

**THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING OF
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING
EDUCATORS**

by

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RESEARCH ESSAY

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) educators within two contexts, that of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and industry (private sector companies). It is my view that in South Africa inadequate recognition and acknowledgement is conferred on ABET educators who have acquired their skills and knowledge through non-formal learning programmes or through work and life experiences. As a consequence they are denied access to institutions of higher learning.

Furthermore, many educators are excluded from certain jobs and from promotion opportunities. The value of RPL lies in validating educators' skills and knowledge so that they may enjoy not only the 'social' recognition of their learning but also the possibility of access to higher education in the formal education system and to employment opportunities. Fortunately, the current shift towards an integrated education and training system (which encourages a diversity of credible assessment practices) creates the opportunity for educators to receive formal recognition by means of the RPL assessment tool.

It is widely acknowledged that RPL as an assessment tool suffers from a lack of credibility and this may explain why it is not used by most institutions of higher learning to accredit educators. However, RPL is practised in some NGOs and industries which train educators and there is growing acknowledgement of its pedagogical value. I thus located my research in these two contexts. My interest

was to examine the RPL methods used in the NGO and industry environment to assess the skills and knowledge which educators have historically acquired through non-formal routes.

Accordingly my research question was expressed as follows: 'How, within an NGO and industry context, is RPL used to assess ABET educators?' I

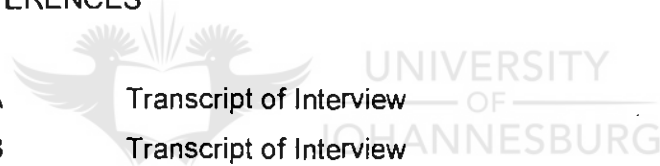
interviewed seven specialist practitioners who are centrally involved in training and assessing educators. Interestingly, my research question elicited information beyond the 'methodological' enquiry that I had initially conceptualised. In summary, I found that:

- RPL is included as an assessment tool alongside the range of more 'traditional' assessment tools.
- The kinds of methods used in RPL are challenge testing, observation and portfolio development.
- There is a need for trained advisors and assessors who understand the value of RPL and who will thus ensure that RPL is included in the range of assessment practices of educators.
- The ABET sub-sector would welcome the accelerated development of nationally recognised standards and qualifications for educators as this affects RPL in two ways: firstly, as an assessment tool to accredit thousands of educators; and secondly, as a component in any curriculum that guides the training of educators.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The research reported in this essay focuses on the question: 'How, within a non-governmental (NGO) and industry context, is the recognition of prior learning (RPL) used to assess adult basic education and training (ABET) educators?' The essay is structured in the following sequence: Firstly, I begin with an orientation to the problem under investigation. Secondly, I provide a literature review, which reflects on assessment practices and RPL with respect to the general field of adult education and more specifically to the sub-field of ABET. Thirdly, I describe my research methodology and the process for data analysis. Fourthly, I examine, analyse and report on the research findings. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the possible implications of the findings for educators.

2. BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Generally in South Africa, inadequate recognition and acknowledgement has been given to ABET educators who have acquired their skills and knowledge by means of non-formal training programmes or through work and life experiences. In the past, many educators attended non-formal training programmes (offered, for example, by NGOs) through which they acquired a great deal of skill, knowledge and experience. Such knowledge and experience, however, was not formally recognised or certificated by higher education institutions or other training providers. This had the effect of excluding such educators from certain jobs, from promotion opportunities and from access to higher education and training opportunities.

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether RPL is a credible means of assessing educators' prior skills and knowledge, thus determining whether RPL offers a basis on which educators without formal accreditation could apply for entry to higher education programmes and/or further their professional careers.

Fortunately, the current shift towards an integrated education and training system that is outcomes based encourages a diversity of credible assessment practices. This creates the opportunity for educators to receive formal recognition, using RPL as an assessment tool, which is guided by the emerging ABET educator national standards and qualifications. In essence this integrated approach would allow such educators access to the higher education system, by formally accrediting their prior learning (Human Sciences Research Council, 1995).

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) embodies the new outcomes-based education and training system, that was given effect in the South African Qualifications Authority Act (SAQA) (Act No. 58 of 1995). De Villiers & Van Zyl (1996) state that the NQF represents a structural means for bringing about coherence (between traditional streams of academic and vocational education and between the formal and non-formal education systems), as well as cohesion (so that there is a logical connection from one level on the NQF to the next level) with respect to the provision of education and training. The NQF is designed, amongst other purposes, to overcome the lack of recognition of prior learning and progression by educators between different NQF levels, characteristic of the past education and training system (Human Sciences Research Council, 1995).

Hemson (1998) and Harris; Saddington & McMillan (1994) claim that the NQF has the potential to address some of the obstacles experienced by educators in the ABET sub-sector. These obstacles include educators' exclusion from:

- the route to a formally recognised qualification due to their non-formal training; and
- re-entry or entry into learning programmes at higher education institutions.

Thus, the NQF represents a framework for the formal recognition of the skills, knowledge, understanding and experience acquired by ABET educators.

However, given the current development phase of the NQF, this study focused on whether RPL is being introduced and used to assess the competence of ABET educators in a NGO and industry context.

3. AIM

In view of the above, the aim of this study was to examine how RPL is used within adult education and training to assess ABET educators.

4. ASSUMPTIONS AND PRESUPPOSITIONS

When embarking on this study I held two assumptions:

- (a) Many educators in industry and NGOs were competent educators but lacked formally recognised certificates to prove their worth;
- (b) RPL could be used as a tool to evaluate and accredit their skills, knowledge and experiences.

I based these assumptions on my experience in the NGO sector and as a technical advisor to the Adult Education and Training Directorate of the National Department of Education, for the United States of America Aid Agency (USAID). My focus area, as technical advisor to the Adult Education and Training Directorate, was to facilitate and coordinate the development of national standards and qualifications for Education, Training and Development practitioners in adult learning.

Despite the intentions underlying the NQF (access, redress, portability of qualifications and the like) I became increasingly aware of the problem faced by ABET educators accessing the newly proposed qualification system. Ironically, given the intentions of the NQF, a whole constituency of educators continues to practise outside this new system without any formal recognition of their skills and

knowledge. A means for them to gain accreditation of their skills and knowledge is offered through the mechanisms of RPL.

It is my view that as long as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and higher education institutions do not recognise or support the RPL practices that are currently implemented by NGOs and industry, a group of ABET educators will always be unrecognised and marginalised. As long as this continues we cannot speak of transformation and redress in adult education and training in South Africa. A consequence will be a loss of a 'cadre' of ABET educators.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 Introduction

As already stated, the aim of this study was to gain an understanding of RPL and assessment practices for educators within a sample of industry-based workplaces and NGOs. Literature concerned with adult basic education and training and literature concerned with assessment and RPL practices have informed this study. Having captured these important concepts, section 5.3 focuses on a few of the theoretical underpinnings of RPL and the importance of RPL for ABET educators. Section 5.4 concludes the literature review with an overview of assessment practices and methods used in RPL.

