This publication has been produced on behalf of the national training system. It was funded under the Reframing the Future National Project administered by the Commonwealth of Australia.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth of Australia or State and Territory Training Authorities.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2006

This work is Copyright.

It may be reproduced in whole or in part for study or training purposes, subject to the inclusion of an acknowledgement of the source and it is not used for commercial use or sale. Reproduction for purposes other than those indicated above requires the prior written permission from the Commonwealth. Requests and enquiries concerning reproduction and copyright should be addressed to the Branch Manager, Technology and Information Services Branch, Industry Skills Development Group, Department of Education, Science and Training, GPO Box 9888 Canberra City, ACT, 2601.

First edition November 2006
Author/Contributors: Suzy McKenna and Dr John Mitchell

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-publication data
Department of Education, Science and Training – Reframing the Future
RPL – DONE WELL IN VET
ISBN: 186 506 8829
331.25920994
Reframing the Future
PO Box 425 Elizabeth SA 5112
Tel 08 8207 9855 Fax 08 8207 9708
Email reframingthefuture@tafesa.edu.au
Website www.reframingthefuture.net
Design by P.A.G.E. 1300 790 704
PAGE 107053

If you are interested in conducting a program of professional development on the topic of RPL – Done Well in VET, a range of additional materials developed for the Reframing the Future forums are available from the Reframing the Future website http://reframingthefuture.net/RPL.Done.Well.Aug06.htm. Some selected materials are also on the CD ROM RPL – Done Well in VET and available from the website http://reframingthefuture.net/Publications.asp
CONTENTS

1 Introduction to the forums and the publication: Suzy McKenna ................................................................. 1

2 How to use the resources and the Appreciative Inquiry methodology ............................................................. 6

3 RPL done often and well: Article in TAFE Teacher by Suzy McKenna ............................................................... 7

4 Reframing the Future and Appreciative Inquiry: Dr John Mitchell and Suzy McKenna ........................................... 9

5 Program of activities for RPL Forums ........................................... 12

6 Yes, we are there! Think piece: Andrea Bateman ................................................................. 15

7 A common sense, client centred approach Think piece: Brian Spencer ................................................................. 21

8 Campus Review article Dr John Mitchell on Andea Bateman and Brian Spencer and the forums ......................................................... 36

9 Insights and good practice from interviews with 21 RPL practitioners: Dr John Mitchell, Suzy McKenna ................................................................. 39

1 RPL FOR MATURE-AGED WORKERS .................................................. 41

RPL for a mature aged chef: Barrie Cooke, Caloola Skills Training, Canberra ACT
RPL for mature aged women and community volunteers: Stephen Bolton, Agrifood Industry Skills Council, Canberra ACT
RPL for mature aged workers in a nursing home – Jo Carling, Drysdale Institute, Hobart TAS
RPL for a 66 year old instructor – Jenn Eaton, St John Ambulance, Melbourne VIC

2 RPL FOR YOUTHS ................................................................................. 44

RPL for youth leaders: Janelle Holis, Eastlake Skills Centre, Newcastle NSW
RPL in agriculture for a youth: Judy Gronold, Product Services, Queensland

3 RPL FOR EXPERIENCED STAFF AND MANAGERS ........................................... 46

RPL for a truckie supervisor: Kit McMahon, Service Skills Australia, Sydney NSW
RPL for retail managers: Gwen Moroney, First Impressions Resources, Brisbane QLD
RPL for experienced adults: Jennifer Bailey, Gold Coast Institute of TAFE
RPL in horticulture: Laurie Miller, TAFE Tasmania
RPL for frontline management in transport industry: Wendy Cato, Cato HR, Adelaide SA

4 RPL IN THE TRADES AREAS ..................................................................... 50

RPL for instrumentation: Pat Tierney, Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) Training, Perth WA
RPL for experienced builders: Robert Coates, Swan TAFE, Perth WA
CONTENTS

5 RPL FOR EQUITY GROUPS ...................... 52
  RPL for a Sudanese migrant: Terri Quinn, Axial Training, Brisbane Queensland
  RPL for a woman from Arabic culture: Jen Hamer, Relationships Australia, Adelaide SA

8 HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO RPL ........... 53
  RPL for public servants: Beth de Jong, Centrelink, Perth WA
  RPL in two hospitality businesses: Gabriella Peters, Hostec IDR, Sydney NSW

7 RPL IN REGIONAL AREAS ..................... 55
  RPL for home carers: Sue Baker, Adelaide North Institute of TAFE, Gawler SA
  RPL for trainers of indigenous learners: Mark James, NT Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Darwin NT

8 RPL FOR A VARIETY OF CLIENT GROUPS .... 57
  RPL for recreation leaders: Andrew Barkham, Queensland Outdoor Recreation
  RPL for Singaporeans: Margaret Gannaway, Challenger TAFE, Fremantle WA

Introduction to the forums and the publication:
Suzy McKenna

We have a dream … in 2010 RPL is completely integrated into a workforce development strategy which reflects the skills, needs and demands of the economy. Industry, learners and providers are active supporters and participants in the RPL process.’

(Participants in 2006 RPL – Done Well Forum)

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to make easily accessible for the vocational education and training (VET) sector a set of resources on the topic of RPL – Done Well. The resources consist of a collection of papers, tools and insights that can inform the effective, innovative and contemporary (up to date) practice of recognition of prior learning (RPL) in Australian VET.

The resources were developed and used at a series of forums held around Australia in 2006 by Reframing the Future, the national staff development and change management program for skilling Australia’s VET workforce to implement the national training system.

Reframing the Future provides a professional learning framework for educational change, staff learning and organisational capacity building in vocational education and training.

These printed materials are complemented by PowerPoint slides available from www.reframingthefuture.net The slides were shown at the national forums conducted in 2006 and can be adapted for local use. The PowerPoints are also available on CD ROM which can be ordered through the website www.reframingthefuture.net

Background to the RPL – Done Well Forums

The recent acknowledgement of recognition of prior learning (RPL) as a key strategy for ‘achieving maximum flexibility in training for employers and individuals’ by the Council of Australian Governments has driven a renewed engagement with recognition of prior learning practice by training providers and VET practitioners. See the COAG Communiqué, 10 February 2006 http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/100206/index.htm#apprenticeships

By January 2007 it is intended that:

• All workers entering publicly funded training will be able to have their existing skills recognised quickly and simply so that wherever possible their training time is reduced
• A joint three year Commonwealth/State and Territory programme, to be agreed on a bilateral basis, will be established to support delivery and good practice of recognition of prior learning. COAG Action Plan http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/100206/index.htm#attach

In response to this renewed interest in RPL, Reframing the Future adapted the sub-program ‘Engaging VET Practitioners’ to support some of the consequent professional development requirements to improve and increase assessment recognition practices in vocational education and training.

The overall aim of the ‘Engaging VET Practitioners’ sub-program is for VET personnel and stakeholders to engage in constructive debate about how to continuously improve the national training system based on learning from both practice and theory.
The aims of the sub-program are to:

- initiate robust national dialogue around alternative teaching, learning and assessment practices in a Training Package environment
- strengthen a sense of professional identity and opportunities for networking amongst practitioners, and
- build RTO capability in Training Package implementation.

Our objective for the sub-program in 2006 was to establish an ongoing forum for knowledge sharing and generation among VET stakeholders and practitioners in making effective professional judgments about recognition of prior learning (RPL).

What we did

During August 2006, Reframing the Future facilitated five one-day forums.

A group of people representing a mix of VET providers and industry areas, and who could have an impact in their organisations, were selected to participate in the forums based on their expressions of interest. Participants’ job roles ranged from RTO directors and managers to workplace trainers and assessors and human resource practitioners. Some participants also came from VET stakeholder groups such as industry associations, State Training Authorities and intermediary organisations such as group training and job network agencies.

In all, 325 VET professionals participated in the forums which were conducted in Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Sydney. Participants from regional areas, the Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania were supported to attend the forum closest to their location. Each of the forums was over subscribed. Owing to the demand, a further two forums are planned as part of Reframing the Future’s national New Ways of Working in VET Forum 3 in Sydney in November 2006.

How we structured the forums

The forums were seen as the midpoint in a learning activity which began when participants filled in expressions of interest and examined pre-reading materials. The forums were structured around two think pieces presented by their authors and a series of activities informed by an Appreciative Inquiry methodology. In addition, five participants, who recounted positive approaches to RPL in their expression of interest were interviewed in person about these experiences at each forum.

By adopting an appreciative inquiry methodology, participants focused on what was positive, what was possible and what works in RPL practice. Rather than dwell on the negative and all the reasons why RPL may not be working as well as it could, the appreciative inquiry approach changed the dynamic and thinking of participants toward a ‘can do’ approach, rather than a ‘can’t do’ feeling. It encouraged them to focus on the positives in current practice and ways we can learn from each other to improve RPL practice.

Participants were encouraged to extend their learning and maintain their interactions, after the forum, either by becoming a catalyst for changing RPL practice in their organisation or by participating in one of several self selected on-line Innovation Teams. A selection of these individuals and teams will present on their post-forum activities at the national New Ways of Working in VET Forum 3 in Sydney in November 2006.

Key concepts and definitions used in the forums

Practice

These forums are fundamentally about influencing and improving VET practice and in particular the practice of RPL. Practice is defined simply as the habits, customs, techniques, approaches and beliefs of VET practitioners (based on Wenger et al. 2002).

Professional Judgment

Exercising professional judgment is part of practice. Dr Anne Jones’s research on professional judgment found that VET practitioners do the following:

- Start with a base of vocational and educational knowledge.
- Learn more on the job, especially through specific cases.
- Incorporate publicly available knowledge with their personal practice.
- Use tacit knowledge to read a situation.
- Reflect on practice as a basis for making difficult judgment calls.
- Make sound judgments based on experiences of similar cases.
- Do the best they can.

For more on professional judgment in VET please go to http://reframingthefuture.net/docs/2005/goal3/3evp_Thinkpiece_Anne_Jones.pdf

Appreciative Inquiry

‘Appreciative Inquiry is an approach…based on strengths rather than weaknesses, on a vision of what is possible rather than an analysis of what is not.’ (David Cooperrider)

Please also see Section 4. Reframing the Future and Appreciative Inquiry

People as catalysts

“Catalysts are elements or chemicals that can cause or accelerate reactions that do not, themselves, get used up. They are, in this case, people who make things happen by their presence and by what they do. They don’t necessarily do everything themselves but they bring out the best in the rest of us. They connect the rest of us, and facilitate our interactions so that we all can do great things.” (Dr Gregg Vanderhieden, on presenting a Catalyst Award to Dr Henry Murphy) http://trace.wisc.edu/catalyst

Innovation

Williams (1999) defines innovation as the implementation of new and improved knowledge, ideas, methods, processes, tools, equipment and machinery, which leads to new and better products, services, and processes (p.17; italics added). Williams also points out that the word innovation is derived from the Latin innovatio (renewal or renovation), based on novus (new) as in novelty. Note that innovation is about the implementation of not just new ideas and knowledge, but also of improved ideas and knowledge. (Mitchell et al. 2003, ‘Emerging Futures’)

The aims of the sub-program are to:

- initiate robust national dialogue around alternative teaching, learning and assessment practices in a Training Package environment
- strengthen a sense of professional identity and opportunities for networking amongst practitioners, and
- build RTO capability in Training Package implementation.

Our objective for the sub-program in 2006 was to establish an ongoing forum for knowledge sharing and generation among VET stakeholders and practitioners in making effective professional judgments about recognition of prior learning (RPL).

What we did

During August 2006, Reframing the Future facilitated five one-day forums. A group of people representing a mix of VET providers and industry areas, and who could have an impact in their organisations, were selected to participate in the forums based on their expressions of interest. Participants’ job roles ranged from RTO directors and managers to workplace trainers and assessors and human resource practitioners. Some participants also came from VET stakeholder groups such as industry associations, State Training Authorities and intermediary organisations such as group training and job network agencies.

In all, 325 VET professionals participated in the forums which were conducted in Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Sydney. Participants from regional areas, the Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania were supported to attend the forum closest to their location. Each of the forums was over subscribed. Owing to the demand, a further two forums are planned as part of Reframing the Future’s national New Ways of Working in VET Forum 3 in Sydney in November 2006.

How we structured the forums

The forums were seen as the mid-point in a learning activity which began when participants filled in expressions of interest and examined pre-reading materials. The forums were structured around two think pieces presented by their authors and a series of activities informed by an Appreciative Inquiry methodology. In addition, five participants, who recounted positive approaches to RPL in their expression of interest, were interviewed in person about these experiences at each forum.

By adopting an appreciative inquiry methodology, participants focused on what was positive, what was possible and what works in RPL practice. Rather than dwell on the negative and all the reasons why RPL may not be working as well as it could, the appreciative inquiry approach changed the dynamic and thinking of participants toward a ‘can do’ approach, rather than a ‘can’t do’ feeling. It encouraged them to focus on the positives in current practice and ways we can learn from each other to improve RPL practice.

Participants were encouraged to extend their learning and maintain their interactions, after the forum, either by becoming a catalyst for changing RPL practice in their organisation or by participating in one of several self selected on-line Innovation Teams. A selection of these individuals and teams will present on their post-forum activities at the national New Ways of Working in VET Forum 3 in Sydney in November 2006.

Key concepts and definitions used in the forums

Practice

These forums are fundamentally about influencing and improving VET practice and in particular the practice of RPL. Practice is defined simply as the habits, customs, techniques, approaches and beliefs of VET practitioners (based on Wenger et al. 2002).

Professional Judgment

Exercising professional judgment is part of practice. Dr Anne Jones’s research on professional judgment found that VET practitioners do the following:

- Start with a base of vocational and educational knowledge.
- Learn more on the job, especially through specific cases.
- Incorporate publicly available knowledge with their personal practice.
- Use tacit knowledge to read a situation.
- Reflect on practice as a basis for making difficult judgment calls.
- Make sound judgments based on experiences of similar cases.
- Do the best they can.

