of the criteria for use of stories, as a methodological approach in educational enquiry is "honesty"

> "Like all good art, honest stories are powerfully observed, carefully detailed. They must tend to generate on the reader awareness of the locations of (actual or fictitious) character's thoughts, beliefs, desires, and habits, in the web of contingencies that constitute their life worlds".

Other criteria for the use of stories in educational enquiry are in the confidence in its representation rather than in the belief that it is real. Since much of what we think as real or "direct experience" is understood or mediated through texts or intertexually. In other words, the conventional binary opposition of reality and fiction - does not mean that it is possible to distinguish clearly between textual representations of the world "out there" and the other world constructed in the text (Gough 1994: 52).

If we take the binary opposition of fact and fiction as a categorical framework to decide whether the stories constructed from interviews with candidates as fact or fiction, the stories cannot be labelled as fiction since they were clearly fashioned from empirical data.

But Gough (1994: 53) points out that this binary opposition is itself a fiction- "part of a story, which has been fashioned to rationalise the strategies used by modernist researchers in the sciences and social

sciences to produce facts". Rather than thinking in these terms, Gough suggests that that there is some virtue in re-conceiving all stories we tell in education as fictions - as stories fashioned for particular purposes. Gough proposes a much more radical approach in configuring narratives as fictional stories that function as "a diffracting lens" that help us generate stories which move educational enquiry beyond reflection and reflexivity and using fiction in educational enquiry "as a means of posing options and alternatives or as a way of connecting present reality with the past and/or future possibilities" (Gough 1994: 47-48).

The second methodological challenge is the researcher speaking and writing on behalf of someone else. This casts the researcher as a patronising voice who speaks on behalf of the respondents. Although the researcher attempted to act empathetically and sympathetically with the candidates in constructing their stories, the researcher acknowledges his distance from the lived experiences of candidates and admits that the construction is only a partial representation of their reality.

The genre used in constructing the stories in this research, represents a conventional narrative strategy to represent, problematise and reconceptualise RPL discourses and practices. It could be argued that the stories constructed in this research is justifiable mode for educational enquiry since it served a particular purpose of providing a framework for identifying patterns in the candidates recollection of their experiences of the RPL process, their reflections and interpretation of that experience; and the issues that emerged were re-described in the theoretical concepts of classification and framing, and were subjected further levels of analysis and abstractions. The stories were not only intended for the research, but was intended for policy-makers, bureaucrats and assessors who were preoccupied with meeting procedural and technical

requirements of the assessment process, thus forgetting the most important beneficiaries of RPL assessment policy- the candidates - their anxieties, feelings, aspirations and expectations.

4.9.4 Representation of findings

The findings was categorised under conditions that either contributed to or acted as a barrier to the transformative education and training policy agenda of access, redress and success of learners, particularly those who have been historically denied access to formal learning. The considerations of the findings for theory, policy and practice were also examined.

4.10 Concluding remarks

The research attempted to make the following methodological contributions. First the research methodology explored the strengths of the complementary use of focus group interviews with individual interviews as research techniques in qualitative educational research. Second, the research attempted to use data collection as opportunity for ongoing professional development of administrators and practitioner. Assessors in particular were encouraged to collectively reflect on their assessment practice and find ways to improve their practice. My interaction with assessors was also a transformative experience. In evaluating the experience of assessors, I had the opportunity to understand what they were doing, was able to internalise their ways of thinking, and was also sensitised to the internal dynamics of the day to day operation of the assessment site.

In the next chapter, the official RPL policy will be described and analysed.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN
RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) POLICY

The first part of the research outlined the contextual background (Chapter 1); described and analysed selected case studies of international and national RPL policy and practice (Chapter 2); developed the conceptual framework (Chapter 3); and described the research methodology (Chapter 4). The second part of this research will attempt to address the critical foci of research by firstly, examining the official claims of RPL policies at the national level (Chapter 5); secondly, by analysing sectoral procedures and the standards that were used by assessors to assess adult learners (Chapter 6); thirdly, by examining how assessors judge and recognise the prior experience of adult learners (Chapter 7); and fourthly, by examining the experiences and engagements of adult learners (Chapter 8). The third part of the research will examine the findings and considerations for theory, policy and practice (chapter 9).

This chapter will describe and analyse the official claims of RPL from the perspective of the national RPL policy document.

5.1   Conceptual issues that will guide the policy analysis

In Chapter 2 the legislations related to RPL was reviewed and analysed in order to identify the coherence and contradictions in policy the legislations, and to examine its implication for RPL policy and practice. In this section the national RPL policy will be analysed. At the first level the main claims of the national RPL policy document will be described. The second level will examine the conceptual coherence and content of

the national policy by focusing on the following conceptual issues (refer to Chapter 2.3):

- Context that influence the formulation of RPL policy;
- The purpose and value of RPL;
- The relationship between knowledge, learning and experience; and
- The relationship between the adult learners and the assessor.

At the third level, the data in the different categories will be analysed using the Bernstein conceptual language (refer to Chapter 3.7). The following conceptual questions will guide the analysis of policy:

- What classificatory and framing principles are proposed by the national RPL policy?
- What are the implications of the strength of the classificatory and framing principles in either including/excluding and/or privileging/marginalising the knowledge and learning gained from experience?
- How does the concept of power construct the relations between different discourses?
- What are the power-relations between different forms knowledge and learning?
- How does the principles of classification and framing regulate recognition and realisation rule for the assessor and candidate?

The fourth level of analysis is an iterative process that brings data, literature and theory into dialogue with each other in order to generate evaluative and qualitative claims (refer to chapter 9).

5.2 RPL policy in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework

The main components of the RPL policy will be highlighted in terms of the policy document (SAQA RPL Policy 2002).

5.2.1 The main components of the national RPL policy

The development of a national RPL policy is one of the mechanisms that is intended to support transformation in education and training. RPL policy is seen as contributing to the creation of an equitable education and training system in the country. The national RPL policy is intended to guide the implementation of the RPL process across all sectors of education and training. The RPL policy is intended to meet the needs of all role players, including Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQA); providers of education and training, and learners. The main audience of the policy is the ETQA who must facilitate the implementation of RPL, and quality assures assessment policies of their constituent providers.

The underpinning principles of the National Qualifications Framework form the basis of the national RPL policy framework (refer to Chapter 2). The key principles that drive systemic change process also drive RPL policy.

According to the National policy document on RPL (SAQA, 2002: 8) the key objectives of RPL are to:

- Facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths; and,

- Accelerate redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.

National policy document is structured according to the following key areas:

- The underlying principles and philosophy underlying assessment and RPL;
- Core criteria for quality assurance of assessment and RPL;
- Strategic framework for the implementation of RPL in South Africa.

The above areas will now be briefly elaborated. Chapter 1 (SAQA, 2002: 11-16) of the national policy document outline the following underlying principles and philosophy:

- A holistic approach to the process and execution of assessment;
- A development and incremental approach to the implementation of RPL, particularly in terms of sustainability;
- An acknowledgement of the differing contexts within which RPL will be implemented;
- Opening up access to education and training;
- Redress of past injustices; and
- An acknowledgement of the dynamic nature of the construction of knowledge that will come into play once the system matures.

Chapter 2 (SAQA, 2002: 17-30) of the policy document addresses the core criteria against which the progress towards the development of an assessment and RPL system offered by education and training providers can be measured. These include:

- Institutional policy and environment;
- Services and support to learners;
- Training and registration of assessors and key personnel;

- Methods and processes of assessment;
- Quality management system (moderation);
- Fees for RPL services; and
- RPL and curriculum development.

A quality statement describes each area, and followed by an example of a self-audit tool, which may be extended for the use by the Education Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs). The provider could also use these instruments, both in terms of formal institutions and workplace-based providers; to measure their progress against agreed targets.

In the introduction to the core criteria for quality assurance of RPL, the policy outlines the principles against which RPL, or for any assessment to be subjected to:
- Credible assessment;
- The quality of evidence;
- An assessment planned and designed on the basis of understanding the requirements of the unit standard, part qualification or whole qualification;
- The use of various methods of assessment;
- The requirements for a credible assessment process; and
- Moderation and quality assurance of assessment.

The policy clearly states that there is no fundamental difference in the assessment of previously acquired skills and knowledge; and the assessment of skills and knowledge acquired through current learning programmes. According to policy the difference lies in the route of assessment. RPL as an alternative form of assessment should be fully integrated into all the learning programmes.

Chapter 3 (SAQA, 2002: 31-32) of the national policy document outlines a proposal for the strategic framework for implementation that includes the following:

Audit of current practice by the ETQA's to determine the extent and depth of RPL delivery within the constituencies. This audit will deal with the following areas:

- The development of detailed sector-specific plan;
- Capacity building of resources and staff;
- The design and the moderation of appropriate assessment instruments and tools;
- Quality management systems and procedures; and
- The establishment of a research base.

Having described the key components of policy, the policy will be analysed in terms of the a priori principles described in 5.1.

5.2.2 Analysis of the national RPL policy

The national RPL policy will be analysed under the a priori thematic categories. The categories will focus on examining the main claims and assumptions of national RPL policy with regard to contextual, epistemological, pedagogical and paradigmatic issues.

5.2.2.1 Context

The analysis of the context at the broadest level will be undertaken by firstly examining the macro economic, social and political factors that informed the RPL policy development. Secondly, the analysis of context

will examine the references made by national RPL policy document to contextual issues.

In chapter one the broad contextual issues such as macro-economic, social and economic factors that informed education and training transformation (and indeed RPL policy development) were described. These contextual issues that informed RPL policy will be briefly highlighted.

Politically, the first priority for the emerging democratic State was to reconstruct and develop all aspects of South African society. The education and training system had to address the inherited racially divided and ethnically fragmented education and training system. A series of legislation were passed to transform South African society and economy. The politics of reconciliation and consensus building of the early 1990s provided a framework for the new policy developments. The guiding principle of the new policy developments was based on forging a common purpose among different ideological leanings. RPL policy can also be seen as a product of the politics of reconciliation and consensus. RPL policy attempted to appease the diverse sectors such as education and training institutions, labour unions, workers and employees. In an attempt to appease the most powerful groupings in society and economy RPL policy runs the risk of compromising the developmental agenda of the state.

RPL policy is driven by the political intentions of the new education and training system. The recognition of prior learning became an integral part of National Qualifications Framework. The principles of the NQF have also informed the development of national RPL policy. The principles of the NQF such as equivalence, articulation, flexibility and progression

across different learning institution and contexts, drives systemic change in education and training generally. As part of the NQF, RPL was intended to be used as a mechanism in contributing to the achievement of policy goals of social equity and redress, broadened access and increased participation of learners who were previously excluded from the education and training system.

Economically, South African RPL policy and practice was seen to have the potential to respond to addressing the pressures of globalisation. South Africa as a developing economy was faced with the similar challenges to the international economies of training workers, re-skilling and re-training workers in response to the changing economy. In order to meet the needs of the changing economy, RPL was viewed by policy makers as a mechanism to re-tool and re-skill adult learners. RPL was also seen as a means to prepare individuals for jobs or improving their skills to become economically productive.

Socially, RPL was viewed by policy makers as a means of contributing to the reconstruction and development needs of the country. In adopting a developmental approach RPL was seen as a means to broaden the range of opportunities for the poor. RPL could be a means to prepare learners to contribute to the development of individuals and communities.

RPL policy was conceptualised in the context of contradictory impulses of various legislation. In chapter two (refer to Chapter 2) the relationship between RPL with other legislations were examined in more detail. The new state was faced with the challenge to address both the humanistic elements and issues that are more narrowly concerned with economic development in formulating a range of policies. The RPL policy document was also faced with the challenge to address both the

humanistic and democratising goals of education; and the goal of developing human resources to improve productivity and economic growth.

Having traced the contextual factors at the macro level that influenced RPL policy development, I will next examine the claims made by policy with reference to the contextual factors by national RPL policy. The national RPL policy acknowledged the differing contexts within which RPL will be implemented. The different contexts acknowledged by policy are:

- Higher Education and Training;
- Further Education and Training;
- General Education and Training;
- Adult Basic Education and Training;
- Formal institutions of learning;
- Work-based education and training centers; and
- Small private providers.

In terms of the policy RPL ought to address the context and conditions that inform the practice. According to policy this meant taking measures to remove the emotional, educational, and cultural factors that may constitute barriers to effective learning and assessment practice.

The policy also claimed that the assessment of prior learning process should consider the context of learning and assessment, and also the context of the learners. According to national policy RPL practice need to "explicitly address the visible and invisible barriers to learning and assessment" (SAQA, 2002: 8). In terms of policy, the visible barriers will include the issues of language and cultural barriers. Invisible barrier will include the psychological barriers experienced by the large majority

of Black learners who were discriminated and excluded from education and training opportunities.

In analysing the claims made by the national RPL policy with regards to contextual factors, there were a number of silences that were identified. Firstly, the national RPL policy failed to sufficiently acknowledge the external pressure of globalisation on the development of RPL policy and practice. The national policy failed to guide sectors and institutions on how to balance the need to meet the external pressures of globalisation with the internal pressures of the newly emerging democratic state. In the absence of clear policy guidelines on how to deal with the competing pressures, sectors and institutions are left to respond, on one hand to the economic pressure of developing a competitive workforce; on the other hand, to address the developmental and transformative needs of the country such as dealing with poverty, unemployment and disease. Sectors and institutions of learning due the pressures of making learning relevant to work; are at the risk of adopting an instrumental approach of RPL. An instrumental approach focuses exclusively on RPL as a means to provide productive workers for the economy.

Secondly, the policy does not engage sufficiently with the change process within sectors and institutions. The policy described the ideal conditions that sectors and institutions will have to work towards, but failed to provide strategic priorities as points of intervention. Institutional assessment practices are currently embedded in their old practices and are difficult to change. Any changes on the ground need to be guided through a phased approach to enable institutions to identify priorities that needs to be addressed. The adaptation of new policies by institutions is currently been challenged by the entrenched culture and embeddedness of policy,

procedures and practices of the existing educational system and the resistance by academics and practitioners to accept the changes

(Kraak and Young, 2001: 1-2). This was particularly evident in the resistance of higher educational institutions to the assessment and affirmation of prior learning. Traditionally, higher education monopolized the site of knowledge production and through its gate-keeping role entrenched and perpetuated a privileged set of access and credit practice (Pretorius, et al., 2002:8). National policy failed to provide a systematic plan to manage the transition towards the ideal vision stated in policy. As Dale (1989) mentions, policies must have a scope and pattern, which deal simultaneously with the desirable, the possible and how to embark on the process of change. The present study will recommend a possible policy implementation strategy (see Chapter 9).

The present research will examine how and to what extent the sectoral procedures and sampled institutional site responded to the contextual factors in the implementation of RPL.

5.2.2.2 Purposes and value of RPL

The policy highlighted the broad purposes for RPL. The political objectives of RPL in terms of policy are to provide access and redress to the majority of learners who have been excluded from the education and training sector.

The different purposes for RPL at the institutional level have also been outlined in the national policy (SAQA, 2002:13). According to the policy the institutional purpose for embarking on the RPL process will depend

on the context in which RPL is practiced. The purposes are stated as follows:

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

In terms of the policy (SAQA, 2002:13), the institution of learning should ensure that the institutional purpose for embarking on the RPL process should match with the aspirations and expectations of the target group that is being assessed.

According to national policy (SAQA, 2002:14-15) there are two target groups identified. There are those adult learners who are seeking access to further education possibilities, and those seeking redress. Learners who are seeking access may include first, those under-qualified adult learners with some level of education and training wanting to upgrade and improve their qualification. Second, those learners who lack the minimum entrance requirements for entry into a formal learning programme. Third, it may also include learners seeking certification as an end in itself.

Those learners seeking redress may include workers who are semi-skilled and/or unemployed. They may have worked for many years and have gained experience in specific areas, but were excluded because of previous discriminatory legislation. In this target group the focus of RPL may be certification as an end in itself, rather than access to further education and training opportunities.

In this research study the target group for whom RPL was intended focused on providing opportunities for redress to adult learners. The target group ranged from skilled employed to semi-skilled unemployed learners in the construction industry.

The policy emphasised that the purpose of meeting the challenges of access and redress has to be balanced against maintaining the integrity and quality of the assessment system. The need to balance the access and redress against issues of quality are described as follows:

> "There is no fundamental difference in the assessment of previously acquired skills and knowledge and the assessment of skills and knowledge acquired through current learning programme. The candidate seeking credits for previously acquired skills and knowledge must still comply will all the requirements as stated in the unit standards or qualifications. The difference lies in the route of the assessment. RPL is a form of assessment, which ideally, should be fully integrated into all learning programmes. As such, the principles of good assessment are equally true for RPL and all other forms of assessment" (SAQA, 2002:8).

According to policy RPL can serve as an alternative form of assessment. As with other forms of assessment RPL is based on the principles of good assessment, these being, fairness, validity, reliability, and practicability.

In examining which discourse was most dominant in driving the national RPL policy, it was apparent that socio-political discourse was most dominant. This meant that the political purpose of RPL policy as a mechanism in providing access and redress to adult learners was

privileged over other discourses. There were however other discourses that were mentioned in the policy, such as the humanistic discourse of supporting the principle of lifelong learning.

The present research study will examine how and to what extent sectoral policy and procedures and sampled institutional practice match the beliefs, values and purposes stated in the national RPL policy.

5.2.2.3 Knowledge, learning and experience

What follows is an analysis as to how national policy deals with issues such as knowledge, learning and experience. First, I will examine the official view of knowledge as reflected in the national policy; and second, I will examine the relationship between knowledge and experience; and, third I will examine the relationship between prior learning and experience.

In examining the official policy view of knowledge, it was evident that policy acknowledged the dynamic nature of the construction of knowledge. But the policy provided a qualifying condition. In terms of policy the dynamic construction of knowledge will only take place once the education and training system matures. In dealing with the dynamic construction of knowledge, national RPL policy addresses both the source (where is knowledge produced) and substance (what counts as knowledge) of knowledge production.

With regard to addressing where knowledge is produced the policy espouses that learning occurring in all kind of situations - formally, informally and non-formally needs to be considered in the development and implementation of RPL. With regard to what counts as knowledge,

the policy challenged the dominant view of knowledge held by providers of learning. The policy urged providers to critically rethink what counts as knowledge to challenge the reproduction of the dominant view of knowledge. According to policy:

"the question that we need to answer is how to redefine, systematically and consciously, which knowledge is valued. This is to ensure that old and new forms of discrimination are avoided and to mediate knowledge transfer across contexts" (SAQA, 2002:12).

The national RPL policy encouraged providers to be more inclusive of other forms of knowledge by recognising workers' knowledge, women's knowledge, and indigenous knowledge" (SAQA, 2002:12).

National RPL policy advocated a constructivist view of knowledge. Knowledge was viewed as been socially mediated by the different role-players in society. According to policy, the national standards setting process should be inclusive of all stakeholders. The standards should recognise the rich diversity of knowledge and learning styles, which the candidates bring to the assessment situation. Institutions developing curriculum and assessment should critically reflect how knowledge is produced. The role of institutions in defining what counts as knowledge is described as:

"Institutions will be required to question and reshape fundamental values, beliefs and paradigms to force the negotiation of two worlds – the world of experience and the world of work" (Osman et al., 2001). In this way it will encourage providers to become not only sites of learning, that define and construct knowledge,

but also places where people examine and engage with the context of knowledge creation" (SAQA, 2002:15).

In terms of the above citation, national policy emphasised that institutions should become sites for the dynamic construction of knowledge. Policy also prompted institutions to take into consideration the social context in which knowledge and performance was constructed.

I will now examine how policy dealt with the relationship between the knowledge in the standards and experience of the adult learners. National policy cautioned against the literal matching of candidate's knowledge and skills acquired from experience to the knowledge prescribed standards. Policy advocated a rough equivalence of the experience and learning of the adult learners to the knowledge in the standards. The policy adopts a developmental approach. Policy argues that as the capacity of agents who implement policy grows, there will be a gradual shifting from purely technical approach to a holistic approach. The holistic approach will include a shift from comparing experience against learning outcomes for a specified qualification, to include a comparison experience with learning outcomes from a range of qualifications at the particular level of the NQF. Policy further advocated that institutions practicing RPL should consider the nature and complexity of experiential learning of adults. These institutions should challenge the existing notions of "standards" to determine whether these standards deal adequately with the complexity and depth of knowledge in communities of practice outside formal education (SAQA, 2002:15-16).

Next, I will examine the relationship between prior learning and experience. The definition of RPL in terms of the SAQA regulation

(RSA, 1998h) makes a clear distinction made between prior learning and experience. According to the regulation

> "recognition of prior learning means the comparison of previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements" (RSA,1998h:3).

In terms of the above definition it is not experience alone but learning from experience that is considered for recognition. This means that experience and learning is not treated as synonymous by the national policy. According to the above definition, learning and experience that occurs in different contexts - formal, informal and non-formal contexts are valued. The measurement of learning and experience takes place against learning outcomes in the standards. Credits are awarded if such learning and experience meets the requirements of the standard.

In analysing the main claims of policy with regards to knowledge, experience and learning, a number of gaps have been identified. These gaps will be briefly described.

Firstly, the policy failed to problematise the vested power relations between vocational and academic pathways and does not deal with how this could pose a threat to the vision of the integration of education and training. The policy argued that:

> "perpetuating the division between these two types of qualification would be an unwarranted position. It is much more important to establish ways in which articulation between

vocationally orientated, professional and academic qualification can take place to facilitate the development of multiple learning pathways" (SAQA, 2002).

In terms of the policy the articulation between vocational qualification and professional and academic qualification was to be based on the "principle of equivalence". But the "principle of equivalence" promoted by policy in relation to bands and levels are not unpacked. As Young (2003: 11) points out the differences between institutional or disciplinary learning and work based learning represent not just differences but a hierarchy of learning. Young argues that:

> "there is much historic prejudice against practical skills and craft knowledge and much elitism surrounding subjects and disciplines, both forms of prejudice have origins in the class structure and divisions of capitalist societies" (2003: 11).

The policy glosses over with the epistemological difference between vocational and disciplinary forms of knowing and learning. The policy places emphasis on the "principle of equivalence" by listing both qualifications on the single NQF framework. In this way, the policy ignores the issue of whether it is possible for articulation to occur between vocational knowledge and skills, and intellectual knowledge and skills, since each represents unequal and different types of knowledge and learning. The policy fails to acknowledge that the "principle of difference" of the different forms of knowledge and learning. If the power-relations of the different forms of knowledge and different types of learning is not taken into consideration, then that could become a barrier to progression (Young, 2003:17).

Secondly, national policy needs to show more explicitly the relationship between learning and experience. According to the regulation the recognition of prior learning means the comparison of "previous learning and experience". The policy needs to clearly show the difference between the principles "learning and experience" and "learning from experience". Further, national RPL policy needs to be more explicit about the theory of learning and the theory of experiential learning that it espouses.

Thirdly, national RPL policy only assesses and recognises knowledge and skills from prior learning and experience against learning outcomes and assessment criteria registered on the NQF. The policy does not provide guidelines as to how to deal with knowledge and skills from prior learning and experience that rest outside the NQF framework.

Policy failed to clearly define the different types of knowledge based on the concept "competency". National RPL policy understands knowledge in the context of "applied competence". The overarching term to describe three kinds of competence, namely, practical, foundational and reflective competencies was not used to define knowledge and learning.

At the next level of analysis, Bernstein's conceptual language will be used examine the epistemological issues underpinning the claims made by national RPL policy. The analysis will describe the "relations between" different kinds of knowledge and learning. The "relations-between" knowledge, learning and experience will also be examined. The concept of power will also be used to examine the knowledge-power relations.

Official national RPL policy advocated the integration of education and training. Integration implied the weakening of boundaries between

education and training; theory and practice; mental and manual labour; and formal and informal/non-formal learning. This particular organisation of knowledge is based on weak classification of knowledge. RPL policy vision challenged the strong classification of knowledge within institutional practice that was predominantly based on two distinct differently specialised organisations of knowledge, one for education and one for training.

In practice the weak classification of knowledge was not possible due to the structural division that exists between education and training. The setting of two separate departments, one for Education and one for Labour made it difficult to co-ordinate the aspects of general education and work-based education. This separation has made the integration between education and training unworkable or at least highly problematic.

The weak classification of knowledge advocated by RPL policy ignored the power-relations that exist between the different forms of knowledge systems. Michael Young (1998) in analysing power-knowledge relations in society shows how access to knowledge is controlled, in modern societies by dominant groups, such as professional bodies and other experts. Young states that the relations between knowledge areas and between those with access to them are also expressions of power. In this case the power of some to maintain or break down the boundaries between knowledge. The higher education sector is a good example of a powerful sector within society that entrenched the boundary between education and training. The higher education sector that traditionally had the power of control knowledge production resisted to the principle of integration of education and training in a single qualifications framework. (Refer to appendix 2 for alternative qualifications framework proposed

by Higher Education Quality Committee). The opposition of higher education was particularly evident in its resistance to national standard setting system that shifted the responsibility of designing qualification from the individual universities to community of stakeholders (Cosser, 2002: 153).

The weak classification of knowledge is not possible or at least highly problematic, since in practice there are deeply entrenched and unequal boundaries between academic and vocational forms of knowledge systems. Instead the NQF and the SAQA has regulated the "principle of equivalence" between the academic sector and vocational sector. The "principle of equivalence" ignored and underestimated the differences between the knowledge and learning generated by the academic sector and knowledge that is generated by the work-based sector. The provision of a differentiated qualifications framework proposed by the higher education sector (refer to appendix 2) highlights the strong boundaries that exists between academic and vocational qualifications.

The weak classification of knowledge in RPL policy and indeed the NQF is based on the assumption that knowledge is socially mediated by various sectors in society. The view that knowledge is socially mediated is based on the assumption that the power of who will define what is to taken as knowledge in society is democratically distributed. In a democratic society, knowledge is made accessible to different groups, particularly those adult learners who have been previously marginalised and excluded from education and training. The SAQA policy was based on similar assumption that the stakeholder driven consensual process will produce standards that are inclusive of different forms of knowledge and learning. However, in practice the Standards Generating Bodies were constituted in the manner that was not representative of all constituencies.

In instances where all constituencies were present there was a dominance of particular groups in the standards generation process (DoE and DoL, 2002b: 3:29). This has led to a situation where there is the re-inscription of dominant discourses and the marginalisation or even exclusion of certain discourses in the standards that are generated.

The present study will attempt to address the critical question as to whether articulation of knowledge between vocational sector and academic sector is possible, given the entrenched and unequal power relations that exist between vocational and academic knowledge systems (refer to Chapter 9 that attempts to address this critical epistemological question).

5.2.2.4 Relationships between the adult learners and the assessor

The policy highlights the training and orientation of assessors is a critical component for the success of implementing the principles and objectives of the NQF. The national policy (2000:22) outlines the following role of the assessors:

- Inform the candidate about the requirements of qualifications or unit standards;
- Support and guide the candidate in the collection of evidence;
- Help the candidate to plan the assessment;
- Inform the candidate about the timing of the assessment; and
- Conduct the assessment and provide feedback.

In terms of policy, assessment is a structured process whereby the assessor gathers evidence and makes judgment about the candidates' performance in relation to national standards and qualifications. The

process involves candidates and the assessor within a particular context in a transparent and collaborative manner.

According to policy, assessors should take a developmental approach in assessing learners. This issue is described as:

> "a holistic approach is learner centered and developmental where assessments are not used to penalize candidates for what they do not know, but to shape and form decisions around educational planning and career-pathing" (SAQA, 2002 :22).

The policy advocates that candidates be actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process to ensure that the assessment is fair and transparent. The assessors according to policy should be exposed to development of self-awareness, sensitivity and the ability to know and manage one's own bias. The critical areas of bias focus on race, language, religion, gender and class, bias against experiential and non-formal forms of learning (SAQA, 2002 :22).

Bernstein's principle of "framing" will be used to analyse the "relations within" between the assessor and the candidates in the assessment context.

The RPL policy document advocated a mixture of strong and weak framing code of the assessor in his relationship with the candidate. The strong framing code for assessors was reflected in the assessors' role as being defined as gathering evidence and making judgments about candidates' performance in relation to registered national standards and qualification. The assessors' role was to judge the quality of evidence

provided against the assessment criteria prescribed by the unit standard or qualification (SAQA, 2002:35-44).

Policy constructed assessors as having the following characteristics that represented weak framing. Assessors were to be transparent and collaborative. Assessors are encouraged to be sensitive to the context of the assessment and the context from which learners come from. Assessors are encouraged to involve adult learners as active participant throughout the assessment process. Assessors were expected to play a developmental role in the assessment process. In terms of policy assessors were to select, design and decide upon the assessment method in such a manner that it is fit for purpose. Assessment methods must be adapted to suit the specific context; and may include alternative forms of assessment. The weak framing of the role of the assessor was intended to create conditions that facilitated the political goals to providing learners' access and redress.

In analysing the role of the assessor in policy, it was evident that policy failed to point out how assessor should deal with the epistemological issues. The policy focused on the regulative and technical role of assessors of matching knowledge in the standards to the knowledge from experience. The policy did not provide guidelines to assessor as how to deal with the relationship between learners' informal knowledge and the formal knowledge prescribed in the standards.

Weak classification of different forms of knowledge and weak framing of relationship advocated by policy between assessor and adult learner attempted to neutralise the power-relations within the assessment context. In an attempt to neutralise the power-relations, assessors were to provide clear recognition and realisation rules. In terms of the recognition rule

assessors were to provide candidates with clear instructions. In this way the candidates will be guided as access the meaning in the standard. In terms of the realisation rule assessor were to provide candidates clear indication of what final product that demonstrated their knowledge and a skill was expected.

I will next examine some general criticism of national policy outside the a priori categories.

National RPL policy does not provide a sufficient theoretical basis for the development and implementation of policy. Young (2001) has argued that although policy makers were strong in pointing to a long term future for a democratic education system, they did not always provide the theoretical basis for the development and implementation of specific policies and institutional contexts that were the legacy of the apartheid. The consequence of this gap has led education and training sectors to adopt an instrumental approach in preparing for the implementation of policies.

5.3   Concluding remarks

I will now examine the strengths and limitations of the Bernstein's theory as tools for analysis, and the research methodology used in answering the first research question. Thereafter, the main issues from the chapter will be highlighted.

The theory of cultural production, reproduction and symbolic control has concentrated on the "limited field of inquiry, limited to formal and local pedagogical modalities" (Bernstein and Soloman, 1999:269). "Pedagogical modalities" refers to interactional situations located within

institutions, for example the teaching and learning situation in the classroom. In this research the conceptual tools provided by Bernstein's theory was used for policy analysis. The conceptual language of the theory as a tool for policy analysis was adequate, in so far as to examine the "relations between" different forms of knowledge production, and "relations within" the assessment context between the assessor and the candidate.

However, the conceptual language was not sufficient to describe and analyse the broader socio-political context that influenced the policy development. For example the concepts of "relations between" and "relations within" were not appropriate to analyse the transfromative policy context of the developing democracy that drive the RPL agenda in South Africa. This inadequacy created a discursive gap between Bernstein's theory as tool for analysis and interpretation of data. This discursive gap will be addressed by exploring alternative conceptual approaches (refer to chapter 9).

Methodologically, the policy analysis in the present study focused on the contextual factors that influenced national policy and examined the contents of the policy. The methodological limitation of the present study is that it failed to examine the process of RPL policy development. In examining the politics involved in the policy development process the following questions needs to be asked:
- Who was involved in policymaking process?
- How was the process of consultation arranged?
- Whose interest did they serve?

The analysis of the policy process could have deepened the understanding of the politics involved in the policy formulation. The analysis could

have also made visible the competing interests in the policy formulation process that may manifest itself as ambiguities in the policy document, and has implications for how policy is read and implemented.

Key issues will now be summarised below:

The change process generally and more particularly changes in education and training was taking place in the context of deeply etched inequalities, resource shortages and inherited backlogs. The new state was faced with addressing the needs of the vast majority of citizens that were previously denied social justice - that faced poverty, unemployment and the growing threat of HIV/AIDS. At the same time the new state had to meet the demands of globalisation such as to develop a competitive economy with increased levels of productivity.

It was against the above background that RPL policy as one of the components of the National Qualifications Framework was developed and implemented. RPL policy was one of the mechanisms to address the political goals of social justice through providing equity access and redress to historically discriminated learners.

In analysing the silences in policy it was evident that national RPL policy failed to deal with the contextual realities both from outside and within the institutions responsible for implementing RPL policy. From the outside the policy failed to sufficiently address the pressures of globalisation on sectoral and institutional RPL policy and practice. The policy also did not engage sufficiently with the change process within sectors and institutions. The policy described the ideal conditions that sectors and institutions will have to work towards, but did not provide strategic priorities as points of intervention.

In analysing the main claims of policy with regards to knowledge, experience and learning, a number of gaps have also been identified. Firstly, the policy did not problematise the vested power-relations between vocational and academic pathways and how this could pose a threat to the vision of the integration of education and training. Second, the policy glossed over the epistemological issues of the vocational and disciplinary forms of knowing and learning. The policy places emphasis on the "principle of equivalence" by listing both qualifications on the single NQF framework. The policy ignored the issue of whether or not it is possible for articulation between vocational knowledge and skills and intellectual knowledge and skills since each represents different types of knowledge and learning. Finally, the national policy did not clearly define the difference between the principles "learning and experience" and "learning from experience". The national RPL policy needed to be more explicit about the theory of learning and the theory of experiential learning that it espouses.

In terms analysing the values and assumptions of the policy in terms of the a priori categories using Bernstein's conceptual language, the national RPL policy advocated a weak classification of knowledge and weak framing of relations between assessors and adult learners.

The weak classification purported by policy was based on the assumption that knowledge generated in the vocational sector and educational sector were equivalent. In practice the weak classification was not possible due to structural division that makes the integration of education and training unworkable or at least highly problematic. The setting of two separate departments in the first democratic government, one for Education and one for Labour made it difficult to co-ordinate the aspects of general education and work-based education. The weak classification ignored the

power-relations between the different forms of knowledge systems. In practice there are unequal and deeply entrenched boundaries between academic and vocational forms of knowledge systems. The policy intended to challenge the traditional monopoly and power from certain groups to generate knowledge. In practice the policy failed to acknowledge the "principle of difference" between the knowledge generated by the academic sector and knowledge that is generated by the work-based sector. This had created great deal of resistance from the academic sector to be part of a single qualifications framework.