To clarify the research problem, the first part of the literature review focuses on terminology and in particular the use of the following terms: 'adult educator', 'adult basic education and training', 'ABET educator', 'assessment', 'applied competence' and 'recognition of prior learning'. These terms reflect the set of key concepts that are central to the introduction of RPL practices for ABET educators in the South African context. The definitions in section 5.2 are drawn from

national education and training policy documents and reflect current national trends with regards to the ABET sub-sector of Education, Training and Development assessment and accreditation practices.

5.2 Concept clarification

5.2.1 Adult educator

The definition of an adult educator as presented in the publication 'Outcomes-based assessment action plan' (Department of Education, 1999:67) applies in this study. An adult educator is defined as:

"Any person who teaches, educates or trains other persons or provides professional educational services, including professional therapy and education psychological services, at any public school, further education and training institution, departmental office or adult basic education and training centre and who is appointed in a post in any educator establishment."

5.2.2 Adult basic education and training

The definition of ABET, as presented in the publication 'National multi-year implementation plan for adult education and training (Department of Education, 1997:12) applies in this study. ABET is defined as:

"... the general conceptual foundation towards lifelong learning and development, comprising of knowledge, skills and attitudes required for social, economic and political participation and transformation applicable to a range of contexts. ABET is flexible, developmental and targeted at the specific needs of particular audiences and, ideally, provides access to nationally recognised certificates."

What distinguishes ABET from other learning sectors is the learner audience, namely, adults and out-of-school youth (aged 15 years and older) who have had

no, or inadequate, schooling.

5.2.3 ABET educator

The definition of an ABET educator as presented in the publication 'National multi-year implementation plan for adult education and training' (Department of Education, 1997:143) applies in this study. An ABET educator is defined as:

"An educator with a special focus on learners at three levels (Levels 1- 3) of general education and training where the focus is on literacy and numeracy acquisition."

5.2.4 Assessment

The definition of assessment as presented in the publication 'Education, Training and Development Practices Final Report' (Education, Training and Development Practices Project, 1998:151) applies in this study. Assessment is defined as:

"... a process of measuring applied competence by observing and evaluating the demonstration of such competence. Demonstration may take place through portfolios, simulations, workplace assessments or written and oral examinations."

5.2.5 Applied Competence

The definition of applied competence as presented in the publication 'Education, Training and Development Practices Final Report' (Education, Training and Development Practices Project, 1998:151) applies in this study.

Applied competence is defined as "*underlying knowledge*" which has three components, namely:

- *"practical competence, which is the ability to demonstrate a range of options and make decisions about practice;*

- *foundational competence which is the ability to demonstrate an understanding of what we are doing and why; and*
- *reflexive competence which is the ability to demonstrate the capability to connect our understandings with our performance.”*

5.2.6 Recognition of prior learning

The definition of RPL as presented in the publication ‘Ways of Seeing the National Qualifications Framework’ (Human Sciences Research Council, 1995:3) applies in this study. RPL is defined as:

“A ‘process’ granting credit for a unit on the basis of an assessment of formal and non-formal learning/experience to establish whether the learner possesses the capabilities specified in the outcome statement. Similarly, a person could gain recognition for prior learning in respect of an entire qualification, provided that such a person is able to demonstrate the full competence associated with the qualification.”

(A unit, short for ‘unit standard’, is the basic building block for qualifications registered on the NQF.)

5.3 What is RPL?

The definition of RPL that I have chosen for this study is referred to in section 5.2.6. Other definitions can, however, be found in the international literature on RPL. For example, the Irish Training and Development Agency defines RPL as: *“an educational process which recognises life-long learning for the purpose of giving credit, exemption or recognition of individuals’ achievements regardless of when, where and how competence was acquired”* (Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Education and Training, 1996:198).

The Australian Training and Development Agency defines RPL as: "*the acknowledgement of skills and knowledge held as a result of formal training, work experience and/or life experience*" (Department of Labour, 1994:30).

The British Education and Training Agency defines RPL as: "*the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) or recognition of prior achievements (RPA)*" (Rutherford, 1995:18). Rutherford (1995) explains that the concept of RPL in some countries may be referred to as: 'accreditation of prior learning' (APL); 'accreditation of prior achievements' (APA); 'crediting competence'; 'recognition of current competence; or 'accreditation of prior qualifications'.

Regardless of which label is attached to the concept, in South Africa RPL is understood to encompass accreditation for learning and experience acquired in non-formal settings, whether through education and training organisations that do not form part of the formal education system, or from experience and skills gained through a learner's working life (Genade, 1998:71).

In essence RPL is a process whereby adults gain formal recognition for skills and knowledge they already possess. The aim of assessment with respect to prior learning is to ensure that the learning being assessed is comparable in content and standard with the course or (part) qualification for which credit is sought. Lategan & van Rooyen (1997:2) are of the view that RPL is both a concept and a tool that needs to be used with informed care. It requires standards to be set so that judgement can be made whether or not to grant credit to an individual for competence acquired through formal, non-formal and informal means. RPL is said to be the mainstay of all outcomes-based assessments because it concentrates on competence, rather than course-based qualifications (Lategan & van Rooyen, 1997:4). Interestingly, some scholars are of the view that RPL does not represent the paradigm shift implied by previous researchers mentioned above. In this vein Harris, Saddington & McMillan (1994:7) argue that the assessment of prior learning is in essence no different

from traditional classroom-based assessment practices as they both involve making "*valid and reliable judgements*" about what people involved in demonstrating competence (in this case educators) know and can do.

5.3.1 The importance of RPL

Challis (1993) and Genade (1998) claim that a fundamental principle underpinning RPL is that learning is worthy and capable of gaining recognition and credit, regardless of the time, place and context in which it has been achieved. Scholars who represent this line of thinking argue that learning is not dependent upon any particular formal setting, and that knowledge is acquired through a combination of processes and places.

In South Africa RPL has particular relevance when viewed against the backdrop of apartheid education and the attendant lack of access to formal learning opportunities. If recognised by statutory authorities and institutions of higher learning, RPL could accredit alternative and diverse routes to education and training qualifications, and thereby offer mobility to educators with respect to career and learning pathways. I argue that RPL would thus have a redress value whereby thousands of educators, mainly black, could receive formal accreditation of their work and life experiences. Furthermore, assessment by means of RPL could encourage access by previously disadvantaged educators to institutions of higher learning.

5.3.2 Assessment practices and methods in RPL

Assessment for the NQF, is conceptualised as a process of measuring 'applied competence' by observing and evaluating the demonstration of such competence in a variety of situations, for example portfolios, simulations, workplace assessments, written and oral examinations (Education, Training and Development Practices Project, 1998:151).

In the report 'Outcomes-based assessment action plan' (Department of Education, 1999) emphasis is placed on the assessment process whereby there is an identification, collection and interpretation of information about the educators' competence, which is measured against prescribed outcomes.

An RPL assessment system assesses a wide range of evidence to show whether an educator's skills and knowledge meet and match the outcome statements in unit standards and qualifications such that the educator displays competence comparable with current standards.

Van Rooyen (1999:8) points out that such evidence may arise from a number of different contexts, such as:

- life experience, self-study, open-learning, or unstructured learning or training; and
- work environments that can provide sufficient evidence of competence.

