

the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach accordingly.
(Ausubel, Novak and Hanesian, 1978)

Background

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority was established under the provisions of the Education Amendment Act 1990, which brought sweeping changes to the state education sector in New Zealand. The functions of the former Department of Education and various examining bodies were redistributed among:

- l the Ministry of Education, a policy and funding agency;
- l the Education and Training Support Agency, responsible to the Ministry of Education for pre-employment training, apprenticeships and industrial cadetships;
- l the Education Review Office, an independent agency with its own Board, with responsibility for reporting on the delivery of education and training in schools;
- l the Special Education Service, responsible to the Ministry of Education for special education in schools;
- l the Teachers' Registration Board;
- l a number of smaller agencies, including some (for example, the Parent Advocacy Council) which have since been disestablished;

and

- l the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, an independent Crown agency with its own Board and responsible directly to the Minister of Education.

In the Act 1990, the Qualifications Authority is given responsibility (among other functions, including the continuing administration of traditional examinations) for developing a national qualifications framework in which there is a flexible system for the gaining of qualifications, with recognition of competency already achieved

The Authority's Board, in a set of published decisions on 24 September 1991, affirmed support for the formal recognition of prior learning (RPL) and approved funding for RPL research projects.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The Qualifications Authority's involvement with the recognition of prior learning is within the context of the National Qualifications Framework.

1 The Framework covers all post-compulsory education, except university degrees and postgraduate awards (although the Qualifications Authority has a quality audit function in relation to universities, the exact nature of which is under negotiation).

2 The Framework is composed of units, or modules, at eight levels. Level One is open-ended downward but roughly comparable to the third year of secondary school, and Level Seven is comparable to the final stage of a 3 year post-secondary diploma or first degree.

3 The levels encompass a national structure of unit standards. Each includes a title, code number, level, credit value, purpose, prerequisites, and other operational detail. Its central constituents are learning outcomes (elements) and performance criteria. Unit standards must be endorsed by national standards

bodies representing providers, employers, professional associations and other affected parties. They cover both vocational and general education.

4 With funding provided under the Training Opportunities Programme, which provides vocational training through a network of institutional and private training providers, a development group within the Authority is sponsoring the writing of approximately 4000 unit standards during the current financial year. Units are checked for quality, and advertised for two months before final registration on the Framework database. Unit standards are unique and cannot, therefore, be duplicated by similar units in the same learning area.

5 The new national qualifications, generically titled National Certificate (Levels One to Four) and National Diploma (Levels Five to Seven), will be defined in terms of combinations of units. Qualifications may share common units, particularly in such core areas as communications skills, mathematics and science.

6 Providers will be accredited, either by the Qualifications Authority or by an inter-institutional agency established for the purpose under delegated powers, to teach specific unit standards and award unit credit or qualifications. Part of the accreditation process involves the evaluation of the provider's RPL policy and procedures in terms of the criteria published by the Authority.

Criteria for the recognition of prior learning

The accreditation criteria for RPL policy and procedures will be

presented initially in a consultation document, which will be circulated among interested parties early in 1993 for comment. The criteria for provider accreditation is likely to include reference to the following:

- l equity - New Zealand's commitments to the Maori people under the provisions of the Treaty of Waitangi, in particular, make this a significant issue in education and training, as do social and legislative requirements for countering ethnic, gender and other bias;
- l staff development - staff dealing with RPL applications should be well versed in the process, whether as advisers, counsellors or assessors;
- l administrative support structures - there should be a commitment to RPL within the organisation and appropriate systems for its validation, moderation and reporting;
- l publicity material - RPL should be publicly acknowledged as a transparent, valid and accessible assessment process;
- l advice and counselling services - these should be readily available to learners, to assist them in self-assessment and the setting of their own objectives;
- l assessment - under RPL, assessment should be concordant with and of an equal standard to parallel procedures;
- l record keeping - in student records, success achieved through RPL should not be differentiated in any overt way from success through other avenues;
- l appeal processes - there should be the opportunity for learners to seek redress against unfair or unsound process;
- l quality control - the organisation should have effective internal quality management procedures and processes;
- l moderation procedures - to ensure consistency of assessment, moderation external to the process is desirable.

What is RPL?

The draft definition of RPL within the National Qualifications Framework is:

Equitable and consistent assessment procedures to verify current knowledge, skills and attitudes gained either in a formal education or training environment or informally, and to award appropriate credit, measured against unit standards, for national qualifications.

The Authority is committed to encouraging the full recognition of prior learning by providers, up to and including the award of complete qualifications based on RPL.

Who benefits?

