

.....
Recognition of Prior Learning:
A Summary of an Exploratory Study in a New Zealand University

Paper presented to by:
NZARE/AARE Conference Dr Jennie Harré Hindmarsh
Deakin University Senior Lecturer in Continuing
Gellong Education
Victoria, Australia. Victoria University of Wellington
22-26 November 1992 PO Box 600, Wellington
NEW ZEALAND.
Fax: (04) 495 5197

Research Project funded and resourced by:
New Zealand Qualifications Authority and Victoria University of Wellington

September 1992

Recognition of Prior Learning: A Summary of an Exploratory
Study in a New Zealand University

This research project was developed by Victoria University of Wellington on contract with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). Funding was provided by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) provided other resources of staff time (academic and administrative) as required.

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority was required by the Education Amendment Act (1990) to recognise prior learning by developing a framework for national qualifications in which there is:
a flexible system for the gaining of qualifications with the recognition of competency already achieved.

Whilst New Zealand universities are not directly governed by NZQA's requirements for RPL, it was considered important to examine recognition of prior learning (RPL) as it may apply in universities given that: RPL is increasingly used in overseas universities; the New Zealand Vice Chancellors Committee (NZVCC) and NZQA have set up a Joint Consultative Committee to clarify the relationship between their systems; and students will expect RPL from universities when it is available in the other tertiary institutions.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the project were:

- * to develop a comprehensive database of current processes and practices used at Victoria University of Wellington, for the recognition of prior learning;
- * to identify principles to guide New Zealand universities in the implementation of a comprehensive and systematic system for the recognition of prior learning; and
- * to identify changes required in the processes and practices of admissions, programme delivery, staff development, liaison, education counselling and guidance services in order to implement such a system.

Research Tasks

In order to achieve these objectives the Victoria University of Wellington research team contracted to:

- * review current literature on the recognition of prior learning, particularly as this relates to the recognition of prior learning in universities;
- * identify principles which may guide university recognition of prior learning;
- * document and analyse current processes and practices in the recognition of prior learning within Victoria University of Wellington;
- * identify changes to university processes and procedures required to implement a comprehensive system for the recognition of prior learning; and
- * identify any major implications for the university in areas such as staffing, course development, student welfare, liaison and guidance services.

In the research proposal initially submitted to NZQA, Victoria University of Wellington stated its intention to give particular attention ... to principles and processes required to recognise the prior learning of under-represented groups – Maori, Pacific Islands, disabled and women in particular fields.

(VUW proposal, November 1991, p. 1).

It was also noted that, with reference to the identification of principles to guide university RPL these principles would be developed with particular reference to the Treaty of Waitangi (p. 2).

Research Processes

In order to meet these objectives and complete the tasks, four research processes were used:

- * a literature review;
 - * analysis of 35 interviews with University staff;
 - * analysis of the University Calendar; and
-
- * the development of this final report with alternative models and recommendations.

The Senior Lecturer in Continuing Education, Jennie Harré Hindmarsh, developed, managed and wrote up the research project, in consultation with the Steering Committee chaired by Dr Gary Burns, the convener of the Academic Committee. Other members of the Steering Committee were Professor David Hamer (Assistant Vice-Chancellor), Gail Longmore (Manager, Student

Admissions and Records), Joanna Kidman (University Teaching Development Centre), Peter Adds (Maori Studies), Professor Hugh Lauder (Education), Katharine Jermyn (Deputy Academic Registrar). These people were invited to make up the Steering Committee given their knowledge of university education and procedures and their strategic location with regard to any recognition of prior learning implementation.

Two researchers were employed part-time from March to June 1992 – TeAroha Mackintosh and Shona de Sain. They conducted all but one of the interviews, analysed the University Calendar, made literature review notes, and drafted notes for the final report. Jennie Harré Hindmarsh and Joanna Kidman provided supervision for the researchers and Peter Adds was consultant to this supervision process.

In order to meet these objectives, the relevant literature was reviewed, 33 University staff were interviewed, the University Calendar was analysed, and this report was compiled in consultation with the Steering Committee of persons with key knowledge of the university's procedures and practices and whose positions are strategic with regard to the recognition of prior learning. (See acknowledgements, p. ,mmes (Griffin, 199[^] for those who contributed as the Steering Committee and research field workers).

This Paper

This paper summarises this research report, and is presented at this conference in tandem with a paper on the implications of RPL for Maori which develops, in more detail, those dimensions of the project.

This paper is in three parts. In the first part an analysis of terminological and conceptual confusion evident in the literature is summarised and RPL definitions for this project clarified. Secondly, the current practices used to recognise prior uncertificated learning in a New Zealand university and key issues which arise are briefly presented. Finally, conclusions drawn regarding principles to guide RPL and academic and administrative charges required to implement a more rigorous and consistent system of RPL in a New Zealand university are noted.

CONCEPTS,

TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

Terminological debates abound in the field of RPL (Slowey, 1992, p. 63). A number of alternative concepts, terms and definitions for the recognition of prior learning are being used currently in New Zealand and in the international literature. Upon encountering this conceptual confusion we considered it necessary to firstly, examine the confusion and secondly, to develop recommendations aimed at the establishment of commonly agreed and understood terminology to guide policy development and implementation procedures in New Zealand. In so doing, we also more clearly define the parameters of the focus of our study.

Conceptual Confusion

Two sources of conceptual confusion can be identified. Conceptual confusion has developed when the same terms are used both as umbrella concepts, to refer to all forms of recognising all forms of learning, and as specific concepts, to refer to specific processes for the awarding of

credit for learning which has not already been assessed – usually acquired in nonformal and/or informal learning situations. In addition, conceptual confusion has developed when the terms emphasise either the identification and assessment of learning or the awarding of credit for learning in relation to a specified set of learning criteria or benchmarks.. Each of these sources of confusion will now be explored using New Zealand examples, where available.