The policy also advocated a mixture of strong and weak framing code of the assessor in their relationship with the candidate. According to policy the strong framing code for assessors is reflected in the assessor's role in judging the quality of evidence provided against the assessment criteria prescribed by the unit standard.

The weak framing code according to policy is reflected in assessors' role as a coach and development partner. Assessors had to be transparent and collaborative. Assessors are encouraged to be sensitive to the context of the assessment and the context from which learners come from. Assessors are encouraged to involve adult learners as active participant throughout the assessment process.

In failing to point out how assessor should deal with the epistemological issues, the strong framing relationship took precedence over the weak framing role of assessors. The policy did not provide guidelines to assessors as how to deal with learners informal knowledge and the formal knowledge prescribed in the standards.

Weak classification of different forms of knowledge and weak framing of relationship advocated by policy between assessor and adult learner attempted to neutralise the power-relations within the assessment context. In an attempt to neutralise the power relation, assessors were to provide clear recognition and realisation rules with regards the quality of evidence that was required from the candidates.

At the broader level, policy analysis examined to what extent the policy document contributed to either reproducing or challenging the existing patterns of social inequalities. The RPL national document attempted to challenge the existing status quo of knowledge production; attempted to bridge the relations between two types of learning - vocational and academic knowledge; attempted to link knowledge gained from experience to knowledge gained from formal contexts. But the failure of policy to acknowledge the "principle of difference" between the different types of knowledge generated by the academic sector and knowledge that was generated by the work-based sector underestimated the deeply embedded differences between these two sectors. Further the policy does not deal adequately with the contextual realities facing sectors and institutions. In not addressing these critical issues the RPL document runs the risk of remaining a symbolic document that pre-dominantly attempts to provide compromises and attempt to appease the different role players, rather than having the clout to challenge the existing patterns of social inequality.

The next chapter will analyse the sectoral RPL procedures and the standards that were used by assessors to examine the knowledge, learning and experience of adult learners.

CHAPTER 6
ANALYSIS OF SECTOR RPL
PROCEDURES AND STANDARDS

In the previous chapter, national RPL policy was described and analysed. It was evident that national RPL policy advocated a weak classification of knowledge, and a strong to weak framing of the relations between assessors and candidates. The weak classification and framing codes advocated by the national RPL policy, was intended to create conditions for institutions of learning to address social justice concerns. In this chapter the sectoral procedures; and, the unit standards that were used to judge adult learners' performance will be described and analysed. The Construction Education and Training Sector (CETA) was selected as a case study for the research study, since it was the first sector to have a comprehensive RPL system in place.

6.1 Conceptual issues that will guide the analysis

The analysis and interpretation of data will take place at various levels. At the first level the main components of sectoral procedures and the unit standards will be described. At the second level the sectoral procedures and unit standards will be examined for their conceptual coherence under the following a priori categories:

- Context that influence the sectoral procedures;
- The purpose and value of RPL;
- The relationship between knowledge, learning and experience; and
- The relationship between adult learners and assessors.

At the third level of analysis the emerging issues will describe and interpreted in terms of the Bernstein's conceptual language. The following conceptual questions will guide the analysis:

- What principle of classification and framing underlies the procedures and standards?

- How does the strength of classification and framing include/exclude and privilege/marginalize the knowledge and learning gained from experience?

- How does the concept of power construct the relations between different categories of discourses?

- How do the procedures and standards deal with the power-relations between different forms of knowledge and learning?

- How do the classificatory and framing principles regulate the recognition and realisation rules for the assessor and the candidate?

6.2   RPL procedures of the Construction Education and Training Authority

This section will examine to what extent sectoral procedures complied with the national policy document.

The following documentation that was developed by the sector was reviewed and analysed in the research study:

- Quality Policy and Quality Assurance Procedures;
- RPL implementation guidelines;
- RPL procedures and instruments; and
- RPL evidence guides for assessment of unit standards consisting of tests, assessment criteria and instructions.

6.2.1 The main components of CETA RPL model

According to CETA procedures (2000) the RPL model (refer to appendix 3) outlines the three distinct phases in the RPL assessment process. They are classified as the advice phase, assessment phase and verification phase. These phases will be briefly described below.

6.2.1.1 Advice phase

In terms of CETA procedures the purpose of the advice phase was intended to assist and support the candidates in identifying the knowledge and skills that were relevant in terms of the selected standards. The process during the advice phase involved the advisor performing the following functions: compiling a portfolio, orientating the candidates to unit standards, matching claims of candidates. Advisors made judgements on the performance of candidates. On the basis of the judgements, assessors had to decide whether the candidate was able to proceed to the next phase of assessment or referred for further learning development. The policy advocated that if "the advisor has concluded in the portfolio review that the candidate had proven - beyond any doubt - competence with regard to the critical cross-field outcomes and the essential embedded knowledge" (CETA, 2000: 2), then on the basis of a review of the portfolio the candidate was awarded credits.

6.2.1.2 Assessment phase

The purpose of this phase was to evaluate the claims made by the candidates, and determine whether the candidates were competent. The assessor had to follow the following procedure:

review portfolio / evidence, orientate the candidates to the unit standards, plan and implement the assessment; evaluate the assessment, and make recommendation.

The table below represents the type of competence and method of assessment used in the different phases of the assessment (CETA, 2000).

Table 6.1 Types of competence and method of assessment

Phases Of Assessment	Type Of Competence	Method Of Assessment
Assessment interview	Foundational competence	Questioning and observation
Assessment assignment	Practical competence	Product sampling and observation
Debriefing interview	Reflexive competence	Questioning and observation

The policy document (CETA, 2000:7-14) defines "competence" as having three interrelated components. Each of the components will be described below:

- "The candidate's foundation competence was seen to be sufficient if "the candidate can name the steps in the right order; name tools and materials which are needed; demonstrate an understanding of ; is able to point out the quality aspects, communicate effectively, and show understanding of work organization ";

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- The candidate's practical competence was seen to be sufficient if "the practical achievements of the candidate meet the technical assessment criteria by which quality of the end product was measured, while carrying out the task. The candidate had to demonstrate effective communication and co-operation skills, solved problems in a professional manner, worked in an organised fashion, and had demonstrated awareness of safety " and,
- "The candidate's reflexive competence was seen to be sufficient if "the candidate was able to explain why these materials were used, and the way problems were solved, gives evidence of critical self reflection, and communicates effectively".

The assessment took the form of evidence that were gathered in a portfolio. The portfolio evidence was supplemented by performance assessment and interviews. The assessor awarded credit to candidates when the knowledge and skills in their prior learning was demonstrated either as portfolio evidence and/or through their performance and answers to the interview questions. The demonstrable evidence had to be directly matched to the knowledge and skills stated in the standards.

6.2.1.3 Verification phase

The purpose of this phase was to manage and qualities assure the advisement, assessment processes and results. The assessor had to subject their assessment to an internal and external moderation process that had to comply with the following procedure: audit the advisement outcomes, audit the assessment outcomes, approve the award and compile and submit reports.

The above was a brief description of the main components of the sector RPL procedure. These procedures will now be analysed in terms of the a priori categories.

6.2.2 Analysis of sector procedures

The sectoral procedures will be analysed in terms of a priori categories, namely, contextual, epistemological, pedagogical and paradigmatic issues.

6.2.2.1 Context

The reference made by the CETA procedure document to the contextual issues will now be examined. The CETA procedures targeted adult learners who were previously excluded from education and training opportunities that needed redress. These candidates were either employed or unemployed. These candidates worked for many years and have gained experience in either building construction or carpentry. Most of these candidates had low levels of formal education due to historically discriminatory education and training policies. The redress of the candidates was to take the form of awarding formal recognition to candidates whose had acquired knowledge and skills through experience. The award of certificates to candidates was intended to increase the opportunities for employment and productivity within the building and construction sector.

In examining the CETA procedures there were contradictory tendencies with regards to taking into consideration the cultural background of adult learners. On one hand, the procedures failed to sensitise assessors that most of the adult learners who plan to embark on assessing their prior

learning often encounter psychological barriers to recognise and value their own knowledge and learning. The mechanisms to deal with the psychological barriers (that include issues such as low self-esteem and lack of confidence due to discriminatory practices) in assessing adult learners were ignored. Instead CETA policy and procedures focused on the technical procedures that focused maintaining "quality" and "standards" in the assessment process.

The procedures did not consider the language barrier inherent in its procedures. Almost all of the instruction and portfolio development work was done in English. The participant for who English was the second language or even third languages were not accommodated.

On the other hand the presence of models provided alternative access to adult learners who had limited formal learning and formal literacy.

The research will examine how sectoral procedures either facilitated or impeded the assessment of experiential learning of candidates.

6.2.2.2 Purpose and value of RPL

In terms of the procedure documents the aim of the CETA RPL project was "to develop an efficient, sustainable nation-wide system for awarding credits to candidates who could demonstrate their knowledge and skills towards standards registered on the National Qualifications Framework" CETA, 2000: 2). The sectoral RPL procedures targeted adult learners both from the formal sector and informal sector to gain access to formal institutions of learning and to provide redress for learners who have been historically disadvantaged.

According to the CETA, RPL will also provide free access to national and international awards and qualification. The CETA procedures also intended to allow adult learners to progress towards life long learning, credit-awards, qualification and employment opportunities (CETA, 2000: 2).

In analysing the CETA procedure documents, it was evident that the economic discourse was most dominant. The procedures aimed to make workers more productive and employable. There were other competing discourses that underpinned the procedure document. The second discourse aimed to use RPL as a means to meet the agenda of social equity through providing adult learners access and redress. This was followed by the humanistic discourse whereby RPL process was viewed as a mechanism of enabling individuals to progress towards life long learning.

6.2.2.3 Knowledge, learning and experience

In this section I will firstly examine the view of knowledge; and, secondly analyse the relationship between knowledge and experience and learning advocated in the procedure document.

The CETA procedural documents viewed knowledge as seen as being synonymous with employment related performance. Knowledge was repositioned as underpinning competence that was created and validated only insofar as it related to definitions of competence relevant to the workplace. Knowledge was viewed as absolute, neutral and value free, and could be considered as generic, separable from their learning context and transferable from one context to another.

In examining the relationship between knowledge, experience and learning, it was evident that experience was not seen as equivalent to knowledge expressed in the standards. The candidates' knowledge and learning from experience that matched the standard counted as the relevant knowledge and learning. Knowledge and learning that was outside the standards was seen as irrelevant.

The notion of literal matching the candidates' knowledge and learning from experience to specific standards encouraged a behaviourist view of learning. The behaviourist approach to learning was characterised by a process whereby individual knowledge and learning from experience was recognised only to the extent that it matched the national standards. Adult learners were encouraged to match their prior knowledge and learning to the external assessment criteria. Another feature of the behaviourist approach to learning was the linear sequencing of the assessment of competencies by the sector. According to sector procedures foundational competence was assessed first at the advice stage, then practical competence being assessed at the completion of product, followed finally by reflective competence being assessed at the end of the assessment.

The use of Bernstein's (Bernstein and Soloman, 1999) vertical and horizontal discourses could help to analyse how different forms of knowledge, learning and experience were valued within the sector. The assessment procedures and tools in the form of a structured ticking sheet represented vertical discourses that "took the form of a coherent, explicit, systematically principled structure, (that is) hierarchically organised" (Bernstein, 1996). The knowledge and learning from experience on the other hand represents elements of horizontal discourses. Horizontal discourses tend to have a more informal construction, include local and

experiential knowledge - knowledge which is "segmental, context-dependent, tacit, multi-layered, often contradictory across contexts but not within contexts' (Bernstein, 1996). The highly structured assessment procedures were set within a formal pedagogic relation and realised according to values and discourses of the context. Whereas knowledge gained through experience represented horizontal discourses that was acquired through informal activity and with the associated with the discourse and values of that context. The sector assessment procedure did not provide adequate mechanisms to value authentic knowledge and experience (horizontal discourses) of candidates.

The conceptual language of Bernstein's theory will now be used to further analyse the issues related to knowledge and knowledge-power relations.

There was a strong linear classification of assessing different types of competence, namely foundational, practical and reflexive in the different phases of assessment. The linear classification of assessment contradicted the principle of integrated assessment, which demanded judging the evidence produced at each of the assessment phases in terms of the delicate intersection and balance of all three elements of competence.

The procedures privileged the assessment of the finished product as against the process of performance. The weighting of the time, credits and method of assessment in favour of product sampling showed commitment of the policy towards non-literacy orientated practice. Non-literacy orientated practice involved the assessor primarily judging the candidates' competence by assessing the product rather than the verbal or written responses.

There was also strong internal classification in how the assessment environment was structured. The presence of models in the assessment site was an example of the strong internal classification of knowledge. The strong classification in the form of models targeted adult learners who had limited or no formal schooling. These adult learners in most instances experienced difficulty in reading and interpreting the written text. The models provided the adult learners with an alternative form of access to what was expected in the assessment context. The use of models was intended to help candidates to acquire both the recognition and realisation rules to create the expected legitimate text.

The strong classification in the form of models in the assessment context served to neutralise the power differentials between those adult learners who had exposure to formal learning and those had no experience to formal learning. The strong classification of knowledge in the form of concrete models was intended to help candidates with no or limited schooling to gain both the recognition and realisation rules.

The sector procedures failed to deal with the epistemological issues of how to deal with relationship between the knowledge and learning of the standards; with other forms of knowledge and learning acquired in informal/non-formal contexts. The procedure primarily focused on technical matching of the claims of experience of candidates or the demonstration of the claims against knowledge and learning in the standards. The standards and procedures created conditions that filtered out the knowledge and learning that was outside the standards.

6.2.2.4 Relationship between the candidate and the assessor

The sector policy advocated a transactional relationship between assessor and the candidates. The assessors' main responsibility was to follow the rules and procedures in gathering the evidence, and to judge the evidence in terms of the criteria provided. The candidate's role was to demonstrate evidence that he/she had gained from experience. The assessor used a prescribed assessment check sheet to tick off the assessment method used. The assessor's role was also to tick off the appropriate box to indicate whether the candidate competence was "sufficient/insufficient". The binary classification of "sufficient"/insufficient" decision about candidates' ability to demonstrate the outcomes was not suitable for the assessment of the performance of candidates. Candidates demonstrated a range of competencies that cannot be neatly placed into "sufficient/insufficient" categories.

The principle of framing will examine the "the relations within" the assessment context between the assessor and the candidates with regards to the elements of selection, sequencing, pacing and criteria and social base.

The CETA RPL procedure espoused both weak and strong framing between the assessor and candidates. Weak framing of the assessors' role was evident in the early stages of assessment. In the advisory phase assessors also played the role of advisors. As advisors, assessors familiarised candidates with the standards in preparation of the assessment.

Strong framing of the assessors' role was evident in the assessor controlling the selection, sequencing, pacing and determining of criteria for the assessment. The sequence of the assessment was fixed and the time allocated for each phase was also predetermined. The criteria used to by the assessor to judge the competence of the candidate was also predetermined. In this way the assessor had control over the assessment situation.

The assessors' role was also strongly framed in the different phases of the assessment process. In terms of the procedure the main responsibility of the assessor was to technically match the knowledge and learning of the candidate with the knowledge and learning in the standard.

In terms of the CETA procedure document the strong framing of assessors took precedence over the weak framing. The strong framing meant that assessors played a more bureaucratic role than professional one in the assessment process. The role of the assessor was dominated by the ticking of boxes, rather than engaging professionally with key issues. The role and identity of the assessor was constructed by the procedure as "gatekeepers". Assessors' roles were seen as controlling access to candidates in order to check whether their knowledge and learning from experience matched with those in the standard.

6.3   Analysis of the standards used in the assessment of prior learning

The CETA had selected the unit standards in bricklaying and carpentry (refer to appendix 5 for an example) against which candidates were assessed. These standards contributed towards the core component of a qualification. The unit standards that were used were not a product of a

socially mediated process since these standards were inherited from the Building Industry Training Board and revised by the Construction SETA.

6.3.1 Brief description of the key components of the unit standards

First a brief description of the structure of the standard, followed by the analysis in terms of a priori categories will be undertaken.

The unit standards for Bricklaying and Construction Carpentry had the following key components. Each of the components will be briefly described. (Refer to annexure 4 for an example of the standards used in the RPL assessment),

6.3.1.1 Title of the standard

The title in each unit standard captured the content of the standard. For example the title, "Casting foundations, building foundation walling for timber or concrete to floor level" pointed to the knowledge and skills required.

6.3.1.2 Level of the standard

The level of the standard indicated the complexity of learning. All the standards were placed at level 3 on the National Qualifications Framework.

6.3.1.3 Credits

The credit assignment reflects the average length the average learners might take to become competent. Each unit standard was assigned credits.

6.3.1.4 Purpose of the standard

The purpose statement of the unit standard captured what the qualifying learner will know and be able to on achievement of the unit standard. For example, the qualifying learner must be able to prepare foundations and build the required foundations walling for a timber or concrete floor to be laid.

6.3.1.5 Learning assumed to be in place

The learning assumed to be in place described the "building blocks" of knowledge, skill and understanding which are assumed to be in place before the commencement of the assessment. The learning assumed to be in place acted as scaffolding that supported the achievement of the new knowledge and learning.

6.3.1.6 Embedded knowledge

Embedded knowledge referred to the knowledge that underpinned the performance of an assessment task. The assessor inferred and judged the quality of knowledge of the candidate through the observation of the performance of the learner.

6.3.1.7 Critical Cross-field outcomes

The unit standards had to relate to the following critical outcomes, such as:

- Identifying characteristics of physical materials used in construction;
- Interpret basic building drawings;
- Communicating with co-workers;
- Identify and solve problems;
- Work effectively with other in the team;
- Organise and manage oneself and one's activity responsibly and effectively; and
- Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.

6.3.1.8 Specific outcomes and assessment criteria

Each unit standard stated the specific outcomes and assessment criteria. The specific outcomes emphasised vocational knowledge and skills such as "casting foundations and building foundations brickwork in stretcher and English bond including grouting, jointing and pointing". These outcomes were measurable and verifiable and contributed to the attainment of the purpose of the standard. The assessment criteria indicated the evidence the learner had to demonstrate, in order for the assessor to judge the learner as competent.

6.3.1.9 Range statements

There was a clear relationship between the range statements, the specific outcomes and assessment criteria. The range statements defined the limits, parameters, and areas for inclusion and areas of exclusion of the standard. An example of a range statement will be:

"selection of tools and equipment from the store to cast foundations and building foundation walls; assistance of a general worker will be restricted to physical handling of material and equipment only on instruction of the candidate".

The statement also described the situations and circumstances in which competence was demonstrated, namely, simulated or normal construction environment.

The requirements of the unit standards were re-contextualised into instruction sheets for candidates (refer to appendix 5). The information instruction sheet for candidates consisted of the following categories:
- Tasks to be achieved by the candidate in the form of an assessment assignment;
- Assessment criteria; and
- Technical assessment specification.

6.3.2 Analysis of the unit standards

The unit standards used in the assessment of adult learners will analysed in terms of the following a priori categories:
- Context;
- The purpose and value of RPL;
- Knowledge, learning and experience; and
- Relationship between the adult learners and the assessor.

6.3.2.1 Context

From the analysis it was evident that the standards failed to accommodate the social context in which knowledge was constructed. For example,

candidates who worked in rural contexts differed from candidates who worked in the urban contexts in the use of materials for the construction of dwellings. Candidates who worked in the East Coast differed from the candidates worked inland in the knowledge related to building construction. The difference in social context in which knowledge was generated was not considered in the standard. The standard should deal with the different social contexts in which knowledge and learning were constructed.

The standards also failed to take into consideration the socio-cultural context in which adult learners lived. Most adult learners spoke an indigenous African language as their first language. The unit standards were written in English. The use of jargon further exacerbated the difficulty in accessing the standards. The language was too complex and difficult for both assessors and adult earners to access.

6.3.2.2 Purpose of the standard

In analysing the standard it was found that the unit standards were driven by the requirements by the workplace and the employer. In this way the standards was driven by the economic discourse of meeting the market demands of producing skilled and productive workers; and meeting the individual need for employment. The standards failed to contribute the personal development of the individual that was part of the humanistic discourse. The standards also failed to focus on the socio-political discourse of producing an informed citizen as part of an emerging democracy.

6.3.2.3 Knowledge, learning and experience

The standards used in the assessment of prior learning were inherited from the former Building Industry Training Board. The standards were written to meet the needs of employers that aimed to improve productivity in the workplace. The standards reflected an attempt by employers to define what was taken as knowledge in society.

Knowledge in the standards was understood as embedded or underpinning knowledge that was largely performance related and procedural in nature. Adult learners were required to perform particular assessment tasks by following fixed procedure. Assessors had to make inferences about the knowledge of learners by observing their performance and questioning them.

The knowledge in the unit standards had a strong training and vocational bias that emphasised the demonstration of practical competence over reflexive competence. The chance for the candidate to go beyond building of concrete models to abstracting general principles from practice was limited. The development of the critical outcomes such as problem solving, communicating effectively, working as a team were not integrated within the assessment criteria. Unit standards defined knowledge in a narrow instrumental manner. The unit standards gave primacy to the instrumental goals of education such as preparing the candidates for work rather than the intrinsic goals such as intellectual development and personal autonomy.

In using the concept of "classification" to analyse the standards, it was evident that there was a strong classification of knowledge within the institution. Candidates had to select standards in either from construction carpentry sector or the building sector. The boundaries between the two categories of unit standards were rigid and are not permeable. This strong

classification prevented candidates who were versatile and had knowledge in both construction carpentry and building construction, to select a mix of standards for the assessment process.

The analysis of the standards used indicated that there was a strong classification of knowledge between economic sectors. The boundary between the knowledge in the construction sector and the other economic sectors was strong. The strong boundaries in knowledge contributed to training of candidates in narrow vocational knowledge for a particular sector. Assessing learners against the prescribed unit standards did not prepare adult learners for a range of trade, entrepreneurial and life skills that define the new working context of adult learners. Further there was a strong boundary between the vocational standards and general education standards such as mathematical literacy and communication. The strong classification of knowledge in a particular construction sector in isolation from general education standards had the power of maintaining and reproduced the separate tracks of education and training. In not providing adult learners access general education standards, the RPL process did not contribute to providing learners opportunities to work towards a qualification and progress to higher levels of knowledge and learning on the NQF.

The standards made rhetorical references to "experience" and "learning from experience". The standards did not address how prior knowledge and learning acquired through experience was to be assessed and recognised. The standard failed to deal with how other forms of knowledge and learning acquired through experience could contribute to achieving the learning outcome. The standards privileged knowledge gained in formal learning context. In this way the standards marginalised and even excluded authentic ways of knowing and learning.

6.3.2.4 Relationship between the adult learners and the assessor

The standards failed to make any direct reference to the relationship between adult learners and assessors. The standards viewed the assessors as being responsible for inferring the knowledge of candidates by observing performance and examining the product against prescribed criteria. The role of the assessor was implied in the standard.

6.4 Comparative analysis of national RPL policy and the sectoral RPL procedures and the requirements of the unit standards

The national RPL policy, sectoral procedure document and the unit standard will be compared using the a priori categories.

6.4.1 Context

In all official policy documents the external and internal contextual realties that impacted on the recognition of prior learning of adult learners particularly those who were previously discriminated were not sufficiently addressed. Although national RPL policy document examined the broad contextual issues such as macro-political, social and economic factors that informed education and training transformation, the policy failed to sufficiently acknowledge the external pressure of globalisation on the development of RPL policy and practice. The policy also failed to deal with the contextual realities within the institutions responsible to implement RPL policy. The policy does not engage sufficiently with the dynamics of the change process within sectors and institutions.

In examining the CETA procedures it was evident that the procedures did not take into consideration the social and cultural background of adult learners. The procedures failed to sensitise assessors to the psychological barriers encountered by adult learners who were discriminated in the past. The psychological barrier of low self-esteem and lack of confidence in their abilities were ignored. Instead CETA policy and procedures focused on the technical procedures that focused on maintaining "quality" and "standards" in the assessment of the candidate's prior learning against selected unit standards.

The standards that were used to assess adult learners also failed to accommodate the social context in which knowledge was constructed. Most adult learners spoke an indigenous African language as their first language. The unit standards were written in English. The use of jargon further exacerbated the difficulty in accessing the standards. The language was too complex and difficult for both assessors and adult earners to access.

The analysis of policy document indicated the failure of policy to factor in the institutional and diverse local contextual realities and the effects of the politics of globalisation on policy. The notion of "policy refraction" (Taylor et al., 1997) is useful in describing how institutions respond in implementing centralised polices. The term "policy refraction" refers to the "process of distortion which result from the complex layering of policy interests" (Taylor et al., 1997: 119). The strongly stated social justice agenda of the national RPL policy was weakened at the sectoral level. The sector procedures were preoccupied with the technical and logistical details of implementing policy, rather than responding to the more complex transformative goals of social justice.

6.4.2 Purpose

The official purpose was underpinned by contradictory and competing categories of discourses. The most dominant discourse in driving the official view of national RPL policy was the socio-political discourse. This meant that the political purpose of RPL policy as a mechanism in providing access and redress to adult learners was privileged over other discourses. On the other hand, the most dominant discourse that influenced CETA RPL procedures and the unit standards was the economic discourse. In terms of the economic discourse RPL was used as a tool to improve the productivity and employability of workers. The present study will examine how competing and contradictory RPL discourses in official policy impact on assessors institutional practice.

6.4.3 Knowledge, learning and experience

The national RPL policy advocated a weak classification of knowledge. This weak classification of knowledge promoted the integration of education and training. The weak classification of knowledge also advocated a rough equivalence between the knowledge and learning in the standards, and the knowledge and learning from adult learners' experience.

All policy documents failed to problematise the essentially different and unequal terrain of general education and vocational education in their attempt to integrate education and training. The national RPL policy framed as part of the NQF based its assumption that there could smooth articulation between education and training, between vocational knowledge and academic knowledge. This assumption was based on the principle of equivalence. The policy does not problematise the vested

power relations between education and training, between vocational and academic pathways and how this could pose a threat to the vision of the integration of education and training.

The weak classification in the national RPL policy ignored the power relations between the different forms of knowledge systems. In practice there are deeply entrenched boundaries between academic and vocational forms of knowledge systems. In failing to acknowledge and accommodate the different and unequal terrains of vocational and general education, the policy contributed to reproducing the conditions that maintain the different tracks of knowledge and learning. The new RPL model (see Chapter 9) proposed attempts guide policy to deal with the epistemological issues related to the vocational and general education tracks.

There were different views of knowledge expressed in the policy documents. National RPL policy advocated a constructivist view of knowledge. Knowledge was viewed as been socially mediated by the different role-players in society. According to policy, the national standards setting process should be inclusive of all stakeholders and the standards should recognises the rich diversity of knowledge and learning styles which the candidates brings to the assessment situation. On the other hand, knowledge in sectoral procedures and unit standards defined knowledge in narrow instrumental terms. Knowledge was defined as underpinning competence that related to definitions of competence relevant to the workplace.

Contrary to national policy that advocated rough equivalence of knowledge and skills in the standards, CETA procedure and unit standards advocated a technical matching that was likely to disadvantage

adult learners' authentic knowledge acquired in non-formal contexts. The sector assessment procedure particularly in the recording of assessment did not provide adequate mechanisms to value authentic knowledge and experience (horizontal discourses) of adult learners.

In all policy documents the concepts "experience and learning" were not treated as synonymous. In both the national RPL policy document and sectoral procedure document the prior learning and experience took place against specified learning outcomes in the standards. Credits were awarded if such learning and experience meets the requirements of the standard. The matching of performance against fixed criteria encouraged a behaviorist approach to learning.

The policy documents both at the national and sectoral levels were silent on the theory of learning and the theory of experiential learning that it espoused.

6.4.4 Relations between assessors and adult learners

National RPL policy proposed a weak framing in describing the relationship the assessor and the candidate in the assessment process. For example in terms of the national policy the assessors had to be transparent and collaborative. Assessors had to play a developmental role in the assessment process. The weak framing of relationship advocated by policy between assessor and adult learner attempted to neutralise the power-relations within the assessment context.

Whilst the national RPL policy advocated a weak framing of assessor's role, the CETA procedures and unit standards took a reductionist view of

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the role of the assessor. The role of assessor was seen as gathering evidence to judge the competence of learners against fixed standards.

Despite the strength of framing all policies constructed the role of the assessor as a "gate-keeper". The assessor was to technically match knowledge and skills of the candidates against the requirements of the standards.

Both the national RPL policies document and sectoral procedures failed to point out how assessors should deal with the epistemological issues. The policy should provide guidelines to assessors as how to deal with learners' informal knowledge and the formal knowledge prescribed in the standards.

In the next chapter the research will examine how assessors mediated the official view of RPL policy within the institutional context. The research will further explore how assessors interpreted the official view of RPL to either include/exclude and privilege/marginalise/exclude adult learners for whom the policy was intended.

6.5   Concluding remarks

First, the adequacy of the theoretical lens and the methodology used for the analysis will be examined. Thereafter the main findings of the policy analysis will be highlighted.

The conceptual language of Bernstein's theory was not adequate to analyse the contextual issues referred to in the procedure document and in the unit standards document. An attempt will made to address this discursive gap in chapter 9 by extending the conceptual language of Bernstein's theory. However the concepts of classification and power were useful in analysing the issues related to knowledge and knowledge-power relations. The concepts of framing and control were useful in analysing the reference made in the documents to the relationship between the assessor and the adult learners within the assessment context.

Methodologically the present study used policy analysis as a tool to critically examine the contents of the national RPL policy, procedures and unit standards. The analysis of the contents of the policy, procedures and standards did not provide sufficient data to understand the politics of the process involved in the development of the RPL procedures and unit standards. Interviews with key players who were involved in the developing the procedures and those involved with standards generation process would have yielded data that could have deepened the analysis with regards to understanding the process, and the competing discourses and assumptions.

Policy analysis needs to examine more critically how policy constructs the policy problem and their contexts. Policy needs to examine how the contexts have been framed in terms of meeting local and institutional realities and global imperatives. For example, there is a need to critically challenge the assumption of the global imperatives that frame national RPL policy and sectoral procedures. The assumption views the global economy as contributing to the development of multi-skilled, flexible and more productive workers. There is a need to examine the politics of globlaisation and its implication of RPL policy in reproducing the

inequalities in society. As Taylor et al. (1997:76) point out that globalisation "is a complex set of processes in which all the social, economic and cultural inequalities of nation states are refigured and in some ways intensified".

The a priori categories were useful methodological technique in analysing data since they focused the analysis on addressing the critical foci of the research.

The main issues of this section will be highlighted.

The focus of the CETA procedures was on systems description and compliance to these systems by assessors and institutions. The purpose of the procedures was to provide a detail description of assessment process and to clearly define and construct the roles, identities and responsibilities of the advisor and assessor; and to introduce a standardised system of operation. The strength of the sectoral procedures document was that it clearly defined the purpose, procedures and process of the roles of various participants in the assessment process. Another strength of the sector procedures was in the strong classification of knowledge in the form of pre-built models in the assessment contexts. The strong classification in the form of models served to neutralise the power differentials between those adult learners who had exposure to formal learning and those had no experience to formal learning.

The limitations and gaps of the sectoral procedures will now be briefly outlined.

First, although the CETA procedures targeted adult learners who were previously excluded from education and training opportunities that needed redress, the procedures in the form of instruction sheet failed to sensitise assessors to the socio-cultural world of adult learners. Procedures did not address the psychological barriers encountered by adult learners who were previously discriminated from formal learning. The procedures did not consider the language barrier inherent in its procedures of the assessment process.

Second, there was overwhelming emphasis on assessing vocational and technical knowledge and skills at the expense of assessing the values inherent in the process of performance such as work ethic. The most dominant discourse that influenced CETA RPL procedures was the economic discourse. RPL was seen as means to produce productive workers in response to the demand of the changing economy.

Third, the danger with the preoccupation with detail procedures constructed the role of assessors as technicians whose role was to adopt a formulaic approach in implementing procedures. These procedures encouraged assessors to uncritically assess learners' knowledge and learning against predetermined criteria. This approach implied a strong classification between what the learner knows and can do as opposed to what knowledge and skills inscribed in the standard. The role and identity of the assessor was constructed as "gatekeepers" who prevented access to candidates, whose knowledge and learning did not match with those in the national standard. The sector was preoccupied with the practicalities of getting the project "up and running" and in doing so, failed to deal with the more complex issues of addressing political goals of equity, access and redress.

Next, the key issues related to the unit standards will be outlined.

First, the standards did not address how prior learning and experience was to be assessed and recognised. The standards privileged knowledge and learning gained from formal learning contexts. The knowledge and learning from informal/non-formal contexts were marginalised or even excluded.

Second, the unit standards favoured adult learners who had exposure to formal learning. Adult learners who have acquired certain levels of literacy and numeracy through formal education were able to recognise the rules of the standards compared to those candidates who had no or limited exposure to formal learning. The language in the standards was too complex and the use of jargon in the instruction sheet created barriers for learners to access to the standards.

Third, the standards failed to accommodate the knowledge gained through experience in different contexts such as rural and inland areas. The standards privileged knowledge and learning gained in a formal context.

The critical issues that emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the official view of RPL (in chapters 5 and 6) will be further be analysed in the final chapter (chapter nine) by bringing the data, literature and theory into dialogue with each other to generate key findings.

In the next chapter, espoused views of assessors of assessment of prior learning process and their practices will be described and analysed.

CHAPTER 7
THE ROLE OF ASSESSORS IN THE RPL ASSESSMENT
PROCESS

Assessors within education and training institutions and at workplaces are an important link between the official visions of RPL policy at the macro level and the aspirations of adult learners at the micro level. Assessors play a critical role in mediating official RPL policies at the institutional level in assessing prior learning of adult learners. In the previous chapter the main claims of national policy and sectoral procedures were described and analysed. This chapter examines the espoused views of assessors and their assessment practices.

7.1   Conceptual issues that will frame the analysis

At the first level of the analysis I will examine to what extent the issues that were prominent in data fall within the predetermined a priori categories. The pre-determined categories that were identified were:

- The influence of the context on the assessors' views and practice;
- The assessors' understanding of the purpose of the assessment;
- The role of the assessors in the assessment process; and
- The assessors' views of the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience.