Harris, Saddington & McMillan (1994) recognise different methods of assessing the prior skills and experiences of ABET educators. These methods are:

- the challenge process (example: standardised examinations);
- portfolio development;
- observation; and
- programme and course evaluation or credit transfer.

5.4 Methods of RPL assessment selected for this study

Recognising the different contexts and different assessment methods, I selected three RPL assessment methods to focus on. These are: the challenge process; observation; and portfolio development.

5.4.1 Challenge process

The Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Education and Training (1996) and Harris, Saddington & McMillan (1994) refer to the challenge process as "*standardised tests, projects or demonstrations which are undertaken with a view to earning credit for or towards a specific course without enrolling in it*" (Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Education and Training, 1994:190). The advantages of the challenge process include the fact that such tests are relatively inexpensive to develop and generally simple to process. They are also useful in situations where individuals have a wealth of experience and learning but little documentary evidence for it. This form of testing in the absence of instruction is widely used in the United Kingdom or Canada. However, in South Africa the challenge process as a method of RPL is a new method of recognising an educator's prior learning. Given this I have focused on standardised exams as an example of challenge process to investigate this method of RPL in the South African context.

Standardised examinations as a form of RPL assessment allow the candidate to achieve a formal qualification without doing the course. Nationally standardised examinations attempt to keep content, format, scoring, standards and conditions of administration as comparable as possible from one test candidate to another. All candidates are expected to demonstrate competence through the same test. External examinations, like other standardised exams, are associated with the maintenance of curricula and pedagogical standards. They are widely and favourably regarded as an objective, convenient and credible yardstick of proven

worth. Assessment is therefore primarily norm-referenced. There is, however, a growing awareness among educators and society at large that traditional-type examinations may be a poor indicator of a learner's (educator's) skills and abilities.

Fundamentally the structuring of any examination should be based on the principles that underlie all assessment: Is the examination valid and is it reliable? In developing a standardised examination, therefore, the following issues must be kept in mind:

- definition of subject area to be addressed;
- development of detailed content specifications;
- development of a pool of test/exam questions;
- pre-testing or piloting with learners on existing courses; and
- scoring scale developed on the basis of learners' performances.

Even though there is some doubt as to the validity and reliability of traditional standardised examinations, steps can be taken to ensure that they are as valid and reliable as possible. If examinations are carefully drawn up, carefully assessed and the result presented in a meaningful way to all concerned, then examinations will serve their purpose (Department of Education, 1999).

5.4.2 Observation

Observation of performance is probably the most common method of RPL assessment. It allows the assessor to observe the learner carrying out a task within the learning environment. Whether or not he or she can continue to repeat this performance is a matter that is dealt with by the inclusion of supporting evidence or assessments of the same performance over a number of occasions. Even so, this method of assessment enables a very accurate judgement to be made about evidence that is clearly authentic and current (Challis, 1993 and Rutherford, 1995).

5.4.3 Portfolio development

A portfolio is a collection of material or evidence that identifies an individual's achievements and documents his/her experience. The portfolio can be assessed against the knowledge and skills required for demonstrating competency. In recent years the development of portfolios has been influenced by an emerging acknowledgement of the importance of RPL practices. This form of RPL assessment requires the gathering of sufficient evidence about competence to enable a judgement to be made against pre-established criteria (Harris, Saddington & McMillan, 1994; Department of Education, 1999; Lategan & Van Rooyen, 1997).

Portfolio development, under the guidance of an RPL advisor, allows the adult educator to gather evidence of current competence (Rutherford, 1995). The portfolio is developed by an educator and then used as a basis for his/her request for recognition of his/her prior learning. Challis (1993) refers to the collection of evidence for portfolio development in two ways: as self-orientated portfolio development and as outcomes-orientated portfolio development. The first implies that a portfolio is developed by an educator to reflect his/her whole life history. The second is developed for a specific purpose and therefore is goal orientated, such as a portfolio created for entry into an institution of higher learning.

An advantage of portfolio development as a form of assessment is that it is highly individualised, it provides opportunities to consider what is important, not only within an adult learning context, but also in a person's life. However, the disadvantage is that this method tends to be time-consuming and expensive.

6. THE RESEARCH DESIGN

6.1 Introduction

My starting point for the research was to devise a process to access the opinions and experiences from a sample of adult education and training practitioners, who focus on ABET. Merriam (1998:1) refers to the researcher as the "*primary instrument of data collection and analysis*". Maykut & Morehouse (1994:26) refer to the research process as "*indwelling*", where the researcher is directly involved in the process of collection, interpretation and analysis of data. The researcher recognises and works with the participants rather than 'outside', thereby demonstrating an understanding and sensitivity towards their situation. This section focuses on the research methodology that was followed in this study. It describes how the sampling was done, the qualitative data collection methods that I used and the process of data analysis.

6.2 Sampling

The sampling method I used was "*purposive sampling*" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Merriam, 1998). Participants were selected as they were presumed to reflect "*information-rich cases*" (Patton, 1991:169).

The 'purposive sample' consisted of participants who work in ABET as trainers and educators and as assessment specialists. Each of the participants interviewed were able to discuss RPL in relation to the broader area of assessment and in relation to their particular context in which they displayed a sound understanding of RPL.

The composition of the sample included both ABET educators, trainers and assessment specialists. I conducted seven interviews. Two of the assessment

specialists ran their own business, the other interviewees either worked in the NGO or industry sector. The trainers and educators were selected because they represented a group of practitioners in the sub-sector of ABET and provided training to ABET educators. The two assessment specialists were selected because they represented a group of practitioners in the broader field of adult education and training with expertise in assessment practices.

6.3 Data collection methods

6.3.1 A qualitative study

This study is qualitative in nature as it is focused on understanding participants' opinions and experiences of how RPL is used to assess ABET educators.

6.3.2 Interviews

The participants in this research were interviewed both in their homes and at their places of work so as to observe the environment in which they work and to interview them in a place that was non-threatening. Each participant was contacted telephonically to discuss their participation in the study and to arrange a date and time for their interview. Because all the participants were senior members of staff or independent consultants no permission was needed from their employers.

The interviews were conducted in English. There were two participants for whom English was not their first language.

Before starting each interview I explained the purpose of the study and asked the participants whether they needed me to clarify anything. The interviews were recorded on tape-recorder, with the participants' permission. The participants were not threatened by the fact that the interview was being recorded and did not

insist on the confidentiality of the recordings. The interviews were transcribed shortly after the interview was completed.

In this study semi-structured interviews were used. The interview schedule comprised of two open-ended questions to all the participants, regardless of whether they were an ABET trainer or educator or an assessment expert. The questions were:

- *What method of assessment is used in your organisation or company to determine the prior skills and knowledge (RPL) of an ABET educator?*
- *How would you change, or what methods would you use to improve, the RPL of ABET educators in your organisation or company?*

In order to obtain the maximum amount of information I asked probing questions. Probes are questions or comments that follow up something already asked (Merriam, 1998). Examples of probing questions used in an interview: 'To clarify further, would you explain what you mean by peer evaluation'; or 'Would you clarify the issue of assessment in relation to the educator?' I avoided follow-up questions that could be answered with 'yes' or 'no' without motivation. These forms of responses do not assist in obtaining detailed information from participants and so would not have added value to the study.