For more on professional judgment in VET please go to http://reframingthefuture.net/docs/2005/goal3/evp_Thinkpiece_Anne_Jones.pdf

Appreciative Inquiry

‘Appreciative Inquiry is an approach…based on strengths rather than weaknesses, on a vision of what is possible rather than an analysis of what is not.’ (David Cooperrider)

Please also see Section 4. Reframing the Future and Appreciative Inquiry

People as catalysts

“Catalysts are elements or chemicals that can cause or accelerate reactions that do not, themselves, get used up. They are, in this case, people who make things happen by their presence and by what they do. They don’t necessarily do everything themselves but they bring out the best in the rest of us. They connect the rest of us, and facilitate our interactions so that we all can do great things.”

(Dr Gregg Vanderheiden, on presenting a Catalyst Award to Dr Henry Murphy)

http://trace.wisc.edu/catalyst

Innovation

Williams (1999) defines innovation as the implementation of new and improved knowledge, ideas, methods, processes, tools, equipment and machinery, which leads to new and better products, services, and processes (p.17; italics added). Williams also points out that the word innovation is derived from the Latin innovatio (renewal or renovation), based on novus (new) as in novelty. Note that innovation is about the implementation of not just new ideas and knowledge, but also of improved ideas and knowledge. (Mitchell et al. 2003, ‘Emerging Futures’)

Please also see Section 4. Reframing the Future and Appreciative Inquiry
Ideas and concepts generated in the forums

During the forums a number of issues and themes emerged that could be seen as key indicators of how RPL frameworks are currently being implemented, monitored and managed. In a policy and planning context, the forums provided an invaluable gauge of how disparate current RPL practice can be even within one industry sector or provider depending on an array of real or perceived barriers and enablers. Most of these are well documented in NCVER research papers.

As to the future however, according to forum participants, contemporary RPL approaches and practices should feature:

• A change in culture toward RPL as an integral aspect of assessment processes.
• A refined process/methodology.
• A streamlined, simplified process.
• An acceptable, accessible, affordable and accelerated process.
• A high degree of industry acceptance and confidence.
• A culture that recognises that RPL is a core component of life long learning.

The list above was perhaps best summarised by a group of Melbourne participants:

‘… by 2010 all knowledge and skills are valued and recognition is given by a process that is accessible, fair, reasonable and valued by all’.

A number of the themes, ideas and concepts were consistent across the five forums such as:

• RPL accentuates the positive and it is motivating and engaging – and a catalyst to innovate.
• RPL is a positive experience and builds on one’s strengths.
• Adopting a positive approach toward RPL can be a major contributor to a successful RPL.
• RPL should be consistent across industry sectors and assessors so it provides applicants with a confidence that the RPL process is strong and rigorous.
• RPL should be client focused and driven by the individual and in so doing enhance the ownership of the process to the individual.
• By adopting a professional judgment approach assessors can become more confident in their assessment decisions.
• RPL is an assessment process and must be integral in everyday teaching and learning processes.
• RPL is an ideal tool for building human capital.
• RPL can be a win/win for all stakeholders i.e. applicants, assessors, industry, Registered Training Organisations.

In a broad sense the concept of RPL was widely acknowledged as a potential vehicle for both learning and assessment, though it is primarily an assessment strategy. Perhaps further research needs to be undertaken to tease out how RPL is simultaneously an assessment of knowledge, attitudes and skills and a learning experience for the applicant.

The above themes are but a snapshot of participant’s views from the forum, and there are undoubtedly many, many more views yet to be heard. Where RPL policy and practice is being implemented as a best practice strategy, it is based on a positive, client driven and rigorous process by all of those involved.

Based on the participants’ feedback and comments at the forums, we all still have some way to go in developing a consistent approach to RPL policy and practice. However with the collective goodwill of the sector’s policy makers, stakeholders and practitioners, a stronger, richer and consistent RPL framework is not beyond us. This was best stated by one of the groups at the Adelaide forum:

‘We have a dream … in 2010 RPL is completely integrated into a workforce development strategy which reflects the skills, needs and demands of the economy. Industry, learners and providers are active supporters and participants in the RPL process.’

Catalysts for change

The forums included an examination of the role of a catalyst in fostering the adoption of new approaches to RPL. In scientific terms catalysts speed up reactions by providing a surface on which the chemical reactions can proceed, or accelerate reactions by interacting with different compounds. By extending the concept to people acting as catalysts, participants were encouraged to take on the role of ‘catalyst’ in facilitating changes in RPL practice on returning to their organisation.

RPL – Done Well innovation teams

Towards the end of each forum, participants were invited to identify innovative ideas, projects or initiatives in relation to RPL that needed more attention. Innovation Teams of around 10 members were then formed to share/explore one of the topics further. Each group nominated a convenor to oversee the group, keep them on track and maintain contact with the Reframing the Future national project team.

The teams were encouraged to define innovation in a way promoted by Williams (1999) who points out that innovation is about the implementation of not just new ideas and knowledge, but also of improved ideas and knowledge.

In developing the groups there were no further ground rules or restrictions on how the groups might operate or examine the topic. Groups were encouraged to adopt and practice an appreciative inquiry approach to their work in an effort to elicit positive and motivating examples of RPL – Done Well.

Around 40 topics were raised overall and explored in one form or another. In summary, the main topics were:

• Skills recognition processes for teachers
• Mentoring candidates and mentoring new RPL assessors
• Applicant centered interviewing
• RPL and the COAG agenda
• Managing change in RTOs
• Promoting and marketing RPL
• Professional Development for RPL Assessors
• Changing attitudes to RPL within RTO’s
• Changing attitudes to RPL in industry.

In many ways the depth and breadth of the topics show the range of professional practices and the organisational support required that the participants and RTOs need to work on in order to develop a more contemporary and innovative style of assessment practice.

The challenge for the VET community is how best to implement an RPL policy and practice that is rigorous, transparent, fair, flexible and affordable for the applicant, the provider and employers. While the topics chosen by the Innovation Teams show the specific challenges for implementing RPL from a practitioner’s perspective, there is very strong support for the notion that RPL can be seen as an integral and vital aspect of any assessment process.

A formal evaluation of the forums and post-forum activities is currently underway.
Ideas and concepts generated in the forums

During the forums a number of issues and themes emerged that could be seen as key indicators of how RPL frameworks are currently being implemented, monitored and managed. In a policy and planning context, the forums provided an invaluable gauge of how disparate current RPL practice can be even within one industry sector or provider depending on an array of real or perceived barriers and enablers. Most of these are well documented in NCVER research papers.

As to the future however, according to forum participants, contemporary RPL approaches and practices should feature:

- A change in culture toward RPL as an integral aspect of assessment processes.
- A refined process/methodology.
- A streamlined, simplified process.
- An acceptable, accessible, affordable and accelerated process.
- A high degree of industry acceptance and confidence.
- A culture that recognises that RPL is a core component of lifelong learning.

The list above was perhaps best summarised by a group of Melbourne participants:

‘… by 2010 all knowledge and skills are valued and recognition is given by a process that is accessible, fair, reasonable and valued by all’.

A number of the themes, ideas and concepts were consistent across the five forums such as:

- RPL accentuates the positive and is motivating and engaging – and a catalyst to innovate.
- RPL is a positive experience and builds on one’s strengths.
- Adopting a positive approach toward RPL can be a major contributor to a successful RPL.
- RPL should be consistent across industry sectors and assessors so it provides applicants with a confidence that the RPL process is strong and rigorous.
- RPL should be client focused and driven by the individual and in doing so enhance the ownership of the process to the individual.
- By adopting a professional judgment approach assessors can become more confident in their assessment decisions.
- RPL is an assessment process and must be integral in everyday teaching and learning processes.
- RPL is an ideal tool for building human capital.
- RPL can be a win-win for all stakeholders i.e. applicants, assessors, industry, Registered Training Organisations.

In a broad sense the concept of RPL was widely acknowledged as a potential vehicle for both learning and assessment, though it is primarily an assessment strategy. Perhaps further research needs to be undertaken to tease out how RPL is simultaneously an assessment of knowledge, attitudes and skills and a learning experience for the applicant.

The above themes are but a snapshot of participant’s views from the forum, and there are undoubtedly many, many more views yet to be heard. Where RPL policy and practice is being implemented as a best practice strategy, it is based on a positive, client driven and rigorous process by all of those involved.

Based on the participants’ feedback and comments at the forums, we all still have some way to go in developing a consistent approach to RPL policy and practice. However with the collective goodwill of the sector’s policy makers, stakeholders and practitioners, a stronger, richer and consistent RPL framework is not beyond us. This was best stated by one of the groups at the Adelaide forum:

‘We have a dream … in 2010 RPL is completely integrated into a workforce development strategy which reflects the skills, needs and demands of the economy. Industry, learners and providers are active supporters and participants in the RPL process.’

Catalysts for change

The forums included an examination of the role of a catalyst in fostering the adoption of new approaches to RPL. In scientific terms catalysts speed up reactions by providing a surface on which the chemical reactions can proceed, or accelerate reactions by interacting with different compounds. By extending the concept to people acting as catalysts, participants were encouraged to take on the role of ‘catalyst’ in facilitating changes in RPL practice on returning to their organisation.

RPL – Done Well innovation teams

Towards the end of each forum, participants were invited to identify innovative ideas, projects or initiatives in relation to RPL that needed more attention. Innovation Teams of around 10 members were formed to share/explore one of the topics further. Each group nominated a convenor to oversee the group, keep them on track and maintain contact with the Reframing the Future national project team.

The teams were encouraged to define innovation in a way promoted by Williams (1999) who points out that innovation is about the implementation of not just new ideas and knowledge, but also of improved ideas and knowledge.

In developing the groups there were no further ground rules or restrictions on how the groups might operate or examine the topic. Groups were encouraged to adopt and practice an appreciative inquiry approach to their work in an effort to elicit positive and motivating examples of RPL – Done Well.

Around 40 topics were raised overall and explored in one form or another. In summary, the main topics were:

- Skills recognition processes for teachers
- Mentoring candidates and mentoring new RPL assessors
- Applicant centered interviewing
- RPL and the COAG agenda
- Managing change in RTOs
- Promoting and marketing RPL
- Professional Development for RPL Assessors
- Changing attitudes to RPL within RTO’s
- Changing attitudes to RPL in industry.

In many ways the depth and breadth of the topics show the range of professional practices and the organisational support required that the participants and RTOs need to work on in order to develop a more contemporary and innovative style of assessment practice.

The challenge for the VET community is how best to implement an RPL policy and practice that is rigorous, transparent, fair, flexible and affordable for the applicant, the provider and employers.

While the topics chosen by the Innovation Teams show the specific challenges for implementing RPL from a practitioner’s perspective, there is very strong support for the notion that RPL can be seen as an integral and vital aspect of any assessment process.

A formal evaluation of the forums and post-forum activities is currently underway.
2 How to use the resources and the Appreciative Inquiry methodology

Using the resources
The resources contained in this document can be used as follows:

- By individual practitioners seeking to improve their knowledge and skills about contemporary ways to use assessment and recognition processes
- By groups of VET practitioners examining a range of issues and solutions to implement contemporary RPL practice.

Individuals can:
- Read the think pieces and review the PowerPoint slides
- Follow up any references
- Consider the questions and activities in the Appreciative Inquiry process
- Make changes to their practice and reflect on the outcomes to continuously improve practice.

Groups or organisations can do the same as individuals plus:
- Design their own forum or series of forums on the topic
- Select issues and solutions raised in the think pieces and focus on them
- Add to the think pieces by inviting group members to research issues and solutions from the discussions
- Invite external speakers to talk on issues and solutions related to the think pieces.

Groups are encouraged to not concentrate the discussions into one short session, but to imitate the developmental process used by Reframing the Future. This includes providing pre-reading as well as supporting on-going dialogue and activities after sessions.

Individuals and groups using these resources are encouraged to also review the materials from the ‘Professional Judgment in VET’ forums facilitated by Reframing the Future in 2005. These are available on the website in the ‘Engaging VET Practitioners’ page and on a CD ROM or print publication that can be ordered free from the Reframing the Future website www.reframingthefuture.net

Using Appreciative Inquiry
Section 4 contains a brief statement on Reframing the Future’s innovative use of the methodology of appreciative inquiry to increase the practice of RPL in vocational education and training (VET). The chapter includes the detailed program followed in each of the forums.

Other Materials Available
The Reframing the Future PowerPoint which guided the use of the Appreciative Inquiry during the forums is available from the website www.reframingthefuture.net. It is also available on the RPL – Done Well CD ROM which can be ordered free through the website.

3 RPL done often and well: by Suzy McKenna

Paper published in The Australian TAFE Teacher, November 2005
Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is arguably the most pressing topic around the VET sector. With strong encouragement from COAG that providers find ways to more frequently identify learners’ prior learning, most providers are vigorously examining their current RPL strategies and seeking more streamlined or accessible or attractive approaches.

Reframing the Future, the national staff development and change management program for implementing the national training system, is actively assisting this quest for improved RPL strategies. Five national forums called RPL – Done Well were recently conducted by Reframing the Future, in Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Sydney and were attended by over 350 VET practitioners.

A further two forums will be conducted as part of Reframing the Future’s national conference in Sydney on 28–29 November 2006.

Innovative methodology
The appreciative inquiry methodology underpinned Reframing the Future’s series of forums on RPL – Done Well in August and November 2006 as well as the activities before and after the forums. Appreciative inquiry focuses on stories of innovation, hope and positive change. The methodology offered RPL – Done Well forum participants in August 2006 a participative, collaborative and systematic method for discovering and building on the positive aspects of successful approaches to RPL that are used in VET.