At the second level of analysis the conceptual language (concept of classification/framing; and recognition/realisation rules) will be used to describe the agencies, contexts and practices through which assessors have constructed themselves and others. This will involve the understanding of how power and control enter these constructions to

include or exclude, or to privilege or marginalise the aspirations of adult learners.

7.2 Brief biographical description of assessors

There were eight assessors who were responsible for the assessment of prior learning of adult learners. All of the assessors were African males whose ages ranged from 35 to 50. All assessors had experienced the similar conditions of the discriminatory practices of the apartheid government. They understood that most of these adult learners were also discriminated against previously from being denied access to or being exposed to inferior forms of education and training opportunities. All assessors had more than 5 years experience in their particular trade that they were assessing. Most assessors had the minimum qualification of a trade certificate. Assessors underwent a two weeks RPL assessment-training course that was funded by CETA. These assessors constituted the first batch of recently certified assessors in the institution. I selected all eight assessors who were involved in the programme for a series of focus group interviews for the present study. The most senior assessor in terms of his position as acting manager was chosen for a series of follow-up interviews.

At the institutional level the identity and role of the assessors were clearly classified. Assessors worked completely independent of those involved in the institution's learning programme. There were two categories of assessors: one group for building and the other group for construction carpentry. Assessors who assessed RPL candidates for construction carpentry did not assess candidates for building. There was also a strong boundary between the assessors, internal moderators and external moderators. This strong classification promoted an institutional culture

where each assessor worked on their own instead of sharing their best practices.

According to the CETA policy there was a strong boundary between the role of advisors and assessors. In terms of policy, the role of advisors and assessors was assigned to different individuals within the assessment context. However, in practice there was a weak boundary between the role of assessors and the role of advisors in the first two phases of the assessment process. During the advisory phase, assessors also played the role of advisors. The institutional practice of extending the role of assessors as advisors worked in favour of candidates. Assessors who acted as advisors were able to recognise the potential of adult learners in the advisory phase. Assessors had the advantage of knowing how to align the experiential knowledge and learning to the requirements of the standard. Assessors as advisors were also able to make inferences of the experiential knowledge and learning even though these adult learners did not have sufficient documentary evidence.

7.3   The influence of the context on the assessors' practice

All assessors who worked with adult learners shared similar biographical experiences as the adult learners. Both experienced similar historically oppressive political and socio-economic conditions. Through observations of the interaction of assessors and adult learners at critical moments of the assessment process, it was evident the assessors were sensitive to the "visible barriers" and "invisible barriers" that learners brought into the assessment context.

Assessors were sensitive to the "visible barriers" that adult learners had defined. Most of the candidates expressed difficulty in understanding the

language in which the assessment was conducted. The following excerpt from the interview with the most senior assessor highlight the issue of language:

> *"Candidates especially from the local community were not able to speak English. Most of them have not been to school...*
> *These candidates were not able to read or follow instructions in English" (Extract from the follow-up interview with the most senior assessor, interview no. 6, transcript no. 6).*

Assessors also pointed out that the jargonistic language of the official documents posed an added problem to candidates. One assessor referred to this issue as follows:

> *"It was not just the language that posed a problem but the words in which the instruction sheet were written, words like 'fabricate', 'assemble' were not understood by candidates" (Extract from the follow-up interview with the most senior assessor, interview no. 6, transcript no. 6).*

Assessors dealt with the language barrier experienced by some adult learners, by speaking in the home language of adult learners. The use of home language provided adult learners with access to the instruction, improved the quality of interaction between them, and also helped to neutralise the power differentials between the assessor and the adult learners.

The assessors argued that the presence of concrete models in the assessment site helped adult learners, especially those who were unable to read the instructions. Assessors pointed out that the adult learners who experienced difficulty reading the plan relied heavily on the model to

decode what was expected. This was described by one assessor as follows:

> *"They found the model more useful since it simplified what they had to do. Those who could not read used the model to get to know what they had to do. They didn't use the documents so much. Most of the time you will find the instruction sheet in the tool box" (Extract from focus group interview no.4, transcript no. 11).*

Assessors remarked that they were also sensitive to the "invisible barrier" that adult learners brought into the assessment context. They conceptualised learners as "previously disadvantaged" who had serious psychological "barrier" to being assessed in a formal context. They viewed the psychological barrier as contributing to the low degree of self-confidence and self esteem in adult learners. Assessors constructed their role as agents whose role was to restore the dignity and self esteem to individuals who were victims of apartheid's discriminatory education and training policies.

However, the assessors who were sensitive to the social context had to respond to the technical role constructed of themselves by the procedures of the sector. In their role as technicians they were to match the adult learners' experience with the requirements of the standards.

Assessors did not allow their role as technicians to overshadow their role as agents responsible for acknowledging and recognising experiential knowledge of adult learners. From observations it was evident that assessors had implicit personal theories regarding the epistemological issues inherent in the assessment context (this issue is discussed in more

detail later in section 7.5.4). Assessors who shared a similar biographical profile as the adult learners in terms gender, culture, language, race and social experiences were sensitive to the different social contexts in which knowledge from experience was constructed and reconstructed. Assessors understood that the expectations of the assessment contexts placed on adult learners in terms demonstrating their experiential learning and knowledge, was different from the world of work. Assessors acknowledged that the knowledge and skills that were part of learners' experiences were generated in real social contexts in which adult learners worked and lived. For example, candidates who worked in rural contexts differed from candidates who worked in urban contexts in the use of materials for the construction. These varied social sites that informed the construction of knowledge featured in the questioning strategies of the assessors.

7.4 Assessors' understanding of the purpose and value of RPL assessment

There were competing discourses that underpin assessors' assumptions and practices with regards to the purpose and value of the RPL process. Through a series of focus group interviews the most prominent views of assessors were identified. These views will be highlighted below.

Some assessors viewed the assessment of prior learning of adult learners as contributing to the social justice agenda. Assessors viewed themselves as agents who provided opportunities for access and redress to adult learners who were denied access to formal education and training in the past. One assessor described the issue of RPL providing redress as follows:

"I have realised that... many people who have the experience, know the job even though they have no proof. These people were disadvantaged in the past ...so after assessing them they could get a certificate" *(Extract from focus group interview no. 1, transcript no. 2).*

Some assessors highlighted the humanistic discourse. The humanistic discourse is based on the belief that all people are capable of learning and developing their potential. Assessors viewed the RPL process as a mechanism of providing positive self-affirmation to adult learners.

Assessors expressed this view as:

"Many of the candidates from the community have not gone to school ... if these candidates are given certificates for what they know and can do... based on their experience; they will be given some pride in themselves. These candidates will be then being encouraged to continue to learn..." *(Extract from focus group interview no. 1, transcript no. 3).*

Assessors believed that the success experienced by candidates in the assessment process will contribute to the "healing" process of individuals and communities who were victims of discriminatory legislations. This "healing" process the assessors believed will contribute towards restoring human dignity and self-respect of adult learners.

Assessors also believed that RPL could provide adult learners with formal recognition of their experiential learning and will increase their chances of finding employment. This belief was described by one assessor as follows:

"There are a number of people who are builders in the community but these people work on short contracts. They are out of a job for long periods of time. With a RPL certificate these candidates could get a job with big contractors..." (Extract from focus group interview no. 1, transcript no. 5).

Assessors also viewed the assessment of prior learning as a technical exercise. They argued that the purpose of assessment was to match adult learners' knowledge and skills against standards to enable candidates to obtain formal recognition. Assessors expressed this technical view as follows:

"I first looked at the knowledge and skills of the candidate and then searched for the criteria, after that I tried to match the candidate's knowledge with knowledge in the unit standard" (Extract from focus group interview no. 4, transcript no 10).

In summary, the following competing discourses underpinned the assessors' view of the purpose and value of the RPL process:

- Political discourse: assessors viewed themselves as agents who provided opportunities for access and redress to adult learners who were denied access to formal education and training in the past;

- The humanistic discourse: assessors' assumptions and practices was based on the belief that all candidates were capable of learning and developing their potential;

- The econometric discourse: assessors believed that RPL could provide adult learners with certification that will increase their chances of finding employment; and

- The technical discourse: assessors believed that the purpose of assessment was to match adult learners' knowledge and skills provided against standards to enable candidates to obtain formal recognition.

From the data yielded from interviews with assessors and observations of assessors' institutional practices, it was evident that assessors struggled to strike a balance between the competing discourses. Whilst assessors consciously challenged the technical role that was constructed by the institution and sectoral procedures, they also attempted to ensure that the assessment was fair, reliable and valid in terms of the institution's and sector's procedure. The influence of the competing discourses on assessors' practices will be examined in the subsequent sections.

7.5   The role of the assessors' in the assessment process

The data revealed that the following roles of the assessors were prominent in the assessment process:

- The assessors' role as the coach;
- The role of the assessor in monitoring the assessment process; and,
- The role of the assessor in recording of assessment process.

Each of the above roles of the assessor will be described and then analysed and interpreted in terms of the conceptual language.

7.5.1 Assessors' role as the coach

Assessors viewed the assessment process as a developmental and formative process for the adult learners. Assessors acted as coaches who supported candidates at the different phases of the assessment process.

From the series of interviews with assessors, assessors described their supportive role in the advice stage of the assessment:

> *"In the advice stage candidates were helped to recall and describe their key experiences...learners were asked to make their claims as to what they can do, and to provide evidence through practical demonstrations to support those claims" (extract from follow-up interview with most senior assessor, transcript no.4).*

During the advice stage assessors intended to establish the nature and quality of the foundational knowledge through use of questioning and by examining the evidence provided by adult learners. Assessors did not exclude adult learners who were unable to provide sufficient evidence in the form of testimonials, and who those had difficulty to articulate their experiences in the advice stage. These learners were given alternative forms of assessment. Assessors conducted some form of pre-assessment of the candidate's knowledge and skills. Assessors allowed learners to support their claims through performing simple practical demonstrations. Based on theses pre-assessment tasks, assessors were able to make inferences about the candidate's experiential knowledge, and candidates were allowed to proceed into the assessment phase.

Assessors used the physical models as a point of reference to guide adult learners who had difficulty reading and understanding the instructions. One assessor illustrated the value of the model in providing access:

"We used the models in the advise stage to orientate the candidate ...we used the model to show them what they have to do before they performed their assessment tasks... during the advise stage candidates used the model to answer the questions we asked them..." (Extract from focus group interview no.4, transcript no. 11).

Assessors used the models to provide access to adult learners who had difficulty reading the instruction sheet.

Once adult learners moved on from the advice phase to the actual assessment phase, assessors provided continued support to these candidates. In the observations of assessors' interactions with adult learners, assessors were found to have used a series of verbal questions and answers to prompt candidates towards "acceptable performance". Assessors did not penalise candidates for not providing the answers to their questions; rather they saw the gap in their knowledge as an opportunity for adult learners to acquire new knowledge. Instead, assessors provided the answers and made candidates familiar with the knowledge that underpinned their performance.

As one assessor has pointed out:

"We don't always expect the candidates to have answers to all the questions. If the candidate cannot answer the question, we tell him the "why's". We give them the answers so that they become aware of why...." (Extract from focus group interview no.5, transcript no. 19).

"We don't mark him down for not knowing the answers. At a later stage I will ask him the question once more to test his knowledge.

Then if he gives me the correct answer, I will mark him as having the knowledge..." (Extract from focus group interview no.5, transcript no. 19).

Assessors also provided support to candidates in the final stages of the assessment process. They claimed that candidates were given the opportunity to identify their errors in their work and were prompted to provide corrective techniques to solve the errors that were identified. For example, one assessor pointed out:

"If the corners were not squared accurately, I will then show them how to correct it...then give them a chance to redo the corners...." (Extract from focus group interview no.5, transcript no. 20).

In this way candidates were given an opportunity to assess their own work and were given a second chance to successfully complete their work. The role of assessors as coaches increased the adult learners' chances of success. Assessors interpreted and mediated the formal procedures and adapted these procedures to meet the needs of the context and the needs of the adult learners, particularly those adult learners who had no formal learning.

The assessors' role as a coach will be analysed using Bernstein's concept of "framing". "Framing" refers to the relationship between the assessor and the adult learners. There was strong and weak framing of the role and identity of the assessor in the assessment process. In terms of the institutional and sectoral procedures the role of assessors was strongly framed. Assessors were constructed as having the power of making judgment of the candidates' experiential knowledge and skills. But, in

practice assessors were responsible for initiating the changes in the framing from strong to weak. Weak framing was evident when assessors communicated in the home language of the adult learners. Assessors viewed the assessment process as being formative and developmental rather than a technical process. Adult learners were deliberately supported throughout the assessment process. Assessors provided support to adult learners to access the standard at critical stages of the assessment process and direct their actions towards achieving the learning outcomes. Assessors were willing to combine teaching and assessing; and made judgments not only on the candidate's initial action, but on the candidate's ability to learn and correct their errors during the assessment process.

The weak framing of the assessors' relationship with adult learners were based on sound moral and ethical values. The following moral and ethical value and characteristics of the assessor to adult learners were prominent throughout the assessment process. Most assessors were:

- Sensitive to learner diversity in terms of language, culture and gender;
- Empathetic with adult learners who had no or limited formal training;
- Conscious of the power vested in them as assessors;
- Committed to the belief that RPL process will allow adult learners to formally recognise their experiential learning and will provide them with access to further learning;
- Aware of their role in building the self-esteem of the individuals by affirming their learning gained through experience; and,
- Providing a pedagogical teaching role when knowledge was initially not evident.

The weak framing benefited adult learners, particularly those who had no or limited form of formal schooling. These adult learners were able to gain access to the recognition and realisation rules. They were able to know and understand (recognise) what was expected of them when they began with the assessment task. The assessors consciously supported adult learners towards realising what was "acceptable" in terms of the standards.

7.5.2 Monitoring of candidates during the assessment process

Assessors claimed that they used the "Assessors Evidence Guide" (refer to appendix 6) as an instrument to monitor the candidates' performance. This official document outlined the assessment instructions, the assessment conditions and requirements, assessment criteria and specifications the assessor must follow in the assessment process. It was observed that assessors interpreted and mediated the formal procedures and adapted these procedures during the assessment process.

From the interviews with assessors, assessor claimed that they observed candidates at the critical moments of the assessment process. At the beginning of the assessment task the assessors claimed that they monitored the adult learners closely. They claimed that it was critical for candidates to be guided in setting up of the task so that adult learners could proceed with the subsequent steps with more chances of success. One assessor described the role played by assessors in the assessment process as follows:

> *"We monitor the different stages of the process… because in some stage you need to question the candidates. We don't observe the candidates all the time. We can't leave them at the beginning; if the candidates make a mistake he could continue with the mistake*

*until the end. This could be a waste of valuable time and money.
So we monitor the candidate at the beginning, where the
candidate sets out their work, somewhere in the middle and at the
end where we check the product" (Extract from follow-up
interview with most senior assessor, transcript no.4).*

In most cases assessors claimed that they allowed candidates to work
independently without any interference throughout the assessment
process. The observations of the different stages of assessment process,
confirmed that candidates were given sufficient space to do their task
without any intimidation. The assessors stressed the importance of
guiding and monitoring the candidate at the beginning of the assessment
process. The close monitoring at the beginning contributed to the
candidates successfully setting up the tasks in line with the required
specifications. The monitoring of the candidates at intervals served a
formative function of providing feedback and prompts to guide the
candidates. At the end of the assessment task, assessor judged the final
product and made inference about the candidate's skills and knowledge.

Some assessors remarked that they found it difficult to be present at one
assessment site for long periods of time since they had to assess more
than one candidate at the same time in different venues which they found
challenging.

Generally, assessors pointed out that they relied mainly on observation
and questioning techniques to judge candidates' performance. They
claimed that they made inferences about the candidate's performance and
knowledge through questioning and observing the candidate's ability to
follow the plan, handle tools, and heed to safety requirements, and
complete the final product.

Through observations it was found that assessors generally had a differentiated approach in dealing with different types of learners. Those adult learners who demonstrated high level of competence at the early stages of the assessment process were judged to be competent even before they completed the assessment task. Based on the inference of their experiential learning, these learners were "accelerated" to the next assessment task. On the other hand, assessors dealt with those adult learner who were "at risk" of not meeting the standard, differently. The adult learners who experienced difficulty in completing the tasks were more closely guided. Assessors used the models to provide learners with appropriate cues and prompt to complete their tasks successfully. Those candidates who made errors in constructing the final product in terms of the specifications were given a second chance. Assessors used the "mistakes" of candidates as an opportunity to prompt adult learners to identify their errors and to allow them to provide remedial measures to correct their errors.

Assessors stated that they consulted the moderator when candidates failed to perform according to the expectations of the standard; or when they were in doubt about the performance of the candidate. The moderator and assessor had to confer on the final evaluation of the candidate. During the observations of the assessment process, it was found that it was assessors who made the final judgment about the adult learner's competence. The moderator was completely absent from the assessment scene.

The role of the assessors in monitoring of adult learners will be analysed using the Bernstein conceptual language. Assessors played an important agency role in enabling adult learners to successfully demonstrate their experiential learning. Assessors consciously enacted their developmental

and supportive role. The assessors' approach weakened the power and control they had over candidates in the assessment process. Assessors allowed adult learners more space and freedom in the assessment context. Assessors challenged the bureaucratic role and identity that was constructed by the CETA procedures. They mediated the rules and procedures prescribed by the sector in such a manner that it did not act as barrier to adult learners within the assessment context

In adopting a weak framing relationship with adult learners, the assessors enabled candidates to exercise some degree of control of the assessment process. The candidates were allowed opportunity to participate in the decisions about their assessment. Particularly those adult learners, who did not meet the standard, were encouraged to assess their own work, to enable them to identify errors and to correct their work.

Assessors' weak framing relations with adult learners, and their approach in providing alternative access to the strong classification that characterised the knowledge in the standards enabled candidates, particularly those adult learners who had limited or no exposure to formal schooling to succeed. This meant that assessors were flexible in providing both access to the recognition rule, and the realisation rules when they judged the competence of adult learners. The actions of these assessors created conditions that pushed against adult learners being filtered out of the assessment process.

The developmental and supportive role of the assessors was consistent with espoused claim that they were campaigning for social justice rhetoric of providing access and redress to previously disadvantaged learners. Assessors were consciously and unconsciously challenging the legitimisation and reproduction the existing hierarchies of power in

society. This was evident when the assessors' loyalties to adult learners were privileged over their bureaucratic role that was constructed by the sectoral procedures in the act of practicing RPL.

7.5.3 Assessors' role in recording the assessment process

In the interviews held most assessors indicated that they found the recording of the observations during and after the assessment process as time consuming. The time spent in the advice and the assessment of candidates was described by one assessor as follows:

> *"You need two hours to advise one candidate. In one day I will be able to only advise four candidates. I will have to assess at least five candidates in one week" (Extract from follow-up interview with most senior assessor, transcript no. 8).*

The assessor also expressed that it took them a lot of time in completing the portfolio and other documents in the advice and registration of the adult learners.

Assessors complained that they spent a lot of time completing the tedious paperwork at the expense of monitoring the candidate's work in progress. One assessor aptly described this in the following manner:

> *"In assessing the candidates I knew that I had to see what was going on, but at times I found myself in the office completing the paperwork whilst the candidate was busy outside" (Extract from follow -up interview with most senior assessor, transcript no. 8).*

From observations it was found that assessors used the recording forms that were provided by the sector. These recording forms were highly structured. Assessors had to tick boxes to indicate between acceptable and unacceptable competence. In practice, assessors filled in the recording forms at the end of the assessment phases. Assessors did not technically match candidate's performance against itemised boxes. Instead, assessors in their close relationship with candidates understood the process that led to construction of the final product and made inferences about the learners' competence by judging the evidence in the form of final product. Only after a thorough understanding of the process and examining the final product did assessors complete the recording forms.

In analysing the recording protocol by assessors using Bernstein's conceptual language, it was observed that the structured assessment environment with complex instructions and recording protocols provided by the sector represented vertical discourse or a mode 1 form of knowledge. There was a contradiction in using elements of vertical discourses to value horizontal discourses of adult learner. Horizontal discourses or Mode 2 forms of knowledge production refer to the application of knowledge to solve problems in particular social contexts. In practice the assessors' approach privileged adult learner's knowledge and learning that represented horizontal discourses and Mode 2 forms of knowledge. The use evidence-based knowledge in the form of models and the valuing of performance by assessors provided a mechanism to value the horizontal discourses of the adult learners. Knowledge acquired through experience represented horizontal discourses. The valuing of horizontal discourses benefited adult learners from informal contexts whose strength was in demonstrating their knowledge and skill through constructing models.

The approach of assessors in challenging the recoding protocol prescribed by the sector made assessors cautious of the risks of judging learners authentic knowledge through the official lens of Mode 1 forms of knowledge. In this way assessors managed the risk of filtering out the authentic knowledge and skills that was connected to experiences of adult learners, and that was bound to particular social contexts of adult learners.

7.5.4 The assessors' view of the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience

The following categories emerged in analysing the assessors' conception of the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience:

- Assessors' conceptions of knowledge;
- Relationship between knowledge, learning and experience.

The data will be analysed in the above categories will then will be described and analysed in terms Bernstein's conceptual language.

7.5.4.1 Assessors' conceptions of knowledge

From the series of interviews, it was evident that assessors' view of knowledge was varied. Whilst some assessors viewed knowledge in the standard as neutral and absolute, most assessors viewed knowledge as socially constructed and relative.

Those assessors who viewed knowledge in the standard as neutral and absolute had the tendency to blindly accept the knowledge in the standard as representing the quality of knowledge within the sector. They did not interrogate whether the knowledge had currency in relations to the

different context in which learners had generated their own authentic ways of knowing. There was a strong correlation between assessors who viewed and valued knowledge as neutral with how they assessed adult learners. From series of observation at different points of the assessment process it was evident that assessors who had an instrumental understanding of knowledge responded technically by looking for direct match between adult learner's knowledge and requirements of the standard. The instrumental understanding was evident from following remarks made by one assessor:

> *"The finish product at the end of the assessment task is checked, to see if the product meets the specifications of the plan and instruction sheet ..." (Extract from focus group interview no. 4, transcript no 10).*

On the other hand, there were those assessors who viewed the knowledge in the standard as socially constructed and relative. Through the observations of assessors' engagements with adult learners during the assessment process, assessors allowed candidates to use their own methods of knowing and doing in performing the task but claimed that their authentic methods had to lead to desired outcome. One assessor described this process as follows:

> *"Whatever steps the candidates follow should lead towards the end product. If a candidates follows his own way of doing the L-shaped roof, I will ask him why he is doing that and how it will help him to move towards the end product. I will keep a close check on his methods of working to see whether it leads towards the final product" (Extract from focus group interview no. 4, transcript 10).*

From the observations of these assessors during the advisory and assessment phases it was also found that assessors used a flexible approach when collecting and judging the knowledge and skills.

During the advisory phase, most candidates from informal and non-formal contexts were not able provide documentary evidence to support their knowledge and skills. Assessors questioned learners who were not able to provide documentary evidence in order to infer from their responses the nature and quality of their experiential learning. Assessors also asked learners to perform simple demonstrations to determine whether the candidates had the knowledge and learning. One assessor highlighted the use of questions in the advisory phase:

> *"Candidates are asked questions to check their knowledge in building; they were asked certain questions... from their responses were can tell whether this person had the experience and knowledge" (Extract from the focus group interview no. 1, transcript no. 3).*

Another assessor pointed out the value of demonstration as a form of pre-assessment to infer the knowledge and learning of adult learners. This was described as follows:

> *"Candidates were also asked to demonstrate their knowledge by performing simple tasks ... you can ask them to show you how to use the different tools...from our observation we can guess the knowledge and skills of the candidates" (Extract from focus group interview no.1, transcript no. 3).*

The use of alternative methods of assessment during the advisory phase to judge adult learners' experiential knowledge provided adult learners particularly those with limited or no exposure to formal education and training an opportunity to move into the next phase of the RPL assessment process.

In general it was observed that most assessors focused primarily on assessing practical competence of adult learners. Assessors inferred the foundational knowledge from the learner's ability to perform calculations or to read and interpret the plan; by examining the final product; and through questioning. The assessment of reflective competence was evident when assessors questioned adult learners to evaluate why they made certain choices within their assessment process when they made errors. This was evident from the remarks made by the assessor:

> *"It was difficult to assess three to four candidate at once... we stood at strategic places to observe the candidates ...we visit candidates at critical points to observe what they had done and to question them...but in most instances we judged the final product " (Extract from follow-up interview with most senior assessor, transcript no. 9).*

The assessors' views and engagement with knowledge will be analysed in terms of Bernstein's conceptual language. The concept of classification will be used to examine how assessors dealt with the relations between the different types of knowledge. There was a strong classification of the different types of knowledge in the assessment context. The assessor privileged performance-based knowledge and evidence-based knowledge. Assessors, through observing adult learners performing practical tasks inferred the performance-based knowledge. These observations were made at the critical moments of the assessment process. Assessors

inferred evidence-based knowledge when they made final judgment about the learners' knowledge through the observation of the finished product. The foundational knowledge of adult learners was inferred by through observing performance; examining the final product; and by questioning the candidates. From the observations of assessors' practices it could be deduced that assessors judged adult learners' reflective competence when adult learners demonstrated their ability to transfer their experiential learning to solve new problems.

Most assessors who viewed RPL as a social process had the tendency to adopt a flexible assessment approach. The flexible approach to assessment involved the assessors searching for a rough equivalence between the performance and demonstration of the adult learners to the requirements of the standard. In adopting a flexible assessment approach assessors positively affirmed the authentic knowledge of learners.

Adult learners were given space to use their own method in performing the task but had to support their decisions with an explanation. Adult learners were also allowed space in the process of performing the assignment task. The flexible approach of rough equivalence benefited adult learners, particularly those who had no or limited formal education and training exposure. The assessors attempted to make meaning of the knowledge demonstrated by the adult learners.

The flexible approach taken by assessors in matching learners' knowledge was due to them having the recognition rule to identify the different types of knowledge. The possession of the recognition rule by assessors was due to assessors having the horizontal discourses as part of their repertoire. Horizontal discourses refer to the informal construction of knowledge and practical application of knowledge. Most assessors

who had the practical experience as builders acquired the horizontal discourse. The horizontal discourses of assessors enabled assessors to understand how adult learners constructed and reconstructed experiential knowledge in the assessment context. The assessors' experience in informal construction of knowledge encouraged them to adopt an approach of rough equivalence.

Assessors stated that they experienced difficulty in understanding key concepts such as "competencies", "applied competences", and "integrated assessment". Assessors had difficulty in accessing the recognition rules in the form of the vertical discourse of the policy and procedure. From the interviews it was evident that assessors appropriated the technical language stated in the sector procedure document. Assessors did not have the power to question the appropriateness of or change the procedures. Assessors however responded by creating their own meaning of the technical concepts and mediated the procedures in a manner that privileged adult learner's knowledge and experiential learning.

The emphasis of the assessment of demonstrated competences made sense given the institution and sector in which assessors operated. Assessors privileged the assessment of performance-based knowledge and evidence-based knowledge since they were influenced by the institutional identity in which they were operating. Assessment was done by assessors in a technical college sector, in a sector where the emphasis was on the assessment of practical competence. In the vocational and technical sector, inferences about the nature and quality of knowledge, are made by the assessor primarily judging the demonstrated actions and by examining the end product.

There was also strong classification that favoured the construction of knowledge by individual learners. From the observations of the different stages of the assessment process, it was evident that assessors valued the assessment of knowledge that was generated by individual adult learners. There was not much consideration for adult learners to generate knowledge by working in a group. Assessors did not have the power and authority to change the sector and institutional procedures that focused on assessing individual learners. In reality, adult learners as workers perform their tasks as part of a team and as members of the team they co-construct knowledge. By emphasising knowledge generated by individual performance, the generation of knowledge as part of a group was ignored. The working as part of the team, as an important critical outcome of the new education and training policy was ignored. In everyday practice it is highly unlikely that a builder would not work in a team, and this social practice was ignored in the RPL assessment process.

Next, Bernstein concept of power and control will be used to analyse the knowledge-power relations within the assessment context. Most assessors opted for finding a rough equivalence between the standards and the candidates' experience. As was evident from the series of interviews most assessor's assumptions of knowledge was based on the view that knowledge was connected to adult learners' experience and constructed in particular historical and social contexts. In this way assessors privileged the authentic knowledge that was demonstrated by adult learners. The observations of how assessors judged candidates' performance corroborated with the view that knowledge was socially constructed. Assessors' practices weakened the boundary between prior learning of adult learners and the knowledge inscribed standards. In this way the assessors' practices pushed against the marginalising and exclusion of the knowledge of adult learners. The assessors' approaches

indicated that they were able to find ways of acknowledging and dealing with the authentic knowledge of adult learners that was generated in different social contexts.

7.5.4.2 The relationship between knowledge, learning and experience

In this section I examine the assessors' view and understanding of the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience. As discussed in the previous section, knowledge was viewed by assessors as inferred from practical demonstrations either through observations or questioning. Knowledge was also viewed as being socially constructed, and as been acquired from and closely connected to experience.

Assessors' definitions and assumption of experience were implicit. However it could be inferred from the interviews with assessors that they assumed that experience was related to specific social and historical contexts. Experience was also inter-related to knowledge, learning and action. For example, adult learners' experience could be related to their actions of constructing houses in the specific contexts either in the community or for the contractor. In their experience of constructing houses adult learners have acquired important learning informally. Assessors understood that recognition of prior learning involved the identification, construction and reconstruction of the knowledge from experience of the adult learners.

Assessors stated that it was learning from experience that was recognised. The learning was recognised if knowledge from previous learning provided the candidate insight into the assignment task and enabled them to competently adapt and apply the experiential learning to complete the assessment task. It was learning from experience that was roughly

matched to the skill and knowledge in the national standards. It was not experience on its own that was recognised.

In general assessors claimed that adult learners who had many years of experience in the particular trade had a deeper knowledge of building or carpentry and were better equipped for RPL assessment compared to candidates who did not have any experience. Assessors believed that there was a marked difference in the performance during the assessment process between those who had many years of experience, and those who had limited experience, but had gone through formal training.

Assessors felt that:

> *"Candidates who had gone through formal training had done certain modules only and had a selective understanding of building or carpentry. Candidates who had worked in the community as builders worked with the building project from start to finish, they had a better understanding. Candidates from the community were able to solve problems creatively, compared to candidates who had only book knowledge" (Extract from focus group interview no. 4, transcript 12).*

Those adult learners who had many years of experience in the particular trade were seen to have a deeper knowledge and understanding of building or carpentry and were seen as better equipped for RPL assessment compared to adult learners who had limited experience.

The relationship between knowledge, experience and learning will be analysed in terms of Bernstein's conceptual language. There was strong classification in assessors' views of learning and experience. Assessors

did not view experience and learning as synonymous. It was learning from experience and not experience alone that was judged. The learning from experience was roughly matched against the learning outcomes of the standard. The assessors' role in matching learning from experience to the specific learning outcome promoted a behaviorist view of learning. Assessors recognised individual learning from experience only to the extent that it roughly matched the standards. Candidates were encouraged to match their prior learning to the external assessment criteria prescribed in the standard. Learning that was outside the standards were considered irrelevant.

There was a weak classification between knowledge and learning. Assessors' practices were based on the assumption that knowledge could be acquired through prior learning and could be formally assessed and recognised. Assessors made inference about the knowledge acquired through prior learning firstly, through observing the performance of candidates; secondly, by examining the evidence produced by adult learners; and finally by questioning learners. Assessors' approaches indicated that they had an implicit understanding of the recognition rules to analyse experience and learning in terms of the theory of experiential learning. The experiential learning cycle is a cycle of growth and development that involves learners in an interactive reflective process, starting from their experiences, reflecting on them, generalising from them and applying them in new situations. Assessors' practices reflected that they prompted adult learners to construct and reconstruct their learning from experience to adapt and apply their learning in the assessment contexts.

In general the assessors had an implicit understanding of the rules to recognise the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience.

This allowed them to adopt a flexible and practical approach that challenged the drift towards the technicist application of institutional and sector procedures.

7.6   Concluding remarks

In this section I will comment on the adequacy of the research methodology and conceptual tools that were used in addressing the research question focusing on the role of assessors. Thereafter the key issues that emerged from the interaction of data and literature and theory will be highlighted.

Focus group and individual interviews with assessors and observations of assessor engagement with adult learners were used as tools to gather data for the research question. The use of interview and observation were seen as appropriate tools since the important "pedagogic" and "evaluative" moments of the assessors' engagement with adult learners were captured. The research instruments and the data collection strategy enabled the researcher to collect adequate and quality data to make important knowledge claims. But, follow-up interviews after the analysis to gather appropriate data could have helped to substantiate claims.

The conceptual language of the theory provided useful tools to describe and analyse the issues of knowledge, learning and experience; knowledge-power relations and the relationship between the assessor and the candidate within the RPL assessment context.

The main issues that emerged from the research will be highlighted.
The present research study has shown the assessors who had shared the similar historical, cultural and linguistic biographical experience had

greater insight and receptivity towards addressing both the visible and invisible barriers experienced by candidate in the assessment process. Assessors' views and actions were based on the assumption that adult learners had acquired valuable knowledge and learning from experience that could be formally recognised. Assessors were conscious of their developmental role in supporting adult learners especially those learners with limited formal learning.

In examining the competing discourses that underpin the assessors' engagement in the RPL assessment process, the developmental approach had the tendency to dominate the RPL process. Assessors challenged the technicist role constructed by policy by initiating weak framing in their relationship with candidates. Assessors made it possible for candidates to access the instructions by using their home language and coached candidates to complete their tasks successfully. The developmental approach to RPL allowed candidates better chances of success. Assessors were flexible in providing access to both the recognition rule and the realisation rule when they judged the competence of adult learners.

The research also highlighted the role of assessors in facilitating the learning and development of candidates during the assessment phase. In terms of sectoral procedures it was during the preparatory/advice phase that the rules, regulations, language and understanding of RPL are clearly explicated to adult learners. In the present study assessors were willing to combine teaching and assessing; and made judgments not only on the candidate's initial action, but on the candidate's ability to learn and correct their errors during the assessment process. Whilst the assessors conducted the assessment in a supportive, sympathetic and non-threatening context, they also demonstrated a genuine attempt to come to grips with knowledge and learning experiences of adult learners.