On completion of the interviews, the participants were thanked and asked whether they wanted to ask questions or make comments regarding the interview. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

6.4 Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed from the audio-tape after every interview. These transcripts served as the primary source of information and were vital in the data analysis process of this study.

In analysing the data I used the constant comparative method of data analysis as discussed by Merriam (1998) and Maykut and Morehouse (1994). The following steps were followed: coding data pages, unitising data, inductive category coding and interrogation of that coding.

Every page of an interview transcript had the following codes:

- an interview number (1);
- the code for the type of data (T);
- the source of the data (initial letter of participants first name);and
- the page number of the particular transcript.

The transcripts were saved on computer disc and hard copies printed in case the computerised data got damaged or lost. A copy of a transcript from the interviews has been included in Appendix A and B of this study.

I read through each transcript a number of times in order to identify provisional categories. The information was arranged according to the provisional categories shown in Table 6.1

Table 6.1: Provisional categories developed during the data coding process

Provisional Categories	
Provisional category 1	Methods of assessment
Provisional category 2	Observation as a measure of assessment in the RPL process
Provisional category 3	Testing competency of educators in the RPL process
Provisional category 4	Portfolios – used to illustrate a collection of information about the Educators in the RPL process
Provisional category 5	Peer assessment as an assessment measure in practice
Provisional category 6	Training as a means to identifying the needs of educators when in a RPL programme
Provisional category 7	Relation between current ETDP standards and RPL in relation to 'identifying an educators' competence
Provisional category 8	Access to a qualifications route for educators
Provisional category 9	RPL advisors and assessors needed in this process as counselors and experts to RPL educators
Provisional category 10	RPL is currently practiced and included in the process of assessment

The information within each provisional category was then further grouped into units. These units of data were identified in the following way; each unit was underlined with a pencil and a line was drawn across the transcript to separate one unit from the next unit. A code was then written adjacent to the unit (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). An example of this can be found in Table 6.2. These units and codes were then written on index cards. The index cards were used to sort the units that were similar under the provisional category headings as recorded in Table 6.1.

When a provisional category contained approximately six units of data, I was in a position to begin developing final categories by using the “rule of inclusion...which would serve as the basis for including (or excluding) data in order to create a final category” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:139). Through this process of data analysis all the interviews were analysed as described above until there was no longer any data left. The emerging categories were analysed to identify those that stood alone and those that had noteworthy connections to the research question. In this way the final categories began to emerge and formed the framework of the findings.

Table 6.2: Example of units of data determined during the data coding process.

<u>Units of data</u>	
6/T/M/1	Unit: Assessment method
<i>Researcher:</i>	What form of assessment method would apply in RPL?
<i>Respondent:</i>	On the job observation.
1/T/E/1	Unit: Observation
<i>Researcher:</i>	What benefit would observing educators bring to this process?
<i>Respondent:</i>	An important contribution can be made through peer observation when assessing skills.

6.5 Ethical considerations

The ethical consideration that I needed to be aware of was to ensure that I followed the expected interview strategy and not abuse my power because I work with and know the participants. I was fortunate to experience openness from participants in this research study and in fact I did not have any problems regarding issues of confidentiality or sensitivity around recording interviews.

6.6 Validity and reliability

In this study, I used the following measures to strive towards the attainment of valid and reliable interviewing. I maintained my professional persona during interviews but allowed for relaxed and free flowing discussion. I allowed participants to share their experiences, knowledge and opinions without interrupting discussions. I audio-taped all interviews and used data directly from the transcripts. I cross-referenced the data in the findings of this study with related literature from the field.

In working towards validity, reliability and generalisation, I have attempted to provide the reader with a chain of evidence so that she/he will be able to 'see' the path that I have followed from the statement of the problem to the findings. By doing this, the reader can assess whether the description applied in this study is applicable to other situations or can be extended in subsequent research.

7. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

7.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the main categories, which are listed in Table 7.1. In this section, I discuss each major category and its sub-categories in the order in which they appear in the Table. In relating the findings for each category, I draw on excerpts from the interviews that illustrate or substantiate the discussion and link this with the literature review. I then conclude with a summary of the findings.

Table 7.1: Table of categories, sub-categories and reflection in interviews

Category and sub-category	Reflection in interviews
<p>1. Assessment methods</p> <p>(a) Challenge process (standardised exams)</p> <p>(b) Observation</p> <p>(c) Portfolio development</p>	<p>Standardised exams are still an effective and inexpensive way of determining the underlying knowledge and competency of educators.</p> <p>Observation is carried out by the assessor when the educator is demonstrating the facilitation of adult learning.</p> <p>Portfolio development is used to gather evidence as a form of self-assessment or to demonstrate the skills and knowledge previously acquired in informal training over a period of time.</p>
<p>2. Training programmes based on educator needs</p>	<p>The use of RPL serves to determine the training or retraining needs of an educator.</p> <p>Through RPL programmes, the trainer and the assessor are able to avoid the repetition of training and thereby prevent the waste of both human and financial resources.</p>

<p>3. RPL in relation to current ABET standards and Qualifications development</p>	<p>The developments in the national standards processes are designed to facilitate recognition of prior learning of an educator who aspires towards a qualification.</p> <p>RPL is the linkage between the current development of standards and qualifications and the existing competencies of adult educators.</p>
<p>4. The need for advisors and assessors</p>	<p>There are different ways of assessing and recognising an educator's prior knowledge, skills and experience. In doing so there is a need for qualified assessors. The responsibility of an assessor is to be familiar with the outcome framework against which the educator is being assessed and make judgements about the match between the evidence presented and stated performance criteria required.</p>

7.2 Discussion of findings

7.2.1 Assessment methods used in RPL processes

My assumption, as reflected in the (section 4), was that many educators whom I met in industry and NGOs were competent educators but lacked a formally recognised certificate to prove their worth. It is my view that with RPL their skills, knowledge and experiences could be evaluated and, if particular standards are met, duly accredited. As revealed in the interviews, a common finding was that RPL is not seen to be excluded from assessment practices but now forms an integral part of the assessment process for many educators in industry and the NGO sector. This can be ascribed to the fact that RPL has grown to be accepted as a valid and reliable tool for assessing achievement of learning acquired outside formally recognised institutions. As one participant said "*RPL needs to*

be included in programmes, in particular if RPL is considered to be a reliable and a valid assessment of performance.” His response outlines an important aspect in the development of RPL in that it has become an integral part of the assessment practices for adult education and training providers, as a means of determining the ‘applied competence’ of adult educators, when entering employment and for further learning.

As discussed in the literature review there are three prevalent RPL assessment methods used in South Africa, the challenge process, (with standardised examinations as an example), observation and portfolio development.