Positive factors
Two key presentations were made at the August 2006 forums, one by Andrea Bateman from Bateman & Giles entitled ‘RPL – We are there!’ and the other by Brian Spencer from the Community Services and Health Industry Training Board in Victoria, entitled ‘Recognising Competency – A community development approach’.

In calling her presentation “RPL: Yes, we are there!” Andrea Bateman acknowledged that we do have the positive core of capabilities in VET people to deliver RPL effectively, “but that the statistical collection standards (AVETMISS) and an outmoded view of what is RPL may in fact be clouding our VET RPL landscape.”

“The line between ‘pure’ RPL and other forms of assessment sometimes referred to as ‘fast track’ and ‘partial RPL’ are not clear, nor are they differentiated in the data collection,” says Bateman.

In the field, says Bateman, RPL is practised effectively by many VET practitioners, so our attention needs to shift to the factors which promote or enable an effective RPL process.

Proof of Bateman’s point that many VET practitioners already have a positive core of capabilities in practising RPL, was provided at each forum, where five participants were interviewed in front of the audience. Over the course of the five forums, the twenty five interviews demonstrated conclusively that many VET practitioners are not only effectively providing recognition services, they also have advanced methodologies for adjusting the service to suit individual applicants and a variety of different contexts.

Positive approach
Brian Spencer suggested to the forum participants that the traditional approach to RPL is flawed: “the process involves a time-consuming, retrospective, paper chase. The process is often regarded as too bureaucratic and too demeaning for experienced workers and they tend to avoid engaging in the traditional process.”
2 How to use the resources and the Appreciative Inquiry methodology

Using the resources
The resources contained in this document can be used as follows:

- By individual practitioners seeking to improve their knowledge and skills about contemporary ways to use assessment and recognition processes
- By groups of VET practitioners examining a range of issues and solutions to implement contemporary RPL practice.

Individuals can:
- Read the think pieces and review the PowerPoint slides
- Follow up any references
- Consider the questions and activities in the Appreciative Inquiry process
- Make changes to their practice and reflect on the outcomes to continuously improve practice.

Groups or organisations can do the same as individuals plus:
- Design their own forum or series of forums on the topic
- Select issues and solutions raised in the think pieces and focus on them
- Add to the think pieces by inviting group members to research issues and solutions from the discussions
- Invite external speakers to talk on issues and solutions related to the think pieces.

Groups are encouraged to not concentrate the discussions into one short session, but to imitate the developmental process used by Reframing the Future. This includes providing pre-reading as well as supporting on-going dialogue and activities after sessions.

Individuals and groups using these resources are encouraged to also review the materials from the ‘Professional Judgment in VET’ forums facilitated by Reframing the Future in 2005. These are available on the website in the ‘Engaging VET Practitioners’ page and on a CD ROM or print publication that can be ordered free from the Reframing the Future website www.reframingthefuture.net

Using Appreciative Inquiry
Section 4 contains a brief statement on Reframing the Future’s innovative use of the methodology of appreciative inquiry to increase the practice of RPL in vocational education and training (VET). The chapter includes the detailed program followed in each of the forums.

Other Materials Available
The Reframing the Future PowerPoint which guided the use of the Appreciative Inquiry during the forums is available from the website www.reframingthefuture.net. It is also available on the RPL – Done Well CD ROM which can be ordered free through the website.

3 RPL done often and well: by Suzy McKenna

Paper published in The Australian TAFE Teacher, November 2005
Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is arguably the most pressing topic around the VET sector. With strong encouragement from COAG that providers find ways to more frequently identify learners’ prior learning, most providers are vigorously examining their current RPL strategies and seeking more streamlined or accessible or attractive approaches.

Reframing the Future, the national staff development and change management program for implementing the national training system, is actively assisting this quest for improved RPL strategies. Five national forums called RPL – Done Well were recently conducted by Reframing the Future, in Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Sydney and were attended by over 350 VET practitioners.

A further two forums will be conducted as part of Reframing the Future’s national conference in Sydney on 28–29 November 2006.

Innovative methodology
The appreciative inquiry methodology underpinned Reframing the Future’s series of forums on RPL – Done Well in August and November 2006 as well as the activities before and after the forums. Appreciative inquiry focuses on stories of innovation, hope and positive change. The methodology offered RPL – Done Well forum participants in August 2006 a participative, collaborative and systematic method for discovering and building on the positive aspects of successful approaches to RPL that are used in VET.

Positive factors
Two key presentations were made at the August 2006 forums, one by Andrea Bateman from Bateman & Giles entitled ‘RPL – We are there!’ and the other by Brian Spencer from the Community Services and Health Industry Training Board in Victoria, entitled ‘Recognising Competency – A community development approach’. Papers by each presenter were also tabled, and are available on the website www.reframingthefuture.net

In calling her presentation “RPL: Yes, we are there!” Andrea Bateman acknowledged that we do have the positive core of capabilities in VET people to deliver RPL effectively, “but that the statistical collection standards (AVETMISS) and an outmoded view of what is RPL may in fact be clouding our VET RPL landscape.”

“The line between ‘pure’ RPL and other forms of assessment sometimes referred to as ‘fast track’ and ‘partial RPL’ are not clear, nor are they differentiated in the data collection,” says Bateman.

In the field, says Bateman, RPL is practised effectively by many VET practitioners, so our attention needs to shift to the factors which promote or enable an effective RPL process.

Proof of Bateman’s point that many VET practitioners already have a positive core of capabilities in practising RPL was provided at each forum, where five participants were interviewed in front of the audience. Over the course of the five forums, the twenty five interviews demonstrated conclusively that many VET practitioners are not only effectively providing recognition services, they also have advanced methodologies for adjusting the service to suit individual applicants and a variety of different contexts.

Positive approach
Brian Spencer suggested to the forum participants that the traditional approach to RPL is flawed: “The process involves a time-consuming, retrospective, paper chase. The process is often regarded as too bureaucratic and too demeaning for experienced workers and they tend to avoid engaging in the traditional process.”
In response to the shortfalls of the traditional approach, Spencer’s organisation has developed and implemented over the last four years an approach to RPL that overcomes these off-putting aspects. “The significant difference of the CS&H ITB recognising competency model, when compared to the more traditional approach, is that it is aligned to an industry’s familiar practices for establishing validity and is grounded in adult learning theory. Our process aligns to the job interview process without compromising the validity of the assessment. It includes established ways of dealing with paper-based, first and third party evidence, and examples of work.”

Catalysts and innovation teams

The forums included an examination of the role of a catalyst in fostering the adoption of new approaches to RPL. Catalysts speed up reactions by providing a surface on which the chemical reactions can proceed, or accelerate reactions by interacting with different compounds. We see catalysts in VET providing similar, positive acceleration for RPL.

The forums also provided participants with an opportunity to join innovation teams. The teams were encouraged to define innovation in a way promoted by Williams (1999) who points out that innovation is about the implementation of not just new ideas and knowledge, but also of improved ideas and knowledge.

In its use of appreciative inquiry, catalysts and innovation teams, Reframing the Future is continuing to model its use of new methodologies to assist with the implementation of a high quality national training system.

Increasing the practice of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

A brief statement on Reframing the Future’s innovative use of the methodology of appreciative inquiry to increase the practice of RPL in vocational education and training (VET).

| You gotta accent-tu-ate the positive, |
| E-lim-inate the negative, |
| An latch on |
| To the affirmative |
| Don’t mess with Mister In-between! |

(Verse from lyrics for ‘Accentuate the Positive’ by Johnny Mercer)

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach ... based on strengths rather than weaknesses, on a vision of what is possible rather than an analysis of what is not. (David Cooperrider)

Innovative methodologies

Since 2000 Reframing the Future has provided leadership to the sector in its use of staff development methodologies such as networks, communities of practice and professional conversations. This leadership was acknowledged in the external evaluation of the program in late 2004, which compared the program to others around the world and declared the program to be world class.

Continuing this leadership, in 2006 Reframing the Future is modeling the use of appreciative inquiry for national staff development. While the methodology of appreciative inquiry has been used in occasional Australian VET staff development activities and research projects, Reframing the Future is using it as a innovative strategy for addressing a high priority issue in the sector: increasing the practice of recognition of prior learning (RPL).

A rigorous use of the appreciative inquiry methodology underpins Reframing the Future’s series of forums in August and November 2006 as well as the activities before and after the forums. Details about these forums, including the program and expression of interest forms, are available from www.reframingthefuture.net

Briefly, what is appreciative inquiry (AI)?

A doctoral student at Case Western Reserve University in the 1980s, David Cooperrider, and his faculty mentor Suresh Srivastva are acknowledged as pioneering the use of appreciative inquiry. In undertaking change projects, they found that in focusing on organisational problems and designing interventions to address the problems, the problems seemed to multiply. However, when they reframed their approach as an inquiry, in the sense of seeking to learn and discover the positive forces within an organisation, they shifted their own and their subjects’ attention away from the causes of failure and turned attention to the causes of success.

When initially developing the methodology of appreciative inquiry, Cooperrider and others decided to focus on stories of innovation, hope and positive change. They set out to find examples of success and experiences of high points. In this way, they constructed a methodology for influencing change that concentrated on the positives within an organisation, not the organisation’s deficiencies.
In response to the shortfalls of the traditional approach, Spencer’s organisation has developed and implemented over the last four years an approach to RPL that overcomes these off-putting aspects. “The significant difference of the CS&H ITB recognising competency model, when compared to the more traditional approach, is that it is aligned to an industry’s familiar practices for establishing validity and is grounded in adult learning theory. Our process aligns to the job interview process without compromising the validity of the assessment. It includes established ways of dealing with paper-based, first and third party evidence, and examples of work.”

Catalysts and innovation teams

The forums included an examination of the role of a catalyst in fostering the adoption of new approaches to RPL. Catalysts speed up reactions by providing a surface on which the chemical reactions can proceed, or accelerate reactions by interacting with different compounds. We see catalysts in VET providing similar, positive acceleration for RPL.

The forums also provided participants with an opportunity to join innovation teams. The teams were encouraged to define innovation in a way promoted by Williams (1999) who points out that innovation is about the implementation of not just new ideas and knowledge, but also of improved ideas and knowledge.

In its use of appreciative inquiry, catalysts and innovation teams, Reframing the Future is continuing to model its use of new methodologies to assist with the implementation of a high quality national training system.

Increasing the practice of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

A brief statement on Reframing the Future’s innovative use of the methodology of appreciative inquiry to increase the practice of RPL in vocational education and training (VET).

You gotta accent-tu-ate the positive, 
E-lim-inate the negative, 
An latch on 
To the affirmative 
Don’t mess with Mister In-between!

(Verse from lyrics for ‘Accentuate the Positive’ by Johnny Mercer)

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach ... based on strengths rather than weaknesses, on a vision of what is possible rather than an analysis of what is not. (David Cooperrider)

Innovative methodologies

Since 2000 Reframing the Future has provided leadership to the sector in its use of staff development methodologies such as networks, communities of practice and professional conversations. This leadership was acknowledged in the external evaluation of the program in late 2004, which compared the program to others around the world and declared the program to be world class.

Continuing this leadership, in 2006 Reframing the Future is modeling the use of appreciative inquiry for national staff development. While the methodology of appreciative inquiry has been used in occasional Australian VET staff development activities and research projects, Reframing the Future is using it as a innovative strategy for addressing a high priority issue in the sector: increasing the practice of recognition of prior learning (RPL).

A rigorous use of the appreciative inquiry methodology underpins Reframing the Future’s series of forums in August and November 2006 as well as the activities before and after the forums. Details about these forums, including the program and expression of interest forms, are available from www.reframingthefuture.net

Briefly, what is appreciative inquiry (AI)?

A doctoral student at Case Western Reserve University in the 1980s, David Cooperrider, and his faculty mentor Suresh Srivastva are acknowledged as pioneering the use of appreciative inquiry. In undertaking change projects, they found that in focusing on organisational problems and designing interventions to address the problems, the problems seemed to multiply. However, when they reframed their approach as an inquiry, in the sense of seeking to learn and discover the positive forces within an organisation, they shifted their own and their subjects’ attention away from the causes of failure and turned attention to the causes of success.

When initially developing the methodology of appreciative inquiry, Cooperrider and others decided to focus on stories of innovation, hope and positive change. They set out to find examples of success and experiences of high points. In this way, they constructed a methodology for influencing change that concentrated on the positives within an organisation, not the organisation’s deficiencies.
The appreciative inquiry methodology focuses on the causes and examples of success, as explained by Ludema et al. (2003):

Appreciative inquiry is an approach to organisation change that has been used successfully in small – and large – change projects with hundreds of organisations worldwide. It is based on the simple idea that organisations move in the direction of what they ask questions about. For example, when groups study human problems and conflicts, they often find that both the number and severity of these problems grow. In the same way, when groups study high human ideals and achievements, such as peak experiences, best practices and noble accomplishments, these phenomena, too, tend to flourish. Appreciative inquiry distinguishes itself from other change methodologies by deliberately asking positive questions to ignite constructive dialogue and inspired action within organisations. (p.259)

It is important to stress that appreciative inquiry is not viewed by Reframing the Future as superior to the many other methodologies that seek to identify organisational problems and look for solutions: it is simply an alternative. It is appropriate to use appreciative inquiry when the goal is to find ways to move forward, rather than to continue to identify obstacles and problem solve.

Accepting that there are barriers to RPL

While the methodology of appreciative inquiry builds on the positives, it does not preclude an acknowledgement of obstacles. Reframing the Future acknowledges that the obstacles to RPL have been enumerated in detail in many fine research reports in recent years. See, for example:


The Reframing the Future forums take into account that many barriers have prevented the uptake of RPL and forum participants will be encouraged to develop an understanding of these barriers. To assist this understanding, Reframing the Future will provide participants with references to VET reports that clearly identify barriers, such as the report cited above, and with a copy of NCVER’s 2006 publication, Recognition of prior learning: At a glance.