Although RPL is a power-laden process with group of assessors given formal process of judgment over another, assessors were conscious of the power that was vested in them. Most assessors made deliberate attempts to neutalise the power relations between themselves and candidates.

Assessors had an implicit understanding of the epistemological issues that underpin the demonstrated performances of learners. Assessors had their own personal theories of how to identify and deal with different ways in which knowledge and learning from experience was constructed and reconstructed in the assessment context. Most assessors' assumptions were based on the view that knowledge was connected to adult learners' experience and constructed in particular historical and social contexts. The assessors' approaches indicated that they were able to find ways of acknowledging and dealing with the authentic knowledge of adult learners that was generated in different social contexts. Assessors' approaches also indicated that experience was inter-related to knowledge, learning and action. Assessors understood that recognition of prior learning involved the identification, construction and reconstruction of the knowledge from experience of the adult learners.

Most assessors searched for rough equivalence that promoted a weak boundary between prior experiential learning and knowledge in the standards; thereby creating the conditions that pushed back against the potential marginalising and/or excluding of the authentic knowledge and skills gained by experience. The approach of the assessors created opportunity for inclusive and progressive RPL practice that removed the barriers to learners from informal and non-formal contexts during the actual assessment process.

In the next chapter, the felt experiences of candidates who had been assessed will be illuminated and the emerging issues from the data will be analysed in terms of the conceptual language of classification and framing/ recognition and realisation rules.

CHAPTER 8

ADULT LEARNERS EXPERIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT
WITHIN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In the previous chapter the assessors' views and their roles and identities in the assessment context were described and analysed using the concepts classification and framing, power and control and recognition and realisation rules. This chapter reconstructs and analyses the experiences of the adult learners who were assessed through the RPL process.

8.1   Conceptual issues used to analyse data

Data will be analysed and interpreted at three levels. At the first level the data from interviews with adult learners will be reconstructed and represented as "stories". The interviews with the adult learners attempted to capture the adult learners' recollection of their experiences of the RPL process, their reflections and interpretation of that experience. The "stories" were written in and in the first person to make them as authentic as possible. The stories were reconstructed in a simple mechanical manner to capture the authentic voices of the candidates. Each of the stories was reconstructed from the responses that were in the dialect of the candidate (with the help of a translator). These stories that emerged from the data acted as a valuable mode of inquiry into the experiences of candidates in the RPL process. The construction of "stories" from data can be located as part of much broader approaches within narrative theory. The genre used in constructing the stories in this research represents the use of a conventional narrative strategy. Interviews were used to capture the critical moments of the adult learners' experiences of the RPL assessment process.

In representing the data in the form of stories I attempted to capture the voices of the adult learners (refer to chapter 4 on representing data in the form of stories).

The "stories" were structured into the following categories:
- brief description of the adult learner's biographical profile;
- reasons why the candidates wanted their prior learning assessed;
- candidates' experiences during the different stages of the assessment process;
- relationship with the assessor ; and
- future aspirations of adult learners.

The real names were not used to guarantee the candidates their anonymity.

At the second level of the analysis of data I will examine to what extent the issues that were prominent in data fall within the predetermined/a priori categories. The predetermined categories that were identified were:
- the influence of the context;
- the purpose and value of RPL;
- the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience; and
- the relationship between the adult learner and the assessors.

The third level of analysis I will analyse the emerging issues using the concepts of classification and framing, power and control, and recognition and realisation rules to deepen the levels of abstraction.

8.2   Brief profile of candidates that were selected for the study

The adult learners who were selected were amongst a cohort of learners who were recently assessed through the RPL process and were all awarded formal recognition for their prior learning. In the selection of the sample of candidates there was an attempt to get a balance representation of respondents who had formal education and those who did not access to formal education, and those who were employed and those who were unemployed. There was also an attempt to include candidates who attended the preparatory course prior to the assessment process and those who did not attend the course.

The first adult learner was a 27-year-old African male who completed standard eight and entered into employment as carpenter. After four years of work experience the learner enrolled and completed a nine week construction carpentry course in construction carpentry before enrolling for RPL assessment.

The second adult learner was a 45-year-old African female who completed her standard nine and has no work experience. She enrolled and completed the nine-week construction carpentry course before enrolling to be assessed for her prior learning. She was the only female candidate who enrolled to be assessed in construction carpentry.

The third adult learner was a 30-year-old African male who completed his post matric N3 diploma in carpentry and was employed by the South African Defence Force. He enrolled for the RPL assessment in construction carpentry.

The fourth adult learner was a 50 year old African male who had approximately 20 years of building experience but no formal education nor fixed employment. The candidate enrolled for the RPL assessment in construction building.

8.3 Representation of data from adult learner in the form of "stories"

The stories of each candidate will be described in a simple mechanical manner to reflect the language proficiency and voices of the adult learners. In order to reflect the authenticity of the stories, the stories were constructed to capture the tone and communication style of the adult learners. All candidates did not speak English as their first language. In cases were candidates responded in their home language, the responses were translated with the help of a translator.

8.3.1 The Story of Candidate One

"I am Alfred Setetlanyane and I am 27 years old. I lived in Mafikeng when I was young, and we spoke Tshwane at home. I have a brother and twin sisters. My father left my mother and us when we were all very young. As the eldest son I had to take care of the family. I was forced to leave school when I completed my standard eight at Moqhaka Secondary School in 1993. I then joined the army where I was given the job as an apprentice cabinetmaker. I learnt carpentry by working with an experienced carpenter. I worked in the army for four years before coming to Atteridgeville College to continue my training.

The army enrolled me for a nine-week training course in construction carpentry at the Atteridgeville College. When I completed the course I was asked by the assessor to register for RPL. Although I had a training certificate I agreed to join the RPL course so that I could get the RPL certificate. I felt that the RPL certificate had more value than the training certificate and hoped that it will allow me to get entry into training at the Olifantsfontein Trade Centre.

Before the assessment could start, the assessor asked me what I was able to do. I told the assessor that I was able to build the ceiling, build a L-shaped roof, and hang a door. The new certificate that I was given was proof that I was able to do all that I claimed I could do. The first task that I had to perform was to build a ceiling. The assessor explained the instructions to me. The drawing on the instruction sheet and the models were used by the assessor to make me understand what I had to do The assessor explained the instructions to me. He showed me the drawing and the model. The model really helped me to know what I had to do. I used the model to take measurements and then used the drawing on the instruction sheet to guide me to do the task. I was able to read the plan on the instruction sheet, since I learnt this during the nine-week training course. The tasks that I had to do during the RPL assessment were same to the tasks I did during the training. The training course helped me to perform the assessment tasks more accurately, work with more speed in doing the measurements and in handling the tools confidently. The model was very helpful. I was not happy with the tools that were given to me to do the assessment tasks. The pliers and the tape were not in good condition. I completed the first task before I proceed to the other.

I did not do partitioning before, but my experience as a carpenter helped me to do this new task during the assessment process. As a cabinetmaker I used to divide rooms, I used the same method to partition the room. My experience as a carpenter helped me very much especially, when it came to using the tools, and also when I used the tape to take measurements. I have done some of these tasks that I had to do for the assessment whilst I worked in the army, but the name given to these tasks by assessors were new to me. I was very relaxed during the assessment process. The assessor gave me the instructions and then left me alone to complete the tasks. When I had a problem in understanding what to do, I called the assessor for help. The assessors were very helpful and explained what I had to do by referring to the instruction sheet and the model.

I found the assessment process to be unfair. I did not like the idea of one assessor checking my work during the assessment process and another doing the actual assessments. I think that the assessor did not have all the knowledge to assess my work. The assessor did not ask me questions like why did you do this or why did you not do this during the actual performance of different tasks and at the end of the tasks. I did not know whether the tasks that I completed were correct since the assessor did not give me any comments. The assessor also had to observe and assess more than one candidate at a time. This did not allow the assessor to concentrate on me.
My dream is to enroll for a trade certificates after I got my RPL certificate."

8.3.2 The Story of Candidate Two

"My name is Elizabeth Phaphla and I am 45 years old. I am married with three sons. I went to school when I was nine years old and left when I was in standard eight because I met my husband. I became a housewife, but I wanted to go back to school. When I was young I always watched my father work as blacksmith. I was very interested in what he did and at times helped him, think I wanted to follow in his footsteps. So I enrolled at the Holy Trinity Adult Centre to do my standard eight on a part time basis. I passed standard eight and nine. I also passed four subjects in grade 12 and only need two more subjects to get my matric certificate.

I heard about the courses that were offered at College in the community. When I came to College, the trainers told me about the training courses. I agreed to enroll for the nine-week course in construction carpentry. I wanted to learn carpentry so that I could fit ceilings and doors in my new house that we built. At the end of the course I got a carpentry certificate. Although I was very excited to have a carpentry certificate, I did not have any working experience. This made it difficult for me to find a job, since employers wanted people with experience. I hoped that with a RPL certificate I could easily find a job. Maybe I could get a job as a store-lady at the College or in a hardware store in the community.

One of the trainers encouraged me to register for the RPL certificate. The trainers asked me what I was able to do in carpentry. I told them that I learnt to fit doors, ceilings, partitioning, and wall paneling in the recent course. I went to the College on Monday morning and was prepared for the test. The trainer asked me to fill in the forms and come back tomorrow. I was eager to do the first test on the same day. I was sure that I would pass any test they gave me. At the beginning of each test the trainer gave me an instruction sheet and explained what I had to do. I understood what I had to do. I started with clad roofing on the first day, from there I went to complete the test of wall paneling and ceiling on the same day. Partitioning took me two days. On the last day I did the test of setting out and drawing of a sketch. The trainer showed me how to use the spirit level with the rod and water level. They also taught me to use the dumpy level. One of the problems I had during the tests was that the measurements on the instruction sheet were not the same as the measurements on the model. Let say I had to measure the wall, on the instruction sheet the wall measures 4 meter, but when you measure the wall itself you will find that the wall measures 4.5 meters. In these situations you have to use your common sense.

The nine-week training course gave me good understanding of carpentry, and helped me to be able to pass the RPL tests. The tasks that were given to me in the tests were not new to me since I did the same tasks during the training. I felt that I learnt nothing new whilst I was doing the RPL tests.

Although I was a woman doing carpentry, the trainer was very fair with me. The trainer respected me and was warm and friendly when he checked by work. There was only one trainer who observed and assessed my work. The trainers allowed me to work on my own. I only called the trainer when I had a problem and asked the trainer to help me. At the end of each test the trainer checked my work and made his comments on his notepad. He hardly asked me questions at the end of the test. The trainer had to check on a lot of us at the same time. I had no idea as to how the trainer assessed my work. They showed me my mistakes, as I did not hang the door straight. I did not get angry with them since I wanted to learn from my mistakes. I had to sometimes redo the tasks like re-hanging the door.

My dream is to get a trade certificate and to open my own hardware swap store in the community."

8.3.3 The Story of Candidate Three

"My name is Nkosinathi and I am formerly from Umlazi in Durban. I am married and now living in Nelspruit. I went to Umlazi Technical College in Durban where I did my studies in N1 up to N3. I also worked part-time for four years as a builder in my community. I did not have enough sponsors to continue with my studies so I joined the army in 1994. When I was in the army I applied to do the Engineer's course. In 2000 we were selected at Nelspruit to do the course RPL at Atteridgeville College.

At the College they explained to us about the RPL course. They told us that RPL course would help us who had the knowledge and experience to get a certificate. Even if we did not do the trade test we will have some papers to prove that we know the job. With the RPL certificate we hoped to have the chance to do the trade test.

I wanted the RPL certificate because it was a national and an international recognised certificate. I told the assessor that I had six years experience in the army doing building. I told them that I could do all the tasks that they were assessing such as the setting out, building the foundation, the cavity wall and a block work. The army had given me a testimonial to prove that I was able to do these things. There were other tasks that I was able to do but were not part of the assessment. Before we started the actual assessment the assessors checked my knowledge by giving me a written test and also asked me questions. I also had to do some demonstrations to prove to the assessor that I was able to do the job. The assessors were happy with what I had done and allowed me to proceed to the next stage of the actual assessment.

Before I started the assessment task I was given an instruction sheet. The instructions were very clear and I was able to understand what I had to do. I was also able to read the plan. When I had problem understanding certain things the assessor helped me. They motivated me and gave me advice when I need it. I was given enough time to complete certain tasks. They closely observed what I was doing. Whilst doing the work I checked with the assessor whether I was doing the right thing. He told me that I had to first complete the task before he could tell me what I was doing was wrong. I was not afraid by his presence. When I completed the task the assessors checked my work and showed me my mistakes. I corrected my work .The assessor also questioned me about my final work.

The most difficult task was building the cavity wall because there is a lot of work and you have to be accurate. You have to also use a lot of quarters. There were also new things that I had to do during the assessment like the segmental arc. I had to read the plan carefully and build the arc according to the plan. The assessor guided me to be careful with the number of bricks that I had to use in the center of the arc. My experience as a builder helped me to build the segmental arc. The sort of problems that I experienced during the assessment was that the working area was too small and they were very few helpers.

I felt that the assessor was fair in his judgment and there was a great deal of respect between us. Once I get the RPL certificate I hope to do the trade certificate."

8.3.4 The Story of Candidate Four

This story was reconstructed from the recollections of candidates in the dialect of Tshwane with a help of a translator.

> "My name is Christiaan Mafega. I am forty years old and am married with four children. I completed standard two and had to leave school to start work at a very early age. I worked as a handy man on contact basis for many construction companies. I am a bricklayer and worked mostly on a part-time basis. I built five houses in my lifetime. I worked for many building contracting companies who did not pay me well since I did not have a certificate. I came to Atteridgeville College with the hope that I will get a RPL certificate. With the certificate I hope to be able to earn better wages. After I get the certificate I will like to do more courses so that I could learn more.
>
> I told the assessor that I could build houses. I could do all tasks from trenching to roofing. The assessor told me that I could only be assessed on the courses that they were offering. I did not have any proof. In order to help me to prove my claims I brought someone from the community who had known me for several years and who had seen my work. The assessors listened to the evidence given by the member of the community but asked me a number of questions.
>
> Before I could start the assessment the assessor told me what I had to do. The assessor helped me to understand the instructions. The assessor translated and explained the instructions step by step for me. This was done before I started each task. The assessor was very helpful.
>
> My most important memory about RPL was the building of the arc. Doing this task was very challenging and interesting for me. I did built the arc before but the one I had to build here was very different. I had to use a new method of building the arc. My experience helped me to tackle this new task. I also learnt something new during the RPL, most especially the building of the cavity wall. I did not do this before but was able to tackle this new task. I was able to do this by following the instructions given to me by the assessor very closely. I also read the plan very carefully and found the model very helpful.
>
> The assessor asked me a number of questions whilst I was completing my tasks. He asked me questions about the use of tools like "What was the purpose of the sprit level?" or "Why was there the gauge?" I had no problem with the assessor. I trusted and respected the assessor's opinion. I valued his help in guiding me before and during the task. The assessor closely monitored my tasks. The assessors reminded me of the time and told me to keep the place clean. But I had no say in commenting on my own work. This was the job of the assessor. The assessor was happy with my work. I agreed with the assessor's judgment and saw the assessment as a fair process. I was not given my results and I am still waiting for my results.
>
> I want to come back here to be assessed for the other tasks. I also told the assessors that they should phone me at home and let me know if there are any jobs. I am having very happy with what happened. I hope that more people from the community are told and invited to have their experience assessed and given a certificate."

8.4 Analysis of the "stories"

The following issues will be examined in more detail across the different stories:

- What assumption does the candidate make regarding context?
- What assumption does the candidate make regarding the purposes of RPL?
- What assumption does the candidate make regarding knowledge, learning, and experience?
- What assumption does the candidate make regarding the relationships between the candidate and the assessor?

Each of the above categories will be described and analysed in terms of Bernstein's conceptual language.

8.4.1 Context

The sector and institutional procedures failed to address the linguistic, cultural and geographical contexts in designing the instruction manuals for candidates. According to the observations of performance of and claims made by adult learners, the instruction sheet acted as a "barrier" to adult learners from informal context with limited or no schooling. Refer to appendix 6 for an example of the instruction sheet. The models provided a valuable alternative access for learners particularly those adult learners who had limited formal literacy.

There was a strong classification between the learners who had exposure to formal learning and those who did not have exposure to formal learning. The strong classification in the form of the instruction sheets advantaged candidates who had prior educational and training experience. Adult learners who had exposure to formal context were able

to use the instruction sheet to recognise what was expected of them. They were relatively more prepared and aware of the boundary between the work context and the assessment context. These adult learners were able to cross the boundary from work context to the assessment context by recognising the distinguishing features of the assessment context. The adult learners who had prior formal learning experience were in power to recognise and realise what was expected of them.

Adult learners, particularly those who were at risk of being excluded, relied on the models present at the assessment site. The models helped adult learners to gain an alternative form of access to the recognition and realisation rules. One learner who had limited formal schooling described the use of the model as:

> *"The model really helped me understand what I had to do. I used the model to take measurements and then used the drawing in the instruction sheet to guide me..." (Extract feom the story of candidate 1),*

Adult learners, especially those from informal learning context used the model as their frame of reference to perform their assessment task. These candidates constantly referred to the models at critical moments of their performance of their assignment task. The presence of the model increased these adult learners' chances of success. The use of models demonstrated the viability of non-written assessment tools and methodologies for the assessment of adult learners with limited or no formal learning.

8.4.2 Purpose and value of RPL

Adult learners expressed different purposes and values for wanting to do the RPL course.

The adult learner who was unemployed hoped that the RPL certificate would increase his chances to find employment, and hoped that the formal recognition will help him to set up his own business. The economic purpose for wanting to be RPL-ed was described by one adult learner as follows:

> "I hoped that with I could easily find a job. Maybe I could get a job as a store-lady at the College or in the hardware store in the community" (Extract from the story of Candidate 2).

Adult learners who had both formal education training qualification and experience wanted RPL to provide them with the opportunity to enter into further training. The aspiration of the adult learner for further training was illustrated as follows:

> "With the RPL certificate we hope to have a chance to do the trade test..." (Extract from the story of Candidate 3).

Another adult learner with several years of experience expressed their desire for further training as follows:

> "After I get the certificate I will like to do more course so that I could learn more" (Extract from the story of Candidate 4).

The adult learner with several years of experience viewed the RPL certificate as a means to improve their capacity of earning more income. This view was expressed as follows:

> "*I worked for many building contracting companies who did not pay me well since I did not have a certificate. I came to Atteridgeville College with the hope that I will get RPL certificate. With the certificate I hope to I will be able to earn better wages*" (Extract from the story of Candidate 4).

Adult learners believed that the RPL certificate had a greater social value than the certificate gained through attending training.

> "*I wanted the RPL certificate because it was a national and an international certificate...*" (Extract from the story of Candidate 3).

In analysing the above views, it was evident that there were competing discourses that underpin the views expressed by adult learners for wanting their experience assessed and formally recognised. The economic and humanistic discourse seems to be the most dominant discourse that underpinned the purpose and values of RPL for adult learners. In terms of the economic discourse, adult learners viewed RPL as means to become more employable, and those who were employed viewed RPL as means to improve their earning power. In terms of the humanistic discourse adult learners viewed RPL as a mechanism to gain access to further learning.

8.4.3 Relationship between knowledge, learning and experience

In analysing the relationship between experience, knowledge and learning of the adult learner the following categories emerged. The categories will be briefly described followed by a more critical analysis using Bernstein's conceptual language.

Category One: Adult learner with limited vocational and technical education and training, and no prior experience.

Through interviews and observations it was evident that the adult learner who had limited formal knowledge (through the short course) but no experience in construction carpentry, relied on the short course in preparing them for the RPL assessment. The adult learner described the value of the short course in preparing her for the RPL assessment as follows:

> *"The nine-week training course gave me good understanding of carpentry, and helped me to be able to pass the RPL tests. The tasks that were given to me in the tests were not new to me since I did the same tasks during the training. I felt that I learnt nothing new whilst I was doing the RPL tests" (Extract from the story of Candidate 2).*

The candidate applied her knowledge and learning gained form the short course to perform the assessment tasks. It was highly problematic to have included candidates typical of category one into the RPL process. The candidates typical of group one did not have any experiential learning. The inclusion of adult learners typical of this group indicated how the sector and institutions interpreted national RPL policy.

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Category Two: Adult learner with no vocational and technical education and training but had limited (four years) of experience.

In category two the adult learner had no formal vocational and technical training (except in the form of a short course) with limited form of experience. The learner had four years of experience as a cabinetmaker before enrolling for the training course. Through interviews and observation it was established that the knowledge gained in the short course provided the necessary scaffolding to adult learners to perform the assessment task efficiently with speed and accuracy. This was illustrated in the claim made by the adult learner that they were able to:

> *"Perform the assessment tasks more accurately...work with more speed in doing the measurements and in handling the tools confidently" (Extract from the story of candidate 1).*

The adult learners typical of this group with experience were able to apply and adapt their experiential knowledge to perform the assessment tasks. The application of their learning from experience to solve new problems during the assessment was described as follows:

> *"I did not do partitioning before, but my experience as a carpenter helped me to do this new task during the assessment process. As a cabinetmaker I used divide sections in making the cabinet, I used the same method to partition the rooms. My experience as a carpenter helped me very much especially, when it came to using the tools, and also when I used the tape to take measurements" (Extract from story of Candidate 1).*

The adult learner was able to transfer his experiential learning as a cabinetmaker to solve new problems within the assessment context. The learners typical of this group were targeted by the national policy and by the sector, with the intention of using RPL to address the issues of redress.

Category Three: Adult learner who had no formal vocational and technical education and training but several years of experience (16 years).

In this category the adult learner had several years of building experience but no formal schooling. Through interviews and observation of the adult learner it was established that the learner had a broad frame of reference and a general understanding of construction. The learner had the ability to draw from his own experience and apply his learning from experience to perform new assessment tasks successfully. The adult learner expressed the value of his experience as follows:

> *"My most important memory about RPL was the building of the arc. Doing this task was very challenging and interesting for me. I did build the arc before but the one I had to build here was very different. I had to use a new method of building the arc. My experience helped me to tackle this new task I also learnt something new during the RPL, most especially the building of the cavity wall. I did not do this before but was able to tackle this new task. I was able to do this by following the instructions given to me by the assessor very closely. I also read the plan very carefully and found the model very helpful"* (Extract from the story of Candidate 4).

The candidate's general knowledge of construction with the assessor's guidance enabled the candidate to transfer his knowledge and learning acquired from experience to solve new problem in the assessment context. The learning form experience and the quality of that experience enabled the adult learner to use new methods to perform new assessment tasks. Adult learners typical of this group were also targeted by the sector.

Category Four: Adult learner with theoretical knowledge and years of experience

In this category the adult learner had both the theoretical knowledge and years of experience in construction carpentry. The adult learner described his knowledge and experience as:

> "I did my studies in N1 up to N3. I also worked part-time for four years as a builder in my community...when I was in the army I applied to do the Engineer's course... I had six years experience in the army doing building.... I could do all the tasks that they were assessing such as the setting out, building the foundation, the cavity wall and a block work. The army had given me a testimonial to prove that I was able to do these things" (Extract from the story of Candidate 3).

Through interviews it was evident the adult learner with theoretical knowledge and experience was able to reflect on his previous learning gained from theory and experience to solve new problems in the assessment context. This ability to use learning from experience and theory to solve new problems was described as follows:

*"There were also new things that I had to do during the
assessment like the segmental arc. I had to read the plan
carefully and build the arc according to the plan. The assessor
guided me to be careful with the number of bricks that I had to
use in the center of the arc. My experience as a builder and
courses that I had done helped me to build the segmental arc"*
(Extract from the story of Candidate 3).

The adult learners typical of the above group had the formal learning and
experience in construction, but enrolled into RPL assessment to obtain
formal credits towards specific technical and vocational standards. The
adult learners typical of this group should have been awarded credits at
the advice phase of assessment. The learners typical of this group were
able to confidently demonstrate their experiential learning in the advisory
phase of assessment.

The conclusions with regards to the adult learners' views and
understandings of the relationship between knowledge, learning and
experience will be highlighted and interpreted in terms of the Bernstein's
conceptual language.

The experience and engagements of adult learners indicated that there
was a weak classification between the different types of learners and
learning. Adult learners who had both experience and formal knowledge
had better chances of success since they had both the recognition rule and
the realisation rule. These adult learners with prior formal learning were
not the typical group targeted by the sector for RPL process.

The adult learners who did not have any formal learning were also
capable of drawing from their knowledge gained from the short course

and their general understanding of construction to solve the new problems in the assessment context. The adult learners without high levels of formal literacy were able to demonstrate their ability to transfer abstract and critical thought processes gained form experiential learning to solve new problems in the assessment context.

Although sectoral RPL policy targeted candidates who were typical of category two and category three, in practice a range of adult learners were enrolled for RPL assessment. The candidates (category one) with only formal learning should not have been included into the RPL process, since the candidate did not have any experiential learning. On the other hand, the candidate typical of category four, who was able to sufficiently demonstrate his knowledge and learning during the advice stage should have been given credits for his experiential learning at the advice stage.

In general adult learners viewed their knowledge, learning and experience as synonymous. Candidates expected their knowledge and skills acquired through experience to be affirmed and recognised.

In practice there was strong classification between knowledge in the standards and learning from experience of adult learners. It was observed that assessors only selected the learning form experience that matched the expectations of the prescribed standards. The learning from experience that did not match the requirements of the standard was filtered out. One adult learner described the filtering of their knowledge as:

> "I told the assessor that I could build houses. I could do all tasks from trenching to roofing. The assessor told me that I could only be assessed on the courses that they were offering..." (Extract from the story of Candidate 4).

Those adult learners, who had been assessed in the formal course, had already obtained formal recognition for their knowledge and learning. Adult learners typical of this group should not have been enrolled into RPL assessment to be assessed against the similar standards. The enrollment and assessment of experiential learning of candidates who had gone to the formal course, represents how the concept of RPL and national RPL policy were interpreted by the sector and the institution. However the introduction of the short formal course in building and construction carpentry prior to the RPL assessment provided valuable information for preparing candidates for RPL, particularly for those learners with limited or no formal education and training. The curriculum of the short course was based on standards that were similar to the RPL assessment curriculum. The curriculum provided opportunities for candidates to understand the recognition and realisation rules. It was clear that the nine-week course gave candidates precisely the tools they needed to compensate for a lack of previous formal training. Candidates were given an opportunity to refresh their knowledge and skills and acquire new learning. The adult learners who had gone through the short training course described state of readiness for the RPL assessment as follows:

"... I was able to read the plan on the instruction sheet, since I learnt this during the nine-week training course" (Extract from the story of Candidate 1).

In summing up the important issues, firstly adult learners without high levels of formal literacy were able to demonstrate their ability to transfer abstract thought processes gained from experiential learning to solve new problems in the assessment context. Secondly, the short course provided adult learners with limited or no schooling with the necessary scaffolding for the RPL assessment. Thirdly, most adult learners viewed their

knowledge, experience and learning to be synonymous. In practice adult learners' expectations clashed with the assessors' practices and sectoral procedures that privileged learning from experience.

8.4.4 Relationship between the candidate and the assessors

From the interviews with adult learners and observations of learners' engagement with assessors, adult learners viewed assessors as coaches. Adult learners valued the role played by assessors as coaches in the different phases of assessment. One adult learner described the assessor's role as

> *"Before I could start the assessment the assessor told me what I had to do. The assessor helped me to understand the instructions. The assessor translated and explained the instructions step by step for me. This was done before I started each task. The assessor was very helpful" (Extract from the story of Candidate 4).*

From the analysis of the "stories" of the adult learners, the following roles of assessors were described:

- Assessors explained the instructions to adult learners using the drawing on the instruction sheet and the models at the start of the assessment;
- Assessors translated and explained the instructions in the home language of adult learners;
- Assessors allowed the adult learners space and time to do their work without much interference;
- Assessors helped adult learners to solve the problems experienced during the assessment exercise;

- Adult learners were given a second opportunity to correct their work;
- Adult learners were motivated and provided continuous support and advice;
- Assessors provided feedback to candidates performance at the end of the assessment task; and finally
- Adult learners remarked that the assessor showed them a great deal of respect and fairness during the assessment process.

Candidates viewed the role of assessors as critical in weakening the classification between the formal and informal contexts. This was seen when assessors translated the requirements of the instruction sheet in the home language of the candidate and simplified the instruction by explaining the requirements in familiar everyday language of work and life. This process enabled candidates who were unsure of what was expected of them in the assessment context, to recognise the distinguishing features that made up the assessment context.

Candidates commented that the weakening of framing in the relationship between themselves and assessors happened when the assessor guided them at critical moments of the assessment process to construct the specific text or practice. In this way candidates acquired the realisation rules. As candidates proceeded from the first assessment task to the successive assessment tasks, they progressively had a better understanding and were able to acquire the recognition and realisation rules.

8.5   Concluding remarks

I will first comment on the adequacy of the research procedure and conceptual lens used to address the research question on how adult

learners' experienced and engaged with the assessment process. Thereafter I will highlight the main issues that emerged from the research.

The strengths and limitations of the approach used in the research procedure will be briefly described. The use individual interviews with candidates who in the process of assessment and those who have successfully completed the assessment yielded sufficient quality data to draw important conclusions. The use of transcripts for constructing "stories" provided insights into the perspective of the adult learner. The sample of candidates included all adult learners who were declared competent. The selection of the sample could have included candidates who had "failed" the assessment to provide interesting and contradictory data. The conventional use of the narrative approach in constructing the stories produced very factual and mechanical descriptions of the critical moments of the learners' experiences. They fail to capture a more complex and textured approach to constructing "stories" that the methodology offers.

The theory was adequate in providing a conceptual vocabulary and syntax to describe and analyse the "relations between" and "relations within" the assessment context. The concept classification was useful in describing and analysing the "relations between" the different discourses that underpin the purpose for the adult learners to engage in the RPL assessment process. The concept of control and power was useful in describing the relations within the assessment concept between the adult learners and the assessor. The concepts recognition and realisation rules was useful in describing and analysing how adult learners from different contexts were able to access and perform to the requirements of the assessment standards.

The main issues of this chapter will be highlighted.

The presence of models provided an alternative access for learners particularly to those adult learners who had limited or no formal schooling. The use of models by those candidates who were not able to read English and their ability to draw on their experiential learning enabled candidates to demonstrate a kind of informal critical reasoning skills that is often denied by those who adopt a conservative RPL approach.

The adult learners without high levels of formal literacy were able demonstrate the ability of transferability, abstraction and critical reflextion during the assessment of their experiential learning. These candidates were able to draw on their general understanding of construction acquired from experience to construct objects they never built before. In some cases the construction course attended by learners who had no or limited formal schooling, before enrolling into the RPL process, helped to provide the recognition and realisation rules.

The study had found that theoretical and textual learning need not be the primary avenue for critical and analytical skills. Adult learners with limited or no formal literacy were able to use the models and assessors' verbal explanations to acquire the recognition and realisation rules to produce the "acceptable" text in the assessment context. The research challenges the conservative approach to RPL that places emphasis on theoretical and textual forms of learning in either their curriculum or assessment practices to recognise and accredit the demonstration of critical and analytical skills acquired from experiential learning.

The main purpose for wanting their knowledge and skills to be recognised was dominated by the need to find a job and to get access to

further learning. The economic and humanistic discourses dominated the purpose expressed by adult learners.

Most adult learners viewed their knowledge, experience and learning to be synonymous. In practice their expectation clashed with the assessors' practice and sectoral that privileged learning from experience.

Power and control entered the construction of the identities of the assessor and candidates. The weak framing in the relation between the candidates and assessors contributed to neutralising the power differentials. The candidates viewed assessors as being supportive and helpful.

The use of "stories" in illuminating adults learners' experiences provided policy makers and assessors who implemented policy with a closer understanding of the issues facing implementation. The policy makers and agents who implement policy were given first hand feedback of their anxieties, frustrations, aspirations and expectations of adult learners. In examining the recollections of the experiences and engagements of adult learners, policy makers and implementing agents are ask forced to ask the question: to what extent did policy and practice address the espoused claims of redress and equity?

The final chapter will represent the findings and considerations for policy, practice and theory.

CHAPTER NINE
SYNTHESIS OF MAIN ISSUES, FINDINGS AND
CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY, THEORY AND PRACTICE

The first part of the research orientated the reader to the broad context in which the study was located (Chapter1); described and analysed the selected case studies in international and national RPL policy and practice to identify trends, gaps and limitations and to develop the first set of preliminary lens for the analysis of data (Chapter 2); developed the conceptual framework using Bernstein's theoretical constructs as a second set of preliminary lens for analysis (Chapter3); and described the research methodology (Chapter 4).

The second part of the research addressed the critical foci of research by firstly, examining the official claims of national RPL policy (Chapter 5); secondly, by analysing the sectoral RPL procedures and unit standards that were used by assessors to assess candidates (Chapter 6); thirdly, by examining how assessors assessed and recognised the prior experience of adult learners (Chapter 7); and fourthly, examining the experiences and engagements of adult learners (Chapter 8).

This chapter will constitute the third part of the research. The chapter will firstly develop a synthesis of the main issues in response to the following critical questions; namely,

- What were the claims of the official RPL policy?
- How did assessors assess and recognise prior learning?
- What were the experiences and engagements of adult learners in the assessment and recognition of prior learning process?

Secondly, the chapter will develop a meta-narrative that will identify the emerging findings, by creating a dialogue between the findings, theoretical lens and literature.

Thirdly, the chapter will conclude by examining the considerations of the emerging findings for policy, theory and practice.

9. 1 Synthesis of main issues in the research

The synthesis will highlight the main issues that emerged in analysing data, in response to the critical questions that framed the research focus. The main issues from the analysis will be structured according to the following conceptual issues that emerged from the review of international and national case studies of RPL policy and practice (refer to 2.3):

- Context that influence the formulation of RPL policy;
- The purpose and value of RPL;
- The relationship between knowledge, learning and experience; and
- The relationship between the adult learners and the assessors.