'Recognition of prior learning'

NZQA Policy Documents (1991)

In NZQA's November 1991e policy document booklets, the recognition of prior learning is used both as an umbrella concept and to refer to one of two specific processes included under this umbrella concept. The latter use refers to RPL specifically as the awarding of credits for non-certificated learning. As an umbrella concept (in the same documents but under the sections entitled 'Key Elements in the Framework'), RPL is used to group both this specific process (but defined as the 'formal acknowledgement' rather than the 'awarding of credit' of non-certificated learning) and another specific process, that of credit transfer.

The recognition of prior learning ... requires a structured system which allows learning completed outside the formal education and training environment to be formally acknowledged. That learning may proceed from life experience (for example, management of a voluntary organisation), work experience, self-education and non-formal education.

Learning within one area of the formal education system will be given appropriate value in any other area.

Both these developments are to be thoroughly researched in the months ahead to determine assessment methods (NZQA, 1991e).

In the March 1991 discussion document (1991a) and the accompanying background paper (1991c), NZQA also use the term, the recognition of prior learning, as an umbrella concept, to refer to all forms by which prior learning can be formally acknowledged. In these documents, RPL is broadly defined as the structures and processes to accord value to prior learning. Prior learning is grouped under five broad categories: work based learning, experiential learning, competencies and qualifications gained overseas; skills attested to by an ethnic or other group, and credit accumulation and transfer within the formal education system (1991a, pp. 64-5; 1991c, pp. 2-17).

In these documents and in the 'Key Elements' sections of the later policy statements (1991e), RPL is neither confined to the awarding of credits, nor to non-certificated learning acquired outside formal education and training. Rather, RPL refers to a range of possible outcomes for the learner, not only the awarding of credit. The following possible outcomes are listed:

- * the awarding of credit;
- * exemption from parts of a course;
- * admission with advanced standing;
- * granting of equivalence between overseas competencies and

qualifications and those acquired in New Zealand;

- * admission to a course; and

- * credit accumulation and transfer by formal institutions or by a formal national (centralised) credit accumulation and transfer system.

Furthermore, RPL refers to learning acquired anywhere (formal, non-formal and informal settings), both certificated and non-certificated (NZQA, 1991a, c, e).

In summary then, and as summarised diagrammatically in figures 1 and 2 (pp. 22-23), the same term – RPL – has been used by NZQA in its policy document (1991e) to refer to two types and levels of conceptualisation and categorisation. Figure 1 illustrates RPL, the umbrella concept; figure 2, RPL, the specific concept. This conceptual confusion is exacerbated when one focuses on the potential outcomes of RPL assessment processes. In figure 1, the outcomes include a range of provisions, not exclusively the awarding of credits. Admission, admission with advanced standing, exemptions and equivalence are included as outcomes of RPL. In figure 2 all outcomes involve the awarding of credit.

These anomalies create conceptual confusion which is unhelpful to those seeking to explore the relationship between RPL policy statements and current practices, and to identify changes required to implement such policies. In the light of this analysis, it is suggested that NZQA has a choice – to adopt the term RPL to refer specifically to processes of awarding credit, and/or other forms of recognition for non-certificated learning; or to refer broadly to all processes for the recognition of all forms of prior learning. Which ever option is chosen, requires the

adoption of an appropriate available term for the remaining option. In the following sub-section we review the available terms and discuss the appropriateness of each as an alternative for either RPL in the specific sense or RPL in the general sense.

However, before this review, it is necessary to complete two further tasks: firstly, to briefly discuss the draft definition of RPL most recently posed by NZQA, in the light of the above analysis; and secondly, to review the Australian Broadmeadows College of TAFE's use of the term RPL, given its influence in New Zealand to date.

NZQA Draft definition 1992

In August 1992, NZQA developed another draft definition of RPL which defines RPL as:

Fair, equitable and consistent assessment procedures to verify and award appropriate unit credit, measured according to National Qualifications Framework unit standards, for current knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired informally (outside formal education and training environments), or formally (but not completed NQF units).

(Nancy Mills, NZQA, 8/92).

INSERT FIGURE 1

INSERT FIGURE 2

This definition signals two shifts in NZQA's conceptualisation of RPL. Firstly, this definition narrows RPL even more specifically to the realm of awarding credit only in relation to unit standards registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). In effect, it is an operational definition for NZQA rather than a policy/conceptual definition. This definition RPL would not be applicable to any programmes outside the NZQA framework – which includes, at present, all university programmes (overseen by NZVCC) and all programmes not seeking national recognition. Such a definition may be appropriate when NZQA is operating a central, national qualifications awarding body and all available programmes are registered as unit standards on the National Qualifications Framework. It appears unhelpful at this stage of policy development and operationalisation when education and training providers potentially inside and outside the NQF are exploring RPL. However, it does indicate that the authority of NZQA to develop policy and to monitor practice does not extend beyond the boundaries of the National Qualifications Framework.

Secondly, the definition confirms the Glossary of Terms (1991e) definition, with the emphasis both on the awarding of credits and on learning acquired outside formal environments.

Two additional points must be made. Firstly, the term 'nonformally' should be added so the phrase which reads – 'for current knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired nonformally and informally' – to be consistent with concepts commonly used in the education literature. Secondly, whilst this definition excludes credit accumulation and transfer and equivalences procedures for completed qualifications (as per the Glossary of Terms, 1991e), it specifically includes formally acquired learning which is not completed – in relation to NQF units. This learning may well have already been formally assessed and certificated.

In conclusion, then, this definition confirms the direction signalled by NZQA's Glossary of Terms definition (1991e) – that RPL as a concept in New Zealand is to specifically refer to the awarding of credits and to the assessment of prior learning previously not assessed and verified, formally. Therefore, it begs the question – what term will be used, if any, to embrace all forms of assessing and acknowledging all forms of prior learning?