7.2.1.1 The challenge process

A number of the participants interviewed stressed and supported the use of standardised examinations as an assessment method when determining competency. Although most stated that this was not an ideal form of assessment, it still had an important role to play when determining the prior knowledge and level of competency of the adult educator. As described by one interviewee (4/T/E/4): *“I actually think that there is a place for written tests or exams. As long as it is not used exclusively, it must only form a part of and not the total form of assessment. These tests must be able to test the necessary skills of the adult educator without wanting the adult educator to have an in-depth knowledge of, for example, creative writing. For an adult educator, and in particular an ABET practitioner, one does not require them to be literary experts. You want their ideas on paper in a simple way and you can set your paper in such a way so as to prevent rote learning and regurgitation of facts and still allow for creativity.”*

As noted in the literature review, Harris, Saddington & McMillan (1994) include standardised tests as an essential component in assessing the skills of the adult educator when assessing for RPL purposes. Challis (1993) draws on the fact

that the assessor may feel it necessary to ensure the currency (value) of the claimed competency. The use of 'tests', as stated by many of the research participants, is still an effective and inexpensive way to determine the underlying knowledge and competency of educators. Rutherford (1995) and Challis (1993) support the use of standardised testing and outline the following steps when developing these tests:

- definition of subject area to be addressed;
- development of detailed content specifications (as generic as possible);
- development of a pool of test questions;
- pre-testing or piloting with educators on existing taught courses; and
- scoring scale developed on the basis of students' performance.

It was emphasised by the participants that a test can be effectively carried out using oral or written questions that are aimed at gathering evidence of the educator's competence. However, in-depth questioning will be more important when determining competence at higher professional level (for example, at NQF level 5), where greater knowledge and understanding is required, than simply the assessment of facilitation skills, that may be a requirement at a lower level (for example, NQF level 4).

Testing has an important role in assessing the competency, knowledge and skills of the educator when performing a task. However, Genade (1998) warns that testing, in particular written tests, do not measure prior knowledge satisfactorily because of the following:

- Testing only reflects the test developer's perception of how learning can be 'measured'. This often falls short of the real range of options, which exist.
- Most educators have been away from the formal learning environment, with its 'test' culture, for a considerable period and have forgotten the skills they may need to survive in this culture and are therefore reluctant to write tests in order to demonstrate their prior learning.

Rutherford (1995) refers to additional methods in the RPL process and these methods include projects and assignments. Projects and assignments can provide a reasonably realistic assessment of an educator's competency and can be assessed against the standards required by the educator to facilitate adult learning. Written assignments and projects are often used instead of standard examination papers and combined with an open learning approach. Examples may include preparation of a learning programme, lesson plans and reports of learners. The main advantage of this method is that educators have to take responsibility for their own learning, and have to use their initiative to access information critical to the completion of the assignment or project. Projects and assignments can provide evidence of skills, knowledge and capability.

It must be remembered that standardised examinations cannot be used as the only measure of applied competence and the educator may have to provide further evidence of competency. Therefore, an additional and more appropriate method suggested by the respondents in this study focused on observation and portfolio development.

7.2.1. 2 Observation

Observation of the educator at work is way of assessing and judging evidence of performance. The main advantage is that the educator operates within his or her own work environment while an effective and holistic assessment of his or her competence is carried out. Activities within the learning environment, the classroom, will provide evidence of an educator's underlying knowledge and understanding, which can be supplemented by questioning from the assessor. An interviewee (1/T/M/3) noted, *"through observation you can actually see whether the adult educator can facilitate learning by listening to the learner; whether they actually make themselves understood to the learners; whether they test the understanding of the learners, and how they cope with different situations. I would say that observation is the first priority."*

Assessment theorists such as Challis (1993) and Rutherford (1995) who emphasise observation as a method for RPL assessment echo this in the literature. For the educator who is claiming to be competent, this is an opportunity to actually demonstrate this competency and substantiate the claim.

Some participants emphasised that although competency is not always directly observable, and while observation allows for the assessment of skills, overall competence can only be determined after including other assessment methods. These additional assessment methods could include interviews, work related simulations or projects and assignments (Rutherford, 1995).

7.2.1. 3 Portfolio development

The participants interviewed supported the use of portfolio development as an assessment method when determining skills, knowledge and prior experience. A number of participants referred to the gathering of evidence as a form of self-assessment or the demonstration of the skills and knowledge previously acquired in non-formal training over a period of time. Participant (1/TIM/3) said: *"... you make use of more indirect evidence and historical evidence if you do RPL. And you can use a portfolio so you can refer back to the history of the person"*. Participant (6/TIG/3) claimed: *"... so that outcomes are made completely transparent and you look at the list of outcomes and I have to demonstrate competence in writing lesson plans, so you produce a portfolio full of lesson plans to demonstrate this competence"*.

I would argue, based on the support from the participants in this study and the literature, that portfolio development is an important assessment method that critically contributes to determining the competence of an adult educator. However, there were two aspects of portfolio development that were discussed by the participants in their interviews which, must not be ignored. In some

contexts, the term 'portfolio' is used solely to refer to the documentation of informal and experiential learning. In other contexts, the term is used to signify the overall process of gathering and presenting all prior learning and can therefore be seen as a compendium of the different forms of assessment of prior learning. Portfolio development is, however, arguably the most difficult method of assessment when relating to RPL and as a means of proving or disproving the competency of an educator. Van Rooyen (1999) and Harris, Saddington & McMillan (1994) suggest a reason for this is that portfolio development requires a high level of commitment to the process of developing the portfolio. The basis on which the information gathering takes place demands commitment, is time consuming and expensive and assessors need to be satisfied that the evidence of competence submitted in the portfolio is sufficient, valid, reliable, authentic and current.

Up to now I have highlighted how participants thought RPL could be used as a tool to assess an educator's prior learning by assessing their current competencies, namely, through methods such as the challenge process (standardised exams), observation and the development of portfolios. These methods can be conducted with a view to earning credit for or towards a specific course or enrolling with a course provider. It can also be used to identify gaps in the educator's knowledge and skill base, so that he/she can remedy this through additional training programmes.

7.3. Training programmes based on educators' needs

The participants interviewed identified the importance of addressing the educators' needs through RPL in order to ascertain areas of a lack of knowledge and skills and thereby identify the educators' training requirements and the training programmes that will address these needs. They understood the need for training programmes that would improve the skills and knowledge of the adult educator in order that they could better facilitate adult learning. An interviewee

(3/T/S/ 2) expressed his view: *"If a client comes to us and says that our people have been through a particular training course, we have a fair idea of what is dealt with in the course. And what we often do then is condensed training. So where our training course might be a 5 -day course we will go through an assessment process, which includes RPL. Then we take out the stuff that we feel they would have already covered and can demonstrate competency in so that in that way we do not retrain and waste time and money"*.

When identifying further training needs Lategan & Van Rooyen (1997) state that as a result of recognition of prior skills in an assessment programme, the development needs of an educator are identified. A training programme that includes RPL will alert the trainer and the assessor to the educator's areas of competency or lack thereof. Consequently, the educator is able to know what he or she needs to concentrate on in order to gain credit for, or towards, a qualification. Through RPL programmes not only are existing competencies identified, but also the trainer and the assessor are able to avoid the repetition of training and thereby prevent the waste of both human and financial resources.

7.4 RPL in relation to the current ABET standards and qualifications development

All the participants referred to the relationship between RPL and the current development of Education, Training and Development standards and qualifications. They recognised strong links between the methods, such as the challenge process (for example, standardised examinations), observation and portfolio development, that can be used to assess the prior learning of adult educators and the current process of developing national standards and qualifications for adult educators.