The above issues acted as a first set lens for the analysis of data. The above issues also intersected with Bernstein's theoretical model to produce a second set of analysis (refer to 3.7).

9.1.1 CONTEXT

The following issues emerged from the analysis of the influence of contextual factors on RPL policy and practice. The analysis was based on examining official policy documents, assessors' views and their practice; and adult learners' experiences and engagement with the RPL process.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is one of a number of important policy instruments of the South African Government for transforming the education system of the country. The prime objective is to develop a seamless integrated system of education and training that would span the general, further and higher education sectors. One element of the NQF is the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), designed both to overcome the injustices of the past and to contribute to human resource development. The national RPL policy was crafted within the context of the National Qualifications Framework and related education and training legislations. The national RPL policy was driven by the political discourse of addressing the transformative goals of social justice in the form of equity, access and redress to learners who were previously discriminated. The NQF and RPL policy was developed and implemented in the context of deeply etched inequalities, resource shortages and enormous backlogs.

At the broader level, the analysis of the contextual factors indicated that the official policy failed to sufficiently consider the impact of broader contextual issues, more particularly the impact politics of globalisation on policy formulation. The danger of this failure by policy is that it runs the risk of encouraging institutions to take a narrow instrumental approach to assessing experiential learning. Sectors and institutions could view RPL exclusively as a means to produce a productive workforce to meet the needs of employers; rather than being viewed as a means to address the developmental challenges of the country such as addressing issues of poverty and HIV/AIDS.

Whilst national policy was campaigning for social justice agenda, the analysis of CETA procedures and standards reflected contradictory tendencies in considering the social and cultural background of adult

learners. On one hand the procedures in form of written instruction sheets were blind to the varying socio-cultural contexts from which adult learners came. The procedures and standards failed to sensitise assessors to deal with the psychological barriers such as low self-esteem and lack of confidence experienced by adult learners due to decades of oppression. The use of English, official jargon and complex language in the procedure document and the standards further exacerbated the difficulty in accessing the standards by adult learners. On the other hand the use of models and preparatory course before the RPL assessment process promoted the use of alternative assessment methods and tools to meet the needs of adult learners who had limited or no formal literacy.

In analysing the assessors' understanding of the contexts it was found that assessors who shared a similar biographical profile as the adult learners in terms of gender, culture, language, race and social experiences; were sensitive to the different social contexts in which experiential knowledge was constructed and reconstructed. Assessors understood that the expectations of the assessment contexts placed on adult learners in terms demonstrating their experiential learning and knowledge construction, was different from the world of work. Assessors acknowledged that the knowledge and skills that were part of learners' experiences were generated in real social contexts in which adult learners worked and lived.

Most adult learners concurred with the finding that assessment procedures and methods were insensitive to their socio-cultural context. The adult learners indicated that they found it difficult to read and understand the formal written instructions. The instruction sheet acted as a "barrier" to adult learners, particularly those from informal context with limited or no schooling. But, the presence of models, use of the

preparatory course before the assessment, and assessors' use of home language and flexible approach in assessing their experiential learning helped adult learners to overcome the "barriers" in the assessment context.

Bernstein's concept of "classification" was used to analyse the contextual issues that influenced policy and institutional interaction between assessor and the adult learners. The concept of "classification" was not adequate as an analytical tool for policy analysis. The conceptual language was not sufficient to describe and analyse the complex transfromative policy context that drive RPL agenda in South Africa.

The concept "classification" was however adequate to analyse the institutional assessment context. When adult learners enrolled into the RPL process from differing educational experiences, there was a strong classification or boundary between the learners who had exposure to formal learning and those who did not have exposure to formal learning. The formal written instructions advantaged candidates who had the prior educational and training experience. The adult learners who had exposure to formal context were able to recognise what was expected of them. They were relatively more prepared and aware of the boundary between the work context and the assessment context. These adult learners were able to cross the boundary from work context to the assessment context by recognising the distinguishing features of the assessment context. Adult learners who had no or limited exposure to formal schooling had difficulty to access the written text.

The research had shown that the presence of models, the preparatory course and assessor's use of home language contributed to weakening the strong classification/boundary between learners who had exposure to

formal learning and those who did not have exposure to formal learning. The use of alternative assessment methodologies and tools enabled adult learners with limited or no formal schooling to participate in the assessment process and experience success.

9.1.2 PURPOSE AND VALUE OF RPL

In examining the official policy documents, assessors' views and recollections of experience by adult learners it was evident that the purpose and value of RPL was underpinned by contradictory and competing categories of discourses.

The purpose and value of RPL in terms of the national RPL policy was to address the transformative agenda of the emerging democratic state. Unlike any other international countries, RPL in South Africa had to respond to the contextual challenges inherited from apartheid. RPL was driven primarily by the political discourse in South Africa. It was viewed by policy makers as a mechanism to address the issues of social justice by providing equity, access and redress to learners who have been previously and presently discriminated. On the other hand, the most dominant discourse that influenced CETA RPL procedures and the unit standards was the economic discourse. In terms of the economic discourse RPL was used as a tool to improve the productivity and employability of workers. Clearly there was a gap between policy rhetoric and sectoral practice.

Amongst assessors, the following competing discourses underpinned their view of the purpose and value of the RPL process:

- Political discourse: assessors viewed themselves as agents who provided opportunities for access and redress to adult learners who were denied access to formal education and training in the past;

- The humanistic discourse: assessors' assumptions and practices was based on the belief that all candidates were capable of learning and developing their potential;

- The econometric discourse: assessors believed that RPL could provide adult learners with certification that will increase their chances of finding employment; and

- The technical discourse: assessors believed that the purpose of assessment was to match adult learner's knowledge and skills provided against standards to enable candidates to obtain formal recognition.

Assessors' practices indicated that they adopted a developmental approach to RPL thereby privileging the humanistic and political discourses described above.

The competing and contradictory discourses could be represented in the form of a diagram (refer to table 9.1 below).

Table 9.1: Competing and contradictory discourses that underpin the purpose and value of RPL

	Social justice discourse	Humanistic/ developmental discourse	Economic discourse	Technical discourse
National Policy	Professed			
Sector procedures		Claimed		Enacted
Assessor		Claimed and Enacted		
Adult Learners		Desired and experienced		

The competing and contradictory discourses underpinning the purpose of RPL in official policies and institutional practice reflected the blurring of liberatory/emancipatory, technical/instrumental and holistic/developmental approaches to RPL.

The sector's economic discourse went contrary to the political discourse of social justice. Most adult learners who were formally recognised through the RPL process were not provided opportunities by the sector to access further learning or were not able to find employment. On the other hand, the developmental approach of assessors enabled adult learners to meet their expectations of the RPL process.

9.1.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE, LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE

The following issues emerged from the analysis of the epistemological issues, namely, competing and contradictory views of knowledge; the relationship between the different types of knowledge; the knowledge-power relations; and the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience. These epistemological issues were based on the analysis of official policy documents, assessors' views and practice; and the adult learners' experiences and engagement with the RPL process.

9.1.3.1 Competing and contradictory views of knowledge

There were competing and contradictory views of knowledge expressed in the policy documents. On one hand, national RPL policy advocated a constructivist view of knowledge. Knowledge was viewed as been socially mediated by the different role-players in society. According to policy, the national standards setting process should be inclusive of all stakeholders, and the standards should recognise the rich diversity of knowledge and learning styles that adult learners bring to the assessment situation. On the other hand, knowledge was defined by sectoral procedures and unit standards in narrow instrumental terms. Knowledge was viewed as absolute and neutral and defined as "underpinning competence" relevant to the workplace.

Most assessors had an implicit understanding of the epistemological issues related to RPL process. Assessors had their own personal theories of how to identify and deal with different ways in which knowledge and learning from experience was constructed and reconstructed in the assessment context. Most assessors' assumptions were based on the view

that knowledge was connected to adult learners' experience and constructed in particular historical and social contexts. The assessors' approaches indicated that they were able to find ways of acknowledging and dealing with the authentic knowledge of adult learners that was generated in different social contexts. Assessors' approaches also indicated that experience was inter-related to knowledge, learning and action. Knowledge was viewed by assessors as inferred from practical demonstrations either through observations and/or questioning.

On the other hand, adult learners viewed knowledge as equivalent to their experience. They expected to gain access and succeed based on the knowledge gained from experience.

There were thus competing and contradictory views of knowledge held by the national policy, sector and assessors. In practice, most assessors viewed of knowledge as socially constructed and created conditions whereby adult learners, particularly those with limited formal literacy skills, were able to gain access to and succeeded in the assessment process.

9.1.3.2 Relationship between different types of knowledge and learning, and knowledge-power relations

An analysis of the relationship between different types of knowledge and learning in the national RPL policy indicated that the policy document advocated the integration of education and training. According to Bernstein's theory this blurring of boundary between education and training could be referred as "weak classification" of knowledge.

In advocating weak classification of knowledge, all official policy documents glossed over and failed to deal with the deep epistemological issues underpinning RPL policy and indeed the NQF. The national policy failed to problematise the essentially different and unequal terrain of general education and vocational education. The national RPL policy, framed as part of the NQF based its assumption of integration on the view that there could smooth articulation between education and training, between vocational knowledge and academic knowledge. This assumption was based on the "principle of equivalence". The policy did not problematise the vested power relations that exist between education and training, between vocational and academic pathways and how this could pose a threat to the vision of the integration of education and training.

Unlike official policy that failed to address the different types of knowledge and learning, most assessors on the other hand were implicitly conscious of the epistemological issues that underpin the demonstrated performances of learners. Assessors acknowledged and responded positively to the different ways in which knowledge and learning was constructed and reconstructed in the assessment context. Assessors made inferences about the nature and quality of knowledge and learning from the demonstrated performance of adult learners.

Most assessors who had the recognition rule to identify the different types of knowledge and learning were able to adopt a flexible approach in matching learner's knowledge against the standards. The flexible approach by assessors was due to assessors having the horizontal discourse as part of their repertoire. Horizontal discourses referred to on the informal construction of knowledge and practical application of knowledge. The horizontal discourses provided the tools for assessors to

gain deep insights into the knowledge and learning demonstrated by adult learners. The use of a flexible approach neuralised the knowledge-power relationship between those adult learners who had exposure to formal learning and those did not access to formal schooling. The assessors' sensitivity in dealing different types of knowledge and learning increased the chances adult learners who had limited or no exposure to formal learning to experience success in having their experiential learning formally recognised.

An analysis of adult learners' reflections about the assessment process indicated that there was a weak classification between the different types of knowledge and learning. Adult learners without high levels of formal literacy were able demonstrate their ability to transfer abstract and critical thought processes in the assessment context. These candidates were able to draw on their general understanding of construction acquired from experience to construct objects they never built before. In some cases the construction course attended by learners who had no or limited formal schooling, before enrolling into the RPL process, helped to provide the recognition and realisation rules. The use of alternative assessment tools and strategies, and assessors' approach to dealing with different types of knowledge and learning, neutralised the power relations between those who had exposure to formal learning and those who had limited or no formal learning.

9.1.3.3 The relationship between knowledge, learning and experience

In all policy documents the concepts "experience and knowledge and learning" were not treated as synonymous. In both the national RPL policy document and sectoral procedure document the learning and experience took place against specified learning outcomes in the

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standards. National RPL policy advocated a rough equivalence between the knowledge and learning in the standards; with the knowledge and learning from adult learner's experience. This principle of rough equivalence was based on weak classification of knowledge. On the contrary, sector procedure and unit standards advocated a strong classification of knowledge and learning that involved a technical matching. The sector's technical approach was likely to disadvantage adult learners' authentic knowledge and learning acquired through experience in non-formal and informal contexts.

Most assessors challenged the technicist approach advocated by the sector. Assessors viewed RPL as a social process. Assessors who searched for rough equivalence weakened the boundaries between prior learning and knowledge in the standards; thereby creating the conditions that pushed against the marginalising or/and excluding the authentic knowledge and learning gained by experience. Most assessors were able to implicitly analyse experience and learning in terms of experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984). Most assessors prompted adult learners to reflect on their experience, generalise from them and apply them in new situations. This was evident when adult learners with no formal learning and limited formal literacy skills, were able to solve new problems in the assessment context. The research had indicated that adult learners with limited or no schooling were able to draw from their experiential learning to generate new learning and were able to engage in deeper levels of abstractions and generalisations.

Assessors did not view experience and learning as synonymous. It was learning from experience and not experience alone that was judged. The learning from experience was roughly matched against the learning outcomes of the standard. The assessors' role in matching of learning

from experience to the specific learning outcome promoted a behaviorist view of learning. Assessors recognised individual learning from experience only to the extent that it roughly matched the standards. Candidates were encouraged to match their prior learning to the external assessment criteria.

The adult learners without high levels of formal literacy were able demonstrate high level thought process during the assessment process such as transferability, abstraction, and critical reflexivity. These candidates were able to draw on their general understanding of construction acquired form experience to solve new problems. The use of models by those candidates who were not able to read English, their ability to draw on their experiential learning, their learning during the preparatory course (in some cases) enabled candidates to demonstrate a kind of informal critical reasoning skills that is often denied by those who adopt a conservative RPL approach.

In general adult learners viewed their knowledge, learning and experience as synonymous. Candidates expected their knowledge and skills acquired through experience to be affirmed and recognised. But, in practice they found that assessors only selected the learning from experience that matched the expectations of the prescribed standards. The learning from experience that did not match the requirements of the standard was filtered out.

Assessors' approach to knowledge, learning and experience was critical in determining which learners and under what conditions they are judged. Most assessors adopted a flexible approach of rough equivalence to judge performance of adult learners. This approach helped adult learners who had limited or no exposure to formal schooling to access the assessment

context and experience success. Assessors were flexible in providing access to both the recognition rule and realisation rules when they judged the competence of adult learners. The approach of these assessors created conditions that prevented adult learners with no or limited formal literacy from being filtered out of the assessment process. Assessors' actions challenged the reproduction and maintenance of the divide between those who had access to formal education and training and those who had limited or no exposure to education and training opportunities.

9.1.4 Relationship between the assessor and the adult learners

In examining the relationship between assessors and adult learners in the national RPL policy, it was found that the policy proposed a weak framing in describing the relationship between the assessor and the candidate in the assessment process. For example in terms of the national policy the assessors had to be transparent and collaborative. Assessors had to play a developmental role in the assessment process. The weak framing of relationship advocated by policy between assessor and adult learner attempted to neutralise the power- relations within the assessment context.

Whilst the national RPL policy advocated a weak framing of assessor's role, the CETA procedures and unit standards took a reductionist view of the role of the assessor. The role of assessor was seen as gathering evidence to judge the competence of learners against fixed standards. The strong classification of knowledge and strong framing of the assessors' role at the sectoral level created mechanisms and practices that reproduced the traditional identities of the assessor and adult learners.

Despite the strength of framing national and sectoral policies constructed the role of the assessor as a "gate-keepers". The assessors' role and identity were constructed as one of gathering evidence and having the power to make judgment about the candidates' competence. The assessor had to technically match knowledge and skills of the candidates against the requirements of the standards.

The policy (both at the national RPL policy document and sectoral procedures) failed to point out how assessor should deal with the epistemological issues. The framing relations focused on the regulative discourse between the assessor and the adult learners. Regulative discourse dealt with the nature of relationship between assessors and adult learners. Policy and sector procedures failed to examine the implications of framing on the instructive discourse. The instructive discourse examined how assessors dealt with issues of negotiating the different types of knowledge and learning. The policy did not provide assessors with mechanisms and practices to challenge and change the embedded culture in institutions.

In examining assessors' views and practices with regards to the relationship between the assessor and adult learners, most assessors' played a developmental and formative role in the RPL process.

Assessors were responsible for initiating the changes in the framing from strong to weak, in elements that they had control over. The development and formative role of assessors was described as "weak framing". Assessors constructed their role and identity as a coach, who supported, advised, motivated and allowed candidates to work without any interference.

In adopting a weak framing relationship with adult learners, the assessors enabled candidates to exercise some degree of control in the assessment process. The candidates were allowed opportunity to participate in the decisions about their assessment. Particularly those adult learners, who did not meet the standard, were encouraged to assess their own work to enable them to identify errors and to correct their work.

The research highlighted the role of assessors in facilitating the learning and development of candidates during the assessment phase. In terms of sectoral procedures it was during the preparatory/advice phase that the rules, regulations, language and understanding of RPL are clearly explicated to adult learners. In the present study assessors were willing to combine teaching and assessing; and made judgments not only on the candidate's initial action, but on the candidate's ability to learn and correct their errors during the assessment process. Whilst the assessors conducted the assessment in a supportive, sympathetic and non-threatening context, they also demonstrated a genuine attempt to come to grips with knowledge and learning experiences of adult learners.

In general there were positive comments made by adult learners in describing the relationship with assessors. The assessors were seen as an important resource who helped and guided adult learners to complete their assessment tasks. Adult learners viewed assessors as an important resource in helping them gain both the recognition and realisation rules. Candidates relied heavily on assessors in translating the requirements of the instruction sheet in the home language of the candidate, and in simplifying the instruction in familiar everyday language of work and life.

Assessors' practices challenged the technical, instrumental and rationalist approach to RPL advocated by the sector procedures. Assessors' translated the rhetoric of social justice of national policy into institutional practice that contributed to a developmental approach to RPL. Assessors' developmental approach challenged the marginalisation and even exclusion of adult learners who were previously denied access to formal knowledge and learning.

9.2 Emerging Findings

The findings will be categorised under conditions that either contributed to or acted as a barrier to meeting the national transformative goals of social justice such as equity, access and redress to adult learners, particularly those who had been historically denied access to formal learning.

9.2.1 Opportunities

In this section I will examine the conditions that contributed to national policy, sectoral procedures and institutional RPL practice in meeting the agenda of access, redress and success of learners, particularly those who have been historically denied access to formal learning. The section will examine to what extent RPL policies, practices and agencies challenged the status-quo and contributed to effective social change.

9.2.1.1 The CETA RPL procedures provided clear technical guidelines for implementation.

The Construction Sector and Training Authority were the pioneers amongst the Education and Training Authorities in designing and

developing a fully fledged RPL system. The CETA assessment procedures, methods, instruments, quality management system and administrative system despite its technical orientation provided clear guidelines that enabled the institutional sites to implement the RPL process.

9.2.1.2 The use of Mode 2 methods (horizontal discourse) provided access and recognition rules to adult learners.

The conception of knowledge at policy and practice levels challenged the dominant Mode 1 form of knowledge production (vertical discourses) that was based on formal disciplinary forms of knowledge. The sector's use of Mode 2 methods (horizontal discourses) in the assessment process provided access and recognition rules to adult learners, particularly those who had limited literacy skills. First, the use of the models provided adult learners with alternative forms of access to the formal written instructions. Second, the assessment of the final product by assessors to judge the learners' competence privileged Mode 2 forms of knowledge.

The use of models and the valuing of practical performance provided a mechanism to value horizontal discourse of the adult learners. The valuing of horizontal discourses benefited adult learners from informal contexts, whose strength was in practically demonstrating their knowledge and learning acquired through experience. The reliance on the Mode 2 forms of knowledge production (horizontal discourses) favored adult learners from informal learning backgrounds who had limited or no exposure to formal learning.

9.2.1.3 Assessors played a critical role in providing enabling conditions for the adult learners.

Assessors viewed RPL as a social process whereby assessors intertact with candidates to facilitate the construction and reconstruction of knowledge and learning from experience. Assessors viewed knowledge as being connected to adult learners' experience and constructed and reconstructed in particular historical and social contexts. In this way assessors privileged the authentic knowledge that was demonstrated by adult learners. Assessors' practices weakened the boundary between prior learning of adult learners and the knowledge inscribed standards.

Assessors who were culturally and socially sensitive to the RPL process were tuned to the needs of the adult learners. Assessors challenged the technicist construction of their identity advocated by the sectoral policy. Assessors' supportive and developmental approach played an important role in enabling adult learners to demonstrate their knowledge and learning acquired from experience. The weak framing of the assessors' relationship with adult learners was embedded by moral and ethical values throughout the assessment process. Assessors showed great deal of respect and empathy for adult learners throughout the assessment process.

The developmental RPL approach adopted by assessors contributed to adult learners gaining access and experiencing success. Assessors were aware that the role they enacted as developmental agents contributed to an inclusive and equitable RPL approach.

9.2.1.4 The scaffolding of learners in the form of training before the RPL assessment increased their chances of success.

The scaffolding of learners in the form of training before the assessment increased the chances of success of adult learners, particularly those with no or limited exposure to schooling. The short formal course in building and construction carpentry prior to the RPL assessment provided those learners with limited or no formal education and training exposure the necessary recognition and realisation rules. The adult learners were able to refresh their knowledge and skills and acquire new learning during the short course. Those who were given the short course before the RPL assessment were able to gain the recognition and realisation rules. These adult learners, particularly those with limited or no schooling had increased chances of success.

The present study challenges the conservative view that formal educational sites are the only basis for knowledge acquisition and critical reflexivity. Adult learners without high levels of formal literacy used models, and sometimes aided by the short preparatory course to compensate for the formal knowledge, were capable of transferable, abstract and critical thought processes. Adult learners with limited or no formal learning were able to demonstrate that they were able to reflect on their experiential learning to solve new problems in the assessment context. By acknowledging the different types of knowledge, assessors' RPL practice neutralised the power relations between adult learners who had exposure to formal learning and those who were denied access.

9.2.2 Constraints

In this section I will examine the conditions that acted as a barrier to national, sectoral RPL policy and institutional practice in meeting the

agenda of access, redress and success of adult learners. This section will also examine how RPL policies, practices and agencies contributed to symbolic control and reproduction of existing social inequalities.

9.2.2.1. National RPL policy failed to sufficiently acknowledge and deal with the impact of global socio-cultural and economic shifts on RPL practice.

In the broader context of the transformation of education and training, the emphasis of RPL policy was directed by addressing the political goals of social justice in the form of equity, access and redress. With its preoccupation with addressing the political goals, RPL policy neglected to acknowledge and deal adequately with the broader contextual issues of global socio- cultural and economic pressure on RPL practice. The policy document failed to provide clear guidelines to sectors and institutions to challenge the economic pressures of globalisations. This policy gap ran the risk of contributing to sectors and institutions adopting a narrow technical, instrumental and rational approach to RPL. In the present study the instrumental approach to RPL was evident in sectoral procedures that focused on assessing prior learning of adult learners, primarily in terms of responding to the needs of the employer and market changes. The response to market changes will only contribute to the employment of few workers, leaving the majority jobless. The danger of adopting a narrow focus on economic goals is that this could be done at the expense of RPL policy and practice neglecting the developmental and reconstructive challenges facing the country, such as addressing poverty, unemployment and combating of HIV/AIDS.

9.2.2.2 The national RPL policy and sectoral procedures ignored local contextual realities experienced by adult learners for whom the policy was intended.

The national policy and sectoral procedures failed to acknowledge the different barriers to learning experienced by adult learners particularly those from the informal sector.

First, the language of the national RPL policy and sectoral procedures were too complex for both assessors and adult learners. The policy and procedure documents were laden with policy jargon, thereby making it inaccessible to assessors and adult learners. Assessors found it difficult to recognise and access the meaning of the concept used in the policy documents. Assessors had difficulty to understand the meaning of key concepts used in assessment. For example, concepts such as "integrated assessment", "competencies", "embedded knowledge", and "unit standards" posed difficulty for assessors. Assessors found it difficult to understand how these concepts related to each other and their relationship with the structures of South African Qualifications Authority. Adult learners, particularly those whose did not speak English as a first language and had poor formal schooling found it difficult to read the complex language.

Second, the sector procedures failed to address the psychological barriers experienced by the majority of adult learners who were victims of the discriminatory policies of the apartheid system. Most of these adult learners needed supportive and enabling conditions to restore their self confidence and self esteem to enable them to recognise their knowledge and learning acquired through experience.

Third, the use of a "portfolio" as a method of assessment acted as a barrier particularly for adult learners from the informal sector. In the advise stage the retrospective evidence gathering exercise did not favour adult learners who had no or limited exposure to formal learning. These adult learners had no indirect evidence such as testimonials, certificates and references to support their claims. Adult learners especially those who had no exposure to formal learning were further limited by difficulty to articulate their supporting evidence due to limited literacy skills. The portfolio was an ineffective means of assessing prior learning of workers from the informal context. Harris (2000:42) makes a similar point by pointing out the adult learners who are likely to succeed in RPL in traditional institutional contexts will be those who already possess the cultural capital and this is likely to be those who have previous formal education and/or who are middle class.

9.2.2.3 The official RPL policies and procedures failed to meet the aspirations of adult learners.

Policies and procedures failed to provide adult learners access to further learning as part of the continuum of life long learning and opportunities for employment. The sector RPL policy focused on adult learners seeking redress. The target group that needed redress included workers who were employed, under-qualified, semi-skilled and/or unemployed workers. The adult learners who enrolled into the RPL process wanted access to further education and training and employment opportunities. But, the focus of the sector RPL project was certification as an end in itself. The sector failed to link learners to either further training opportunities or employment opportunities. Adult learners expressed different expectations that were not met by the RPL process. Adults who received certification wanted access to further training. Adult learners who were

employed wanted to up grade and improve their qualification in order to improve their earning power. Those who were unemployed wanted to RPL process to provide them opportunities for employment. The sector failed to meet the aspirations and expectations of both learners who were employed and unemployed.

9.2.2.4 The national RPL policy and sectoral procedures failed to acknowledge and deal with the deep epistemological issues.

First, national RPL policy reflected the inherent problems of the National Qualifications Framework of attempting to integrate all types of knowledge and learning into a single qualification framework across all bands and levels. In arguing for the integrated approach of linking education and training, theory and practice, manual and mental ability, the RPL policy was inclined to promote the search for "principle of equivalence" between assessing vocational knowledge and learning with disciplinary knowledge and learning at that level and band of the NQF framework. The national RPL policy and indeed the NQF failed as Young (2003:17) highlights the need to explicitly recognise the tension between the "principle of equivalence" and the "principle of difference" and recognise the different types of knowledge and different types of learning. The danger of not acknowledging and addressing the "principle of difference" between two different forms of knowledge and types of learning has led to the practice of assessing vocational knowledge and learning (a mode 2 form of knowledge production) using the lens of mode 1 forms of knowledge production. The highly structured procedures of the sector in recording the assessment of the learners represented mode 1 forms of operation. These highly structured technical procedures were used to judge knowledge and learning generated in informal contexts representing mode 2 form of knowledge production.

The use of highly structured procedures disadvantaged adult learners, particularly those who had no or limited exposure to formal learning.

Secondly, the sectoral procedures were based on the technical searching for direct equivalence of the knowledge and learning in the standards with the experiences of adult learners. The technical approach to recognise adult learners' knowledge and learning from experience was based on the behaviourist view of learning. The assessment procedures advocated the view that the knowledge of adult learners had to be matched against prescribed knowledge and learning stated in the standards.

Further, the procedures failed to deal with the epistemological issues of how to deal with boundaries between the knowledge and learning in the standards, with other forms of knowledge and learning acquired in informal/non-formal contexts. In this way the standards and procedures created the risk of filtering out the knowledge and learning that was outside the standards.

Finally, the shift in Mode 2 knowledge production at the sectoral level did not bring a re-conceptualisation of the meaning of learning. National RPL policy viewed learning as a "social process" and learners engaged in learning based on foundational, practical and reflective competencies. The sectoral procedures on the other hand viewed learning as largely practical and an individual practice. The assessment was highly individualistic and no attempt was made to assess learners in group or the social context of learning.

In failing to address the deep epistemological issues, national RPL policy and sector procedures failed to challenge the traditional assessment assumptions and practices held by different agents at institutional levels.

The main findings of the study have been summarized in the Table 9.2 below.

Table 9.2 Summary of the main research findings

1. Opportunities: Conditions that contributed to RPL policy and practice meeting the social justice agenda
1.1 The CETA RPL procedures provided clear technical guidelines for implementation
1.2 The use of Mode 2 methods (horizontal discourses) provided access and recognition rules to adult learners
1.3 Assessors played a critical role in providing enabling conditions for the adult learners
1.4 The scaffolding of learners in the form of training before the RPL assessment increased their chances of success.

2. Constraints: Conditions that contributed to RPL policy and practice acting as a barrier to meeting the social justice agenda.
2.1 National RPL policy failed to sufficiently acknowledge and deal with the impact of global socio-cultural and economic shifts on RPL practice
2.2 The national RPL policy and sectoral procedures ignored local contextual realities experienced by adult learners for whom the policy was intended
2.2 The official RPL policies and procedures failed to meet the aspirations of adult learners
2.4 The national RPL policy and sectoral procedures failed to acknowledge and deal with the deep epistemological issues.

9.3 Considerations for policy, theory and practice

Although the research is located within the vocational FET sector the conceptual issues raised could be applicable across the different sectors and bands of learning.

9.3.1 Policy considerations

The following section will examine the considerations of policy at national, sectoral and institutional level.

9.3.1.1 National policy level

First, national RPL policy needs to guide sectors and institutions to guard against the negative effects of globalisation. Globalisation has a homogenising effect on values and culture and conceptions of knowledge. The global economy links-up "everything that is valuable according to dominant values and interests, while disconnecting everything that is not valuable, or becomes devalued" (Castells, 1998). Globalisation defines knowledge systems in westernised and scientific terms. The process of globalisation legitimises knowledge that matches the dominant values and interest. A transfromative RPL policy in South Africa should challenge the privileging of dominant western values and interest, and westernised conception of knowledge.

Globalisation also has the tendency to commodify education and reduce its importance to narrow market forces. RPL could be seen exclusively as a means to prepare individuals for jobs or to improve their skills to become more economically productive, thereby producing small core highly skilled, flexible and competitive workforce to meet the needs of the employer. South African RPL policy should inform sectors and

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institutions to guard against the narrow instrumental and technical understanding of RPL.

National education and training policy generally, and in this instance RPL policy, should refocus beyond the restrictive role of education and training for economic growth. National education and training policies need to refocus the policy vision on the holistic development of the individual and towards contributing to the political and cultural reorganisation of society. This is referred to as a shift from an economy-driven education system to education-led economy (Young, 1997:7).

The national RPL policy should be linked directly to the promotion of the reconstruction and development of communities. This will mean assessing knowledge and learning of adult learners and providing education and training opportunities for informal sector. This could take the form of creating opportunities for self-employment. In this way the assessment of prior learning could be extended to communities to play an active and positive role to address issues of unemployment, poverty and HIV and AIDS.

Second, the analysis of official RPL policy (Chapter 5) has identified that the top-down approach taken in providing an implementation strategy for the sectors was flawed. The policy implementation strategy ignored the problems on the ground. In assessing the policy implementation strategy, the following questions needs to be addressed:

- What assumptions does policy make about the implementation process?
- How do different implementing agents understand these policies and their translation into practice?
- What strategies are devised to implement policies?

- Under what conditions and through which means is the implementation process envisaged?

National policy should consider the use of the "backward mapping approach" as an alterative approach to understand policy implementation strategies. According to Elmore (1980:1). backward mapping is defined as:

> "...backward reasoning from the individual and organisational choices that are the hub of the problem to which the policy is addressed, to the rules, procedures and structures that have the closest proximity to those choices, to the policy instruments available to affect those things and hence to feasible policy objectives".

The advantage of beginning with concrete behaviour and focusing on delivery-level mechanism for affecting that behaviour is that it focuses attention on reciprocity and discretion. It emphasises that it is not policy or the policy maker that solves the problem but someone with immediate proximity. Policy can direct individual's attention towards a problem and provide them an occasion for the application of skill and judgment, but policy cannot solve the problems. Hence, the connection between the problem and the closest point of contact is the most critical in providing a strategy for implementation. The backward mapping approach points to the issue that policy implementation strategy should capitalise on discretion of agents as a devise for improving the reliability and effectiveness of policies at the institutional level (Elmore, 1980). The focus of policy should be on building the capacity of implementing agents – the institutional capacity of managers and assessors in the assessment process. This bottom-up reform process will attempt to

narrow the gap between nationally driven policy agendas involving SAQA and other influential key players, and practices "on the ground" defined by different players with different interests.

Third, the articulation between vocational and technical unit standards and whole qualification standards needs to be negotiated with respective sectors and role players. The vocational and technical unit standards should be linked to general education orientated standards such as numeracy and communication and life skills. In this way aspects of vocational qualification would be linked to general education. Refer to figure 9.1 that illustrate the link between vocational standards and general education standards.

Figure 9.1 Link between vocational standards and general education standards
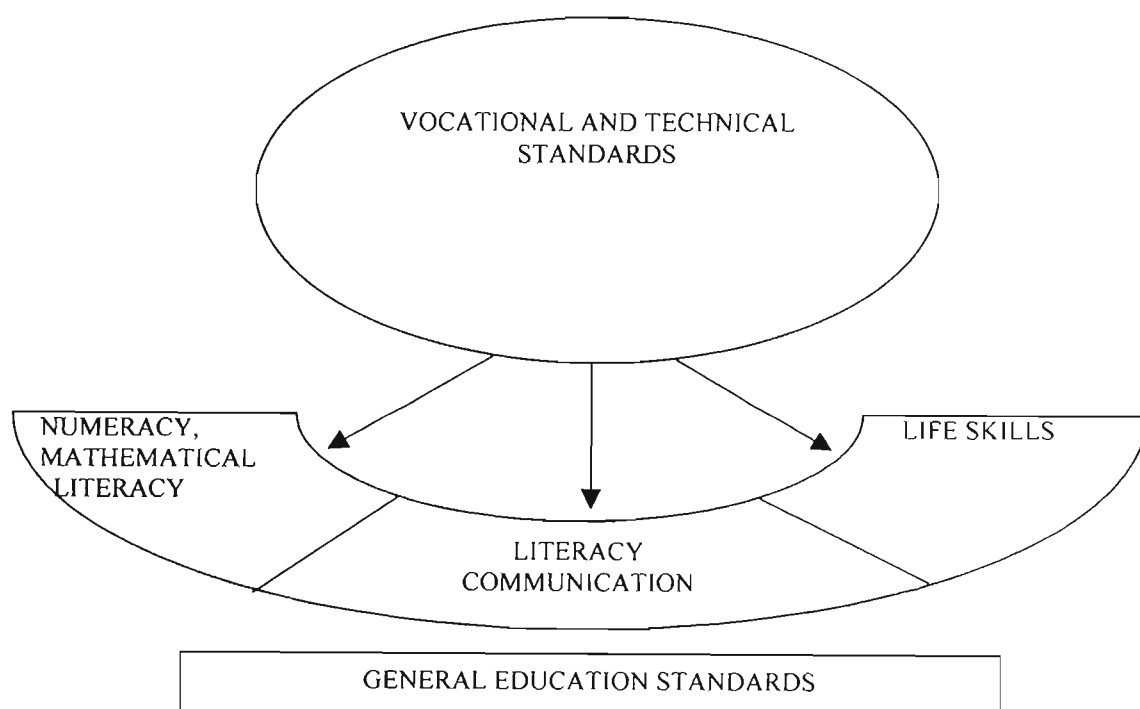
In terms of the Review of the NQF (DoE and DoL, 2000b) regulations on Fundamental Learning should not be prescriptive but serve as guidance,

as to allow standards setting bodies to take account of the varied needs of learners. This linkage will facilitate and realise the policy vision of an integrated approach to education and training, thereby contributing to the holistic development of learners.