Overseas experience suggests that recognition of prior learning will be sought most often by people over 25 years who have acquired, through work, home, community or provider-based experience, skills or knowledge that can be assessed for credit in terms of unit standards. In New Zealand, 33% of working age people have no formal qualifications. With the flexibility of the National Qualifications Framework and introduction of RPL, we can expect considerable increases in the number of mature students applying to enter our tertiary institutions.

The existence of verifiable learning outcomes within each unit standard will assist the process greatly, since success will be judged wholly on assessment and not on the nature or length of participation in any teaching or learning process. Publicity and guidance should clarify that it is skills and knowledge, rather than years of experience, that are assessed.

How will it work for the individual?

Ideally, advice and guidance is provided from the beginning, before the submission of an application. Self-assessment can be used by those who understand RPL procedures and know for which units they want credit. Published unit standards will give them criteria against which to match their skills and knowledge, and stimulate ideas on appropriate evidence to support them. Advice should continue to be available.

Group assessment has been found to be not only time-effective, but excellent for the peer support and exchange of ideas it generates. Regardless of the subject area in which unit credit is sought, group discussion facilitated by an adviser has been useful in the preparation for RPL assessment as well as offering a valuable learning experience. RPL and evidence preparation workshops have been successful in New Zealand.

Evidence/methods of assessment must be appropriate to the performance criteria of the desired unit standards and may be decided upon by the candidate, RPL assessor, or through negotiation:

- l information from an acknowledged expert in the field or employer may be part of an attestation process;
- l a demonstration, presentation of a product or project may be most relevant for learning outcomes based on competencies;
- l documentation of formal or non-formal courses are useful as an indication of knowledge, but currency (is it up to date?) must be determined;
- l examinations can be used to efficiently and accurately

evaluate knowledge.

Other models are based on the assessment of documentation, or may occur in the workplace. As long as the result of the assessment leads to a fair, consistent, and valid decision, the model must be seen to work. Decision-making and appeal procedures should also be documented.

When credit is awarded for RPL within the national qualifications framework, notification will be given to the Authority to update the student's Record of Learning or Credit. This lifetime document will be kept on a Qualifications Authority database for all individuals who complete at least one unit. In this way a cumulative and accurate record, held in one place, can be accessed by the individual or, on authorisation, by the provider. The record will not indicate that the credit was awarded through RPL.

What is emerging as the New Zealand model?

Through the work of several tertiary providers, we are finding that success with RPL depends on familiar requirements of flexibility, experimentation, discussion, willingness to share information, co-operation and review.

The Qualifications Authority does not intend to implement a national RPL model but supports and encourages current and evolutionary developments.

What are the roles of the Qualifications Authority in relation to RPL?

The Qualifications Authority will not be responsible for:

- 1 the RPL assessment model employed - this is a provider decision, though subject to Qualifications Authority criteria;
- 2 the form of quality control by the provider - although there will be quality monitoring by the Authority or delegated agencies;
- 3 the nature of staff training - also a provider responsibility, but national RPL unit standards will be developed under Authority sponsorship;
- 4 who are to be the assessors - this may be the responsibility of delegated agencies or of national standards bodies;

5 costs - it is worth noting that, in overseas implementation, the cost of RPL is often the same as the cost of regular enrolment in a course.

The Qualifications Authority will be responsible for:

1 fulfilling legislative requirements by including RPL in the National Qualifications Framework;

2 funding research - a first phase is now completed, and reports are available from the institutions concerned, which are:

- 1 Christchurch College of Education;
- 1 Nelson Polytechnic;
- 1 Victoria University of Wellington;

3 conducting research - a recent Qualifications Authority survey of polytechnics and colleges of education requested information on policy, project description, costs, models, case studies, results, evaluation/insights, recommendations and

supporting documents; information on RPL activities was provided by the a large number of institutions, details of which are given in the Appendix to this paper;

4 sponsoring unit standards development in RPL (e.g. for candidates, assessors and trainers) - a working party is to meet, probably in January;

5 developing guidelines for RPL procedures required for provider accreditation and moderation of National Qualifications Framework qualifications - a consultation document on RPL will be circulated early in 1993 and will be finalised by March of that year;

6 organising a national RPL conference in April - a call for papers will be made in November;

7 auditing moderation procedures - these will be finalised in 1993;

8 acting as a contact point for information.

Conclusion

I should like to thank the organisers for giving me this opportunity to outline developments in RPL from the Qualifications Authority's stand-point.

A final quotation...

This accords with my own view of educational process, which should begin with assessment of the learner's knowledge and skills, proceed to the learner's educational goals and aspirations, and finally address those teaching and learning experiences which will bridge the gap between them. Discrete procedures for the recognition of prior learning then achieve their proper status, which is redundancy.