Broadmeadows College of TAFE 'RPL'

The Broadmeadows College of TAFE, Victoria, Australia has developed a concept and model for the recognition of prior learning which has been widely adopted in Australia and which has been studied by many New Zealanders in the past year. It is based on learning which has been attested; and credit accumulation and transfer (NZQA, 1991d). Unions were most supportive and universities, whilst less enthusiastic, were also

positive. Those in favour saw RPL as fair and equitable (NZQA, 1991d,

This model uses RPL as an umbrella concept where RPL is defined as: the acknowledgement of skills and knowledge obtained through:

- formal training (conducted by industry or education);
- work experience (including informal training); and/or
- life experience.

(Broadmeadows College of TAFE, 1990, p. 15).

This conceptualisation of RPL, then, is more akin to NZQA's umbrella concept of RPL, including both the assessment of all prior learning and a range of potential outcomes from an RPL assessment. RPL is used to link learners, education providers and/or the workplace or a community. RPL is used, firstly, to provide a link between an education and training provider and the learner – the particular focus for this study. Here, the purpose of RPL is:

to recognise prior learning and experience within a formal education and training programme, in order to grant advanced standing or credit.

(Broadmeadows College of TAFE, 1990, p. 24).

Secondly, RPL is used to provide a link between the learner and an industry or community. Here, a measurable relationship must exist between the requirements of an industry or community and the individual's prior learning. The outcome of RPL could be placing someone at a certain salary level, in relation to an award or to enhance portability.

Thirdly, RPL provides a link between industry or a community and the education and training provider where occupational requirements are defined and translated into education and training needs, and thus into curriculum design. This is another potential use of RPL in relation to university programmes – specifically those with vocational or community involvement in curriculum definition and design (eg. Law, Architecture, Social Work, Maori Studies, Samoan Studies ...).

The point to note here, in relation to this analysis of terminology and concepts, is that the Australian model defines RPL as a broad concept which assesses all forms of learning and for many potential purposes and outcomes. In relation to course provision, the outcomes are particularly the granting of admission with advanced standing, exemptions, credit, curriculum design, and, by implication, the designing of programmes of study specific to the individual learner.

NZQA's choice between RPL as an umbrella concept and RPL as a specific concept, may need to take into account the Australian model, given the proximity of the two countries and the mobility of the respective populations. However, this choice will also be influenced by other alternative international concepts which now will be briefly reviewed.

Further Alternative Terms

The alternative terms to RPL most commonly used in New Zealand, to date, are the 'accreditation of prior learning' (APL), the 'assessment of prior learning' (APL) and the accreditation of prior learning achievement (APLA).

Assessment of prior learning

Assessment of prior learning was used by the Palmerston North College of Education (Griffin, 1990) in the first exploratory study conducted in a New Zealand tertiary institution. In this report the assessment of prior learning is used as an umbrella concept and defined as:

the acknowledgement of skills and knowledge obtained through formal training (industry and education), work experience and/or life experience...

The purpose of APL is to identify and assess the accumulated learning experience of an individual in relation to clearly defined vocational outcomes... APL is concerned with what people learn, that is with learning outcomes, rather than with how, when or where such learning takes place.

In this way the emphasis is on recognising competencies achieved ... APL involves the assessment of both formal and informal education and training.

(a) The assessment of formal education and training covers courses taken and qualifications gained through other institutions. Here APL is concerned with the equivalence and outcomes of the respective courses.

(b) Informal assessment includes both work experience, such as on the job training, and life experience, such as the involvement in community organisations. That is, 'knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experience and study which are not formally attested through any educational or professional certification.'

(Griffin, 1990, p. 2)

APL here is used to include both the assessment of formal education and training and of informal (non-formal and informal) education and training, not only the latter. APL, is thus used in the same way as in the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) in UK (CNAA, 1989) – to refer to the assessment and recognition of all prior learning, whether acquired formally (and thus creditable through credit transfer and equivalencies systems) or nonformally/informally by experience (and thus assessed and awarded credit using procedures to assess and assign a credit value to non-certificated learning).

Griffin's (1990) use of APL also refers to the acknowledgement of prior learning which, by implication later in the report, is usually through the

awarding of credit, but also may be through the granting of exemptions from courses or parts of courses, and/or through specially designed programmes of study for the student. In this way, too, the Palmerston North College of Education is using APL in the same way as Broadmeadows TAFE uses RPL and the CNAA in the UK uses the term CATS.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme

Under CATS (CNAA, 1989), a student's prior learning achieved through formal courses of study may be assessed to give students access to, and possibly some credit towards, a higher qualification. (CNAA, 1989, Regulation 5).

Furthermore, credit for learning which is not associated with a qualification may be awarded for prior experiential learning and industrial training (Regulations 2 and 5). As part of this process students work with an academic adviser to agree to a specific programme of study which comprises credit for previous studies and credit for experiential learning

(if applicable), and course units to be taken to complete the award (certificate, diploma or degree). This, in effect, is a learning contract between the student and CATS (CNA, 1989, Regulation 11).

The Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme is also operating in some universities (eg. University of London) and some consortia involving a university, polytechnics, local education authorities, Training and Enterprise Councils and business organisations. These consortia are interested to explore the potential of CATS to improve cooperation between sectors and to raise participation in education and training (eg. in London).

It must be noted here, however, that the UK's use of the term CATS as an umbrella concept (replacing 'RPL' in figure 1 and RPL I in figure 2) differs from NZQA's definition of CAT (Glossary of Terms, 1991e). There, CAT specifically refers to credit transfer between courses which lead to a qualification. Thus, if CAT/S was to be adopted in New Zealand as the umbrella concept, NZQA would need to use different terminology to refer to the specific process of credit transfer – perhaps that term: 'credit transfer'.