Fourth, the standards setting process should respond to the source and substance of knowledge production in different contexts. National standards setting process should be more inclusive and representative of different stakeholders. The standard setting process should guard against entrenching the uneven power relations that exists between and among the different and training stakeholders. The interests of the powerful constituencies needs to be challenged, if not this could lead to the powerful and privileged entrenching their interests in the generating of knowledge. The constituency that represents the interests of the marginalized practitioners and learners are not well organised and have differential access to power, resources and uneven capacities. The interests and aspirations of the assessors and learners need to be represented and given a voice in the standards generating process.

The existing standards in construction carpentry and building should be reviewed if it is to contribute to the holistic development of the individuals. The standard setting process should focus on theorising about the epistemological issues related to vocational and technical knowledge and learning. The standards should affirm the outsider knowledge - authentic knowledge and learning generated in informal and non-formal contexts. The outcomes and assessment criteria should shift from the existing emphasis on practical and foundational competence to addressing reflexive competence. The reflective competence should focus on learner having the ability to critically reflect on their own experience by reviewing their existing practice. Reflective competence and higher

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levels of abstraction is only possible if standards and the curriculum/learning programme link learners' knowledge and learning form experience to theoretical knowledge. The relationship between experience and theory is illustrated by model put forward by Michelson (1998) refer to figure below:

Figure 9.2 Relationship between experience and theory

Social Context of Practice
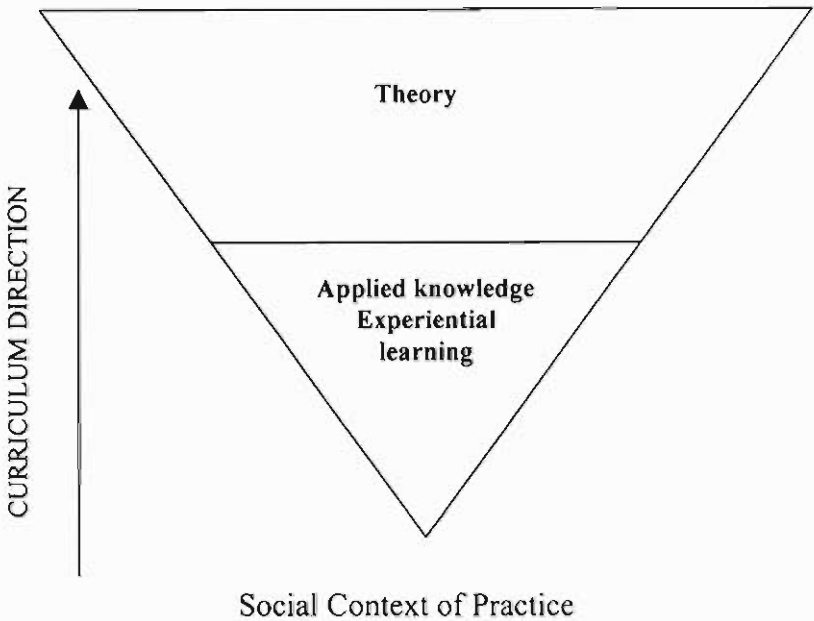
The design of the standards and curriculum should start by find ways of affirming knowledge and learning from experience that is located in particular social context. Thereafter the standards and curriculum should link learning from experience to theoretical knowledge. The linking of experiential learning with theory will provide opportunities for learners to access higher levels of knowledge and learning on the NQF.

9.3.1.2 Sectoral policy level

At the sectoral policy level, there should be shift from providing technical formulaic specifications for institutional practice. Sectoral procedures should interrogate the complexities of knowledge, the assessment process and the context of assessment.

First, the Construction Education and Training Sector should develop its own sector related RPL policy and provide a clear implementation strategy to manage the change process. The sector should develop a RPL policy that is framed by national RPL policy, but the sector policy should address the peculiarities and complexities of the context. The sector should also develop a strategic plan using the backward mapping process to prioritise the points of intervention to challenge the inequalities of the past.

Second, the sector procedures and the guidelines to assessors should be sensitive to the socio-cultural context of adult learners, particularly those learners from informal and non-formal contexts. The sectors guidelines should be written in simple language free of the jargon of official policy. A glossary of definitions should accompany all documentation. Instructions sheets should also be available in the language of the candidate so that the candidate decodes the instructions.

As the system matures the assessors' capacities need to be built to enable them to prepare contextually relevant assessment materials. Assessors should also have the capacity to be flexible in selecting appropriate assessment methods to match the learning style of adult learners.

Third, the sector should provide institutions with a clear guideline framework to enable them to deal with different types of knowledge and learning. RPL policy and practice should challenge the homogenising effect of globalisation on knowledge, values and culture, by affirming the indigenous and diverse cultural knowledge systems. Policy should challenge the assumptions of what counts as knowledge. As Gogh (cited by Hoppers 2001) points out:

> "knowledge systems including western science should be recognised as sets of local practices, so that it can be possible to decentre them and develop a framework within which different knowledge traditions can be equitably compared, rather than absorbed into an imperialist archive".

The sector needs to challenge the existing hegemony of power represented in the standards by finding ways to include knowledge generated in informal and non-formal contexts.

Finally, the sector should promote closer collaboration and partnerships between different role players in order to develop a holistic human resource development strategy. In the instance of the research there was a need for a partnership between the sector, the training provider, SAQA and the Department of Education and the Department of Labour in developing a RPL strategy for the sector. According to the NQF review (DoE and DoL, 2002b) the Departments of Education and Labour working closely with SAQA should assert their strategic leadership of implementing the NQF and in this instance the RPL process. This inter-governmental linkage will provide opportunities for graduates from the RPL process, particularly those who are unemployed and are from the informal sector to be placed in employment. According to Kraak (1994a)

the development of an integrated system of education and training has a radical meaning only if it is linked to corresponding institutional reforms in the labour market and in the economy. The cooperative and coordinated approach amongst different partners is necessary to ensure successful implementation of a human resource strategy.

There should also be cross sector collaboration in the design of a vocational and technical qualification at NQF level 4. For example, entrepreneurship knowledge and learning located in the Commerce Sector should be linked to the technical and vocational knowledge and learning located in the Construction Sector.

The inter-sector collaboration will also create opportunities for networking amongst different sectors. The sharing of experience and information through networking will help sectors to broaden their knowledge base and will also help sectors to avoid duplication of costs.

9.2.1.4 Institutional RPL policy level

The research findings have the following consideration for institutional policy.

First, at the institutional level, the institution should use the sector RPL policy as a guideline to develop their own RPL policy and procedures in order to meet individual needs and to suit the institutional context.

Second, the intended changes advocated by RPL policy need to be institutionalised in structures, cultures and practices. As Taylor (1997:172) points out that "in the institutionalisation of progressive change, considerable thought needs to go into how change can be effected in relation to these structural, cultural, administrative,

ideological and personal elements of the system into which policy is introduced ". I will provide examples of how changes advocated by RPL policy could be institutionalised. Structurally, institutions should locate RPL at the learning programme level in order to establish a close link between the assessment and recognition of prior learning and mainstream curricula. Administratively, RPL services can be located at the central office level, the function of this office should be limited to publicity and marketing of RPL services. The actual advisement and assessment function should be located within the programme level. The institutional RPL policy and the structural location of RPL will help facilitate a change in attitudes and practices of agents responsible for implementing RPL. Trainers and educators who have the authority to engage with mainstream curricula codes will be inclined to accept the assessment of prior learning as a credible and legitimate educational practice. Credits acquired from prior learning assessment will also be accepted without resistance, as an alternative form of entry or as a means of advance standing within learning programmes. There will be gradual cultural change within institutions, whereby key agents will accept the status of the standards acquired through RPL process as equal to the standards gained through traditional means.

9.4 Practical considerations

The following practical consideration could be made from the research findings.

The education and training institutions should provide opportunities for learning and development of adult learners at the following critical phase of the RPL process.

Firstly, adult learners who are unable to provide sufficient evidence at the pre-assessment phase should be allowed to proceed to a learning development phase. The purpose of this learning intervention will be to provide the adult learners with the recognition and realisation rules before they are given a second chance for the assessment of their prior learning.

Secondly, adult learners who "fail" the assessment should proceed to a learning development phase that will help build their knowledge and skills base.

Thirdly, successful adult learners should be given counselling and advice about further learning opportunities. The close link between assessment and recognition of prior learning, and learner development will ensure that RPL policy and practice move towards meeting the policy vision of promoting life long learning.

In addition to providing adult learners the opportunities for development, there should also be provision for continuous professional development of assessors. Assessors should continuously develop their pedagogical and assessment knowledge and skills. Assessors should reflect on their practices and share good assessment practices with colleagues. Assessors should build their capacity to adapt the materials to match the learning style of adult learners, to develop their own assessment materials that are accessible to second language speakers, and appropriate for learners form different contexts. Assessors should build, as Young (2003) refer to "communities of trust" within the institution by working with each other. The professional development of assessors will contribute towards effecting change in both organisational culture and practices.

Finally, the research has shown the need for a corps of assessors who represent the full range of the South African workforce. Sectors need to train assessors with similar biographical background as the adult learners they are assessing so that assessors understand not only their technical role, but RPL assessment as a social process.

9.5 Theoretical considerations

The first part of this section will establish how the discursive gap between the conceptual language used in the research, and the analysis and interpretation of official RPL policy will be addressed.

The second part will illustrate theoretical model that emerged from the present research study.

9.5.1. Addressing the discursive gaps that emerged in policy analysis

Bernstein's theory of cultural production, reproduction and symbolic control concentrated on the interactional situations located within institutions. In this research the conceptual tools provided by Bernstein's theory was extended to examine policy. The concepts used in the theory, namely "relations between" categories and "relations within" interactional situations were useful in analysing policy, in relation to the nature of knowledge, knowledge power-relation, and the relationship between the assessor and adult learners. However, the conceptual language was limited in analysing the impact of the contextual realities of a developing state on the RPL policy and practice. In order to address the discursive gap, the present study identified the need for a broader theorisation of the concept "policy" and policy analysis within Bernstein's framework.

The important theoretical assumptions of what constitutes policy and policy analysis will be briefly described. Thereafter the key questions that frame policy analysis will be outlined in an attempt to address the discursive gap in the research.

In using the definition provided by Taylor (et al., 1997) as a frame of reference the present study has identified the following critical issues in defining the concept "policy" and the policy process:

• Policy as more than text: Policy could firstly be referred to as text that includes a set of instructions or intentions. In the present study analysis of the RPL policy included examining the contents and the conceptual coherence of policy. But policy can be seen as more than the text. Policy analysis includes the examination of the nuances and subtleties of the historical, political, social, economic contexts which gave meaning and significance to policy. In the present study the contextual factors that influenced RPL policy was examined.

• Policy as process: The process of policy is viewed as dynamic and interactive. The policy process involves the study of process prior to the formulation of the text; and the process which continues after the text has been produced. Policy is modified as policy is contested and challenged whilst being implemented. Policy makers get feedback through actual practice and evaluation in order to review the original policy. The present study focused on the examining the gap between policy intentions and implementation of the policy at the institutional level.

• Policy as compromise of competing perspectives and values and discourses. Policy represented compromise of different perspectives, values and discourses of the powerful lobby groups. In the present study RPL policy formulation process illustrated the conflict and contradiction between the perspectives of the different role-players involved. RPL policy represented a political compromise between conflicting

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perspectives of how educational change should proceed. These competing perspectives, values and discourses influenced how policy was interpreted and implemented by the different sectors and institutions.

• Policy exists in context: Policy is located within particular ideological and political climate, socio- economic context. In the present study RPL policy was located as part of the macro education and training strategy, that reflected the prevailing political ideology and its social justice agenda, of transforming the inequalities of the inherited from the apartheid past. RPL policy as part of the human resource strategy of the new state also aimed to use RPL as a mechanism to a highly skilled, flexible and competitive workforce, in response to changing market conditions and the global economic changes.

Having outlined the concept of policy in relation to the study I will now examine the issues related to critical policy analysis. Critical policy analysis involves examining the values and assumptions that underpin policy and the related issues of power. At the broader level critical policy analysis should examine the moral order of change process and the relationship of reform to either reproducing or challenging the existing patterns of social inequalities. At the broader level the present study examined to what extent RPL policy and practice facilitated or acted as a barrier in meeting the goals social change that aimed to create a more just, equal and caring society.

Critical policy analysis should also focus the process of policy development and implementation. The limitation of the present study is that it failed to examine the policy development process. In examining the policy development process, the present study should have examined how contextual factors such as economic and social forces, institutions, individuals and events influence policy process. The issues related to

power are examined by asking questions such as who is involved in policy making, how processes of consultation are arranged and whose interests they serve become critical.

The "what", "how" and "why" questions are useful in policy analysis. The "what" questions in the present study focused on what the policy claims to do (its contents); the "How" question in the present study examined how the policy was framed. The question focuses on the assumption that policy makes with regards to the context, purpose, issues of experience and learning; and the relationship between the assessor and adult learners. The "why" question focused on political and historical contexts that influenced the selection of RPL policy. In answering the questions, policy analysis looked at various interests involved, the compromises reached and the issues that were ignored by policy.

Related to the above questions are the questions of power and authority in the policy formulation process. Critical policy analysis will ask the question: Does policy genuinely facilitate and support institutions or whether policies restrict education and training institutions to effect educational change?

The theorisation of the policy formulation process has provided a useful framework to examine the limitation of the present study and helped to explore ways to extend Bernstein's theory. Bernstein's theory could be used as a tool for policy analysis by addressing the "why" question in policy analysis. The "why" question will focus on political and historical context that influenced the policy development process and policy as text. The concept **"relations outside"** could be added to the existing repertoire of concepts like "relations within" and "relations between". The concept "relation between" was adequate to analyse the different discourses and

the power-relations between the discourses in the policy. The concept "relations within" was adequate to analyse the relationship between the assessor and the adult learners in the policy. **The new concept "relations outside" could refer to the contextual factors shaped by external and internal historical social, political and economic influences that shape policy formulation process.**

9.5.2 Emerging conceptual framework: A critical orientation of RPL policy and practice

The conceptual model (Figure 9.3) below highlights the complex nature of RPL policy and practice process. Although the model specifically relates to RPL policy and practice in the vocational and technical sector in the South African context, the model is generative in nature, and could applied to the general educational sector; and could also be used to analyse and understand RPL policy and practice internationally.

The research has shown the need for a theory of change that underpins RPL policy and practice to be made explicit. The present study has shown that RPL policy and practice needs to be based on an incremental and developmental approach considering the social and political contextual factors.

The model illustrates the following layers in the critical orientation of RPL policy and practice. The following layers are interactive and dynamic.
• Contextual factors: issues of external pressures like globalisations; internal dynamics such as socio-political change; and the institutionalisation of change as is expressed through the dialectic between external pressures and internal institutional dynamics;

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- Epistemological issues: issues related to the nature of knowledge; the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience and the knowledge-power relations;

- Pedagogical issues: issues related to the relationship between assessor and adult learners in the assessment context; and

- Paradigmatic issues: issues related to the purpose and values underlying RPL policy and practice.

The issue of power-relations cuts across the various conceptual issues. The concept of power-relations will embrace the concepts "relations within", "relations between" and "relations outside". The concept "power-relations" will be used to examine how each conceptual issue in its relationship to the moral order of the change process either reproduces or challenge the existing patterns of social inequalities.

The relationship between the different concepts is illustrated in the figure 9.3 below:
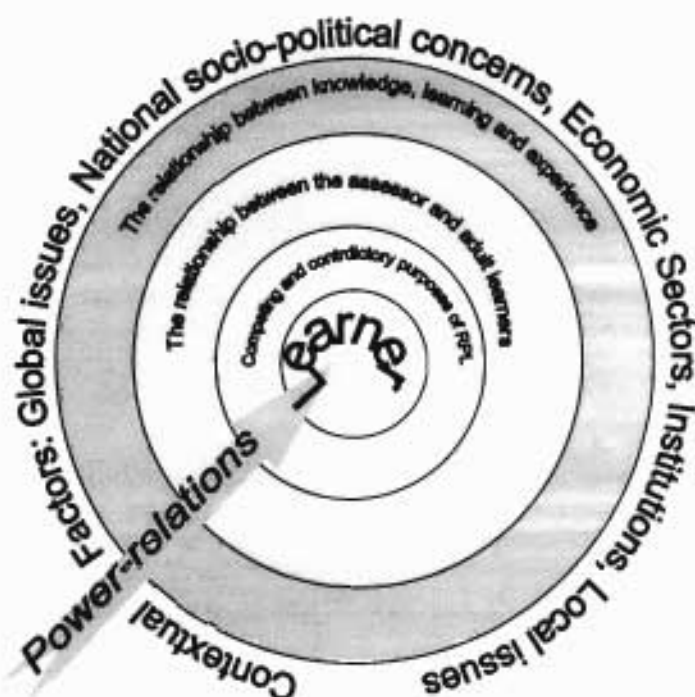
A critical orientation to RPL policy and practice needs to examine how the power-relations from "outside", "between" and "within" these conceptual issues either challenge or reproduce the inequalities in society

Contextual factors

Global issues

- RPL policy should include an effective strategy that provides an understanding of the complexity, ambiguity and politics of globalisation in order to challenge the dominant model of development.

National socio-political concerns

- RPL policy and practice should challenge the racial, economic, gender inequalities of South African society.

Economic sectoral issues

- A critical RPL approach should consider the complexities that characterise sectors that either facilitate or impede sectors to affect RPL.

Institutional issues

- A critical RPL approach should consider the dynamics within institutions that facilitate or impede educational change.

Local issues

- A critical RPL policy and practice should consider the different socio-cultural contexts from where adult learner comes in order to address the issues of social justice.

Epistemological issues: Different conceptions of knowledge; the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience

- A critical approach to RPL should value and legitimise different forms knowledge produced at both formal and in/non-formal sites that are intended to provide access and redress to learners who have been historically excluded or marginalised.

- Policymakers and practitioners should acknowledge and deal with "the principle of difference" between the different types of knowledge and learning and the power-relations between the different types of knowledge and learning.

- Critical RPL approach should refocus standards and the curriculum to link experiential learning to theoretical knowledge.

- A critical approach to RPL should attempt to explore ways of linking individual learning to historical experience of the community

- A critical approach to RPL policy and practice should promote a socially inclusive and equitable RPL approach that advocates a rough equivalence of experiential learning with knowledge and learning in the standards.

Pedagogical issues: Relationship between assessor and adult learners

- Ina critical approach to RPL assessors make discretionary choices (in the form of their ability to adapt the procedures to specific circumstances and context) to ensure learners are successful.

- In a critical approach to RPL assessors deal with epistemological issues, by negotiating the different cultures of knowledge and learning

- In a critical approach learners are empowered in assessment context, both as individuals and in groups, to assess their own work, and to critique the assessment regime.

Paradigmatic issues: Competing and contradictory purposes and values of RPL

- In a critical RPL approach the various competing discourses (the human capital discourses of productivity and employability, with the humanist discourses of holistic development and life long learning; and political discourse of social justice could be viewed as complementary rather than antithetical goals.

- In the critical approach the purposes and values underlying different agents for the assessment process should match the aspirations and expectations of the adult learners

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The issues in the above model will be briefly elaborated below.

9.5.2.1 Contextual factors

The following contextual issues that emerged form the research will inform the theoretical model.

A critical orientation to RPL will focus on how external and internal contextual factors either impeded or facilitated RPL policy and practice in addressing the issues related to social justice such as equity, redress and access.

A critical orientation to RPL will take into consideration the impact of the politics of changing global economic conditions on education and training policies and practices generally; and RPL policy and practice specifically. According to Taylor (1977: 76) "globalisation is a complex set of processes in which all social, economic and cultural inequalities of nation states are refigured and in some ways intensified". A critical approach to RPL policy will require national policy makers to develop a strategy that provides an understanding of the complexity and ambiguity of the globalisation to challenge dominant model of development. The dominant western view of development is essentially about competitiveness and productivity that fails to address the broader social purpose of education and training policy. This critical awareness will enable sectors and institutions to develop policies to counter the economic determinism and negative impact of globalisation. A critical approach to RPL policy will refocus policy and practice to address the reconstruction and development needs of the country and challenge the new inequalities created by globalisation.

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At the political level a critical approach to RPL policy and practice will challenge the racial and economic inequalities of South African society. RPL policy and practices will target the relatively underdeveloped, poor black majority. These will include women in rural communities, the unemployed youth, and self-employed workers in the informal sector.

A critical approach of RPL will position the state to play a more facilitating role in directing education and training and other major social institutions in the transformation process. The state through its various structures should balance its interventionist role in guiding and monitoring institutional transformation with respecting the autonomy of institutions. In this way the state could neutralise the power-relations between themselves and the institutions. Institutions will be given the space to manage the change process and be accountable to different structures of the state.

Critical RPL orientation should consider the complexities that characterise sectoral and institutional contexts. Firstly, national RPL policy needs to consider that readiness of sectors to implement policy. Thus far sectors have concentrated their energies on setting up structures. Secondly, the critical RPL orientation will highlight the need for policy to acknowledge the embeddedness of institutions to change and the need to build the capacity form bottom-up. RPL policy needs to recognise the number of competing priorities facing institutions to transform. For example, the restructuring of both Higher Education and Further Education institutions have forced institutions to focus on the immediate governance and administrative challenges facing these newly merged institutions. The issues of RPL are viewed by such changing institutions as a less pressing priority.

In critical RPL orientation institutional policy and assessors' practice will be responsive to social, cultural and linguistic differences of adult learners.

9.5.2.2 Paradigmatic level: Purpose and value of RPL

A critical approach to RPL policy and practice advocates the need to balance the various competing discourses (the human capital discourses of productivity and employability; with the humanist discourses of holistic development and life long learning; and political discourse of social justice). A critical orientation of RPL policy and practice should view the competing and contradictory discourses as complementary rather than antithetical goals. The purposes and values underlying different agents for the assessment process should match the aspirations and expectations of the adult learners.

9.5.2.3 Epistemological level: The different conceptions of knowledge; relationship between different types of knowledge; and relationships between knowledge, learning and experience

The epistemological issues that emerged from the present research study could inform the theoretical model. These issues relate to view of knowledge; the relationship between different types of knowledge and learning; and the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience. Each of these issues will be described below.

A critical RPL orientation advocates a constructivist view of knowledge. Knowledge is viewed as socially mediated amongst the different role players in society. This view of knowledge will allow for the prior learning of marginalised communities - of ordinary workers, women, and

Black indigenous culture - to be coded into the knowledge and skills of the standards that are used for assessment. The valuing and legitimising of different forms knowledge produced at both formal and in/non-formal sites is intended to provide access to learners who have been historically excluded or marginalised.

Knowledge that is socially mediated will have the following implications for the assessment of prior learning. In terms of what counts as knowledge and learning, the knowledge and learning of adult learners generated outside the formal context will have be negotiated and included. In terms of the purpose of assessment of prior learning the focus will be on the social context in which knowledge and performance is constructed and reconstructed. RPL assessment will be seen as a social process. The systems of beliefs, values and purposes in which the agents involved are participating are made explicit. The power-relations between the assessors on the assessed are foregrounded. The power relations between assessor and adult learners are neutralised whereby candidates participate in the assessing their own work or the work of their peers.

Critical RPL approach will attempt to shift the focus from the assessment of practical vocational knowledge of the individual to exploring ways that will contribute to the holistic development of the adult learners. The vocational and technical standard should be link to standards that provide opportunities for the linking of the personal experience of the learners to the historical experience of the community. This will allow for learners who were oppressed and discriminated to explore collectively their experience to help them to move towards healing and reconciliation of individuals and society. This will mean the RPL will be more than assessing and recognising knowledge and skills but will also be a means

that focuses on values – the value of personal healing and reconciling society.

A critical approach to RPL policy and practice will acknowledge and deal with "the principle of difference" between the different types of knowledge and learning and the power-relations between the different types of knowledge and learning.

From the present study the following possibilities of integrating education and training can be explored within the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework.

The first possibility will be to link work-based vocational knowledge and learning with the components of general education. In the present study the vocational standards offered by the construction sector should be linked to the standards offered by the general education sector. The general education standards could include numeracy and literacy standards. The principle of linking vocational standards to general education is possible across all economic sectors and at least within the Further Education Band of the NQF.

The second possibility is to find ways to link practical knowledge with theoretical knowledge. Writers of vocational standards should search for ways in which the learners could reflect and be able to abstract certain principles underlying their performance; or examine the theories that inform their performance of practical tasks. The inclusion of theoretical components in the vocational standards could provide opportunities to address the unequal social status between vocational and general/ academic education. The inclusion of theory with practice will also allow the learner to higher forms of knowledge and learning within the NQF.

The present research study had shown that assessors used their implicit personal theories of building construction, adult learning principles, and assessment issues were able to deal with a highly complex and contested task of identifying and dealing with different types of knowledge generated in different contexts. Although many of the assessors were unable to articulate their practices in theoretical terms, their practices were nonetheless a manifestation of an underlying theory. The challenge is for assessors to engage critically to reflect and examine their unarticulated theories that underpin their practice.

The third possibility will be for the vocational sector to form partnerships with the academic and/or professional sector at the institutional level. The vocational and academic institutions could negotiate an approach to recognise what knowledge and learning could be articulated and recognised. This institutional approach could allow for a move towards a more integrated of education and training system. Young (2001:31-32) points out the one of the key components for the successful implementation of a qualification was the need a basis of trust between different role-players.

The present study advocates a rough equivalence of knowledge and learning from experience with knowledge and learning in the standards. A socially inclusive and equitable approach to RPL will encourage sectors and institutions to include a preparatory module that prepares adult learners with limited formal literacy skills for the RPL assessment. In this preparatory module learners could be provided with the opportunity to reflect on their knowledge and learning from experience. Adult learners will also be given access to the formal discourses to participate in the assessment process. Assessors could use the claims

made by adult learners as a basis to find the appropriate match with the range of standards across the sectors.

9.5.2.4 Pedagogical level: Relationship between assessor and candidate

In terms of a critical approach to RPL policy and practice, the role of assessors as agents responsible for translating policy visions into concrete actions in the assessment context will be highlighted. The discretionary choices made by assessors in the form of their ability to adapt the procedures to specific circumstances and context will be viewed as critical in ensuring learners are successful. The role of assessors will need to shift beyond providing guidance and support to adult learners; to dealing with epistemological issues of how to negotiate with learners the different cultures of knowledge and learning. Assessors need to negotiate between the unequal culture of knowledge and learning from experience; with the culture and knowledge inscribed in the standards. In this way assessors will engage in the instructive discourse by challenging the assumptions of knowledge in the standards.

In a critical RPL approach adult learners should be given the opportunity in assessing their own work. This practice will encourage learners to reflect and identify limitations of their own work and search for ways to correct their work. The self assessment will encourage learners to gain more insight into their performance.

9.5.3 Implications for future research

The present study has identified the following conceptual and methodological areas for future research:

9.5.3.1 Conceptual issues

Firstly, there is a need to examine critically the theory underpinning epistemological issues related to vocational and technical education.

Secondly, there is a need to examine critically the epistemological issues related to the articulation between the different knowledge and learning registered on the National Qualifications Framework – with particular reference to link between vocational and technical knowledge with general/academic knowledge and vice versa.

Thirdly, there is a need to examine critically the appropriateness of RPL in assessing abstract theoretical knowledge at higher levels on the NQF.

9.5.3.2 Methodological issues

There is a need to critically examine the role of theory in research. The present research focused on the methodology of how established theories provided a conceptual language for describing data that allows the researcher to deepen the levels of abstraction. Conversely, the new research could focus how a priori framework of established theories inhibits creative and innovative space for educational and sociological enquiry.

9.6 Concluding remarks

In this section the main theoretical contributions of the research will be highlighted. Followed by examining how the present study contributed to identifying key critical indicators to understand the nature and extent of

transformation of education and training generally after a decade of democracy.

The present research had extended Bernstein's theory of cultural, reproduction and symbolic control to examine policy formulation and the policy process. The research had identified the need for a broader theorisation of policy analysis within the Bernstein framework. The use of Bernstein theory to examine policy created a discursive gap. Whilst the conceptual language "relations between" and "relations within" was adequate in so far as describing and analysing the interactional situations located within institutions; the conceptual language was inadequate to analyse the contextual factors that shaped policy. In terms the framework of critical policy analysis, the construct "relations outside" was created as an analytical tool to examine and understand the nuances and subtleties of the historical, political, social, economic contexts which shape the meaning and significance of policy. The use of Bernstein theory within a critical policy analysis framework to examine both the inhibiting and enabling conditions of policy, could contribute to developing strategies to harness the potential of the policy to the address the transfromative political goals .

The research study has also provided a new conceptual framework to analyse and understand the complex and dynamic nature of RPL policy and practice in a transitional and developmental context. The model provides an analytical framework for a critical orientation and engagement with RPL policy and practice. The model highlights how the power-relations within and across each of the conceptual issue; namely contextual, epistemological, pedagogical and paradigmatic issues, could either reproduce or challenge the existing patterns of inequalities in society.

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The present study of RPL policy and practice provided some critical indicators in understanding the nature and extent of transformation of education and training generally after a decade of democracy.

In critically reflecting on the social change after a decade of democracy, one has to be mindful that the injustices and inequalities inherited have been deeply etched in the South African psyche. Given, also the limitation of resources and the relatively short time since the introduction and implementation of the new policies in education and training, one has to acknowledge that it would clearly take considerable effort, time and resources to make any meaningful impact on the social injustices of the past.

The research has shown the need to view policy as a process. There is a need for policymakers, practitioners and researchers to critically interrogate the original policies before shifting the blame for the failure of policy to implementation issues. One important finding from the analysis of policy in the present research was the absence of theory of change that guided the original RPL policy formulation and implementation process. The RPL policy assumed that change could be mandated by a top-down approach. The policy underestimated the power of institutional culture and attitudes and the capacity of street level bureaucrats to subvert the policy vision. This approach failed to challenge the power of existing patterns of stratification, social division and inequality.

Second, the research has shown the need to strengthen the gap between policy vision and actual practice. The research has shown the need for adopting a bottom-up reform process that will attempt to narrow the gap between nationally driven policy agendas involving influential key

players, and practice "on the ground" defined by different players with different interests. Policy makers need to understand the power of implementing agents in either subverting or contributing to the social change agenda of the country. In the present research the developmental approach practiced by implementers contributed towards moving the transformation agenda one step closer. The focus of policy should therefore be on building the capacity of implementing agents – the institutional capacity of managers and practitioners who are at the "coalface" of implementing policy.

Finally, the research has raised much wider issues in the future development of the South African National Qualifications Framework. The issues raised in the research could contribute to debates that emerged form the review of the National Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the NQF that attempts to develop a seamless and articulated South African education and training system. The research has shown that the debates around the NQF should move beyond dealing with strategic choices about implementation, to the need for greater theorisation of the epistemological issues related to different knowledge and learning registered on the NQF. The research has also shown for the need for continuous negotiation between role-players in the education and training sectors to deal with the essentially different and unequal terrains of general and vocational knowledge and learning; to ensure more flexibility and better articulation between education and training sectors.

The present study of national RPL policy and practice has indicated the need for policy makers and practitioners to acknowledge the complexity of educational and social change. Both policymakers and practitioners will need to adopt a critical reflexive stance in viewing the relationship between policy visions and implementation. As Muller (2001) aptly

points out that through reflecting on the experience of practice on the basis of continuously interrogating the original policy vision, we could engage in a critical dialogue between policy vision and practice. It is only through this critical engagement with policy and practice, can policymakers and practitioners contribute to address the reconstructive and developmental challenges facing our emerging democracy.

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Appendix 1

Research Instruments

1.1   Focus group interview with assessors (Interview Schedule 1)

1.2   Focus group interview with assessors (Interview Schedule 2)

1.3   Focus group interview with assessors (Interview Schedule 3)

1.4   Interview Schedule: Adult Learners/Candidates

1.5   Follow up interview with the assessors

1.6   Observation schedule of the RPL assessment process

1.7   Interview questions for the Management of the RPL Project

1.1 Focus Group Interview with assessors

Interview schedule 1

1 What were the critical incidents (important incidents) that you remember in the assessment of prior learning process?

2 What do you understand by use of the words "competent" and "not yet competent"

3 What are your view about the knowledge and skills expressed in the unit standards that you used to assess the workers/learners in terms of:

3.1 The level of difficulty

3.2 The relationship between academic and vocational related knowledge

4 What are your views of the experience the workers that they want assessed?

5 What challenges did you face in measuring the workers/learners experience against the standards?

1.2 Focus group interview with assessors

Interview Schedule 2

Interview schedule for assessors 2	Strengths	Weakness	Opportunity	Threats
1.Before the assessment • Sustainability of the unit standards in terms of taking the context of workers, needs of workers, skills and knowledge acquired through experience • Designing of assessment process • Selection of candidates • Registration of candidates • Planning of assessment Preparing learners for the assessment				
2. During the assessment process • Collecting evidence • Relationship with workers • Recording the evidence Ethical and moral consideration				
3. After the assessment process • Testing the validity of the assessment results • Testing the reliability of the assessment process • Appeal procedure] • Ethical and moral considerations				

1.3 Focus group interview with assessors

Interview schedule 3

Background of the assessors

1 No of years of experience in the field as a educator.
2 No of years experience in the field as worker.
3 Age:
4 Race:
5 Qualifications in the specialist field:
6 Qualification in assessment:

Answer the following questions

2.3.1 Why did you assess workers' prior experience?

2.3.2 Do you think the standards against which workers were assessed incorporated the kind of knowledge and skills workers had? Comment briefly.