These components were defined by the Education, Training and Development Practices Project (1998) and the South African Qualifications Authority (1999) as:

- practical competence, which is the ability to demonstrate a range of options and make decisions about practice;
- foundational competence which is the ability to demonstrate an understanding of what we are doing and why; and
- reflexive competence which is the ability to demonstrate the capability to connect our understandings with our performance.

For the participants, a critical element in the development of such national standards is that each standard includes a set of criteria necessary for assessing the components of applied competence: practical, foundational and reflexive. Participants stressed that the assessment activities captured in the standards are designed to gather evidence of how 'able' the person is, how competence is shown and how overall proficiency is ascertained.

Lategan & van Rooyen (1997:13) broaden the issue of determining competency when relating this to RPL. They state: "*Recognition of prior learning is a process of granting credit for a unit on the basis of an assessment of formal and non-formal learning/experience, and to establish whether the learner possess the capabilities specified in the outcome statement.*" This was confirmed by the participants I interviewed who discussed the link between assessing for current competence in order to award credit, and at the same time identifying the training needs of adult educators.

The identification of training needs would show the gaps in the educators' knowledge and skills and this ultimately would prevent them from obtaining credits towards a full qualification or part of a qualification. In my interpretation of the data I found there to be mutual agreement amongst the participants that there was no need for the re-training of educators who are able to demonstrate

competency as set out in the proposed Education, Training and Development Practices standards. Further support for this was emphasised by participant (3/T/G/1) who stated that *“an adult educator could gain recognition for prior learning towards an entire qualification, provided that such a person is able to demonstrate the full competence associated with the entry requirements for that qualification.”*

Therefore, granting credit for a unit on the basis of an assessment of formal and non-formal learning and experience is determined by whether the learner (educator) can demonstrate the competencies specified in the outcome statement of each unit standard. Consequently, a person could gain recognition for prior learning in respect of an entire qualification, provided he or she is able to demonstrate all the competence associated with that qualification (Genade, 1998). This was emphasised by participant (4/T/L/1) who said, *“Once we have the unit standards you will know how you are going to recognise people, like benchmarking yourself, knowing this is required. At least there are draft unit standards.”*

Despite the difficulty of developing standards, participant (6/T/E/3-4) said that his organisation intended to address these difficulties *“... by identifying a way in which courses or skills people have in relation to the unit standards, the ETDP standards. So what we would like to do is put together is a training course which is modular and then certainly for people that we already work with and we want to go through a process of RPL with them. Where we can say (by implication the awarding credit for competence demonstrated by adult educators when being assessed) then to ‘top up’ on requirements to meet all those unit standards, we would then be offering them additional training before we refer them to an institution. We are still discussing whether we are going to do everything ourselves, or whether we are going to establish some sort of partnership with for example, UNISA.”* This places emphasis on the fact that an essential element and purpose of assessment, when relating this to prior learning, is to ensure that

the learning being assessed aspires to emerging nationally recognised standards.

I am able to conclude from the interviews that there is a genuine willingness to accelerate redress of the past, unfair discrimination policies in the education, training and development field and create better career-pathing opportunities for adult educators. I believe that because of the value placed on recognising the prior learning and experience of adult educators, certainly by trainers and managers, coupled with the commitment to further the personal development of each educator, a precedent has been set by these providers.

7.5. The need for advisors and assessors

As discussed in section 7.2.1 there are a number of different ways of assessing and recognising an educator's prior knowledge, skills and experience. In this respect all the participants identified the need for qualified assessors, as assessors must manage, carry out and coordinate an assessment process.

The importance of qualified assessors was emphasised by participant (1/T/M/4): *"I think that in the learning process you have to prepare the learner (educator) very well. A definite gap that I have identified is the need for qualified assessors."* The assessor clearly has an important role when conducting outcomes-based assessment. At this point it is important to distinguish between an assessor and a RPL advisor. A RPL advisor need not be a qualified assessor. A RPL advisor could be the human resources (HR) manager in the case of industry or manager in the case of a NGO. The RPL advisor provides support and guidance to the learner (educator) with regard to RPL practices and procedures but does not necessarily carry out the assessment practices and procedures.

The role of an advisor, according to Challis (1993), is to offer support and advice in the final stages of preparation for assessment. In support of this participant

(1/T/M/4) said: *"I think what we need in this country are RPL advisors in terms of ABET, it could be a HR (human resource) manager who comes in and helps the facilitators in a large company like ESKOM to prepare their portfolios and to get them ready for assessment. Because assessing is so expensive, it is better to get people through other ways. If you get the assessor in place, who wants to prepare the people and another time to assess them actually, it is going to be much more expensive. Now what we need is a plethora of RPL advisors within providers and from practitioners in companies in the HR section. Even line people, (within an industry context on-line is referred to staff on the production line) who can mentor educators and could be RPL advisors, educators as they come through the system."*

An assessor must be competent in terms of the nationally recognised standards and have appropriate expertise and recognition in the area being assessed. It is important that the assessors in both industry and NGOs be trained in a recognised programme that will qualify them as RPL assessors according to national standards. Challis (1993) points out that the role of an assessor is to be familiar with the outcome framework against which the educator is being assessed and to be able to make judgements about the match between the evidence presented and stated performance criteria. The assessor will be expected to make recommendations to the educator on further work and any additional requirements needed by the educators (Rutherford, 1995).

Most participants indicated the need for qualified assessors and that these assessors will assess the educator's competence using the ABET educator national unit standards as guidelines to award credits towards a qualification (South African Qualifications Authority, 1999). The assessor will also determine the applicability of evidence submitted by the educator (Department of Education, 1999).

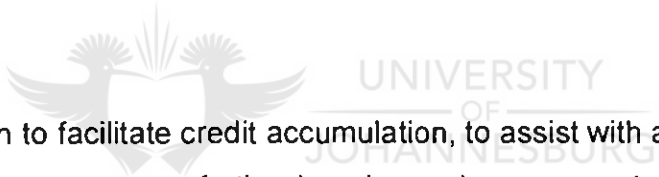
An educator who wants to be assessed will present him/herself to either their RPL advisor (who would request an assessor from an assessor body) or a RPL assessor. The South African Qualifications Authority has recently approved the establishment of assessor standards generating body to determine standards for assessors. Assessment agencies will be accredited by the Education, Training and Quality Assurers (ETQAs), to accredit, audit and monitor learning and learning achievements in respect of specific levels, standards and qualifications on the NQF (South African Qualifications Authority, 1999).

Even though an accredited provider may offer educators the necessary training towards credits and a qualification, it will ultimately be the responsibility of an ETQA to register assessors and approve and award qualifications. The educator is responsible for collecting sufficient evidence to demonstrate competence, which is advocated as a method used to assess prior learning. A few of the participants pointed out that there is a clear distinction between a core of educators who are mainly concerned with assessment and therefore specialise in assessment and educators who are concerned with facilitating learning in the classroom.

7.6 The benefits and implications of recognising prior learning

Participants noted that the introduction of RPL as an assessment tool in to education and training practices in South Africa has beneficial prospects for the ABET educator. RPL has the potential to bridge the gap between the higher education system and non-formal education and training practices found in the industry and NGO sectors. This would improve the career possibilities of the adult educator who, through recognition of prior learning, could gain access to the higher education system and qualify as a professional practitioner. This would enhance the professional recognition and work prospects of the ABET educator in the field of education, training and development.