To this point in the discussion, two alternatives to the term 'RPL' as the umbrella concept have been reviewed – APL and CATS. Assessment of prior learning emphasises the process of assessing all prior learning; Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme emphasises the process of awarding credit for all prior learning. Before discussing the relative merits of each term as a potential umbrella concept, it is important to review other terminology in common use in New Zealand and internationally.

Accreditation of Prior Learning/Achievements

Benton (1990) uses the terms the accreditation of prior learning (APL), the concept of 'prior learning achievements', and the accreditation of prior learning achievements (APLA). The latter, APLA, was then adopted by NZCETSS (1991). Benton (1990) uses the definition of the APL Project Team at Telford College of Further Education (Scotland) as a basis.

APL or the Accreditation of Prior Learning is a process that enables people of all ages, backgrounds and attitudes to receive college credit for achievements they have acquired outside the college classroom.

(APL Project Team, 1989, p. 1).

As above, the emphasis is on the outcomes or achievements of prior learning (hence the extension to APLA) not the learning process itself and regardless of where or how that learning was achieved. This term is more akin to the NZQA's Glossary (1991e) definition of RPL in that the attention is on the awarding of credits for learning achievements acquired outside formal learning contexts.

However, the use of the term 'accreditation' is confusing for the New Zealand context, given that 'accreditation' has been used particularly by NZQA to refer to the accreditation of providers, the formal recognition that a provider is capable of delivering units to the standards specific (on the QA Framework).

(NZQA, 1991e).

Prior learning achievements are defined by Gorringer (1989) as: all those things which a person knows, understands, and can do, at the point where they decide they wish to obtain a recognition, eg. become

formally qualified in something through certification.

(Gorringe, 1989, p. 327).

This more open definition again paves the way for opening up APLA to be embracing concept, as is APL as used by the Palmerston North College of Education.

In adopting Benton's choice of the term APLA, NZCETSS (1991) defines the accreditation of prior learning achievement as:

the process whereby a person's skills, knowledge and abilities acquired before enrolling for a course are measured and credited if demonstrated to be relevant to the goals of the course or of a theme within a course. APLA grants formal recognition, ie. gives full or partial credit, for what the learner has achieved and uses this as the foundation for further learning. It is the outcome and not the learning process that is the key.

(NZCETSS, 1991, p. 55).

In this use of terminology, no distinction or discussion is developed regarding the source of the 'skills, knowledge and abilities acquired' - whether formal, nonformal or informal education and training. The emphasis here is on the awarding of credits for all forms of prior learning, as it is with CATS. However, the accompanying discussion refers to methods for the assessment of prior non-certificated learning. This may be because credit transfer has traditionally been used in recognised social work courses and the guidelines emphasise new procedures. Or it maybe because 'prior learning' is assumed to be non-certificated - given the discussion in Benton (1990). Either way, the term APLA, whether meaning the assessment or the accreditation of prior learning, could be used as an umbrella concept if it is referring to all learning achievements, wherever acquired, and to a range of forms for the acknowledgement of that learning.

Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning

A further, and final term, that is used in the international literature and in New Zealand discussions to date is the assessment of prior experiential learning (APEL). Norman Evans, Learning from Experience Trust, has promoted this concept and terminology in the UK since about 1980. The term is also enshrined in USA developments in that the key organisation which has promoted and guided the acknowledgement of prior learning is the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).

According to Evans,

The Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning involves students or prospective students documenting their learning from life and work experience in such a way that they can use such documentation to gain access and advanced standing in tertiary education institutions.

(Evans, 1990, p. 122).

Evans (1989) documents the histories of APEL in USA and Britain. In USA APEL began with the funding, by the Carnegie Foundation, in 1974 of the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning (now the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) and in Britain, in 1977 with desk studies funded

by FEU and CNAA. In both settings APEL recognises learning is acquired through formal and experiential processes – life and work experiences. Higher education's business is seen as including the assessment of that learning, where appropriate.

Evans (1989, p. 8) distinguishes between APL and APEL. APL, in his view, is defined as the assessment of prior learning directly related to formally taught courses. APEL does not necessarily assess learning in relation to a particular formal course.

An important feature of the concept of APEL is that it is 'concerned with certifying uncertificated knowledge and skill' (Evans, 1990, p. 122). APEL can be used by the learner to boost confidence, to motivate and guide them into further education and training; as a significant learning process in itself; to gain access or admission with advanced standing; or to gain credit – the emphasis is not on gaining access, admission with advanced standing or credit alone. The emphasis is on assessing uncertificated, experiential learning rather than including learning that has already been formally acquired and assessed.

In this sense, then, APEL is not appropriate to use as an umbrella concept, to embrace all forms of assessing all forms of learning. Rather, the potential contribution of APEL to conceptual clarification, policy and practice developments in New Zealand is within the realms of providing a label for the specific processes of identifying, assessing and giving specific value to prior non-certificated, experiential learning as an end in itself – for the learner's own development; as a process of reflection on education and learning; and/or as a means to gain admission, admission with advanced standing and/or credit in relation to a specific course/unit of study or an unspecified aspect of an overall programme of study.

Conclusions and Recommendations

To this point in this review, it can be concluded that the terms 'Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme' if used to encompass not only credit transfer, as by the CNAA; or 'RPL' as used by Broadmeadows College of TAFE are the most appropriate terms to use as an umbrella concept. These terms commonly refer to all forms of recognition of all forms of prior learning. The 'assessment of prior learning', as used by the Palmerston North College of Education; or the 'assessment/accreditation of prior learning achievement' could also be used as umbrella concepts. However, as APL/APLA is more commonly used to refer to the specifics of a focus on uncertificated learning, internationally, it is concluded that they should be reserved as alternative terms to refer to the acknowledgement of uncertificated learning.