Why Reframing the Future is using AI for its RPL – Done Well forums

While Ludema et al. (2003) describe the use of appreciative inquiry for four-day summits, Reframing the Future is adapting the methodology for a learning activity that commences before a one-day forum, pivots on a one-day intensive forum, and continues for some months after the forum is conducted.

The appreciative inquiry methodology will offer RPL – Done Well! Forum participants a participative, collaborative and systematic method for discovering and building on the positive aspects of successful approaches to RPL that are used in VET.

Appreciative inquiry used within forums focuses participants on the positive aspects of what is happening now in an organisation or sector, and what can be achieved in the future. This positive focus is appropriate for these RPL forums, as the forums are targeted at existing and future good practice, not policies.

The benefits of an appreciative inquiry methodology for each forum include the following:

- The forum is designed to engender confidence and stimulate inventiveness and lead to improved practice and positive, sustainable change.

To optimise benefits for forum participants, the appreciative inquiry methodology also will be used to frame both the pre-forum and post-forum activities:

- Pre-forum activities will include identification by participants of success stories; and interviews by the management team with a sample of participants on their successes with RPL.
- Post-forum activities will include taking on the role of RPL catalyst within an organisation and sharing of new practices and successes by innovation teams.

Evaluation

Reframing the Future is evaluating its use of the methodology of appreciative inquiry for these professional development activities in RPL and will report on its findings at the conclusion of the program. Formative evaluation will include observing the response to the methodology at each forum and obtaining verbal and written feedback from participants. The summative evaluation will include reporting on the concrete outputs and immediate outcomes of the forums.

References and further reading


Dr John Mitchell, consultant to Reframing the Future

Suzy McKenna, National Project Director, Reframing the Future

14 June 2006
The appreciative inquiry methodology focuses on the causes and examples of success, as explained by Ludema et al. (2003):

Appreciative inquiry is an approach to organisation change that has been used successfully in small – and large – change projects with hundreds of organisations worldwide. It is based on the simple idea that organisations move in the direction of what they ask questions about. For example, when groups study human problems and conflicts, they often find that both the number and severity of these problems grow. In the same way, when groups study high human ideals and achievements, such as peak experiences, best practices and noble accomplishments, these phenomena, too, tend to flourish. Appreciative inquiry distinguishes itself from other change methodologies by deliberately asking positive questions to ignite constructive dialogue and inspired action within organisations. (p.259)

It is important to stress that appreciative inquiry is not viewed by Reframing the Future as superior to the many other methodologies that seek to identify organisational problems and look for solutions: it is simply an alternative. It is appropriate to use appreciative inquiry when the goal is to find ways to move forward, rather than to continue to identify obstacles and problem solve.

Accepting that there are barriers to RPL

While the methodology of appreciative inquiry builds on the positives, it does not preclude an acknowledgement of obstacles. Reframing the Future acknowledges that the obstacles to RPL have been enumerated in detail in many fine research reports in recent years. See, for example:


The Reframing the Future forums take into account that many barriers have prevented the uptake of RPL and forum participants will be encouraged to develop an understanding of these barriers. To assist this understanding, Reframing the Future will provide participants with references to VET reports that clearly identify barriers, such as the report cited above, and with a copy of NCVER’s 2006 publication, Recognition of prior learning: At a glance.

Why Reframing the Future is using AI for its RPL – Done Well forums

While Ludema et al. (2003) describe the use of appreciative inquiry for four-day summits, Reframing the Future is adapting the methodology for a learning activity that commences before a one-day forum, pivots on a one-day intensive forum, and continues for some months after the forum is conducted.

The appreciative inquiry methodology will offer RPL – Done Well! Forum participants a participative, collaborative and systematic method for discovering and building on the positive aspects of successful approaches to RPL that are used in VET.

Appreciative inquiry used within forums focuses participants on the positive aspects of what is happening now in an organisation or sector, and what can be achieved in the future. This positive focus is appropriate for these RPL forums, as the forums are targeted at existing and future good practice, not policies.

The benefits of an appreciative inquiry methodology for each forum include the following:

• The forum is designed to engender confidence and stimulate inventiveness and lead to improved practice and positive, sustainable change.

To optimise benefits for forum participants, the appreciative inquiry methodology also will be used to frame both the pre-forum and post-forum activities:

• Pre-forum activities will include identification by participants of success stories; and interviews by the management team with a sample of participants on their successes with RPL.

• Post-forum activities will include taking on the role of RPL catalyst within an organisation and sharing of new practices and successes by innovation teams.

Evaluation

Reframing the Future is evaluating its use of the methodology of appreciative inquiry for these professional development activities in RPL and will report on its findings at the conclusion of the program. Formative evaluation will include observing the response to the methodology at each forum and obtaining verbal and written feedback from participants. The summative evaluation will include reporting on the concrete outputs and immediate outcomes of the forums.

References and further reading


Dr John Mitchell, consultant to Reframing the Future

Suzy McKenna, National Project Director, Reframing the Future

14 June 2006
5 Program of activities for RPL Forums

The PowerPoint presentation used by Reframing the Future at the RPL – Done Well Forums to guide the activities is available on www.reframingthefuture.net

1. Pre-forum: activities for participants
   - completion of expression of interest, citing commitment to promoting RPL
   - pre-reading on RPL and professional judgment
   - interviews for a selection of participants on their RPL successes

2. Forum: key activities

   **Introduction to appreciative inquiry (AI)**
   - AI principles: e.g. we move in directions of what we ask questions about; so by deliberately asking positive questions we create constructive dialogue and inspired action.
   - Introduce the AI 4D Cycle:
     - **Discover** – identify the positive core of capabilities in RPL
     - **Dream** – imagine what more could be achieved by your organisation/partnership with RPL
     - **Design** – clarify improvements you could make to your organisation/partnership to implement your RPL dreams
     - **Destiny** – encourage catalysts and innovation teams to achieve RPL dreams and design goals.
   - Undertake an initial exercise to introduce participants to each other.

   **Sample activity used in the RPL – Done Well Forums**
   - Interview other participants, using AI questions:
     - What do you like about RPL?
     - What is an example of a successful RPL process you have completed?
     - Why was it successful?
     - What would you like to do next with RPL?
   - Report on AI interviews with a sample of participants on their RPL successes to the whole group.

   **Discovery activity**
   - Clarification of Discovery phase: Purpose of this phase is to **identify the positive core** – assets, capacities, capabilities, resources and strengths – in the forum participants, in relation to RPL.
   - Rationale: change is more possible if it builds on existing strengths. The discovery phase creates a positive sense of possibilities and builds the momentum to dream.
   - Exercise: **mapping the positive core**

   **Dream activity**
   - Clarification of Dream phase: purpose of this stage is to **envision a bold future** – to imagine what could be achieved with RPL if it was aligned with participants’ skills, strengths and goals.
   - Rationale: when we are clear about where we want to reach, we become inventive about achieving our dreams. Positive images lead to positive action. We build on the ‘positive core’ clarified in the first session: in this sense the envisioning is grounded.
   - Exercise - creating a shared dream
   - Sample activity used in the RPL – Done Well Forums
     - First, ask: What would you like to do next with RPL?
     - Second, imagine a point of time in the future – say 2010 – in our organisations/partnerships where our approaches to RPL are based on our positive core. In this setting, envision what you and your team/partnerships are doing better or differently with RPL.
     - Third, as a small group, write a shared dream statement, based on your vision of the future, starting ‘By 2010…’:
       - Then, prepare a 2-3 minute creative presentation of the shared dream, for the larger group: the creative presentation can be of any nature – e.g.
         - a discussion of a drawing
         - presentation of a short poem
         - or a role play (e.g. an interview).
   - As a whole group, and drawing on the creative presentations, briefly discuss shared images of the future for RPL.

   **Second guest speaker on specialist aspect of RPL, pointing to incentives of doing RPL well and successful strategies for RPL.**

   **Guest speaker on a specialist aspect of RPL, pointing to incentives of doing RPL well and successful strategies for RPL.**

   **Input from previous convenors of Reframing the Future projects, on local examples of RPL.**
5 Program of activities for RPL Forums

The PowerPoint presentation used by Reframing the Future at the RPL – Done Well Forums to guide the activities is available on www.reframingthefuture.net

1. Pre-forum: activities for participants
   - completion of expression of interest, citing commitment to promoting RPL
   - pre-reading on RPL and professional judgment
   - interviews for a selection of participants on their RPL successes

2. Forum: key activities

   Introduction to appreciative inquiry (AI)
   - AI principles: e.g. we move in directions of what we ask questions about; so by deliberately asking positive questions we create constructive dialogue and inspired action.
   - Introduce the AI 4D Cycle:
     - Discover – identify the positive core of capabilities in RPL
     - Dream – imagine what more could be achieved by your organisation/partnership with RPL
     - Design – clarify improvements you could make to your organisation/partnership to implement your RPL dreams
     - Destiny – encourage catalysts and innovation teams to achieve RPL dreams and design goals.
   - Undertake an initial exercise to introduce participants to each other.

   Sample activity used in the RPL – Done Well Forums
   - Interview other participants, using AI questions:
     - What do you like about RPL?
     - What is an example of a successful RPL process you have completed?
     - Why was it successful?
     - What would you like to do next with RPL?
   - Report on AI interviews with a sample of participants on their RPL successes to the whole group.

   Discovery activity
   - Clarification of Discovery phase: Purpose of this phase is to identify the positive core – assets, capacities, capabilities, resources and strengths – in the forum participants, in relation to RPL.
   - Rationale: change is more possible if it builds on existing strengths. The discovery phase creates a positive sense of possibilities and builds the momentum to dream.
   - Exercise: mapping the positive core

   Dream activity
   - Clarification of Dream phase: purpose of this stage is to envision a bold future – to imagine what could be achieved with RPL if it was aligned with participants’ skills, strengths and goals.
   - Rationale: when we are clear about where we want to reach, we become inventive about achieving our dreams. Positive images lead to positive action. We build on the ‘positive core’ clarified in the first session: in this sense the envisioning is grounded.
   - Exercise – creating a shared dream

   Discovery activity (continued)
   Sample activity used in the RPL – Done Well Forums
   - Revisit the stories told in response to the questions in the previous activity to identify the positive core
   - Encourage narratives/stories and ask of each narrative/story: what were the qualities of you, your staff and your organisation and other stakeholders that contributed to the success with RPL?
   - List these narratives/stories on one half of the piece of butcher’s paper and cite the positive factors on the other half
   - Feedback key findings to the whole group

   Guest speaker on a specialist aspect of RPL, pointing to incentives of doing RPL well and successful strategies for RPL.

   Dream activity
   Sample activity used in the RPL – Done Well Forums
   - First, ask: What would you like to do next with RPL?
   - Second, imagine a point of time in the future – say 2010 – in our organisations/partnerships where our approaches to RPL are based on our positive core. In this setting, envision what you and your team/partnerships are doing better or differently with RPL.
   - Third, as a small group, write a shared dream statement, based on your vision of the future, starting ‘By 2010...’
   - Then, prepare a 2-3 minute creative presentation of the shared dream, for the larger group: the creative presentation can be of any nature – e.g.
     - a discussion of a drawing
     - presentation of a short poem
     - or a role play (e.g. an interview).
   - As a whole group, and drawing on the creative presentations, briefly discuss shared images of the future for RPL.

   Second guest speaker on specialist aspect of RPL, pointing to incentives of doing RPL well and successful strategies for RPL.

   Local success stories – from participants.
3. Post-forum: key activities

- participation in RPL innovation teams
- functioning as an RPL catalyst
- presentations at the November NWOW3 2006 Forum

Design activity

- Clarification of Design phase. Purpose of this stage is to design improvements to our work teams or collaborative partnerships to assist the implementation of our dreams for RPL.
- Rationale: structures such as organisational teams or business partnerships have a deep influence on our practice of RPL, and these structures can be redesigned to fit with our values and dreams. Ideally our teams and partnerships will be values-based and foster creativity and be open to continual redesign. The design phase encourages participants to clarify their dreams and to develop a set of compelling propositions so that redesigned teams or partnerships can create an improved future with RPL. The confidence engendered by this exercise feeds into the Destiny phase to follow.
- Exercise - writing provocative propositions

Sample activity used in the RPL – Done Well Forums

- talk about the structural elements of current work teams or partnerships that – if ideally designed – could influence the continually improved provision of RPL e.g. job role descriptions; status and power; communication systems; decision-making processes; reward systems.
- develop a series of provocative propositions – a set of principles – about the ideal design for teams or partnerships in future, to achieve your group’s shared dreams for RPL. The propositions need to be provocative and bold, but grounded in the stories from your table of successes with RPL.
- using butcher’s paper, write the top three propositions, for sharing with the whole group.

Destiny activity

- Clarification of Destiny phase. The purposes of this phase are to encourage catalysts and to plan innovations to achieve our dreams and design goals with RPL.
- Rationale: innovation is likely to succeed if it is fuelled by and based on discovery (existing skills and attributes), dreams (visions of a bold future) and design (improved structures of teams and partnerships). As catalysts and as members of innovation teams, we are more likely to achieve innovation in RPL.
- Exercise 1: preparations of a catalyst

Sample activity used in the RPL – Done Well Forums

- Each participant to individually identify how he/she will be a catalyst in taking the ideas from the forum and using them to positively influence RPL in their own organisations or networks.
- On a piece of paper, identify three things you will do in the next month, and another three things you will do in the next six months, to positively influence RPL practice.
- Exercise 2: forming Innovation Teams

Sample activity used in the RPL – Done Well Forums

- First, the whole group is invited to think about innovative ideas, projects or initiatives in relation to RPL.
- Second, volunteers from the whole group who are willing to convene (using online and telephone platforms) are asked to table their proposed innovation.
- Third, participants are invited to select an innovation they wish to work on and to move a section of the room to sit with their preferred convenor.
- Fourth, the convenor is then to guide the small group through developing the topic and group norms.