The benefits of RPL extend beyond the individual educator as it would mean that past learning activities, in some cases provided by their employers, were not a waste of time and money, and the educator may complete a degree or diploma. RPL facilitates individual development, not only fostering the need for continuous learning (life-long learning) but also reassuring an individual that he or she is capable of, and will benefit from, such development (Genade, 1998). To the employer, RPL means that recognition within the workplace reduces training and costs and highlights those areas in which the educator requires further training. For higher education institutions, as supported by the participants in this research and Genade (1998), the benefits for institutions of higher learning would include increased numbers of learners, especially from groups previously denied access to higher education. The transformation of the curricula to accommodate a more learner-centered approach and the design of the ABET curriculum into a more modular approach can best serve the interests of the educator.

The logo of the University of Johannesburg is centered in the background. It features two stylized birds facing each other with their wings spread, positioned above a shield. The text 'UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG' is written in a light, sans-serif font across the middle of the logo.

RPL can be seen to facilitate credit accumulation, to assist with academic progression and to encourage further learning and assessment. RPL has the potential to open relationships between the formal education system and the wide-ranging training and educational practices of industry and NGOs, therefore improving mobility between these systems of provision (Genade, 1998). RPL can ensure that educators have access to relevant qualifications, acknowledging the skills, knowledge and competence of the educator and thereby improving quality of provisioning and delivery of learning to many ABET learners.

8. CONCLUSION

The participants I interviewed were well informed about RPL and had, in one way or another, already implemented RPL methods as an integral part of the assessment system for their educators. The participants had also used various assessment methods, appropriate to their context, when recognising the prior learning of their educators. Even though this study revealed that the assessment methods were context-specific, a number of the assessment methods used by providers were in fact generic and applicable to all assessment practices. Improved assessment practices that include the recognition of prior learning as a measure of establishing the current competency of the educator is essentially aimed at gaining credit towards a formal qualification without following a programme of formal study.

Nearly all the participants I interviewed drew a comparison between RPL and the access of educators to higher education programmes and institutions. The participants stated that they were eager for the process of development of the standards and qualifications for ABET educators and other practitioners in the ETD field to be finalised in the very near future, in order to be able to accredit adult educators for their prior experience and skills. The transformation of assessment processes through which learning outcomes are measured, from exclusive reliance on tests based on courses to flexible assessment methods, are more likely to reflect how educators can demonstrate their competence with relevance to the 'real world'. This will offer non-formal education and training organisations, in the NGO and industry sectors, the opportunity for their learners to demonstrate the appropriate educational standard of their learning and will provide their learners with access to institutions of higher learning.

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APPENDIX: A**Transcript of Interview**

Interview 1:

Date: 6 October 1999

Researcher: Debbie Machard

Respondent: Mrs. Marietta van Rooyen

Sector: Industry: (Plastics and manufacturing) - Assessment specialist

Code: 1/T/M

Researcher: What method of assessment is used in your company to determine the prior skills and knowledge (RPL) of an ABET educator?

Respondent: What I have read so far from three countries. It is always said that observation is the best and most direct way. Observation on the job. Just like when you evaluate a teacher. It is not considered a full evaluation unless you see them active in the classroom. I can recommend that you use several methods. But that you never leave out the observation of that person doing the facilitation of the lesson. This could be an assimilated way, where they do a kind of observation of their own peers. But the best way is always to get them in front of their own students. Because that way you can actually see whether they listen, whether they actually make themselves understood, whether they test the understanding of the students, how they handle situations and so on. I would say that observation is the first priority. Written tests can be done if there is a lot of theory involved. And also other ways of testing like doing videos, which is very valuable way of doing it and then showing them the videos while they actually discuss their own performance.

Researcher: To clarify further can you explain further what you mean by peer evaluation?

Respondent: Well if you show them the video where they are actually facilitating themselves and you ask them to discuss and be critical about themselves. It often brings out some of the hidden thinking that went on while they were facilitating. And that gives you the opportunity to do more of the critical outcomes, where they reflect about their own way of doing things. It is a bit of a shock, videos are a nightmare, but if you make them used to it, then it can become a useful tool. So I would say that direct observation, while a person is active in a classroom would be my first priority for RPL.

Researcher: Can you further clarify the issue of assessment in relation to the ABET educator?

Respondent: Once again in the past there would have been glass ceilings and obstacles in terms of certificates and paper. Have you got a Standard 8? Have you got a matric? People would often then not become qualified as an ABET facilitator who do not have a piece of paper. RPL gives you the opportunity to test them for competence without referring to those certificates. So it is possible that the person develops themselves over many years and never got a Standard 8 or a Grade 10 certificate but are now really operating on a much higher level because they were reading and they were active and were teaching. So one should be able to recognise them for their prior learning in a formal way that will get them a qualification. If you are only looking at the professional qualification facilitating learning then it is not so difficult because that can be done through observation. But if you also want to look at the underpinning knowledge of literacy and numeracy and so on of this facilitator that part I think is the most complex part. Because you don't want to go give them a Grade 10 certificate or an ABET 4 or something like that you don't want to put them through an exam but you do need to know that they are competent on a certain level.

Researcher: Can you clarify the term you used "*underpinning knowledge*"?

Respondent: You will usually find that that ABET facilitator has got a long history of doing different courses in different places. So through that portfolio they have built they can build up a history of what they have actually learnt. But you can also do it through an interview situation where you orally test a person's knowledge. And kind of by asking the right questions and having them describe situations perhaps. I have seen a lot of descriptions of the situation, which is indirect evidence really, it is not direct evidence. But it still gives you a very good idea of what thinking is there.

Researcher: In order for me to understand the methods you have mentioned previously such as; observation, portfolio development and interviews. Can you elaborate further for better clarity in relation to RPL?

Respondent: I actually think that there is a place for written tests or exams. As long as it is not used exclusively, it must only form a part of the assessment. I feel that we stress exams too much but there is a way that we can set a paper. That tests cognitive ability without wanting them to do an enormous amount of for example, creative writing. For an ABET educator you do not want them becoming a literacy expert. You want are their ideas on paper in a simple way and you can set your paper in such a way so that you do not only have rote learning and regurgitating. And as long as that is the case I have nothing against written papers. As a matter of fact, yesterday a very interesting thought came up in the Department of Education meeting looking at the restructuring at the Further Education and Training sub-sector.

We came to a point where we said rote learning is not such a terrible thing. If you think about your tables. The three and five times table people really do need to know it. You know it when you don't. It is going to be a problem in the future so there are certain things that you do have to regurgitate-certain principles, certain tables in numeracy. And maybe it is one of the ways you can test an ABET facilitator. By offering numeracy basic principles and that can be done in a written or an oral way. So yes, I am not throwing out written exams.

Researcher: What would you change or what methods would you use to improve RPL to ABET educators in your company?