Furthermore, it is considered that APL/APLA are less useful terms to use to refer to the recognition of uncertificated learning than the alternatives APEL or RPL (narrower definition). APEL is favoured given that it includes an indication that the learning is not certificated, but experiential. Also, it is not confused with an umbrella use of the same term. APLA is rejected because of the use of 'accreditation' and the Assessment of Prior Learning is rejected because it can refer to certificated or uncertificated

learning.

Alternatively, New Zealand could develop new terms – A/RPCL and A/RPUL, where the former is the assessment/recognition of prior certificated learning and the latter that of prior uncertificated learning – with CATS/RPL as the umbrella (see figure 3).

In conclusion, as a result of this review of alternative concepts and terminology it is recommended that NZQA:

1. adopt either RPL (Broadmeadows) or CATS (CNAA) to refer to all procedures which assess and acknowledge all forms of prior learning;
2. adopt APEL or RPUL as the specific term to refer to the assessment and according of specific value to prior non-certificated learning; or RPL, if RPL is not adopted as the umbrella concept as per options in recommendation 1.
3. not use the term accrediting of prior learning in relation to this field, given the particular meaning given to 'accrediting' in relation to the approval of providers; and
4. refrain from narrowing the definition of RPL to the awarding of credit for NQF units.

Figure 3 goes here

ed in New Zealand, to date, are and as does Simosko (1991) in the UKT
st^v
^^ (1989)
^^

Recognition of

Prior Learning in this study revisited

The focus of this study is on the recognition of prior learning in universities. In our contract with NZQA this was defined as the awarding of credits for prior non-certificated learning. As noted in the research proposal, our interest and emphasis was to complement the university's own internal review of its procedures for the crediting of formally certificated learning by examining the assessment of prior uncertificated or experiential learning achievements. Given that the NZQA and international literature also refers to RPL as involving a range of outcomes for the learner we examined alternative forms of both assessing and acknowledging or recognising uncertificated, experiential learning, including the awarding of credit, but not to the exclusion of other forms of acknowledgement or recognition. Thus our operational definition of RPL for the purposes of this study was the assessment and recognition of prior, non-certificated learning, through a range of procedures, including the awarding of credit.

CURRENT PRACTICES IN A NZ UNIVERSITY

The focus of the field research part of the project was to identify current processes and practices used at a New Zealand university. In this section, we summarise the current practices stated in the University Statutes and identify issues which arise.

University Statutes

Currently, the university's statutes allow for the recognition of prior uncertificated learning, obtained outside formal education and training to grant:

- exemption from pre-requisites for admission;
- admission to a particular course of study;
- direct admission to advanced courses; and/or
- partial exemption from some courses in a course of study

upon the recommendation of the Chairperson of a department and approval by the Convenor of the Academic Committee of the Academic Board.

The statutes for a range of university qualifications include clauses which enable the formal acknowledgment or recognition of learning completed outside the formal education and training environment. The relevant sections of university Statutes are quoted in full in Appendix 1. This

learning (as per NZQA's broader definition, 1991) may proceed from life experience, work experience, self-education and non-formal education in that the commonly used terminology in the university statutes is that the candidate must produce evidence of qualification for entry, or exemption from any pre-requisites for entry, through extensive practical, professional and/or scholarly experience of an appropriate kind. The university also recognises achievements in the community when awarding honorary degrees.

Whilst the university has a long tradition of awarding both specified and unspecified credits for prior certificated learning through its procedures for credit transfer, it does not have a tradition of awarding credit for uncertificated learning. However, RPL as defined more generally by NZQA (1991e) is possible in the university in that uncertificated learning is acknowledged and accorded academic value through the granting of admission, exemptions from prerequisites and direct entry to advanced courses. It can thus be proposed that the university has a long tradition of recognising prior learning in this general sense; and concluded that a climate conducive to RPL is part of the NZ university culture.

What, then, are the specific current practices which have been occurring in relation to these RPL procedures? More specifically, what procedures are used to inform candidates of the availability of the forms of recognition of prior learning that exist? What assessment procedures are used? Academic staff interviewed were asked to provide answers to these questions, given that there is no central, systematised and easily accessible records of such decisions.

Information and advice available

The university calendar and departmental prospectuses detail admission criteria, pre-requisites and procedures for application and enrolment for courses of study.

In addition, academic planning and guidance is available from all persons whom the prospective student encounters. In these discussions life experience is considered in relation to readiness for university study. Prior learning experiences and career goals are considered in relation to

an appropriate course of study for that person. In the presentations and discussions with groups, attention is drawn to the way in which prior learning (both certificated and uncertificated) can be recognised in relation to proposed courses of study, by credit transfer in the case of certificated learning and, in the case of the uncertificated learning, by admission, exemption from pre-requisites and partial exemption.

Procedures for Recognising Prior Learning

Currently, the following procedures are used to assess prior uncertificated learning:

- interview/discussion with Chairperson of Department and/or lecturer of the course;
- presentation of a portfolio;
- use of referees and attestation; and/or
- examinations and tests.

Issues and Discussion

The following issues were raised by those interviewed with regard to current processes and practices to recognise prior learning.

Information not openly available

There is a lack of consistent and widely available information about current procedures for the recognition of prior uncertificated learning, not only when seeking admission but also with regard to exemptions and direct admission into advanced courses. The information is made available once intending students enquire, but the 'general public' (and some academic staff) are generally unaware of the extent of procedures available. If more widely known, the information could encourage many more older students to seek admission, especially directly to Part II of a Masters degree.

Lack of consistent, clear procedures

Aligned with this lack of open information, there is a need for more consistent, rigorous and clear guidelines and procedures for the RPL that exists, and any further procedures that may be introduced - whilst guarding

against any loss of the flexibility and the case-by-case decision-making features of the current system. Should RPL for credit be introduced, standards for RPL procedures would automatically be required to improve. Standards should also be improved for current procedures.