Overview

At the AVETRA conference in 2003 I presented a paper titled ‘Has RPL served its purpose?’ Over the past three years I have been tempted to draft an RPL paper with the title ‘Are we there yet?’ In light of the approach for this forum I decided to entitle this paper in the positive and acknowledge that we are there, and we do have the positive core of capabilities in VET people to deliver RPL effectively, but that the statistical collection standards (AVETMISS) and an outmoded view of what is RPL may in fact be clouding our VET RPL landscape.

Defining RPL

RPL in the current AQTF Standards for RTOs defines RPL as the: …recognition of competencies currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. RPL assesses the individual’s prior learning to determine the extent to which that individual is currently competent against the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification.

RPL falls at one end of the assessment spectrum; that is RPL is an assessment data collection point that is not attached to training or has occurred prior to training. In terms of data collection, the AVETMISS Standard does not capture information about ‘partial RPL’ situations, such as the granting of RPL for outcomes which form part of a larger unit of delivery (Bateman & Knight 2003). In addition, assessments offered as various opportunities for skills recognition through processes referred to as accelerated learning, early assessment, fast-tracking and challenge testing, which are offered after tuition has begun are not captured. (Bovman et al 2004)

The line between ‘pure’ RPL and other forms of assessment, sometimes referred to as ‘fast track’ and ‘partial RPL’ are not clear nor are they differentiated in the data collection. Bateman & Knight (2003) suggest that probably a more realistic view is to regard RPL as a form of ‘accelerated progression’ (p. 24). This form of accelerated progression is a practice adopted by many providers (Bateman & Knight 2003). Bovman, Clayton, Bateman, Knight, Thomson, Hargreaves, Blom and Enders (2003) attempted to articulate the ‘hidden’ RPL diagrammatically:

They acknowledged that:

A number of jurisdictions noted that strategies such as ‘fast track’ and ‘early assessment’ were more effective strategies for recognition than the traditional methodology of RPL assessment conducted up-front and prior to training. (p. 47)
3. Post-forum: key activities

- participation in RPL innovation teams
- functioning as an RPL catalyst
- presentations at the November NWOW3 2006 Forum

Design activity

- Clarification of Design phase. Purpose of this stage is to design improvements to our work teams or collaborative partnerships to assist the implementation of our dreams for RPL.
- Rationale: structures such as organisational teams or business partnerships have a deep influence on our practice of RPL, and these structures can be redesigned to fit with our values and dreams. Ideally our teams and partnerships will be values-based and foster creativity and be open to continual redesign. The design phase encourages participants to clarify their dreams and to develop a set of compelling propositions so that redesigned teams or partnerships can create an improved future with RPL. The confidence engendered by this exercise feeds into the Destiny phase to follow.
- Exercise - writing provocative propositions

Sample activity used in the RPL – Done Well Forums

- talk about the structural elements of current work teams or partnerships that – if ideally designed – could influence the continually improved provision of RPL, e.g. job role descriptions, status and power, communication systems, decision-making processes, reward systems.
- develop a series of provocative propositions – a set of principles – about the ideal design for teams or partnerships in future, to achieve your group’s shared dreams for RPL. The propositions need to be provocative and bold, but grounded in the stories from your table of successes with RPL.
- using butcher’s paper, write the top three propositions, for sharing with the whole group.

Destiny activity

- Clarification of Destiny phase. The purposes of this phase are to encourage catalysts and to plan innovations to achieve our dreams and design goals with RPL.
- Rationale: innovation is likely to succeed if it is fuelled by and based on discovery (existing skills and attributes), dreams (visions of a bold future) and design (improved structures of teams and partnerships). As catalysts and as members of innovation teams, we are more likely to achieve innovation in RPL.
- Exercise 1: preparations of a catalyst

Sample activity used in the RPL – Done Well Forums

- Each participant to individually identify how he/she will be a catalyst in taking the ideas from the forum and using them to positively influence RPL in their own organisations or networks.
- On a piece of paper, identify three things you will do in the next month, and another three things you will do in the next six months, to positively influence RPL practice.
- Exercise 2: forming Innovation Teams

Sample activity used in the RPL – Done Well Forums

- First, the whole group is invited to think about innovative ideas, projects or initiatives in relation to RPL.
- Second, volunteers from the whole group who are willing to convene (using online and telephone platforms) are asked to table their proposed innovation.
- Third, participants are invited to select an innovation they wish to work on and to move a section of the room to sit with their preferred convenor.
- Fourth, the convenor is then to guide the small group through developing the topic and group norms.

6 Yes, we are there!
Think piece: Andrea Bateman

Overview

At the AVETRA conference in 2003 I presented a paper titled ‘Has RPL served its purpose?’ Over the past three years I have been tempted to draft an RPL paper with the title ‘Are we there yet?’ In light of the approach for this forum I decided to entitle this paper in the positive and acknowledge that we are there, and we do have the positive core of capabilities in VET people to deliver RPL effectively, but that the statistical collection standards (AVETMISS) and an outmoded view of what is RPL may in fact be clouding our VET RPL landscape.

Defining RPL

RPL in the current AQTF Standards for RTOs defines RPL as the:

...recognition of competencies currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. RPL assesses the individual’s prior learning to determine the extent to which that individual is currently competent against the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification.

RPL falls at one end of the assessment spectrum; that is RPL is an assessment data collection point that is not attached to training or has occurred prior to training. In terms of data collection, the AVETMISS Standard does not capture information about ‘partial RPL’ situations, such as the granting of RPL for outcomes which form part of a larger unit of delivery (Bateman & Knight 2003). In addition, assessments offered as various opportunities for skills recognition through processes referred to as accelerated learning, early assessment, fast-tracking and challenge testing, which are offered after tuition has begun are not captured. (Bovman et al 2004)

The line between ‘pure’ RPL and other forms of assessment, sometimes referred to as ‘fast track’ and ‘partial RPL’ are not clear nor are they differentiated in the data collection. Bateman & Knight (2003) suggest that probably a more realistic view is to regard RPL as a form of ‘accelerated progression’ (p. 24). This form of accelerated progression is a practice adopted by many providers (Bateman & Knight 2003). Bovman, Clayton, Bateman, Knight, Thomson, Hargreaves, Blom and Enders (2003) attempted to articulate the ‘hidden’ RPL diagrammatically:

They acknowledged that:

A number of jurisdictions noted that strategies such as ‘fast track’ and ‘early assessment’ were more effective strategies for recognition than the traditional methodology of RPL assessment conducted up-front and prior to training. (p. 47)
What does it look like?

For some VET practitioners, RPL is a framework in which a specific form of assessment occurs; for others it is an assessment at a point in time; and for others it is a purpose of assessment. However, if one takes the view that RPL is an assessment, which does not take place at the end of training, then RPL manifests itself in many guises. Therefore we experience RPL:

- close to enrolment
- just before training begins or on the cusp of training
- within a training scenario and negotiated with the trainer
- as part of a package of units of competency assessments (e.g. possibly as part of an EBA or wage agreement or re-skilling arrangements)
- as part of the development of an individual learning plan.

RPL in these various forms is given different names, such as:

- Recognition of Current Competencies
- Diagnostic or formative assessment
- Skills recognition
- Early progression
- Up-front assessments
- Challenge tests.

Ultimately, RPL is an assessment and needs to be included within the broader framework of assessment, and be bound by the same principles and rules of evidence and quality assurance arrangements as other assessments. As such RPL should have parity of esteem with other forms of assessment.

What are the enablers of success?

It is critical in the discussions of RPL to differentiate between the ‘concept of RPL’ and the framework or processes developed to address RPL. Most discussions of RPL centre on the processes of RPL rather than any apparent resistance to the notion of RPL.

RPL is practised effectively by many VET practitioners. Over the years a number of researchers have attempted to identify the factors which promote or enable an effective RPL process. In the early years much of the information pertaining to enabling factors was gleaned from effective practice models and from strategies to redress the perceived barriers to RPL. Much of the information does not go beyond the RPL process and there is very little critical analysis of more macro influences (Ballantine 1995, Hummel 1995, O’Connor 1995, SA TAFE 1995a, SA TAFE 1995b, Talbot 1997, Harrison 1995, WA DET 1995, Wilson & Lilly 1996).

More recent research in this field aimed to synthesise the literature and current data (Bateman & Knight 2003), provide concrete examples or case studies (Blom, Clayton, Bateman, Bedggood & Hughes 2004), and look at the drivers and barriers to effective implementation (Bowman, Clayton, Bateman, Knight, Thomson, Hargreaves, Blom and Enders 2003).

Bateman & Knight (2003, p. 15 & 16) summarised enabling factors as being:

- Support of candidates through the process (Talbot 1997)
- Streamlined process, user friendly and efficient (SA TAFE 1997)
- Processes that are client focussed and provided support for applicants (Ballantine 1995, Hummel 1996, SA TAFE 1996a)
- Adjusted student enrolment and counselling procedures (Hummel 1995, Wilson & Lilly 1996)
- Maintain course standards processes to be inclusive of RPL processes (Wilson & Lilly 1996)
- Establish formal networks (Wilson & Lilly 1996)
- Ensure evidence of prior learning is consistent with assessments within training programs (Wilson & Lilly 1996)
- Ensure consistency across all training organisations (Wilson & Lilly 1996)

This final report (Bowman et al 2003) provides an overview of enabling features (as it pertains to all the applicants who may be deemed ‘disadvantaged’) which are cited below (p. 39):

### Areas for improvement  |  Possible actions
--- | ---
**Promotion of RPL** | Conduct targeted marketing
| Make links with community based organisations to disseminate information
| Actively ‘sell’ the advantages to the clients

**Process improvement** | Make processes simpler, less threatening and as user friendly as possible

**Enhanced communication strategies** | Use plain English in written materials
| Use other forms of communication methods to reduce the reliance on written documentation
| Offer online option for remote applicants

**Support for applicants** | Provide opportunities for access to pre-interview processes
| Provide access to disability consultants or counsellors
| Coach candidates for process
| Allow mentors or support people to be involved
| Provide more encouragement
| Provide specific support, e.g. language, literacy and numeracy

**Support for assessors** | Provide staff with the skills to assist with recognition for disadvantaged applications, including language and literacy
| Utilise assessors and key support people in team to support the recognition assessment process
| Provide clearer strategies for dealing with overseas experience/qualifications
| Provide resources such as assessment kits

These enabling features were drawn from observations of effective practice of RPL and are a useful underpinning list for the RPL – Done Well Forums convened by Reframing the Future.
What does it look like?

For some VET practitioners, RPL is a framework in which a specific form of assessment occurs; for others it is an assessment at a point in time; and for others it is a purpose of assessment. However, if one takes the view that RPL is an assessment, which does not take place at the end of training, then RPL manifests itself in many guises. Therefore we experience RPL:

- close to enrolment
- just before training begins or on the cusp of training
- within a training scenario and negotiated with the trainer
- as part of a package of units of competency assessments (e.g. possibly as part of an EBA or wage agreement or re-skilling arrangements)
- as part of the development of an individual learning plan.

RPL in these various forms is given different names, such as:

- Recognition of Current Competencies
- Diagnostic or formative assessment
- Skills recognition
- Early progression
- Up-front assessments
- Challenge tests.

Ultimately, RPL is an assessment and needs to be included within the broader framework of assessment, and be bound by the same principles and rules of evidence and quality assurance arrangements as other assessments. As such RPL should have parity of esteem with other forms of assessment.

What are the enablers of success?

It is critical in the discussions of RPL to differentiate between the 'concept of RPL' and the framework or processes developed to address RPL. Most discussions of RPL centre on the processes of RPL rather than any apparent resistance to the notion of RPL.

RPL is practised effectively by many VET practitioners. Over the years a number of researchers have attempted to identify the factors which promote or enable an effective RPL process. In the early years much of the information pertaining to enabling factors was gleaned from effective practice models and from strategies to redress the perceived barriers to RPL. Much of the information does not go beyond the RPL process and there is very little critical analysis of more macro influences (Ballantine 1995, Hummel 1995, O’Connor 1995, SA TAFE 1995a, SA TAFE 1995b, Talbot 1997, Harrison 1995, WA DET 1995, Wilson & Lilly 1996).

More recent research in this field aimed to synthesise the literature and current data (Bateman & Knight 2003), provide concrete examples or case studies (Blom, Clayton, Bateman, Bedggood & Hughes 2004), and look at the drivers and barriers to effective implementation (Bowman, Clayton, Bateman, Knight, Thomson, Hargreaves, Blom and Enders 2003).