Respondent: I think that in the process you have to prepare the candidate very well. A definite opening that I have identified is, well are just in the beginning of all of this, what we need in the country is RPL advisors. I think what we need in this country are RPL advisors in terms of ABET, it could be a Human Resources manager. Who comes in and helps the facilitators in a large company like ESKOM to prepare their portfolios and to get ready for assessment because assessing is so expensive. It is better to get people through other ways. If you get the assessor in place, which wants to prepare the people and another time to assess them actually, it is going to be much more expensive. Now what we need is a plethora of RPL advisors and from practitioners in companies in the HR section. Within an industry context on-line to staff on the production line who can mentor candidates and could be RPL advisors, so they can advise candidates as they come through the system. So that they can advise others as they come through. I have always wondered and this isn't based on anything I am not saying, I am asking rather. 'What about the fact that some people are naturally better at facilitating knowledge than others'? 'How do you measure that'?

I think that in order to measure that observation is really the best way. You can't do it on paper. But I still think that if you are naturally a good facilitator, you could get away with a lot less formal knowledge than people who are not good facilitators but may have all the knowledge of the world. Case in point being such as some of the professors at universities who can't transfer their knowledge at all to the students. And so it is very important to realise that the outcome of these people must be not so much a transfer of knowledge anymore as in the old days but learning taking place. And if you are assessing an adult educator against outcomes you should actually be looking at their learners and what their outcomes are. Well, I suppose in a way you never know what's coming in. If you know what's coming in.

If you have a pre-assessment and a post-assessment of the learners then it is a way of measuring what learning took place. But those who didn't have a pre-assessment you can't really blame the facilitator if the learning wasn't almost the same. And educators feel in is unfair to judge you by your pass rate alone. But I think it should feature somewhere.

Researcher: Thank you for your willingness to assist me in this study.



APPENDIX: B**Transcript of Interview*****Interview 3:******Date: 6 October 1999******Researcher: Debbie Machard******Respondent: Mr. Stephan le Roux (PROLIT)******Sector: Non-government organisation (ABET provider) Trainer******Code: 3/T/S***

Researcher: What method of assessment is used in your company to determine the prior skills and knowledge (RPL) of an ABET educator?

Respondent: What we currently do is more a form of selection prior to training of educators than the actual recognition of their existing skills. We have an assessment or entrance criteria. What we are looking at is that someone must have a minimum of Standard 10 (and that must be in the learning area facilitating in). Obviously this must be English or Maths. For ABET 4, that would be for ABET 1-3 facilitation, for ABET 4 you want a matric plus something. It doesn't have to be a qualification or a degree it can be a certificate or a first year course or something. But then what we also do for ABET 4 for all our clients and for ABET 1-3 as well for people we employ is that they have to write an assessment. If they are going to be facilitating English they write an assessment for English. Which focuses on two things, one it determines existing knowledge of outcomes-based education, of adult education principles. So there are things like how to use group work, how would you accommodate different abilities in the classroom, how would OBE benefit an adult learner, and there is passage that gives them basically some clue of that but they have to use their own existing knowledge and their own experience. That is the one thing it assesses and the other thing it also assesses is their English skills. So in fact marks for language as well.

And then if they are going to be facilitating Maths, we have a pure Maths content assessment to determine their level of mathematics. We have got a graded scoring sheet which, depending on how much they score, we say that they are suitable to facilitate up to ABET 4 or 3 whatever, or they are not suitable to facilitate English or Maths at all. So basically as I say it is a way of assessing whether we can best utilise the people and if we can't use them for English and Maths we usually look at whether we can use them for mother tongue. We look at their language if we need people in that language and so forth. But still it is a minimum of matric we require. We also obviously have an interview, that is prior to the assessment, to find out whether they have worked in ABET before or if they have any form of training.

Often people have taught in a formal school but not adult education. We would like somebody with some form of education and training experience. But it doesn't have to be ABET. So that basically is the screening process that we go through. In terms of using that information what we do sometimes do, if a client comes to us and says that our people have been through Continuing Education Project course and so forth, we have a fair idea of what is dealt with in the course, the UNISA certificate or whatever. And what we often do then is a condensed training. So where our normal training course might be five days we might say because of your existing experience we might say that we can offer you the following in two days and then we take out the stuff that we feel they would have already covered in other courses. So in that way we use what we think that their knowledge and experience would be to make sure that they don't undergo training we think they would have already had.

What we plan to do and that is in fact what we are going to be doing during November and December. By identifying a way in which courses or skills people have in relation to the unit standards. So what we would like to put together is a training course which is sort of modular and then certainly for people that we already work, with we want to go through a process of RPL with them. Where we can say, then to 'top-up' on requirements to meet all those unit standards, we would then be

offering them additional training before we refer them to an institution or whether we are going to establish some sort of partnership, with for example UNISA. What we propose to do there in terms of assessing that is obviously the selection processes, which I have just discussed with you. Then during the training we will observe their performance and by the end of that particular training module we will say 'yes' or no or whether they need support still whatever. We like to have at least two in-service training sessions where we go and observe the class, give them feedback. It is supposed to be a more developmental process than monitoring but it does serve as an evaluation process as well. What we have recently developed is assignments which educators can use to upgrade their content knowledge, either in Maths or English. They in turn will return them to use we will mark and give them feedback. And we are looking at perhaps putting in place assignments based on the more generic things like the theory of ABET and that sort of thing. Which they can also do, so that will be part of a process of upgrading people to meet the unit standards because that is where the actual recognition part will come in-to see where we can assist them in actually obtaining those credits.

Researcher: To clarify and if I understand you correctly you actually have minimum criteria for educators and you will assist them in accessing their levels of competency?

Respondent: We have in the past taken people with less than a matric. Specifically from community-based organisations and in fact in some industries as well who are looking at those educator's qualifications. We find who in fact have got a Standard 8 certificate or lower than that. The further back in our history you go you'll find that more people came with a Standard 5 or Standard 6. We will train them if the company sort of insists on it. We only train people for ABET 4 if they meet those criteria but for ABET 1-3, we will say to the company that we don't think the person is suitable but if they insist we do train them and if they perform on the training then that is fine.

Researcher: How would you change or what methods would you use to improve RPL of ABET educators in your organisation?

Respondent: I think what we want to change is to put a couple of things in that will give us more tangible results. So that the process is more reliable than going on the word of one trainer who has been out to see someone's class who may or may not get along with that trainer. So that is why we do want to put in mechanisms like possible assignments and so forth. Obviously the actual observation of what the person's doing both educationally and in terms of the evidence that you get from that is the soundest way of doing it. But we would like to back it up with other stuff. What we will also have to start looking at when we do start helping our educators getting RPL is the currency of their existing certificates. Because most of the educators we deal with have been through various training programmes. So we will have to like look at you know, like a BESA course 1990. Is it still valid? What's covered and how was it covered? And so forth. Is that knowledge still there and skills and that might be quite challenging to lay value on a person's certificates. Do we just accept it or do we verify it? As I said earlier, at this stage if somebody is really insistent that they have been trained and that, we will customise our course, we won't train everything. We will offer them basically what we think is core to our programme, which they wouldn't have got elsewhere and we will leave out the theory of ABET and principles of adult learning, that sort of stuff. But our experience has also been that most educators do actually benefit when going through the full thing but it depends on the person and that I suppose is where the difficulty lies on identifying who does actually go through it again type of thing.

Researcher: Thank you for your time and assistance in this research study.