Variable clarity in course expectations statements

The introduction of RPL in any more systematic way would require clear and concise statements of course requirements. At present, some staff expectations, especially those with regard to attitudes, are not always stated.

Variable views on the possible advantages and disadvantages of RPL

Variable responses to the potential of RPL were evident in the discussions with university staff interviewed. Issues were raised with regard to the implications of RPL for:

- academic standards;
- the university learning experience;

- Maori learning;
- equity considerations;
- educational efficiency and decreased duplication and wastage of student and staff resources;
- need for increased resource allocation required to set up systems, train staff and to administer RPL.

Standards and the university learning experience

The two most common disadvantages posed to university education by RPL were cited as threats to the quality and to the particular character attributed to learning in some disciplines, especially those which are not linked to a specific vocation. Even in vocationally oriented programmes, some consider that RPL procedures could require professional competence to be defined in terms that serve technocratic interests and thus deemphasise competencies that challenge social and economic injustices, given the promotion of RPL by those promoting technocratic interests.

This concern was linked to the assumption that RPL procedures are inevitably associated with minimal and very specific, finite course outcomes, as set out in a technicist or vocational, competency-based philosophy of education. These features of technicist, competency-based education are in direct opposition to two features held dearly by those committed to a western, liberal and/or humanist view of the purpose of education – which emphasises excellence ; expansion of human potential (rather than a finite level of competency, interpreted as minimal standards); and learning processes rather than outcomes.

Debate, analysis, critical thinking and an examination of thoughts and ideas are stated as important in the learning process and as outcomes of a university education. The argument is extended to state that learning in a university can not be solely specified to particular units – an important outcome is unspecified to any particular subject or content area.

If an ability to debate, analyse, think critically and to examine thoughts and ideas are valued outcomes of learning in a university, then a 'best practices' RPL framework would require that these expectations be listed as criteria. RPL candidates and students undertaking the course would be assessed to the same standards as other candidates, and graded accordingly, in relation to these criteria.

Clearly these are issues which need to be addressed. In so doing, it is not envisaged that RPL would be imposed upon universities according to a particular blueprint or that it would be a fundamental challenge to best academic practice – but that a case-by-case and step-by-step approach to the introduction of RPL would occur.

Maori learning

As with Griffin's (1990) study of staffs' views at a College of Education, some staff at the university considered that RPL presented important implications for Maori learners and staff. RPL was considered to present positive opportunities for Maori learners to be 'fast tracked' in university programmes, particularly through the recognition of their prior skills and knowledge in Maori language, culture and education.

It was considered that, as for RPL in general, RPL for Maori must be based on assessment processes designed and used by those who are experts in the particular field of study, in a culturally appropriate environment, and

using culturally appropriate procedures. In all fields of Maori learning,

this requires that Maori are in charge. These issues and implications are detailed further in the paper presented by Te Aroha Mackintosh.

Increased equity

University Calendar, made literature review notes, and drafted notes for the final report. Jennie Harré Hindmarsh and Joanna Kidman provided supervision. Many staff interviewed commented on the need to develop procedures for the recognition of the special knowledge, skills and contributions to learning processes brought to the university by mature-age students – the majority of whom are women.

Many of these mature-age students (especially women) have a wide range of skills important to successful study at university. These include organisation skills, commitment to the task, time management and a range of self-management skills. This raised the issue of whether RPL for unspecified credit ought to be available, as it is for some certificated credit transfer.

On the other hand, others considered that many mature-age students commencing university study find they must make a significant adjustment. It is no favour to them to exempt them or give them credit for level one courses if their self-esteem is then undermined by failing at level two, because of lack of familiarity with, and skills to study at, university. A suggestion was made for more preparatory or bridging courses for mature-age students to deal with this potential difficulty, alongside RPL. It was also considered important to recognise language and cultural skills brought to the university by people of particular ethnic groups who intended to study their language. Here more RPL could be given for prior learning.

Increased educational efficiency and resource demands

There is a tension between the increased efficiency of resource use implied by RPL (in terms of reduced duplication of learning time) and the increase in resources needed, at least initially, to implement RPL. In relation to the former, the implications of RPL with regard to the necessity to restrict or 'manage' entry to almost all first level courses, because demand exceeds places available, was raised. RPL can decrease pressure on course places, whilst enabling more students to progress with their course of study as those granted credit/exemption through RPL can proceed beyond the level where places are in great demand. However, this requires more staff resources to be allocated to assessment at the point of application for enrolment.

Summary

It was apparent from the discussions with university staff that a climate which favours the general principles of RPL exists already in this New Zealand university. RPL in the broader sense is considered part of the educational practice of the university – but, at this point, not to the extent of awarding credit. This suggests three things. Firstly, that the culture of the university is conducive to the development of more systematic and rigorous RPL procedures – provided academic staff are involved in setting up procedures and standards, to their satisfaction.

And secondly, that to develop RPL for credit would require a more systematic and rigorous set of course statements and assessment procedures. Thirdly, the university may choose to implement RPL for credit, in the interests of improved educational standards and efficiency – irrespective of NZQA's role in relation to universities and New Zealand education.

PRINCIPLES AND CHANGES REQUIRED

As a result of the literature review and the review of current practices, we propose the following set of principles to guide RPL in universities.

General Principles

Honour Treaty of Waitangi

Tino Rangatiratanga must prevail so that tangata whenua reserve the right to determine how Maori knowledge and skills will be assessed and recognised.

Maori and Pakeha must work as equal partners to develop general RPL policies and procedures; Maori participation in education must be enhanced by these procedures; Maoritanga and processes must be protected and respected.

In addition the Broadmeadows College of TAFE principles are proposed:

Commitment

Conviction on the part of the education and training provider of the worth of RPL is essential. This commitment is necessary to ensure that quality procedures will support the implementation of the model.