Bateman & Knight (2003, p. 15 & 16) summarised enabling factors as being:

- Support of candidates through the process (Talbot 1997)
- Streamlined process, user friendly and efficient (SA TAFE 1997)
- Processes that are client focussed and provided support for applicants (Ballantine 1995, Hummel 1996, SA TAFE 1995a)
- Adjusted student enrolment and counselling procedures (Hummel 1995, Wilson & Lilly 1996)
- Maintain course standards processes to be inclusive of RPL processes (Wilson & Lilly 1996)
- Establish formal networks (Wilson & Lilly 1996)
- Ensure evidence of prior learning is consistent with assessments within training programs (Wilson & Lilly 1996)
- Ensure consistency across all training organisations (Wilson & Lilly 1996)

This final report (Bowman et al 2003) provides an overview of enabling features (as it pertains to all the applicants who may be deemed ‘disadvantaged’) which are cited below (p. 39):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas for improvement</th>
<th>Possible actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of RPL</td>
<td>• Conduct targeted marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Make links with community based organisations to disseminate information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Actively ‘sell’ the advantages to the clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process improvement</td>
<td>• Make processes simpler, less threatening and as user friendly as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced communication</td>
<td>• Use plain English in written materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategies</td>
<td>• Use other forms of communication methods to reduce the reliance on written documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for applicants</td>
<td>• Provide opportunities for access to pre-interview processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide access to disability consultants or counsellors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coach candidates for process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Allow mentors or support people to be involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide more encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide specific support, e.g. language, literacy and numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for assessors</td>
<td>• Provide staff with the skills to assist with recognition for disadvantaged applications, including language and literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Utilise assessors and key support people in team to support the recognition assessment process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide clearer strategies for dealing with overseas experience/qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide resources such as assessment kits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These enabling features were drawn from observations of effective practice of RPL and are a useful underpinning list for the RPL – Done Well Forums convened by Reframing the Future.
Effective practice examples

One of the key findings from the research conducted by Blom et al (2004) was that a ‘one size fits all’ approach to RPL is inappropriate in developing recognition processes. The following examples of effective practice that are customised to suit a particular situation emanate from the literature (Bowman et al. 2004) and from professional conversations with VET practitioners. In some instances they have been adapted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement areas</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of RPL</td>
<td>A large public registered training organisation has developed a video informing potential students of RPL (which plays at enrolment time).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process improvement</td>
<td>Registered training organisations are reviewing their formal RPL documents to ensure that they are simpler, and provide the applicant and the trainers with clear guidelines regarding process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced communication</td>
<td>One large public registered training organisation has developed a website in order to offer a ‘one-stop shop’ that provides a single, authoritative source of RPL information, not only for their students, but also for their staff (adapted from Bowman et al 2004, p. 19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for applicants</td>
<td>One registered training organisation offers students the opportunity to enrol in a module, Preparation for skills recognition, to provide them with extensive support in preparing their RPL application. The module is additional to a student’s program of study. A teacher is allocated to the module as a facilitator and support person, and the hours are counted as part of the teacher’s annual load. Students learn skills of self-assessment as well as the skills and knowledge they need to understand VET, particularly in terms of the qualification for which they are seeking recognition. On completion of the module, students submit their completed RPL application and are granted recognition on the basis of it. The module itself is not assessable. This approach gives teachers the time to deliver the skills and knowledge required for students to successfully understand the RPL concept and the evidence requirements (Bowman et al 2004, p. 24).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for assessors</td>
<td>One large public registered training organisation is developing an online system for assessors to use to manage the recognition process; it includes templates and standard letters. One enterprise registered training organisation has gone through their Training Package to identify what the critical pieces of evidence are that must be provided by learners to receive recognition. The RTO has established an approach that is based on candidates using a self-assessment tool to clarify the skills and experiences that they already possess. It is a similar approach to the Frontline Management Initiative Toolbox. They are asked to complete a checklist which asks them to consider ‘Things I know’, ‘Things I do’ and ‘The documents that I have’ (Bowman et al 2004, p. 25).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Skills of assessors

Across the literature there are some discussions pertaining to skills and attributes of assessors involved in RPL assessments. Bateman and Knight (2003, p. 17) offer the following overview:

MacDonald (1996) does not differentiate between an RPL assessor and a ‘normal’ assessor and Wilson & Lilly (1996) by omission does not perceive the role as being an issue. Kenyon et al (1996a & b) however, considers that RPL assessors are different from other assessors, as they have to deal with evaluating evidence of prior learning, especially in terms of relevance and authenticity. Kenyon et al (1996) considers that RPL assessors in many instances take on a wider role including being an advisor and a co-ordinator.

The current Training Package for Training and Assessment provides the benchmark for assessors and by default for RPL assessors. In the competency standards, ‘recognise current existing competence of candidate(s)’ appears as a purpose of assessment. In this instance it is clear that the requirements for RPL assessors are considered to be the equivalent of assessors.

Assessors involved in RPL need to be:

- Accepting of the concept of RPL
- Be highly skilled in their vocational field
- Have industry ‘currency’ and be conversant with the Training Package
- Be highly skilled assessors and assessment tool developers
- Have confidence in their judgements.

Conclusion

In terms of VET assessment activity I know from both my work as a practitioner as well as researcher and as an auditor that there are very many good examples of effective RPL practice across the VET sector. However to make these positive examples more obvious to the observer, I think the outdated view and interpretation of RPL has certainly served its purpose and we should move on to not just viewing RPL as another form of assessment but also to accept its many guises and manifestations. These new views point to a positive future for RPL.

To use some key words from the appreciative inquiry framework of the Reframing the Future RPL – Done Well Forums, having discovered our existing capacities and strengths in practising RPL, let’s envision a future where we achieve even more with RPL.
Skills of assessors

Across the literature there are some discussions pertaining to skills and attributes of assessors involved in RPL assessments. Bateman and Knight (2003, p. 17) offer the following overview:

MacDonald (1996) does not differentiate between an RPL assessor and a ‘normal’ assessor and Wilson & Lilly (1996) by omission does not perceive the role as being an issue... Kenyon et al (1996a & b) however, considers that RPL assessors are different from other assessors, as they have to deal with evaluating evidence of prior learning, especially in terms of relevance and authenticity. Kenyon et al (1996) considers that RPL assessors in many instances take on a wider role including being an advisor and a co-ordinator.

The current Training Package for Training and Assessment provides the benchmark for assessors and by default for RPL assessors. In the competency standards, ‘recognise current existing competence of candidate/s’ appears as a purpose of assessment. In this instance it is clear that the requirements for RPL assessors are considered to be the equivalent of assessors.

Assessors involved in RPL need to be:

• Accepting of the concept of RPL
• Be highly skilled in their vocational field
• Have industry ‘currency’ and be conversant with the Training Package
• Be highly skilled assessors and assessment tool developers
• Have confidence in their judgements.

Conclusion

In terms of VET assessment activity I know from both my work as a practitioner as well as researcher and as an auditor that there are very many good examples of effective RPL practice across the VET sector. However to make these positive examples more obvious to the observer, I think the outdated view and interpretation of RPL has certainly served its purpose and we should move on to not just viewing RPL as another form of assessment but also to accept its many guises and manifestations. These new views point to a positive future for RPL.

To use some key words from the appreciative inquiry framework of the Reframing the Future RPL – Done Well Forums, having discovered our existing capacities and strengths in practising RPL, let’s envision a future where we achieve even more with RPL.

Effective practice examples

One of the key findings from the research conducted by Blom et al (2004) was that a ‘one size fits all’ approach to RPL is inappropriate in developing recognition processes. The following examples of effective practice that are customised to suit a particular situation emanate from the literature (Bowman et al. 2004) and from professional conversations with VET practitioners. In some instances they have been adapted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement areas</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of RPL</td>
<td>A large public registered training organisation has developed a video informing potential students of RPL (which plays at enrolment time).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process improvement</td>
<td>Registered training organisations are reviewing their formal RPL documents to ensure that they are simpler, and provide the applicant and the trainers with clear guidelines regarding process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced communication strategies</td>
<td>One large public registered training organisation has developed a website in order to offer a ‘one-stop shop’ that provides a single, authoritative source of RPL information, not only for their students, but also for their staff (adapted from Bowman et al 2004, p. 19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for applicants</td>
<td>One registered training organisation offers students the opportunity to enrol in a module, Preparation for skills recognition, to provide them with extensive support in preparing their RPL application. The module is additional to a student’s program of study. A teacher is allocated to the module as a facilitator and support person, and the hours are counted as part of the teacher’s annual load. Students learn skills of self-assessment as well as the skills and knowledge they need to understand VET, particularly in terms of the qualification for which they are seeking recognition. On completion of the module, students submit their completed RPL application and are granted recognition on the basis of it. The module itself is not assessable. This approach gives teachers the time to deliver the skills and knowledge required for students to successfully understand the RPL concept and the evidence requirements (Bowman et al 2004, p. 24).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for assessors</td>
<td>One large public registered training organisation is developing an online system for assessors to use to manage the recognition process; it includes templates and standard letters. One enterprise registered training organisation has gone through their Training Package to identify what the critical pieces of evidence are that must be provided by learners to receive recognition. The RTO has established an approach that is based on candidates using a self-assessment tool to clarify the skills and experiences that they already possess. It is a similar approach to the Frontline Management Initiative Toolbox. They are asked to complete a checklist which asks them to consider ‘Things I know’, ‘Things I do’ and ‘The documents that I have’ (Bowman et al 2004, p. 25).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yes we are there! Think piece: Andrea Bateman
Bibliography:

Ballantine, M 1995, ‘Recognition of prior learning for entry to TAFE, Converse; Journal of network of women in further education, no. 1, p. 14

Bateman, A 2003, “Has RPL served its purpose?”, AVETRA, Nowra, NSW.


O’Connor, M 1995, ‘Recognition of prior learning (RPL) and women applicants, promises and pitfalls’, Converse, no. 2, pp. 4 & 16.


Western Australian Department of Training 1995, RPL for entry: report on the Recognition if prior learning for entry to full time TAFE award courses: pilot project, Semester 1, 1995, Western Australia Department of Training, Perth.


(Footnotes)

1 ANTA 2005, AQTF Standards for RTOs, p. 17.

---

7 A common sense, client centred approach

Think piece: Brian Spencer

If I don’t know I don’t know – I think I know
If I don’t know I don’t know – I think I don’t know

Laing R D (1970) Knots Harmondsworth; Penguin

The Recognising Competency model has been developed by the CS&H ITB since 2003, following response to my editorial in the “Intraining” newsletter (May 2003) in which I criticised the prevailing model failing to meet the needs of a mature aged workforce. I proposed a model based on community development principles and models of proof that are commonly used within industry.

Since that time the model has received support from many sectors of industry, trainers and assessors and government.

The process has been refined and adapted to differing needs, but has been shown to produce valid, fair and reliable assessment and to make Recognition of Current Competency accessible to many people.

In Victoria, the recognition of current competency has been placed squarely in the spotlight by the recent Skills Statement “Maintaining the Advantage - Skilled Victorians” released by the Premier Steve Bracks and the Minister for Education and Training, Lynne Kosky in March 2006. The bastard child of the Vocational & Education Training System has been welcomed back to the family and the pressure and onus has been placed on all training providers to offer genuine recognition of competency as part of the truly competency based training and assessment. As a body that has championed the cause of recognition of competency for its mature aged workforce, the Community Services & Health Industry Training Board welcomes the directions proposed in the Skills Statement.

The problem of knowing

Prove it! The words stand as a challenge to the hearer to demonstrate the veracity of something that they have asserted or claimed to be true.

Proof is a funny thing. At one level the simple giving of one’s word can be enough. We swear an affidavit. We cross our heart and hope to die. At the other extreme scientific proof demands empirical evidence that can be repeated in experimental science beyond any doubt. In between, there are a variety of conceptual frameworks which we use to judge the truth of the matter.

In a courtroom, if I stand up and swear that I have not done something, or I have done something, my very words have some weight subject to my good character. And if someone else, of good character, stands up and concurs with me that I did not do it, did do it, (as the case may be) then that may be sufficient to see me convicted of a crime and put away without any circumstantial evidence needed or required.

So what are we to make of the Recognition of Current Competency? Current processes surrounded it in cost and complexity. People who dare assert that they already have a certain competency by virtue of their life experience, previous work history, a transferable skill or informal learning are often faced with suspicion and daunting demands for documented proof.

The current process typically starts with a paperach: collect a portfolio that will demonstrate that you have that competence. This can be a daunting task to those of us who do not have filing cabinet minds and remember along life’s journey to collect and document every achievement and learning skill that we have acquired. For many people, the request for recognition of current competency ends at this point. The task is not just too big, it is nebulous and protracted. How on earth do I find the proof I need? How do I know when I have collected enough?

A PowerPoint presentation of Andrea Bateman’s Think Piece is available from the Reframing the Future website www.reframingthefuture.net/docs/2006/Goal33evp_Andrea_Bateman_RPL_powerpoint_final_1.ppt and is also on the RPL – Done Well CD ROM available from the website http://www.reframingthefuture.net/Publications.asp
7 A common sense, client centred approach

Think piece: Brian Spencer

If I don’t know I don’t know – I think I know
If I don’t know I know – I think I don’t know

Laing R D (1970) Knots Harmondsworth; Penguin

The Recognising Competency model has been developed by the CS&H ITB since 2003, following response to my editorial in the “Intraining” newsletter (May 2003) in which I criticised the prevailing model failing to meet the needs of a mature aged workforce. I proposed a model based on community development principles and models of proof that are commonly used within industry. Since that time the model has received support from many sectors of industry, trainers and assessors and government.

The process has been refined and adapted to differing needs, but has been shown to produce valid, fair and reliable assessment and to make Recognition of Current Competency accessible to many people. In Victoria, the recognition of current competency has been placed squarely in the spotlight by the recent Skills Statement “Maintaining the Advantage - Skilled Victorians” released by the Premier Steve Bracks and the Minister for Education and Training, Lynne Kosky in March 2006. The bastard child of the Vocational & Education Training System has been welcomed back to the family and the pressure and onus has been placed on all training providers to offer genuine recognition of competency as part of the truly competency based training and assessment. As a body that has championed the cause of recognition of competency for its mature aged workforce, the Community Services & Health Industry Training Board welcomes the directions proposed in the Skills Statement.

The problem of knowing

Prove it! The words stand as a challenge to the hearer to demonstrate the veracity of something that they have asserted or claimed to be true.

Proof is a funny thing. At one level the simple giving of one’s word can be enough. We swear an affidavit. We cross our heart and hope to die. At the other extreme scientific proof demands empirical evidence that can be repeated in experimental science beyond any doubt. In between, there are a variety of conceptual frameworks which we use to judge the truth of the matter.

In a courtroom, if I stand up and swear that I have not done something, or I have done something, my very words have some weight subject to my good character. And if someone else, of good character, stands up and concurs with me that I did not do it, did do it, (as the case may be) then that may be sufficient to see me convicted of a crime and put away without any circumstantial evidence needed or required.