2.3.3   How did you select candidates for the assessment process?

2.3.4   How did you plan the assessment process?

2.3.5   How did you collect evidence to make assessment decisions?

2.3.6   How did you provide feedback to learners after the assessment process?

2.3.7 Comment whether workers were given a say in the following process:

2.3.7.1 Planning the assessment

2.3.7.2 Making choices in the assessment process

2.3.7.3 In assessing their own knowledge and skills

2.3.8 What measures did you use to test whether the judgements you made about the workers knowledge and skills were reliable and valid?

2.3.9 What challenges did you experience in assessing workers prior experience?

2.3.10 Are there any other comments you wish to make about your important learning in the assessment of the prior learning workers?

1.4 Interviews schedule: Adult learners/candidates

1. Background

1 Gender
2 Age
3 Race
4 Describe your family background/
5.1 No of years experience in the field as worker?
5.2 Describe your working experience?
6 Education Background:
6.1 Schooling: Highest standard passed   Year:
6.2 List any formal courses you did at work?
6.3 List any courses you did in any other formal institutions?
6.4 List any course you did in the community?

2   Answer the following questions

General questions

2.1   What is the most critical recollection of the RPL process?

Purpose of RPL

2.2   Why did you want your prior experience assessed?

Orientation to unit standards and matching claims

2.3   What claims did you make about the knowledge and skills you gained through experience?

2.4 What evidence did you provide to back up your claims?

2.5 How did you prove that your claims you were making in the absence of evidence?

2.6 Did the assessor recognise all the claims that you were making?

2.7 Did you understand the unit standards against which your claims were matched?

2.8 Did the unit standard measure all the claims you were making?

2.9 What claims were not matched by the unit standard?

2.10 Did you agree with the assessor's judgement in matching your claims against the unit standards?

2.11 How did you view the assessor role when he matched your claims against the unit standards?

Assessment

2.12 Were you prepared and ready for the assessment?

2.13 Did you have a clear understanding of the standards or criteria against which your evidence will be assessed.

2.14 Did you understand the assessment process?

2.15 What were some of the tasks you performed during the assessment process?

2.16 What methods were used during the assignment?

2.17 How did you view the assessor's role in the assessment process?

2.18 How did you cope with the knowledge that you did not know?

2.19 What were some of the problems experienced during the assessment process to demonstrate your knowledge?

2.20 Do you agree with how the assessor collected evidence to make assessment decisions about your knowledge and skills gained though experience?

Evaluation of assessment outcome

2.21 Did you see as assessment process as fair in matching your claims against the unit?

2.22 Did you agree with the assessment decisions made by the assessor? If you disagreed did you challenge the decisions?

2.23 Were you given a say in the assessment of your own knowledge?

Conclusion

2.24 What do you see as the main problem in having your prior experience assessed?

2.25 Did you find your rights violated during the assessment process?

2.26 What would you have done better if you were the assessor?

1.5   Follow up interview with the assessor

1. Do you think assessors have sufficient training to understand all the aspects of assessment?

2. Do you think assessors have sufficient experience to understand the assessment process?

3. What do you consider the value of the relationship between knowledge, learning and experience in the following cases::

3.1   Theoretical knowledge of candidates and application (Elizabeth) Elizabeth claimed that she did what was asked of her and did not learn anything new learning form experience and application

3.2   Christiaan viewed assessment as a learning process – he was able apply learning form experience to do new tasks (arch)

3.3   Theoretical knowledge and learning form experience and application (Nkosinathi) Nkhosinathi was able to understand what he was doing because of his theory and practical experience.

4   How do assessor deal with the different ways of knowing and doing of the candidate?

5   What is the correlation between pre-assessment and final assessment?

6   Do you consider the RPL process heavily administrative?

7   Was there a danger of subjectivity in the assessment of the knowledge of the candidates amongst the assessors?

8   Was there danger of the assessors being to technical in sticking rigidly to the marking of the assessment grid?

9   By referring to the ASSESSORS EVIDENCE GUIDE how did you deal with reading and understanding the unit standard when assessing the candidate?

9.1   Do you understand the terms mentioned in the guide?

9.2   Do you think that the RPL task assessed the practical competence at the expense of the knowledge and reflexive competence?

9.3   Do you think there is the danger that not all assessors will have the similar understanding of the terms?

1.6   Observation schedule of the RPL assessment process

1. Describe the assessment environment? (resources, conditions)	
2. What is the role and responsibilities of assessor in terms of: • Providing cues • Intervention • Support and motivation • Questioning • Dealing with candidates ways of knowing and doing • Dealing with the issue of language • Making assessment decisions)	
3. How does the assessor introduce the candidate to the task	
4. How does the assessor judge the actual performance of the tasks	
5. What assessment tools were used to validate candidates performance?	
6. Are the assessment tools appropriate to validate different types of learning of the candidate?	
7. What forms of evidence are collected by assessors? (Knowledge evidence, performance evidence)	
8. Describe the candidates engagement with the assessment task in terms of: 8.1 Using the instruction sheet	
8.2 Interacting with the assessor	
8.3 Using the model	
9. How does the assessor make inference form performance about the candidate's knowledge and skills in terms: • Practical competence • Knowledge competence • Reflexive competence	
10. How does the assessor make inference about the link between prior learning and new learning	
11. Does the learner have a say in assessing him/her self?	
12. How does the assessor deal with identifying gaps in the knowledge and a process in the addressing those gaps?	
13. Does the assessor inform the candidate of the outcome of the assessment?	
14. Describe the relationship between the assessor and the candidate? (issue of respect, trust and ethical and moral practice)	
15. How does the assessor match knowledge and skills of the candidates to the outcomes of the unit standard?	

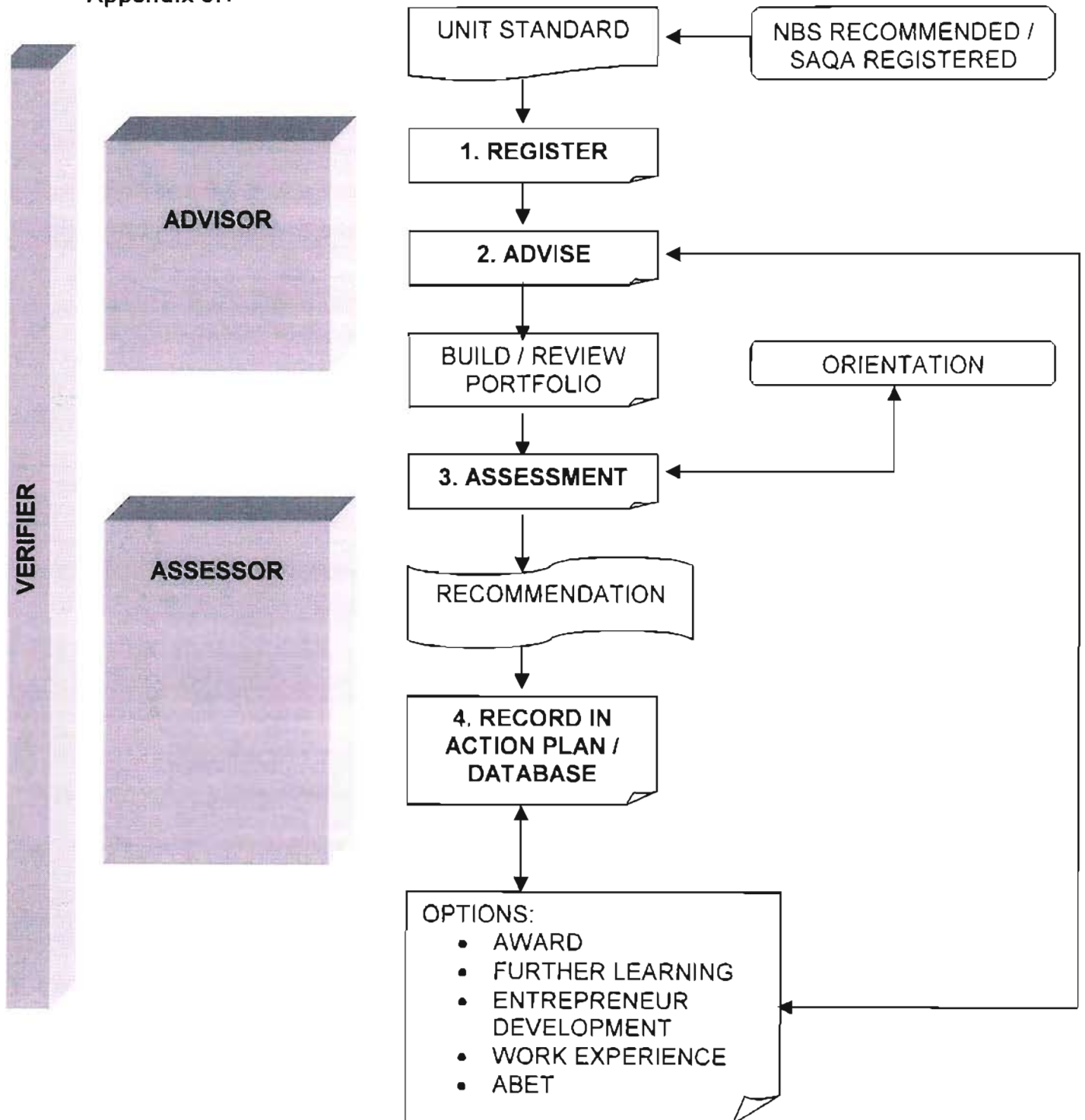## 1.7 Interview questions for the management of the RPL project

1. What were your main objectives in assessing workers/learners for prior learning?

2. Describe the RPL policy procedure that you developed for the project?

3. Do you consider the unit standards appropriate for the assessment of prior learning?

4. How were assessors selected and trained?

5. Describe the contexts from which learners for selected for assessment?

6. What in your view were the main strengths of the RPL project?

7. What were your main challenges of the RPL project?

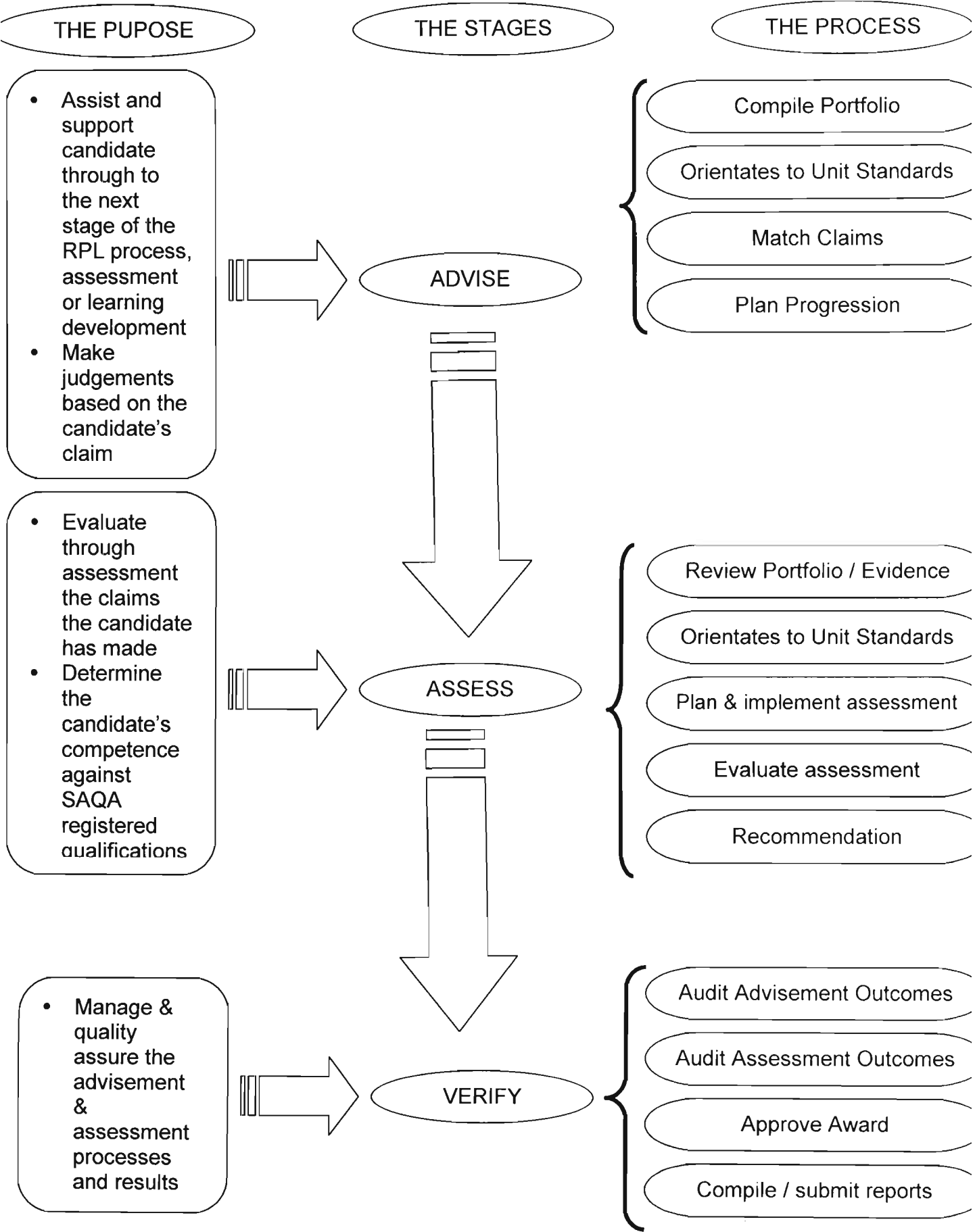8. What recommendations will you make for the success of future projects?

APPENDIX 2

Proposed Qualification Framework for Higher Education

NQF Levels	HE Sub-levels	(Cumulative minimum totals) & credits per qualification	General Vertical articulation		Articulation Horizontal & diagonal articulation	Career-focused Vertical articulation		
8	PG 4	(1020) 360	Doctor of Philosophy (360 @ PG4)			Doctor of Philosophy, Professional Doctorate (360 @ PG4)		
8	PG 3	(660) 180	Research Master's Degree (120 @ PG3)	Structured Master's Degree (60 @ PG3)		Research Master's Degree (120 @ PG3)	Structured Master's Degree (60 @ PG3)	
8	PG 2	(600) 180/120		Master's Diploma (120 @ PG2)	Master's Certificate (72 @ PG2) / (articulation credits)		Master's Diploma (120 @ PG2)	Professional Master's Degree (180 @ PG2)
8	PG 1	(480) 480/120		General Postgraduate Diploma (120 @ PG1)	Postgraduate Certificate (72 @ PG1) / (articulation credits)	Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degree, [e.g. B Tech] (120 @ PG1)		Career-focused Postgraduate Diploma (120 @ PG1)
7		(360) 360/120	General Bachelor's Degree (120 @ 7)		Graduate Certificate (72 @ &) / (articulation credits)	Career-focused Bachelor's Degree (120 @ 7)		
6		(240) 240/	General Diploma (90 @ 6)		(articulation credits)	Career-focused Diploma (90 @ 6)		
5		(120) 120			Foundation Certificate (75 @ 5)	Career-focused Certificate (75 @ 5)		
4		(120) 120	FETC (72 @ 4)		Bridging Certificate (72 @ 4)	FETC (72 @ 4)		

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Appendix 3.1

VERIFIER

ADVISOR

ASSESSOR

UNIT STANDARD ◄──── NBS RECOMMENDED / SAQA REGISTERED

↓

1. REGISTER

↓

2. ADVISE ◄────

↓

BUILD / REVIEW PORTFOLIO   ORIENTATION

↓

3. ASSESSMENT ◄────

↓

RECOMMENDATION

↓

4. RECORD IN ACTION PLAN / DATABASE

↕

OPTIONS:
- AWARD
- FURTHER LEARNING
- ENTREPRENEUR DEVELOPMENT
- WORK EXPERIENCE
- ABET

APPENDIX 3.2
CETA RPL MODEL

THE PUPOSE	THE STAGES	THE PROCESS

THE PUPOSE

- Assist and support candidate through to the next stage of the RPL process, assessment or learning development
- Make judgements based on the candidate's claim

ADVISE

- Compile Portfolio
- Orientates to Unit Standards
- Match Claims
- Plan Progression

- Evaluate through assessment the claims the candidate has made
- Determine the candidate's competence against SAQA registered qualifications

ASSESS

- Review Portfolio / Evidence
- Orientates to Unit Standards
- Plan & implement assessment
- Evaluate assessment
- Recommendation

- Manage & quality assure the advisement & assessment processes and results

VERIFY

- Audit Advisement Outcomes
- Audit Assessment Outcomes
- Approve Award
- Compile / submit reports

Appendix 4: Example of the unit standard used in the RPL assessment

In achieving this Unit Standard (Applying elements which are common to all Bricklaying functions) a person is recognised as able to integrate all these specific outcomes to the standard of the assessment criteria within the range statement.

Specific Outcomes:	1) *Measuring up and determining quantities of materials.* 2) *Identifying the requirements for protection of all stages of bricklaying including good housekeeping.* 3) *Describing and illustrate the various construction needs addressed through bricklaying.* 4) *Using bricklaying tools.*

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	RANGE STATEMENTS
i) Material and quantities required are calculated re: ♦ Concrete ♦ Bricks ♦ Plaster ♦ Screed ♦ Tiles and Pavers.	a) *Access to basic building drawings. Measuring up and determining quantities of material. • Identifying requirements for protection of all stages of bricklaying including good housekeeping. • Describing and illustrating the various construction needs addressed through bricklaying. • Using bricklaying tools.
i) Proportions of ingredients for specific mixtures and the reason for it are identified	
ii) Characteristics, properties and purpose of the different materials & mixtures used in bricklaying trade (Tolerances) are identified	b) Simulated or normal construction environment for building walls.
iii) The stacking and storing and positioning of materials, mixtures and ingredients and equipment are described.	c) General knowledge required for the selection and use of tools and equipment as well as the illustration thereof.
iv) The latest ISO and National Building Regulations applicable to bricklaying as published in the Government Gazette are described.	d) Assistance of a general worker will be restricted to the physical handling of the material and equipment only on instruction of the candidate. e) Only information relating to (a) above needs to be interpreted.
v) The building in and finishing of a steel and wooden window and door frame are described and illustrated.	f) A safe working environment must at all times be maintained by the candidate in compliance with the legislation applicable to the Occupational Health and Safety Act as well as recommendations of the COHSEF.
vi) The construction of a brick arch are described and illustrated.	
vii) The construction of a Concrete foundation and Brick foundation walls are described and illustrated.	g) Basic quantity calculations knowledge. h) Ratio and materials knowledge.
viii) The tiling of a floor and wall are described and illustrated.	Describing and illustrating building, construction and tiling procedures.

ix) The basic procedures for the construction of a corner, and a T-junction are described.

x) The construction of a concrete floor and screed are described and illustrated.

xi) The properties and uses and qualities of building material relevant to bricklaying are described.

xii) The key features of each bricklaying function are described re:
   ♦ Brickwork
   ♦ Concrete work
   ♦ Paving
   ♦ Foundations
   ♦ Finishing surfaces

xiii) The tools used in bricklaying are identified.

xiv) The general concerns relevant to bricklaying are described and illustrated.

xv) Safe uses and care of the following tools are identified and explained:

xvi) setting-out tools

xvii) bricklaying tools

xviii) brick-cutting tools

xix) jointing tools

xx) plastering tools

xxi) tiling tools

xxii) common tools used in bricklaying

The use and care of bricklaying equipment are described.

xxiii) *The relevant standard specified by SABS 0400, codes and practice, ISO standards and standards approved by the official bodies of the building industry are adhered to.

Notes:

1. (*) Asterisk indicates embedded knowledge content included.
3. This unit standard supports and is supported by the cross field specific outcomes listed in **01.CO.CO.12. Notes: 2**

Appendix 5: Instruction sheet for the candidate

Unit Standard	Code	Level	Credits	Duration
Setting out & erecting ceilings and timber partitions	05.CA.CO.12	3	27	5 hours

Tasks to be achieved
1. Construct a ceiling (see the drawings and the model on sight).
2. Construct a timber partitioning (see the drawings and the model on sight).

Assessment Criteria

1. Set out and erect ceilings and timber partitions;
2. Applicable Occupational Health and Safety Act legislation is adhered to;
The relevant standard specified by SABS codes of practice, ISO standards and standards approved by the official bodies of the building industry are adhered to.

Technical assessment specification

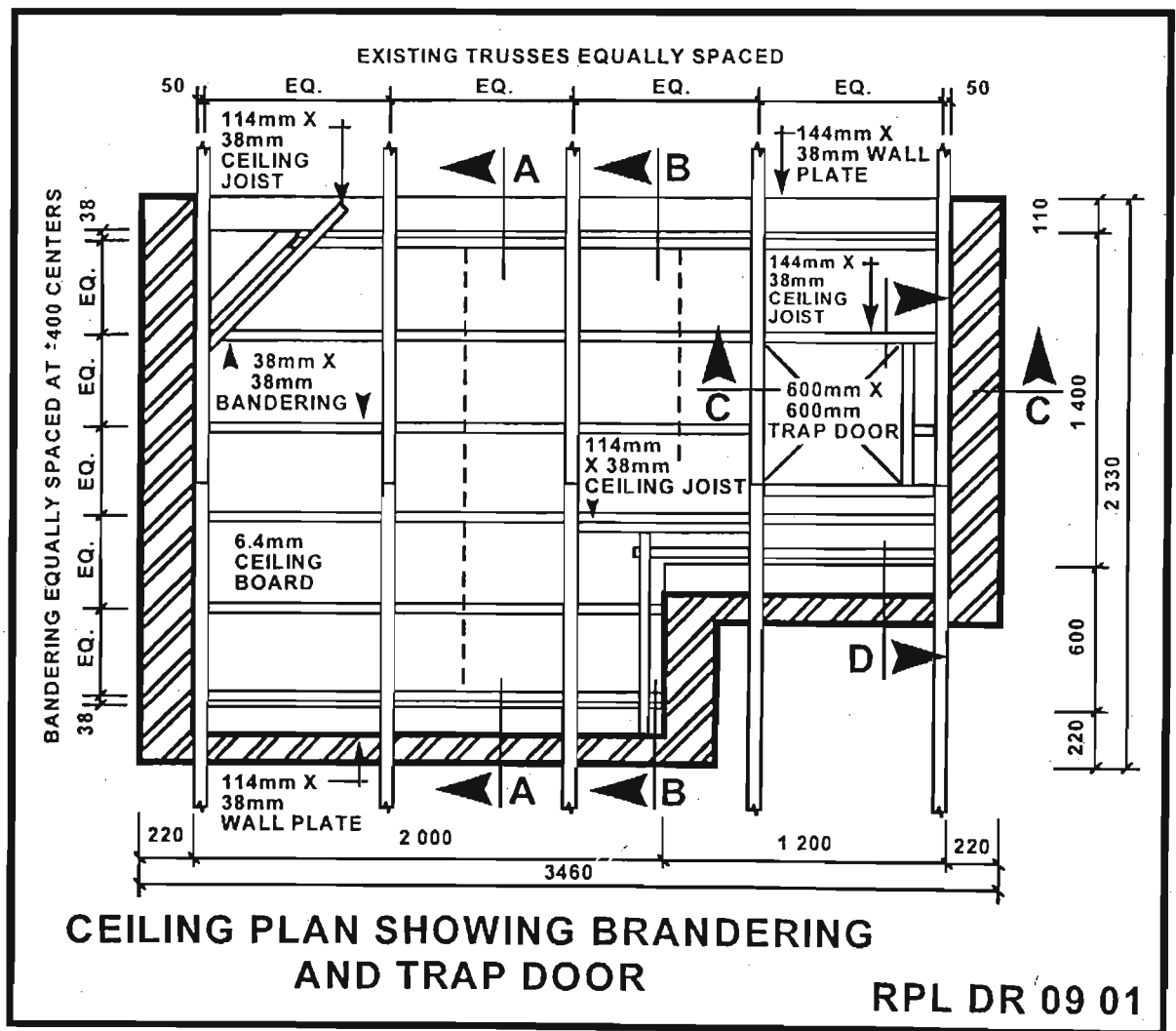| Ceilings			
Alligned	± 3 mm overall length	Intermediate branderings	± 10 mm. fitted at 400 mm centres
Measurements within	± 10 mm. up to 3 m. length	Clout nails	± 3 mm. spaced at 150 mm centres. ± 3 mm.
Trap door opening	± 2 mm flat an square across the top		
Partitioning			
Measurements within	± 10 mm. up to 3 m. length	Architrave 45°	± 2 mm
Plumb.	± 3 mm overall height		

Task 1: Construct a ceiling (see the drawings and the model on sight).

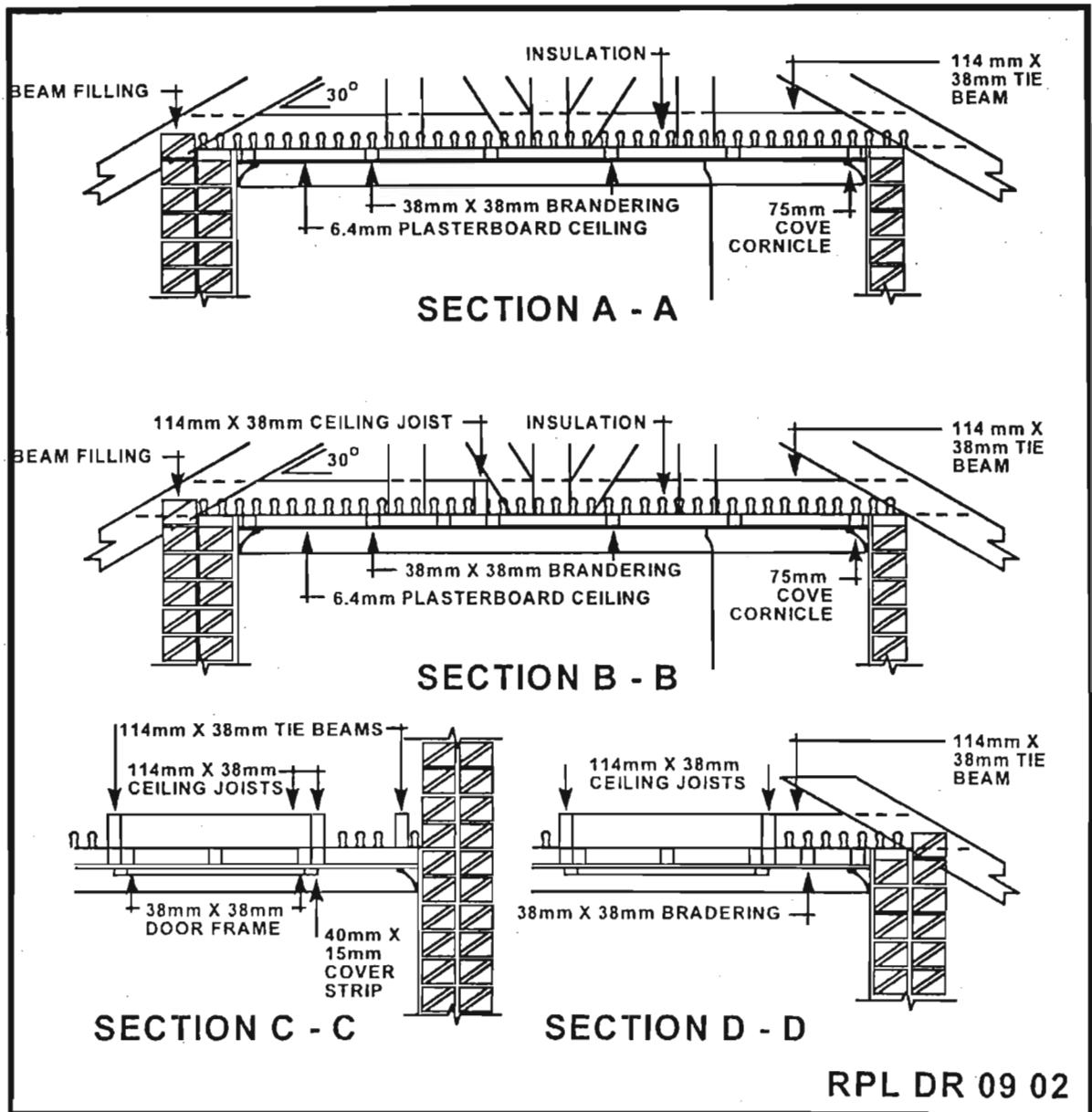**In Place:**

1) Model of completed structure according to specifications;
2) Ceiling mock-up for testing with tie beams / ceiling joists ,walls or similar for cornices according to drawing / model;
3) Complete working platform (scaffolding) in place for candidate.

Assessment assignment for the candidate:

1) Set out and nail 38 x 38 brandering in place;
2) Line brandering both ways;
3) Calculate, construct and position joists for trapdoor opening;
4) Fix rhino board (full sheet + bishop strip) adjacent to 45° side;
5) Fix cornices to: a)   45° side;
                       b)   90° internal corners;
6) Place insulation over boarded area.

CEILING PLAN SHOWING BRANDERING AND TRAP DOOR

RPL DR 09 01

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SECTION A - A

SECTION B - B

SECTION C - C

SECTION D - D

RPL DR 09 02

**Task 2:** Construct a timber partitioning (see the drawings and the model on sight).

In Place:
1) Model of completed structure according to specifications / drawings.
2) Area with 2 walls / pillars or other to fix partition frame according to drawing / model for assessment of
   candidate
3) Adjustable trestles and planks for working platform (scaffold)

Assessment assignment for the candidate:
1) Set out and mark task.
2) Fix frame to walls and floor by steel nailing or drilling.
3) Position the remainder of studs and brace with nogging.
4) Mortice door head to door stud.
5) Fix door lining and rebate to form door frame.
6) Clad one side only.
7) Fix architrave and quadrant .
8) Hang door with accessories / fittings.