Access

Mechanisms and practices must enable all potential applicants to gain entry to the process. It is therefore important that the procedures themselves do not create unnecessary barriers, (e.g. by appearing to be bureaucratic or by being couched in jargon).

Fairness

Processes utilised must be verifiable, credible and just. All participants must be confident that the RPL process and its outcomes are fair.

Flexibility

Procedures must enable course experts to make flexible decisions based on each unique case presented by the applicant in relation to that particular set of course requirements or criteria.

Openness/Transparency

The way in which all decisions, criteria and processes are determined must be open and transparent to all. All participants in the process need to be able to contribute to the way decisions are made.

Support

Potential applicants may not be able to access this system without adequate support. Personnel involved in implementing the Model also require adequate support in order to maintain quality delivery.

The overall approach of these principles reflects the need to incorporate the broad economic issues faced by industry and education, within the context of a social justice framework.

(Broadmeadows College of TAFE, 1992, p. 20).

Specific Principles

All procedures must:

- focus on learning outcomes, rather than on where/how/why prior learning occurred;
- assess prior learning outcomes in relation to expectations specified for the course, to the levels specified for particular grades;
- be centralised, as part of all procedures for granting admission and credit;
- ensure costs to student do not exceed the full cost of course;
- use procedures of assessment which meet standard academic assessment criteria and which are appropriate to course content;
- require clear evidence of learning outcomes from students;
- require assessors to be academic experts in that field and separate from the supporter/advocate of the student;
- require assessment to be carried out at the departmental level, as now;
- require supporters and assessors to be of an appropriate culture and gender in relation to applicant;
- require RPL assessment procedures, like any assessment procedures, to be valid, reliable, sufficient, authentic and current; and
- include a process of evaluative research and documented case studies

of RPL experiences, to monitor quality and standards of RPL.

Standards for Quality Assurance

RPL recognition of any form should be guided by Whitaker's (1989) ten standards for quality assurance.

Academic Standards

i Credit should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.

ii University credit should only be awarded for university-level learning.

iii Credit should only be awarded for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.

iv The determination of competence levels and of credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts.

rationale given

Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.

Administrative Standards

vi Credit awards and their transcript entries should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.

vii Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available.

viii Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.

ix All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive

adequate training for the functions they perform, and there should be provision for their continued professional development.

x Assessment programmes should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised as needed to reflect changes in the state of the assessment arts.

Changes Required

Any implementation of a more comprehensive and systematic system for the recognition of prior learning in the university should require

- (a) that Maori determine how Maori knowledge and skills will be assessed and recognised in RPL;
- (b) admissions procedures to include comprehensive information about, and guidelines for, applying for RPL;
- (c) course coordinators to more clearly specify all expectations and criteria upon which the course assessment is based;
- (d) that academic staff be available to assess students at any point in the delivery of a course;
- (e) that a programme of staff development be available for academic and administrative staff on their roles in RPL procedures;
- (f) that Liaison, Counselling, Registry and Continuing Education staff provide comprehensive information on the availability of, and procedures for, RPL;
- (g) the provision of substantive educational guidance, counselling and planning services through Registry, Liaison, Continuing Education, faculty and departmental academic advisors, and Student Welfare. These could include workshops, credit courses (eg. Maryland's EXCEL) and/or individual sessions.

Conclusions

Current Practices

1. The recognition of prior learning – in the sense of the acknowledgement of non-certificated learning through the granting of admission to specific courses of study; in selection of students for courses with limited enrolments; pre-requisite exemptions, exemptions from parts of courses and direct admission to advanced courses is currently practiced at Victoria University of Wellington.
2. However, the recognition of prior learning – if defined as 'the awarding of credit for non-certificated learning' is not currently practiced at Victoria University of Wellington.
3. RPL – as defined by NZQA (1991e) in 'Key Elements to the Framework – is currently practiced at Victoria University, in that both a system of credit transfer exists and the acknowledgement of prior uncertificated learning is currently practiced. However, the former part of this concept of RPL (credit transfer) is not the subject of this research project.
4. As with credit transfer, RPL, as currently practiced, needs to be made more explicit in university publications.

5. A culture supportive of the general premises of RPL exists in this New Zealand university but it is not as rigorous nor as systematic as the best international RPL procedures.
6. RPL, as currently practiced, uses interviews and application forms, portfolio, attestation and occasionally challenge methods of assessment.
7. RPL assessments are currently made by the chairperson of a department and relevant course lecturers, who recommend most decisions to the Convenor, Academic Committee of the Academic Board for approval.
8. No central or systematised record of RPL practices and outcomes has been kept, to date.

Additional Conclusions:

In addition to the research objectives, we draw the conclusion that:

9. RPL, in and of itself, does not address sexist or racist elements of courses because the criteria and assessment used in RPL reflect the course as it is;
10. conceptual and terminological confusion abound in this field, internationally, and in New Zealand policy documents and literature;
11. a decision needs to be made by NZQA, as to whether to use RPL to refer to: the 'umbrella' concept of all forms of recognition of all forms of learning; or the specific concept of recognising prior non-certificated learning – and how narrowly to define that concept;
12. the concept and term Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) in the UK is useful to refer all recognition of all prior learning in New Zealand universities;
13. the procedures and term 'recognition or assessment of prior

uncertificated learning' (RPUL) is useful to refer to all procedures to assess and attribute course value to uncertificated learning;

14. 'credit transfer' should continue to be used to refer to the recognition of certificated learning.