So what are we to make of the Recognition of Current Competency? Current processes surrounded it with suspicion and daunting demands for documented proof.

Bibliography:

Ballantine, M 1995, ‘Recognition of prior learning for entry to TAFE, Converse; Journal of network of women in further education, no. 1, p. 14

Bateman, A 2003, “Has RPL served its purpose?”, AVETRA, Nowra, NSW.


O’Connor, M 1995, ‘Recognition of prior learning (RPL) and women applicants, promises and pitfalls’, Converse, no. 2, pp. 4 & 16.


Western Australian Department of Training 1995, RPL for entry: report on the Recognition if prior learning for entry to full time TAFE award courses: pilot project, Semester 1, 1995, Western Australia Department of Training, Perth.


Footnotes

1 ANTA 2005, AQTF Standards for RTOs, p. 17.

A PowerPoint presentation of Andrea Bateman’s Think Piece is available from the Reframing the Future website www.reframingthefuture.net/docs/2006/Goal3/3evp_Andrea_Bateman_RPL_powerpoint_final_1.ppt and is also on the RPL – Done Well CD ROM available from the website http://www.reframingthefuture.net/Publications.asp
A cry for help
Letter from experienced, existing worker actively seeking RPL (Edited)

Dear Mr. Spencer,

I am a Kindergarten qualified and a primary school teacher from overseas with over 18 years of experience, working with children with an added experience of 5 years in Melbourne, Kindergartens and Child Care Centers.

I enrolled with (RTO) last year for a Diploma in Children’s Services. At the time of enrollment, my teacher said she would look into my RPL so that I could do my Diploma. Later in the year I realized that I was enrolled in a Certificate III and not the Diploma and it was explained that Cert III was the 1st year of Diploma and I had 2 more years to earn a Diploma. This made me very disappointed and sad that I had not only to pay the whole year’s fee of $1200 (although I had joined only in April) plus continue to pay the sum for an additional 2 years for I was studying part time as I work full time in the industry of Child Care. Through the year I was continually promised to meet with the coordinator/supervisor and it never took place. Me and another 2 candidates were called for a meeting to discuss RPL towards the end of the year and were given the respective modules to begin preparing our documentation and evidences to apply for RPL and I was told that I could even bring my advocate from (employer) with whom I’m presently working (Family Day Care) to speak for me towards gaining RPL. So I began organising this.

When I reminded my teacher of the RPL and meeting, I was told that it did not matter and the same arrangements would apply. When I made a call and explained that something needs to be done about my RPL for I had already received a letter of orientation from the (RTO), I was treated with indifference, that the classes were commencing soon, my teacher was busy and she will try to make an appointment and will get back to me. I waited and waited with no response to any of my calls and messages. So I called the (RTO) and spoke to the teacher in charge of selections and explained the situation to her, that they had offered me 2nd year part time but were unaware of my RPL situation (asked for advice). She was very helpful and sympathetic and told me that she would look into the matter immediately. Sure enough I now received a call from my teacher at the (RTO), who told me that she would be coming to see me to explain what I could do. Here I am, a very hopeful and ardent student of 42 years of age trying my very best to make something of my qualifications, wanting to study and qualify in Early Childhood and further it into a degree and do something with my talent for working with children and families. I believed her once again and waited. Of course my teacher cancelled the appointment and postponed it because something else came up!!

At this point I would like to stop for I could go on another 2 pages! Is it the Australian system of education that functions this way or is it the discrepancy of personnel that they take people for granted, or a person from another country for granted, without any consideration for the time and veneration spent in working towards a goal??

I’m sorry, Mr. Spencer, but what is it that I should make out of this struggle?? Can you please help??

The fabled Sir Humphrey Appleby from the “Yes Minister” series, observed that if you wanted the minister not to do something, it was important to present the issue as complex, costly and controversial. If you wanted him to agree to a proposal, it was important to present it as simple, cheap and popular.

For an industry that recruits mature aged workers; for an industry that has an enormous backlog of skilled and able existing workers who have no formal certification for their skill base, this is a great tragedy. Consider how different the situation could be if we accepted other forms of proof more akin to the types of evidence and amounts of evidence that would be required to secure a job. Typically the job application process relies on the employer specifying the skills and levels of skills that they require for a position. The applicant responds by setting out a summary of their skills and experience addressing the key selection criteria. This application is not a sworn statement, it is not an affidavit, but it is taken in good faith as the first step in the process of appointment. Sometimes the whole process is short circuited simply on the basis of a recommendation, a referral from a trusted source. Someone whose opinion we value, vouchers or advises that so-and-so would be ideal for the job.

The resume is typically followed by an interview process in which two or three people who are familiar with the demands of the job and with sifting and clarifying the skills and capabilities of the applicants spend less than an hour in more detailed conversation about the person’s abilities and how they relate to the job specification.

The third step is to check the referees. Referees are generally senior people who have direct experience of the candidate. Thus having accepted the bona fides of the persons testimony through the C.V. and interview, the referee check acts as a validation. This is usually a phone check with the referee being of the candidates choosing.

If these three things are congruent, we deem the candidate to have proved their claims to the job. On this basis we award a job, salary, a career.

The job application and recruitment process is certainly not foolproof but I don’t seriously hear people proposing to toss the whole thing out.

The process is familiar to employers, is familiar to applicants and is deemed to valid for the purposes. This was the beginnings of the CS&H ITB’s Recognising Competency model.

A community development approach

The Community Services and Health Industry have a large highly experienced workforce, a significant proportion of whom do not have formal qualifications. The development of Training Packages over the last 10 years has assisted in the identification and formalisation of job roles and the skill sets that make up those jobs.

Once the benchmarks have been established for and by industry then the issue is how to align and recognise the experience of the current highly experienced workforce to these benchmarks. Importantly, experienced workers need parity of esteem with new workers who enter through the qualifications pathway.

Clearly this is an issue more relevant to some industries than others. Feminised workforces in the post industrial economy generally have had less access to formal qualifications than traditional trades where apprenticeships have codified and categorised skill and work since in some cases – the Middle Ages.

The task of recognition is a significant and legitimate industry wide issue for Community Services and Health.

The Victorian Community Services and Health Industry Training Board has been responsive to this need and developed a model for recognising current competencies (RCC) within the workforces under their coverage.

The CS&H ITB has identified, promoted and championed the need to efficiently align their experienced workers to the industry benchmarks through a process of RCC. The Recognising Competency model is strengths based, forward focused and generates evidence, while complying with and applying the basic tenets and principles of competency based assessment.

By acknowledging that so many workers in so many sectors are highly experienced yet not recognised the CS&H ITB confirms the veracity and credibility of the workplace as the site of significant learning. It also affirms the principle of competency that it is the outcome that is paramount not the process or how you get there. The focus on the outcome through an assessment process places the emphasis on the most critical aspect of the ‘competency based training and assessment continuum’. It also provides the maximum return for both the individual candidate and the industry.

The RCC model prides a collaborative approach where the emphasis is ‘working with people’ as they define their own goals’. The model ‘values and empowers candidates’ by guiding them through the process. The assessor mentors the candidate through the RCC process and concurrently addresses gaps and training needs.
A cry for help

Letter from experienced, existing worker actively seeking RPL (Edited)

Dear Mr. Spencer,

I am a Kindergarten qualified and a primary school teacher from (overseas) with over 18 years of experience, working with children with an added experience of 5 years in Melbourne, Kindergartens and Child Care Centers.

I enrolled with (RTO) last year for a Diploma in Children’s Services. At the time of enrollment, my teacher said she would look into my RPL so that I could do my Diploma. Later in the year I realized that I was enrolled in a Certificate III and not the Diploma and it was explained that Cert III was the 1st year of Diploma and I had 2 more years to earn a Diploma. This made me very disappointed and sad that I had not only to pay the whole year’s fee of $1200 (although I had joined only in April) plus continue to pay the sum for an additional 2 years for I was studying part time as I work full time in the industry of Child Care. Through the year I was continually promised to meet with the coordinator/supervisor and it never took place. Me and another 2 candidates were called for a meeting to discuss RPL towards the end of the year and were given the respective modules to begin preparing our documentation and evidences to apply for RPL and I was told that I could even bring my advocate from (employer) with whom I’m presently working (Family Day Care) to speak for me towards gaining RPL. So I began organising this.

When I reminded my teacher of the RPL and meeting, I was told that it did not matter and the same arrangements would apply. When I made a call and explained that something needs to be done about my RPL for I had already received a letter of orientation from the (RTO), I was treated with indifference, that the classes were commencing soon, my teacher was busy and she will try to make an appointment and will get back to me. I waited and waited with no response to any of my calls and messages. So I called the (RTO) and spoke to the teacher in charge of selections and I explained the situation to her, that they had offered me 2nd year part time but were unaware of my RPL situation (asked for advice). She was very helpful and sympathetic and told me that she will look into the matter immediately. Sure enough I now received a call from my teacher at the (RTO), who told me that she would be coming to see me to explain what I could do. Here I am, a very hopeful and ardent student of 42 years of age trying my very best to make something of my qualifications, wanting to study and qualify in Early Childhood and further it into a degree and do something with my talent for working with children and families. I believed her once again and waited. Of course my teacher cancelled the appointment and postponed it because something else came up!!

At this point I would like to stop for I could go on another 2 pages! Is it the Australian system of education that functions this way or is it the discrepancy of personnel that they take people for granted, or a person from another country for granted, without any consideration for the time and venergy spent in working towards a goal??

I’m sorry, Mr. Spencer, but what is it that I should make out of this struggle?? Can you please help??

The fabled Sir Humphrey Appleby from the “Yes Minister” series, observed that if you wanted the minister not to do something, it was important to present the issue as complex, costly and controversial. If you wanted him to agree to a proposal, it was important to present it as simple, cheap and popular.

For an industry that recruits mature aged workers; for an industry that has an enormous backlog of skilled and able existing workers who have no formal certification for their skill base, this is a great tragedy. Consider how different the situation could be if we accepted other forms of proof more akin to the types of evidence that would be required to secure a job. Typically the job application process relies on the employer specifying the skills and levels of skills that they require for a position. The applicant responds by setting out a summary of their skills and experience addressing the key selection criteria. This application is not a sworn statement, it is not an affidavit, but it is taken in good faith as the first step in the process of appointment. Sometimes the whole process is short circuited simply on the basis of a recommendation, a referral from a trusted source. Someone whose opinion we value, vouchers or advises that so-and-so would be ideal for the job.

The resume is typically followed by an interview process in which two or three people who are familiar with the demands of the job and with sifting and clarifying the skills and capabilities of the applicants spend less than an hour in more detailed conversation about the person’s abilities and how they relate to the job specification.

The third step is to check the referees. Referees are generally senior people who have direct experience of the candidate. Thus having accepted the bona fides of the persons testimony through the C.V. and interview, the referee check acts as a validation. This is usually a phone check with the referee being of the candidates choosing.

If these three things are congruent, we deem the candidate to have proved their claims to the job. On this basis we award a job, salary, a career.

The job application and recruitment process is certainly not foolproof but I don’t seriously hear people proposing to toss the whole thing out.

The process is familiar to employers, is familiar to applicants and is deemed to valid for the purposes. This was the beginnings of the CS&H ITB’s Recognising Competency model.

A community development approach

The Community Services and Health Industry have a largely highly experienced workforce, a significant proportion of whom do not have formal qualifications. The development of Training Packages over the last 10 years has assisted in the identification and formalisation of job roles and the skill sets that make up those jobs.

Once the benchmarks have been established for and by industry then the issue is how to align and recognise the experience of the current highly experienced workforce to these benchmarks. Importantly, experienced workers need parity of esteem with new workers who enter through the qualifications pathway.

Clearly this is an issue more relevant to some industries than others. Feminised workforces in the post industrial economy generally have had less access to formal qualifications than traditional trades where apprenticeships have coyled and categorised skill and work since in some cases – the Middle Ages.

The task of recognition is a significant and legitimate industry wide issue for Community Services and Health.

The Victorian Community Services and Health Industry Training Board has been responsive to this need and developed a model for recognising current competencies (RCC) within the workforces under their coverage.

The CS&H ITB has identified, promoted and championed the need to efficiently align their experienced workers to the industry benchmarks through a process of RCC. The Recognising Competency model is strengths based, forward focused and generates evidence, while complying with and applying the basic tenets and principles of competency based assessment.

By acknowledging that so many workers in so many sectors are highly experienced yet not recognised the CS&H ITB confirms the veracity and credibility of the workplace as the site of significant learning. It also affirms the principle of competency that it is the outcome that is paramount not the process or how you get there. The focus on the outcome through an assessment process places the emphasis on the most critical aspect of the ‘competency based training and assessment continuum’. It also provides the maximum return for both the individual candidate and the industry.

The RCC model prizes a collaborative approach where the emphasis is ‘working with people’ as they define their own goals’. The model ‘values and empowers candidates’ by guiding them through the process. The assessor mentors the candidate through the RCC process and concurrently addresses gaps and training needs.
There is nothing so practical as a Good Theory

The basis for recognition of prior learning or current competency is often misunderstood. This usually occurs because of the dominance of traditional academic forms of learning. Theory and practice are both important and ideally they should be considered together. As social psychologist Kurt Lewin said, “There is nothing so practical as a good theory.”

Why recognise competency differently?

It fits with modern teaching practice

Modern teaching practice has moved focus of the teacher’s role from the “sage on the stage” to the “guide on the side”. Students learn by incorporating understanding of the subject into their existing knowledge base, and so must take an active role rather than being passively taught. The teacher’s job is therefore to facilitate learning rather than lecture. The teacher guides the learners through the learning process, encourages students to attain a deeper level of understanding and ensures that students are actively involved in the process.