RPL DR 09 03

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SECTIONS:

SECTION A

SECTION B

RPL DR 09 05
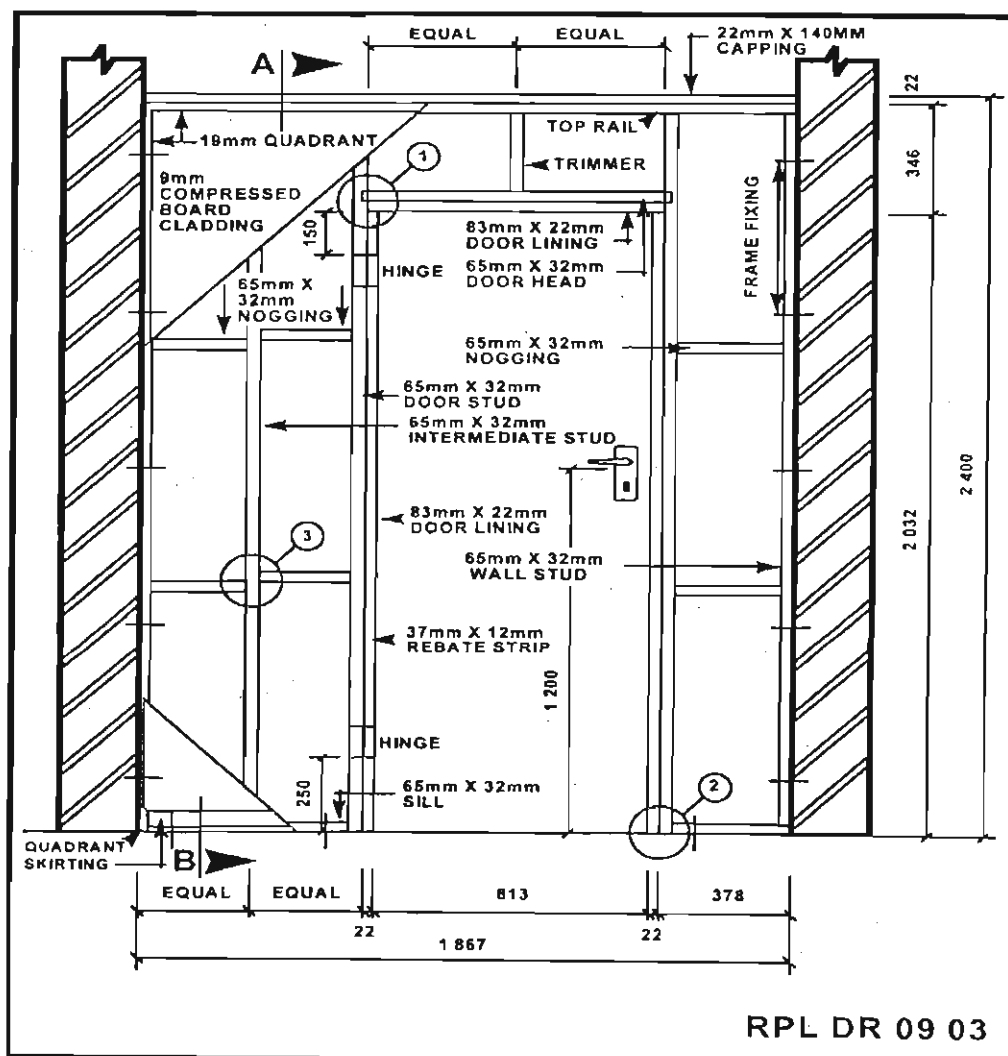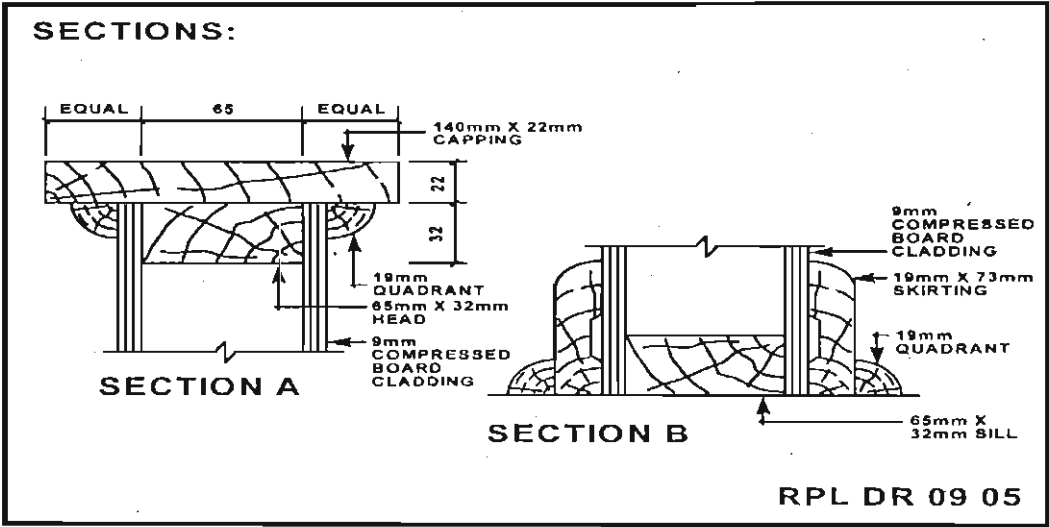
Assessors Evidence Guide

The assessment covers:

| Unit standard title	Code	Level	Credits
Setting out buildings & transferring levels	03.CO.CO.12	3	7

Awarding body:
CETA
234 Alexandra road
Midrand

Purpose evidence guide:

The evidence guide is an **instrument** used by the **Assessor** to judge the candidate's competency. It outlines the **assessment instructions for the Assessor**, the **assessment conditions, assessment criteria** and **specifications** that must be adhered to.
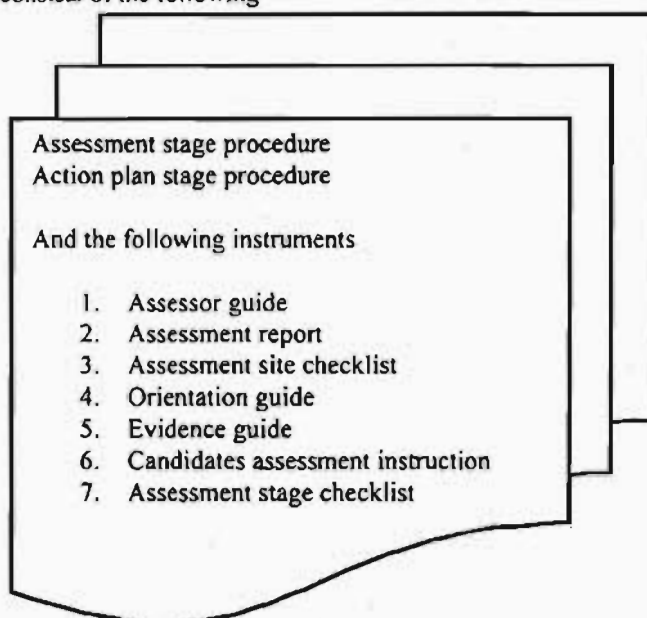
Recognition of Prior Learning project
Funded by the European Union

Assessment stages in RPL process
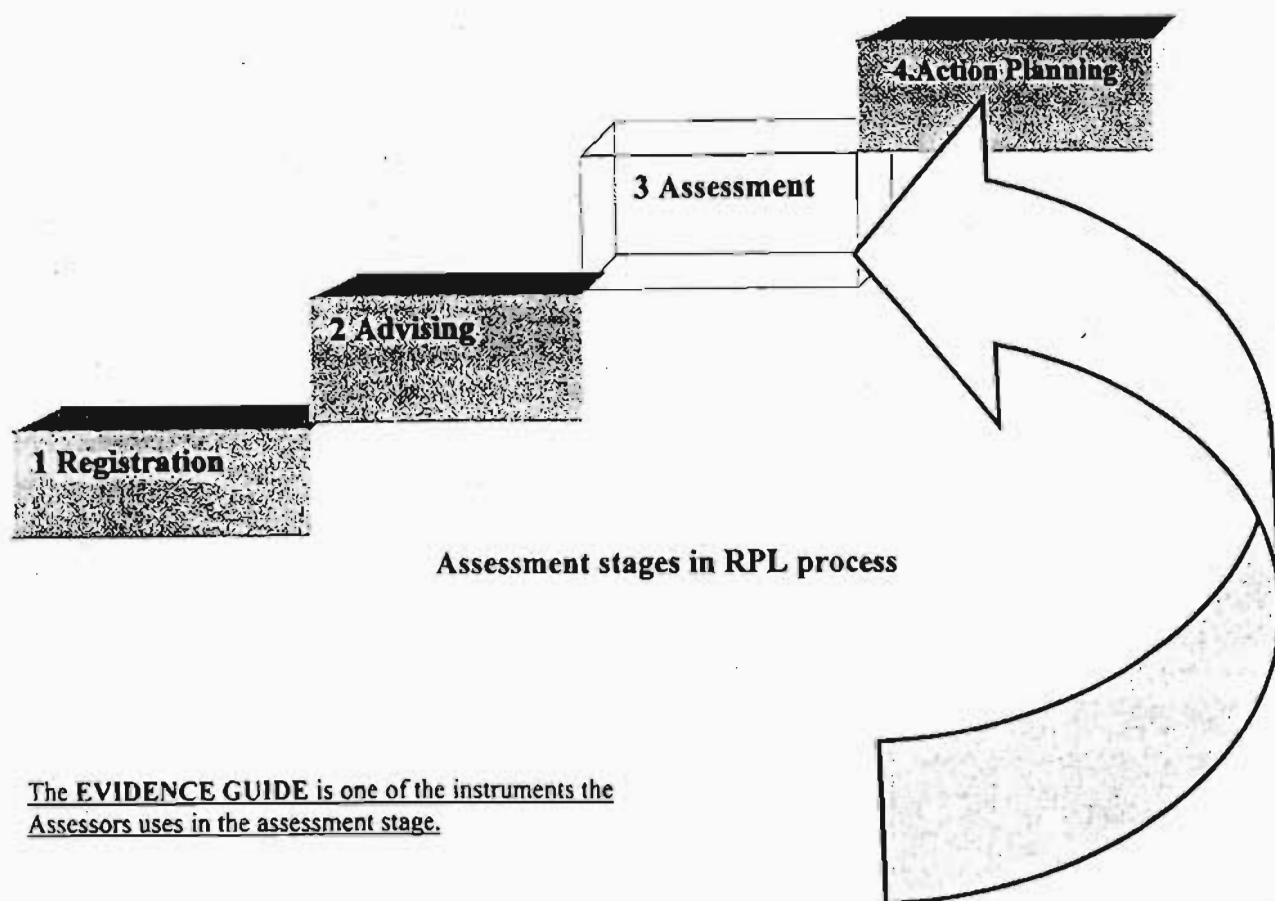
The **EVIDENCE GUIDE** is one of the instruments the Assessors uses in the assessment stage.

The **TOOLKIT** of the **Assessor** consists of the following

Assessment stage procedure
Action plan stage procedure

And the following instruments

1. Assessor guide
2. Assessment report
3. Assessment site checklist
4. Orientation guide
5. Evidence guide
6. Candidates assessment instruction
7. Assessment stage checklist

CONTENTS

The assessment outlined in this evidence guide of the unit standard: **Setting out buildings & transferring levels** is an **integrated assessment** in which **different methods of assessment** are used (questioning, observation, product sampling and file review). By means of these assessment methods **the applied competence** of a candidate **using statements of competence** based on **the assessment criteria established by industry is assessed.**

Applied competence is a **combination of practical** competence, **foundational** competence and **reflexive competence.**

Quality ---

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SECTION 1: INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ASSESSOR

The purpose of this section is to assist you to assess a candidate in accordance with the objective of the assessment and help you plan the assessment.

1.1 Content of the assessment in brief

1.1.1 Objective of the assessment:
To establish the competence of a learner / candidate based on the assessment criteria for the Unit Standard: <u>Setting out buildings & transferring levels</u>.

A candidate declared **competent** will receive credits and a recommendation for an award that will be registered by the CETA ETQA.

1.1.2 Outcomes to be assessed
1. Applying methods and transferring levels
2. Setting out a building
3. The essential embedded knowledge and the critical cross-field outcomes that form part of this unit standard.

1.1.3 Assessment criteria
1. Use of water level, spirit level, dumpy level according to relevant manufacturers recommendations;
2. Set out a (part of a) building according to specifications;
3. Applicable Occupational Health and Safety Act legislation is adhered to;
4. The relevant standard specified by SABS codes of practice, ISO standards and standards approved by the official bodies of the building industry are adhered to.

A person is declared **competent** when able to integrate the outcomes to the standard (expressed in statements of competence based on the assessment criteria) in a quality assured assessment environment.

For more details, refer to the following items in this evidence guide:

section 3: Assessment specifications
section 4: Assessment check sheet.

SECTION 2: ASSESSMENT CONDITIONS & REQUIREMENTS

The purpose of this section is to provide you with the information needed to check that the materials, tools, other equipment, assistance and the allocated time are in accordance to carry out this assessment in a quality controlled manner.

2.1 Duration:

The total time allocated for this assessment is 3 hours (180 minutes). This time is allocated to the assessment elements as follows.

> ➤ Assessment interview: 20 minutes;
> ➤ Assessment assignment: 145 minutes;
> ➤ Debrief interview: 15 minutes.

2.2 Material:

FOR SETTING OUT BUILDINGS AND TRANSFERRING LEVELS			
Material	**Quantity**	**Material**	**Quantity**
Steel pegs	± 24	Lime	10 kg

2.3 Assistance:

One general worker to provide the following assistance during the assessment assignment:

> ➤ The general worker assists in keeping a clean and safe working environment according to the directions of the candidate.

2.4 Tools

Hand Tools	Quantity	Other Equipment	Quantity
Chalk line	1	Dumpy level + staff	1
Pencil	1	Water level	1
Square	1	Line	1
Measuring tape	1	Levelling pegs and pins	
Measuring tape (20 meters)	1		
Club hammer	1		

SECTION 3: ASSESSMENT SPECIFICATIONS

The purpose of the assessment specification is to provide you with all the detailed information needed to assess the competence of a candidate against the assessment criteria of the Unit Standard: Setting out buildings & transferring levels.

3.1 Elements of the assessment

The assessment consists of three elements. For each element, the following time frames should be adhered to.

1. Assessment interview (to determine foundational competence):   20 minutes;
2. Assessment assignment (to determine practical competence):   145 minutes;
3. Debrief Interview (to determine reflexive competence):   15 minutes.

N.B.   **foundational + practical + reflexive competence = applied competence**

For more details refer to the Assessor guide

In principle all the elements of the assessment should be addressed by the Assessor to establish if a candidate is to be deemed competent. **In this sense, all the elements are critical unless the following exception applies:**

The Advisor has concluded in the **portfolio review** that the candidate has proven – beyond any reasonable doubt – competence with regard to the critical cross field outcomes and the essential embedded knowledge addressed in the interviews. The assessment method used to establish the foundational and or reflexive competence in this case is file review. The time allocated for the interview(s) will in this case be forfeited.

If there is any doubt with regard to the conclusion of the Advisor the Advisor and Assessor should confer.

3.1.1 Assessment interview

Duration 20 minu

During the <u>Assessment interview</u> the Assessor will assess the <u>foundational competence</u> o candidate. The foundational competence consists of the set of essential embedded knowledge a critical cross-field outcomes listed in the following table.

If the Assessor based on the review of the candidates file still has to address eek's and ccfo's th the Assessor will encourage the candidates to relate in their own words the answers to the relevous questions that still need to be visited. In the table below a method for assessing is suggested.

	Essential embedded knowledge	Questioning	Observation
	Explains how to set out a building and the transferring of levels by using a spirit level, water level and a dumpy level. should take place	X	
	Explains which tools should be used in the setting out of a building and the transferring of levels.	X	
	Explains which materials should be used in the setting out of a building and the transferring of levels.		
	Explains the reasons for setting out and transferring of levels.	X	
	Critical cross field outcomes		
	Demonstrates communication skills	X	X
	Demonstrates work organization skills	X	X
	Demonstrates planning skills	X	

<u>Statements of competence to determine the foundational competence of candidate</u>

<u>1) The foundational competence is sufficient if:</u>
The candidate can name the steps in the right order; names tools and materials which are needed; demonstrates an understanding for the setting out of a building, and transferring of levels; communicates effectively, and shows understanding of work organisation.

<u>2) The foundational competence is insufficient if:</u>
The candidate is unable to tell how the work will be achieved; cannot name tools and materia needed to do so; demonstrates no understanding of the setting out of a building and the transferrin of levels. Furthermore, in answering the candidate demonstrates no understanding of wor organisation, and communicates ineffectively.

> **The result – and the methods used to assess the foundational competence - should be marked in the appropriate box on the assessment check sheet (section 4).**

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3.1.2 Assessment Assignment

During the assessment assignment, the Assessor will assess the practical competence of a candidate
The practical competence consists of the following set of essential embedded knowledge, specifi
outcomes and critical cross-field outcomes related to the assessment task.

	Essential Embedded knowledge	Assessment method	
		Product sampling	Observation
	Demonstrates understanding for the setting out of a building and transferring of levels.		X
	Demonstrates understanding of use of materials for setting out and transferring of levels.	·	X
	Demonstrates understanding of use of tools for setting out and transferring of levels.		X
	Demonstrates understanding of different ways to set out.		x
	Specific outcomes		
	Applying methods and transferring levels	X	
	Setting out a building	X	
	Critical Cross field outcomes		
	Demonstrates communication skills		X
	Demonstrates work organisation skills		X
	Demonstrates planning skills	X	
	Demonstrates safety awareness		X
	Demonstrates cooperation skills		X

Tasks of the assessment assignment:

The specific outcomes will be carried out according to the specifications of assessment assignmen
drawing section 3.1.2.1: DRAWINGS 1-4, page 11-13, of this evidence guide.

Statements of competence to determine the practical competence of a candidate

1) The practical competence is sufficient if:
The practical achievements of the candidate meet the technical assessment criteria by which quality
of the end product is measured (see below), and the candidate has – while carrying out the task -
demonstrated effective communication and cooperation skills; solved the problems he came across
in a professional manner; worked in an organised fashion, and has demonstrated awareness of
safety.
Technical assessment criteria: see page 10

2) The practical competence is insufficient if:
The practical achievement of the candidate does not meet the technical criteria by which the quality
of the end product is measured, and the candidate has not - while carrying out the task -
demonstrated effective communication and cooperation skills; solved the problems he came across
in a professional manner; worked in a organised fashion, and has demonstrated awareness of safety.
Technical assessment criteria: see page 10

Technical assessment criteria to judge the quality of the end product.

Squaring	± 15 mm up tp 15 m.	Spirit level	± 10 mm in 5 m
Measurements	± 5 mm up to 30 m.	Dumpy level	± 5 mm up to 60 m
Water level	± 5 mm in 15 m.		

These technical criteria form the standard specified by SABS codes of practice, ISO standards and standard approved by official bodies of the building industry and have to be adhered to.

The result – and the methods used to assess the practical competence - should be marked in the appropriate box on the assessment check sheet (section 4).
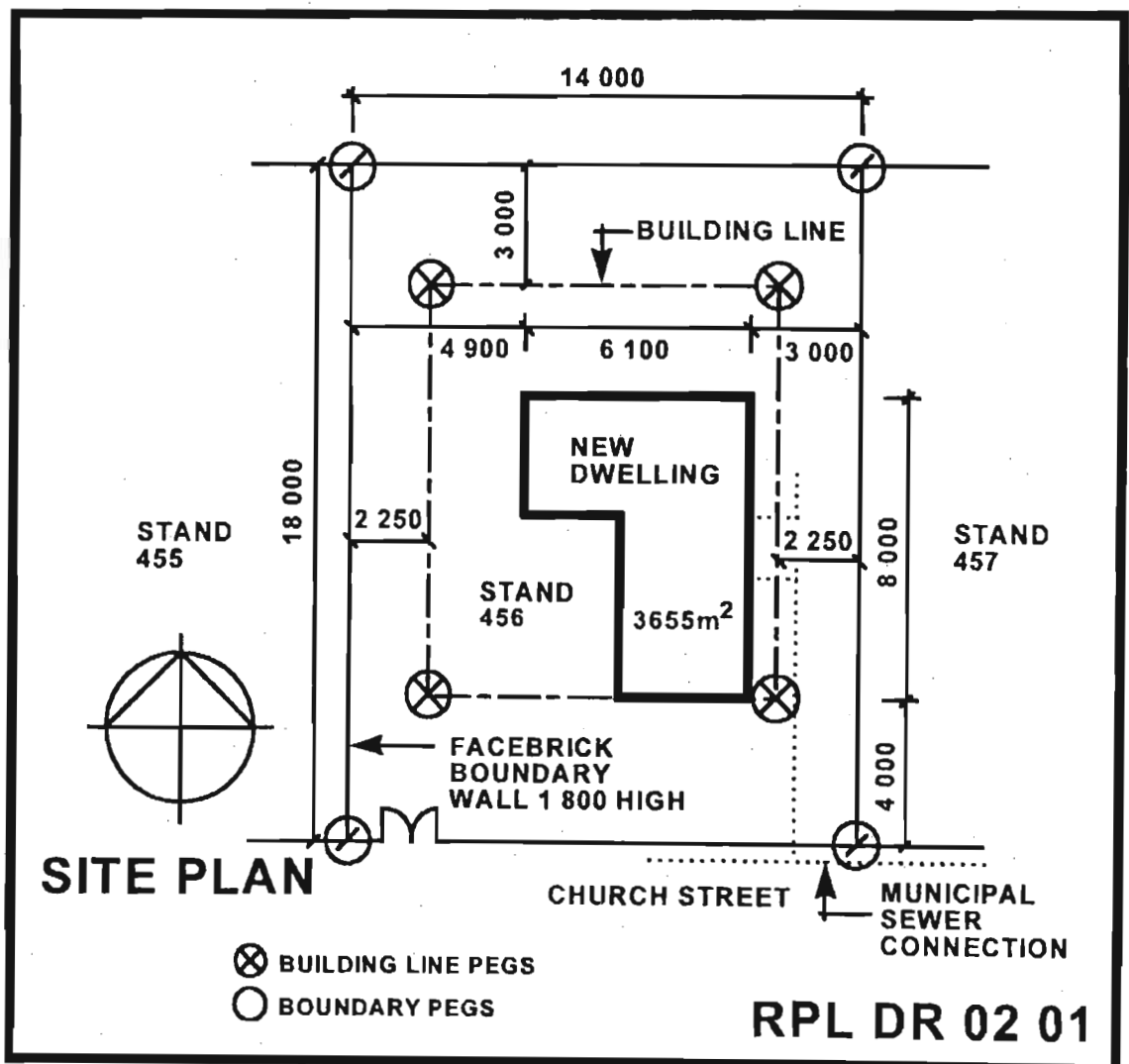
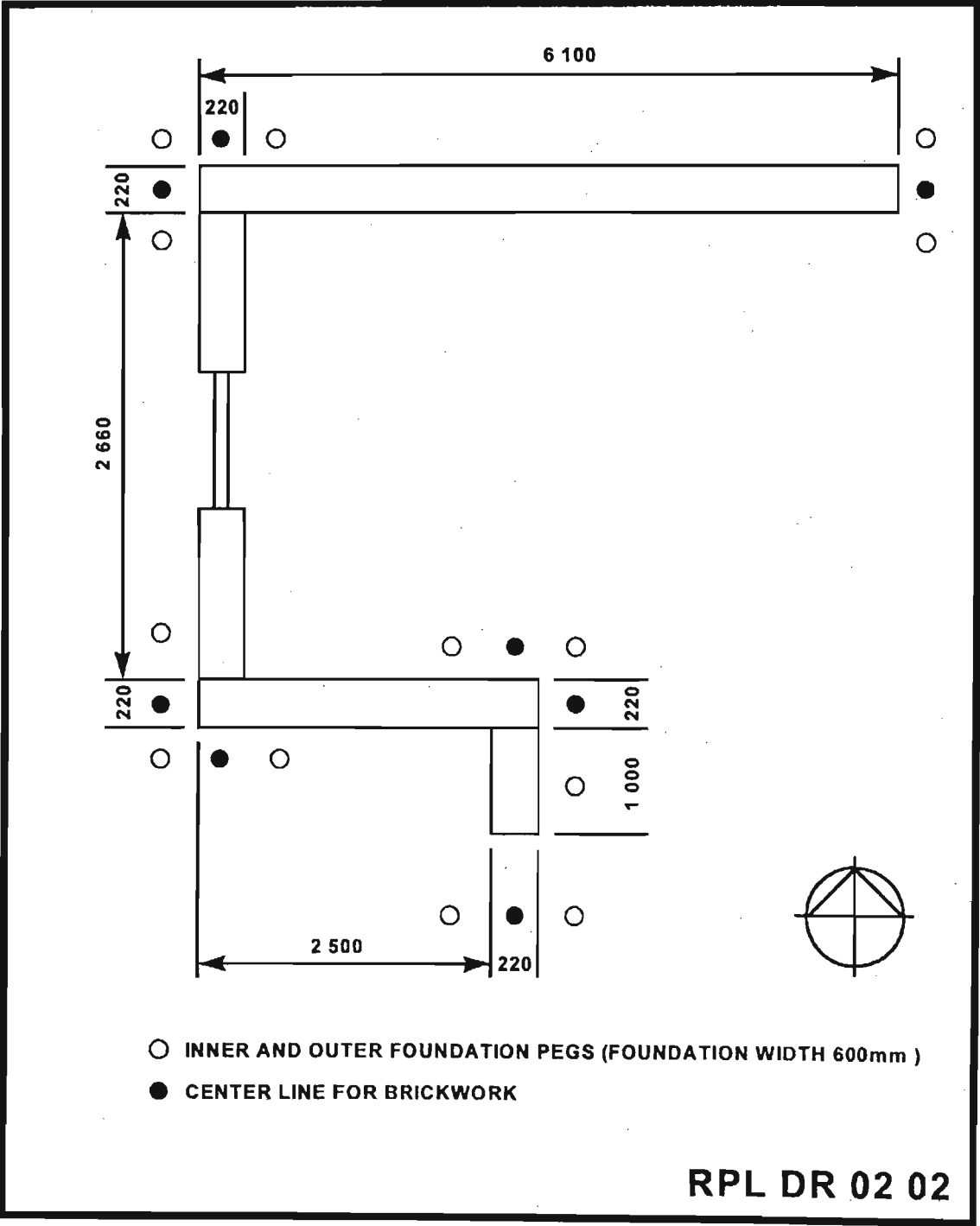## 3.1.2.1 Assessment Assignment Drawing 1 of 4: RPL DR 02 01

In Place:
1) Model of completed assessment assignment according to specifications.(for explanatory reasons, profiles and pegs should be used);
2) Building area for candidate is pegged off according to specifications;
3) Area for setting out must be flat.

Assessment assignment for the candidate: (setting out)
1) Peg off building lines;
2) String fish line between building line pegs;
3) Set out building according to specifications / model;
4) Peg inner and outer lines for foundations.(3 pegs per corner and 2 pegs per straight wall ending);
5) Peg centre line for brickwork. (2 pegs per corner and 1 peg per straight wall ending);
6) Connect pegs with fish line;
7) Spread lime for excavation on lines representing the foundation.

SITE PLAN

⊗ BUILDING LINE PEGS
○ BOUNDARY PEGS

RPL DR 02 01

6 100

220

220

2 660

220

220

1 000

2 500

220

○ INNER AND OUTER FOUNDATION PEGS (FOUNDATION WIDTH 600mm)

● CENTER LINE FOR BRICKWORK

RPL DR 02 02

3.1.2.1 Assessment Assignment Drawing 3 of 4: RPL DR 02 03

In Place:
1) Levelling model according to specifications;
2) Model without projections of level (level m 'X' given).

Assessment assignment for the candidate: (water levelling)
From the given level X , transfer level marks onto wall F and G and strike a chalk line through the marks.

GIVEN LEVEL X

F

G
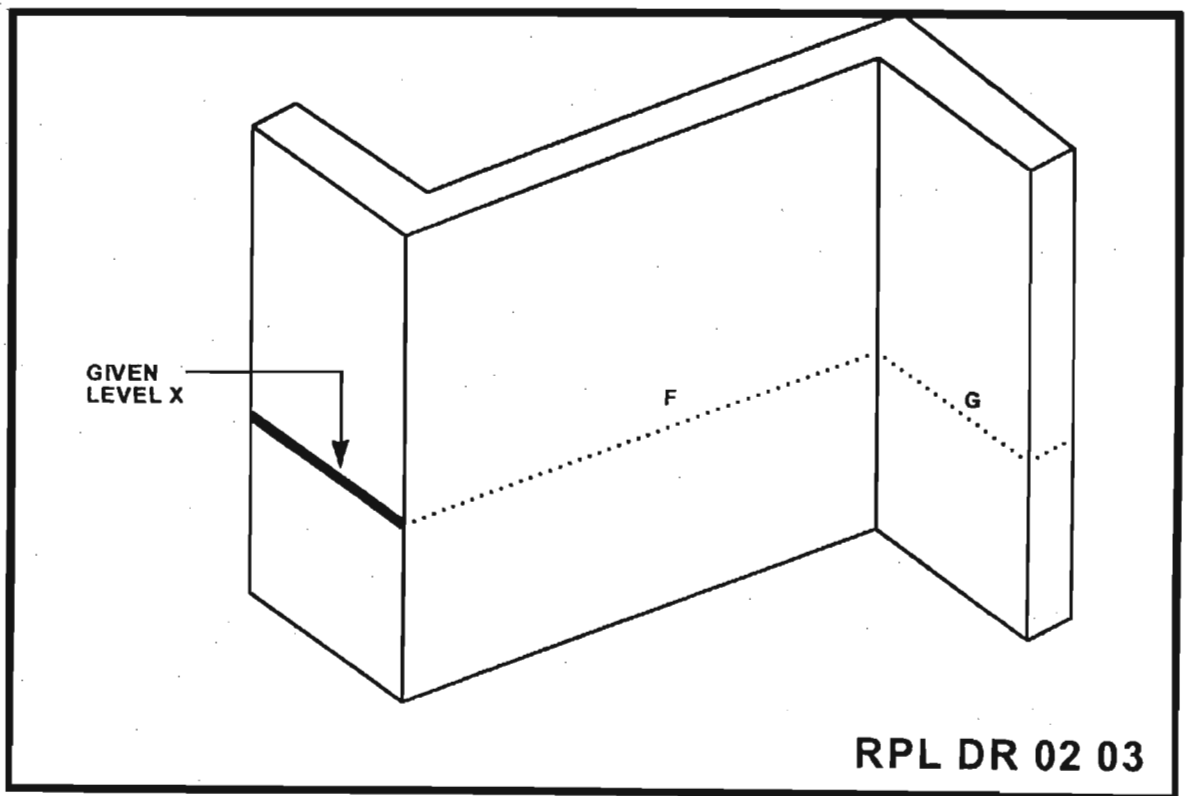
RPL DR 02 03

3.1.2.1 Assessment Assignment Drawing 4 of 4: RPL DR 02 04

In Place:
1) Datum on wall;
2) N at 650 above datum.

Assessment assignment for the candidate: (dumpy level)
1) Set up dumpy level ready for use;
2) Read and write down the staff reading for level point N.

N

D

RPL DR 02 04
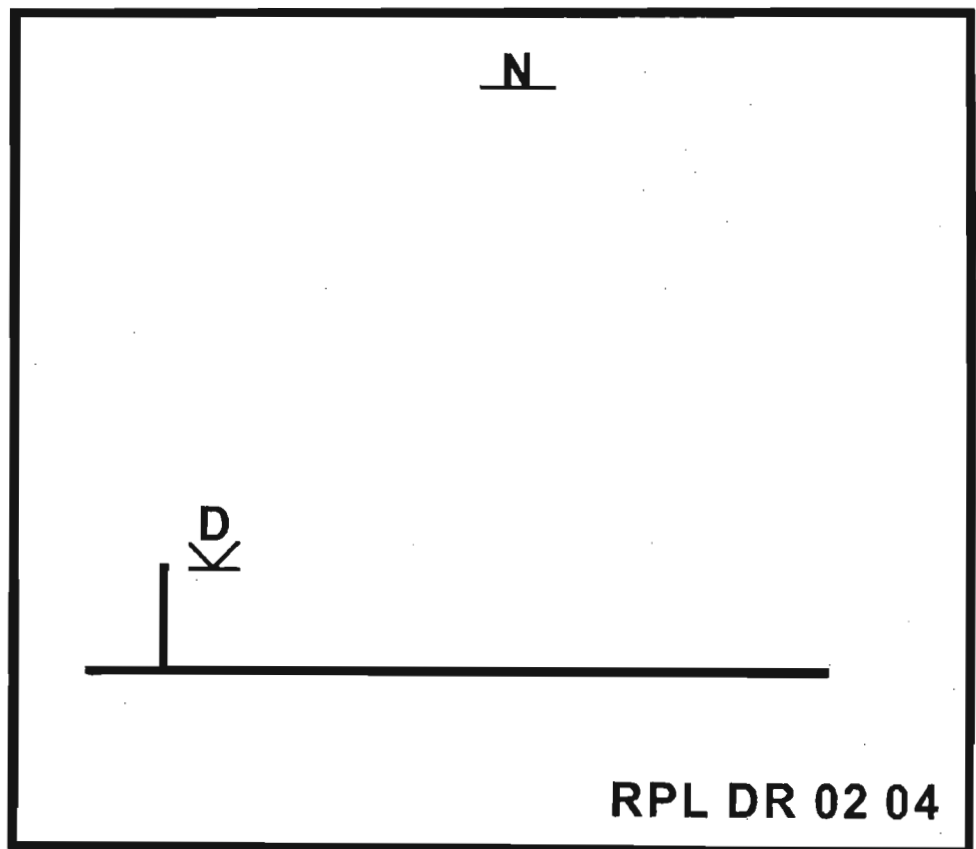
3.1.3 Debrief interview

During the debrief interview, the Assessor will assess the reflexive competence of a candidate. 1 reflexive competence consists of the following set of essential embedded knowledge and criti cross-field outcomes listed in the table below.

If the Assessor - based on the review of the candidates file - still has to address eek's and ccfo then the Assessor will encourage the candidates to relate in their own words the answers to t relevant questions that still need to be visited. In the table below a method for assessing suggested.

Essential Embedded knowledge	Assessment method	
	Questioning	Observation
Explains the difference between the 3: 4: 5 method and the use of a builders square in squaring a building site.	X	
Explains the easiest way to transfer levels.	X	
Explains why one needs to transfer levels on a site.	X	
Critical Cross field outcomes		
Evaluation skills	X	
Explains the way problems were solved	X	
Communication skills		X

Statements of competence to determine the reflexive competence of a candidate

1) The reflexive competence is sufficient if:
The candidate can explain a difference between the 3:4:5 method and the use of a builders square for squaring a building. Furthermore, the candidate can explain the way problems were solved; gives evidence of critical self reflection, and communicates effectively.

2) The reflexive competence is insufficient if:
The candidate cannot explain the difference between the 3:4:5 method and the use of a builders square for squaring a building. Furthermore, the candidate cannot over come problems; gives no evidence of critical self reflection, and does not communicate effectively.

> **The result – and the methods used to assess the foundational competence - should be marked in the appropriate box on the assessment check sheet (section 4).**

SECTION 4: ASSESSMENT CHECK SHEET

The assessment check sheet is provided to let you mark down the results of the assessment in a quality assured manner. You should copy the assessment check sheet on the back of the assessment report of the candidate.

Section 4: Assessment Results					
Addressed in Assessment interview		Tick off assessment method used *			
Essential Embedded Knowledge	Work sequence Tools Reasons for levelling and setting out buildings. Quality aspects	Q	Ob	PS	FR
Critical Cross-field Outcomes	Communication skills Work organisation Planning skills				
The foundational competence of the candidate is: (If insufficient motivate):		SUFFICIENT		INSUFFICIENT	
Addressed in Assessment Assignment:		Q	Ob	PS	FR
Essential Embedded knowledge	Work sequence Tools				
Specific outcomes 1. Applying methods and transferring levels 2. Setting out a building	Assessment criteria: Level,.... within permissible tolerances (see test specification).				
Critical Cross-field outcomes	Work organisation, Safety awareness, Cooperation skills, Communication skills, Planning skills				
The practical competence of the candidate is: (If insufficient motivate):		SUFFICIENT		INSUFFICIENT	
Addressed in Assessment Assignment:		Q	Ob	PS	FR
Essential Embedded knowledge	Work sequence Tools				
Critical Cross-field outcomes	Work organisation, Safety awareness, Cooperation skills, Communication skills, Planning skills				
The reflexive competence of the candidate is: (if insufficient motivate):		SUFFICIENT		INSUFFICIENT	
Signature Assessor					Date & Time

* KEY | Q = Question | Ob= Observation | PS= Product Sampling | FR = File Review
The use of more than one method is possible / considered a good assessment practice

SECTION 5: INSTRUCTING THE CANDIDATE

The instructing of the candidate takes place before the actual assessment. This section briefly outlines some elements to you to assist you with this task.

5.1 Candidates Assessment Instruction Document

The instruction of the candidate is outlined in full in the candidates assessment instruction document. **RPL I 05 03 02**. Attach this document to this evidence guide for yourself!
Give the candidate a copy and explain. It is not enough to hand it over to the candidate and then expect the candidate to know what he has to do during the assessment. Take into account that candidates can lack literacy skills! This point cannot be stressed enough.
Make sure that candidates know what is expected of them.

After going through the candidates assessment instruction document you should give the candidate some time (10 to 20 minutes) to prepare for the assessment. Only then will you call in the candidate for the assessment interview and does the allocated time for the assessment commence.

While instructing the candidate adhere to the following:
1. Put the candidate at ease;
2. Point out the function of the assessment elements:
   - Assessment interview;
   - Assessment assignment;
   - Debrief interview.

5.1.1 General instructions

Go through the general instructions and check that the candidate knows what is expected. Check the feasibility of carrying out the assessment in terms of available time.

5.1.2 Specific instructions

Go through the specific instructions and check that the candidate knows what is expected.

5.1.3 Assessment assignment drawing

The assessment assignment for the unit standard: Setting out buildings & transferring levels consists of **4** drawings. The candidate should prepare using the drawings, but can make use of the model in place on the assessment sight during the assessment.