APPENDIX

Institutions supplying information on RPL to the Qualifications Authority were as follows.

1 Auckland College of Education, Private Bag 92601, Symonds St, Auckland 1035

Term 3 1992 piloting an informal RPL process in primary teacher training

1 Auckland Institute of Technology, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1

School of Nursing - assessment of applicants for the Bachelor of Health Science (Nursing) who applied for credit for the first three years of the programme

Department of Management Studies - partnership with a major New Zealand industry for industry selected personnel to enter a shortened certificate management course

1 Christchurch College of Education, P O Box 31-065, Christchurch

Catering students at Christchurch Polytechnic

Primary teacher trainees at the College of Education

Involved trialling the introduction and assessment of RPL with groups

1 Central Institute of Technology Tutor Education Centre,
Private Bag, Trentham

RPL towards the Diploma in Tertiary Teaching (Details not
yet available)

1 Manawatu Polytechnic, Private Bag, Palmerston North

Nursing and Health Studies Department - investigating RPL
models, developing an RPL workshop for applicants, developing
guidelines for assessors and counsellors, reviewing the
literature, and evaluating the process (November).

1 Nelson Polytechnic, Private Bag, Nelson

Adapted the Broadmeadows TAFE model and have made
recommendations for New Zealand polytechnics. The research report
will be available soon from the institution.

1 Palmerston North College of Education, Private Bag 11035,
Palmerston North

Mainly formal courses and assessment are considered for RPL,
but information on experience and non-formal learning were
collected (including the area of bilingual studies).

1 Southland Polytechnic, Private Bag, Forth St, Invercargill

Holland College model, Prince Edward Island

Setting up assessment centres for basic skills required in

certain industries. (Details not available.)

1 Taranaki Polytechnic, Private Bag, New Plymouth

Department of Human Sciences - RPL considered for total or
partial exemption from units within a given programme (in
progress.)

1 Victoria University, P O Box 600, Wellington

Development of a database of current processes and practices
used at Victoria; identification of principles to guide New
Zealand universities in RPL implementation; identification
changes required to implement such a system; identification of
major implications for the university.

1 Wairarapa Community Polytechnic, Box 698, Masterton

RPL towards exemption from module attendance and recognition towards the Certificate in Archives Management (in progress). Credit for Te Reo and Tikanga Maori is also considered towards this certificate.

1 Wanganui Regional Community Polytechnic, Private Bag 3020, Wanganui

Te Rangakura Maori Primary Teaching Training. A variety of assessment methods are used. (Details not yet available.)

Some Diploma of Computer Graphics Design students have entered year two and three of the three year Diploma based on credit for work experience.

1 Wellington College of Education, P O Box 17-310, Karori, Wellington

Diploma of Early Teaching (Childhood Education) - RPL is offered after student has undertaken teaching experience or centre workshops plus the introduction to the Diploma equity threads. This can lead to a shortened Diploma course. Changes are being considered for 1993. A variety of assessment methods are used.

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research, P O Box 3237, Wellington is compiling a database of resources and New Zealand activities. The database is on-line and available through your modem. Contact Dr Nena Benton for further details.

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Microsoft Word for Windows: Version 1.1a

REFERENCES

Ausubel, David P.; Novak, Joseph D and Hanesian, Helen (1978). Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View. Holt, Reinhart and Winston, Inc.

Education for the mentally or physically disabled
Employment of registered teachers is no longer mandatory in New Zealand

The Authority is to become a Crown Owned Entity, under pending legislation.

1990 Education Amendment Act s253(1)(c)(ii)

Developing the National Qualifications Framework: a Report to the Board, New Zealand Qualifications Authority , 24 Sept 1991

After considerable internal and external debate, the abbreviations RPL, for Recognition of Prior Learning, and CT, for

Credit Transfer, have been adopted as Authority standards.

Confederation of British Industry, 1989. Towards a Skills Revolution, Report on Vocational Education and Training Task Force, City and Guilds of London, U.K.

Compulsory education in New Zealand is until age 15, for which the second year of secondary education (Year 9 in Australia) can be taken as a proxy.

Year 10 in Australia

Discussions have been held with the National Training Board of Australia to achieve concordance of the New Zealand framework with that proposed for Australian credentials.

The New Zealand financial year runs from 1 July to 30 June.

Level Eight covers Honours and postgraduate awards to PhD

Addresses are included in the Appendix

Nelson Polytechnic and Victoria University will be presenting their reports at this conference

Knowles, M.S. et al. (1984). Andragog-in-Action. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN NEW
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