Acknowledgements

TeAroha Mackintosh and Shone de Sain, Researchers, and a Steering Committee of:

Dr Gary Burns, Convenor, Academic Committee

Peter Adds, Maori Studies

Professor David Hamer, Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

Katharine Jermyn, Deputy Academic Registrar

Joanna Kidman, University Teaching Development Centre

Professor Hugh Lauder, Education

Gail Longmore, Manager, Student Admissions and Records

Copies of full report

Available from

Centre Secretary

Centre for Continuing Education

Victoria University of Wellington

PO Box 600

Wellington
NEW ZEALAND.

Fax: (04) 495 5197

Cost, to cover copying, packaging and postage:

410.00 (N.Z.)

Please make cheques payable to 'Victoria University of Wellington'

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Benton, Nena

(1990) Recognition of Prior Learning: Replacing Hegemony by Symphony, NZCETSS, Wellington.

Broadmeadows College of TAFE (1990) Recognition of Prior Learning: Principal Report, Broadmeadows College of TAFE, Victoria, Australia.

Broadmeadows College of TAFE (1992) Recognition of Prior Learning: Training and Application Manual for Education, Broadmeadows College of TAFE, Victoria, Australia.

Council for National Academic Awards (1989), Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme: Regulations and A Guide for Students Registered Centrally with the Scheme.

Evans, N. (1989) The Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning and Higher Education, Some Issues: Some Anglo-American Comparisons, Learning From Experience Trust, London.

Evans, N. (1990) Pragmatism at Work in Britain; Some Reflections on Attempting to Introduce the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning, Studies in Continuing Education, 12, 2, pp. 122-130.

Further Education Unit (1992), A Basis for Credit? Developing a post-16 credit accumulation and transfer framework: A paper for discussion, FEU, London.

Griffin, Helen (1990) Assessment of Prior Learning (Report prepared for the Palmerston North College of Education, Te Kupenga o Te Matauranga), Palmerston North College of Education, Palmerston North.

New Zealand Council for Education and Training in the Social Services (1991), Education and Training in the Social Services: Procedures for Accreditation and Course Approval, NZCETSS, Wellington.

NZQA (1990) Towards a National Qualifications Framework: General Principles and Directions. NZQA, Wellington.

NZQA (1991a) Designing the Framework: A Discussion Document about Restructuring National Qualifications, March NZQA, Wellington.

NZQA (1991b) Ao Kawe Tikanga, NZQA, Wellington.

NZQA (1991c) Recognition of Prior Learning: A Background Paper, NZQA, Wellington.

NZQA (1991d), Developing the National Qualifications Framework: A Report to the Board, September 24, 1991, NZQA, Wellington.

NZQA (1991e) A Qualifications Framework for New Zealand, NZQA, Wellington, The Framework, NZQA Wellington.

Simosko, S. (1991) APL: A Practical Guide for Professionals, Kogan Page, London.

Slowey, M. (1992) Prior Learning - International Developments in

Recognition, NZQA Conference Papers, NZQA, Wellington. pp. 62-72.
Unit for the Development of Adult and Continuing Education (1991), What Can Graduates Do? A Consultative Paper, UDACE, Leicester.
Whitaker, U. (1989) Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles and Procedures, CAEL, Pennsylvania.
Willingham, W., Valley, J. and Keeton, M. (1977) Assessing Experiential Learning – A Summary Report of the CAEL Project, Ford Foundation, New York.

E: EXAMPLES
OF RELEVANT CURRENT STATUTES

NB: Admission to the MBSoc, BArch, MArch, MA (Applied), MEd, MBA, MPP, DipAcc, DipIS, MSc degrees.

A candidate for a degree or a diploma shall before enrolments have...
... produced evidence to the satisfaction of the Academic Board of qualifications for entry to that degree or diploma through extensive practical, professional and/or scholarly experience of an appropriate kind. (VUW Calendar pp. 143, 148, 203, 205, 248, 251, 252, 257, 285)
Admission to BBSoc

9. The Academic Board may admit to the professional course of study a student who has produced evidence to the satisfaction of the Academic Board of qualification for entry to the BBSoc through extensive practical, professional and/or scholarly experience of an appropriate kind. Candidates admitted under this section shall not qualify for the award of

the degree unless an approved personal course of study has been followed for at least three years including a transition year. (VUW Calendar, pp. 139-40)

Exemption from Prerequisites

... if in the opinion of the Chairperson of the Department offering a course a candidate is qualified to enrol for that course, the Chairperson may exempt the candidate from any prerequisite.

(VUW Calendar, 1992, pp. 131 - 32)

Admission to MA/MSc Part 2

2 (d) Other candidates for direct admission to MA (Part 2) shall, before enrolment, have...

(ii) produced evidence to the satisfaction of the Academic Board of qualification for entry to the degree through extensive practical, professional or scholarly experience of an appropriate kind...

(VUW Calendar, 1992, p. 198)

(also MSc Part 2, pp. 286 - 288).

Admission to PhD

A candidate shall ... produce evidence of adequate training and ability to proceed with the proposed course...

Admission to DipEd Stud, DipArts, DipJapaStud, DipCommns, DipLibr, DipSocScRes, DipTESL.

A candidate for ... shall, before enrolment, have:

...

produced evidence to the satisfaction of the Academic Board [or Director of the English Language Institute for DipTESL] of adequate training and experience to proceed with the proposed course for the diploma.

(VUW Calendar, pp. 219, 222, 227, 228, 232, 233).

Admission to DipSocWk

A candidate for the Diploma in Social Work shall be matriculated and shall, before enrolment, be accepted by the Chairperson of the Department:

... as having adequate qualifications or experience in the social services to undertake the course of study, ...

(p. 224).

Note:

In all Statutes the section quoted here is one of several means of gaining entry to that programme. Other provisions for admission are based on prior certificated qualifications.

A number of NZ tertiary educators from polytechnics, universities, colleges of education and some NZQA staff have been trained in this model of RPL, either by visiting Australia or attending courses gaught by Broadmeadows RPL project staff in New Zealand, May and August 1992.