It fits with modern learning theories

Classroom assessment has greater acceptability, not because it assesses more content or assesses more thoroughly. It generates more confidence because the teacher knows what was taught and is tempted to assume this content was also learnt. In this situation, formal assessment is seen as a confirming issues rather than a gateway event. This is not to devalue teachers or the role of teaching. Good teachers empower students to learn and achieve, but they need to find new ways of doing this for mature aged learners which includes recognising existing skills and knowledge.

Experiential learning

The primary distinguishing feature of experiential learning is that it is the experience of the learner that occupies central place. Such informal learning may be termed ‘non-credentialed learning’ or ‘experiential learning’ which is process-oriented rather than (intended) learning outcomes-oriented. ¹

Beard and Wilson (2002) define experiential learning as ‘the insight gained through the conscious or unconscious internalisation of our own or observed interactions, which build upon our past experiences and knowledge.’ ² Such definitions need to be kept in perspective. Definitions help in facilitating an initial understanding but caution needs to be exercised against adopting a narrow and restrictive understanding of what is a highly complex concept. An individual’s experience may comprise of earlier events in life, current life events or those that arise from participation in activities implemented by facilitators.

All learning involves prior or current experience of some sort, though there are some teaching and training practices that do not convey this. Boud et al (1993) identify the assumptions behind experiential learning:

- Experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning
- Learners actively construct their own experience
- Learning is a holistic process
- Learning is socially and culturally constructed
- Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs. ³

It fits with modern business practice

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a process for engaging people across in an organisation in renewal, change and focused performance. The basic idea is to build organisations around what works, rather than trying to fix what doesn’t. A proven benefit of the approach is its reliance on the acknowledgement of contribution at the individual level, which leads to trust and organisational alignment. Since the method creates meaning by drawing from stories of concrete successes and lends itself to cross-industrial social activities, it is enjoyable and natural to many managers, who are thought to be naturally social people.⁴

Behavioural Interviews

The behavioural interview is one of the most accepted forms of employment interview. The process is familiar to both employers and candidates. In a behavioral interview a job applicant is asked to demonstrate his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities, also known as competencies. The applicant must tell about specific experiences when he or she demonstrated these competencies. The purpose of a behavioral interview is to allow the interviewer to determine whether a candidate possesses the competencies to perform a particular job.

360 Degree Feedback

360 Degree Feedback has been in use since 1940 and has evolved to become a very common tool. It is a tool that provides information about yourself from multiple sources, such as your supervisor, peers, direct reports, and others.

Traditional approach to recognition of current competency

Traditionally, the recognition of current competencies (RCC) is regarded as a form of assessment. In applying for RCC, candidates initially compare their own knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes to the course competency standards/learning outcomes before deciding to submit an RCC application. Candidates are considered competent if they can demonstrate the depth of skills, and knowledge specified in the competency standards of a course. Some skills may require refreshing after only one or two years (e.g. information technology), other skills are retained for life (e.g., swimming). Hence, the knowledge and skills to be used as evidence in RCC are expected to be relevant to an industry today.

Students provide evidence to support an RCC claim to demonstrate they have acquired the knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes. Such evidence may include:

- a resume
- certificates of completed courses and qualifications
- awards
- references from employers outlining responsibilities
- letters from clients
- evaluations from supervisors
- job descriptions

On submission, the RCC application is reviewed by an RCC assessor who determines the final RCC assessment. Applicants may obtain zero, partial or full credit for the knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attributes demonstrated.

Consequently, the traditional RCC process involves a time-consuming, retrospective, paper chase. The process is often regarded as too bureaucratic and too demeaning for experienced workers and they tend to avoid engaging in the traditional RCC process. Typically, RCC candidates are people who have acquired industry skills on-the-job (i.e., work-based learning) and often lack key underpinning knowledge to be able to achieve an assessment of ‘full competence’ for an industry specified Training Package competency. The way that Training Package competencies are structured means that it is often a recurring piece of underpinning knowledge that restricts the candidate from being granted RCC, e.g. anatomy and physiology, knowledge of current legislation. As will be explained below, the CS&H ITB Recognising Competency method overcomes the off-putting aspects associated with traditional RCC.

1 Boud et al (1993)
3 Boud et al (1993)
4 Boud et al (1993)
There is nothing so practical as a Good Theory
The basis for recognition of prior learning or current competency is often misunderstood. This usually occurs because of the dominance of traditional academic forms of learning. Theory and practice are both important and ideally they should be considered together. As social psychologist Kurt Lewin said, “There is nothing so practical as a good theory.”

Why recognise competency differently?

It fits with modern teaching practice
Modern teaching practice has moved focus of the teacher’s role from the “sage on the stage” to the “guide on the side”. Students learn by incorporating understanding of the subject into their existing knowledge base, and so must take an active role rather than being passively taught. The teacher’s job is therefore to facilitate learning rather than lecture. The teacher guides the learners through the learning process, encourages students to attain a deeper level of understanding and ensures that students are actively involved in the process.

It fits with modern learning theories
Classroom assessment has greater acceptability, not because it assesses more content or assesses more thoroughly. It generates more confidence because the teacher knows what was taught and is tempted to assume this content was also learnt. In this situation, formal assessment is seen as a confirming issues rather than a gateway event. This is not to devalue teachers or the role of teaching. Good teachers empower students to learn and achieve, but they need to find new ways of doing this for mature aged learners which includes recognising existing skills and knowledge.

Experiential learning
The primary distinguishing feature of experiential learning is that it is the experience of the learner that occupies central place. Such informal learning may be termed ‘non-credentialed learning’ or ‘experiential learning’ which is process-oriented rather than (intended) learning outcomes-oriented.2
Beard and Wilson (2002) define experiential learning as “the insight gained through the conscious or unconscious internalisation of our own or observed interactions, which build upon our past experiences and knowledge.” Such definitions need to be kept in perspective. Definitions help in facilitating an initial understanding but caution needs to be exercised against adopting a narrow and restrictive understanding of what is a highly complex concept. An individual’s experience may comprise of earlier events in life, current life events or those that arise from participation in activities implemented by facilitators.

All learning involves prior and/or current experience of some sort, though there are some teaching and training practices that do not convey this. Boud et al (1993) identify the assumptions behind experiential learning:

Experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning
- Learners actively construct their own experience
- Learning is a holistic process
- Learning is socially and culturally constructed
- Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs.

It fits with modern business practice

Appreciative Inquiry
Appreciative Inquiry is a process for engaging people across in an organisation in renewal, change and focused performance. The basic idea is to build organisations around what works, rather than trying to fix what doesn’t. A proven benefit of the approach is its reliance on the acknowledgement of contribution at the individual level, which leads to trust and organisational alignment. Since the method creates meaning by drawing from stories of concrete successes and lends itself to cross-industrial social activities, it is enjoyable and natural to many managers, who are thought to be naturally social people.3

Traditional approach to recognition of current competency
Traditionally, the recognition of current competencies (RCC) is regarded as a form of assessment. In applying for RCC, candidates initially compare their own knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes to the course competency standards/learning outcomes before deciding to submit an RCC application. Candidates are considered competent if they can demonstrate the depth of skills, and knowledge specified in the competency standards of a course. Some skills may require refreshing after only one or two years (e.g. information technology), other skills are obtained for life (e.g. swimming). Hence, the knowledge and skills to be used as evidence in RCC are expected to be relevant to an industry today.

Students provide evidence to support an RCC claim to demonstrate they have acquired the knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes. Such evidence may include:
- a resume
- certificates of completed courses and qualifications
- awards
- references from employers outlining responsibilities
- letters from clients
- evaluations from supervisors
- job descriptions

On submission, the RCC application is reviewed by an RCC assessor who determines the final RCC assessment. Applicants may obtain zero, partial or full credit for the knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes demonstrated.

Consequently, the traditional RCC process involves a time-consuming, retrospective, paper chase. The process is often regarded as too bureaucratic and too demeaning for experienced workers and they tend to avoid engaging in the traditional RCC process. Typically, RCC candidates are people who have acquired industry skills on-the-job (i.e., work-based learning) and often lack key underpinning knowledge to be able to achieve an assessment of ‘full competence’ for an industry specified Training Package competency. The way that Training Package competencies are structured means that it is often a recurring piece of underpinning knowledge that restricts the candidate from being granted RCC, e.g. anatomy and physiology, knowledge of current legislation. As will be explained below, the CS&H ITB Recognising Competency method overcomes the off-putting aspects associated with traditional RCC.
Community services and health industry training board approach to recognising competency

The significant difference of the CS&H ITB Recognising Competency model, when compared to the more traditional approach, is that it is aligned to an industry’s familiar practices for establishing validity and is grounded in adult learning theory.

The Recognising Competency process aligns to the job interview process without comprising the validity of the assessment. It includes established ways of dealing with paper-based, first and third party (e.g., referee) evidence, and examples of work.

By aligning the Recognising Competency model to already established industry practices, the recognition of competency process is better understood by both the Recognising Competency candidate and industry representatives. In effect, the evidence for competencies already attained is generated in the course of a candidate’s normal work rather than relying on an historical approach. In addition, allowance is made for gathering, observing and generating evidence with the opportunity to address gaps in the lead up to final assessment.

The Recognising Competency model, then, is considerably less onerous than traditional approaches to recognising current competencies. An industry is more inclined to support the recognition of competency process and candidates wishing to avail themselves of it.

A holistic approach

Recognising Competency takes a holistic approach to competency assessment. Competencies are clustered under four broad, but familiar headings, and knowledge is likewise aggregated from the competencies under consideration. This structure allows for a performance based interview approach.

Six steps to Recognising Competency

Most people develop skills through their working life which are not always formally recognised. The Recognising Competency approach facilitates candidates to:

• demonstrate their knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes as part of their everyday work through the observations and practical questions posed to them by a trained assessor using the Recognising Competency model
• be formally recognised for what they already competently know and can do
• qualify for a nationally accredited qualification or work out what additional requirements are needed to meet the requirements of a qualification

The Recognising Competency process emphasises the need for valid, reliable, authentic and consistent evidence in relation to the candidate’s current context, third party testimonials, practical questioning and direct observation of the candidate.

A particular strength of the six step Recognising Competency model is that it provides opportunity for a concrete primary record of the final assessment (i.e., the audio/video interview) of the candidate where the competencies demonstrated and revealed. In most cases this is not necessary, particularly with existing employees, who have access to stronger third party and employer references. But the step is an important component of the model in that it provides a way for otherwise competent workers, but with poor documentation, to generate compelling evidence. Support from assessors to this step is directly proportional to their comfort and competence with recording equipment! Those who are familiar with the equipment and use it as part of their assessment and teaching see no problems. Those who are not familiar with it, tend to assume that the candidate will not be comfortable with being recorded.

Revealing the recognising competency candidate’s full knowledge, depth of skills, and experience

The intention of the Recognising Competency process is to get to the stories behind a candidate’s experiences and the framework of underpinning knowledge that is alluded to in the evidence gathered. An assessor using this model is trained to apply deep and pragmatic analysis of all of the evidence presented and to conduct interviews. Within the previously established partnership between assessor and candidate, the candidate is prompted and encouraged in an interview situation to disclose as much detail as possible about their knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes. Validation can occur through employers, past and present, and other referees.

The key distinguishing features of the model are:

• It is interview and observation driven. It recognises that most of the key competencies in CS&H (and in service industries generally) are interpersonal and demonstrable. They require real time responses from a worker to a client need. Interviewing is an entirely valid and appropriate way of establishing competency. Such an approach is a familiar validating process to all industries – ‘the job interview’, referee reports and secondary evidence
• a focus on generating evidence as opposed to collecting historical evidence
• evidence relates directly to the competency standards
• the concurrent acceptance of both a validation pathway and development pathway which allows a candidate to bridge the small gaps between partial and full competency before being assessed.

Questioning the Recognising Competency candidate

Just as would be expected during a job interview based on contemporary methods, the Recognising Competency assessor will usually use three types of questions:

• Factual questions to create a record of all the important details
• Probing questions to establish details
• Hypothetical questions which invite the candidate to ‘do the job’ within and beyond their experience.

The three types of questions can be framed around:

Knowledge – to get to facts about a topic
Behaviours – about what a person has done or is doing
Attitudes/Opinions/values – about what a person thinks about a topic

Background/demographics – standard background questions such as education, experience, etc.2 To obtain an indepth understanding of the candidate’s knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes, the Recognising Competency assessor can frame questions in terms of the past, present or future.
Community services and health industry training board approach to recognising competency

The significant difference of the CS&H ITB Recognising Competency model, when compared to the more traditional approach, is that it is aligned to an industry’s familiar practices for establishing validity and is grounded in adult learning theory.

The Recognising Competency process aligns to the job interview process without comprising the validity of the assessment. It includes established ways of dealing with paper-based, first and third party (e.g., referees) evidence, and examples of work.

By aligning the Recognising Competency model to already established industry practices, the recognition of competency process is better understood by both the Recognising Competency candidate and industry representatives. In effect, the evidence for competencies already attained is generated in the course of a candidate’s normal work rather than relying on an historical approach. In addition, allowance is made for gathering, observing and generating evidence with the opportunity to address gaps in the lead up to final assessment.

The Recognising Competency model, then, is considerably less onerous than traditional approaches to recognising current competencies. An industry is more inclined to support the recognition of competency process and candidates wishing to avail themselves of it.

**A holistic approach**

Recognising Competency takes a holistic approach to competency assessment. Competencies are clustered under four broad, but familiar headings, and knowledge is likewise aggregated from the competencies under consideration. This structure allows for a performance based interview approach.

**Six steps to Recognising Competency**

Most people develop skills through their working life which are not always formally recognised. The Recognising Competency approach facilitates candidates to:

- demonstrate their knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes as part of their everyday work through the observations and practical questions posed to them by a trained assessor using the Recognising Competency model
- be formally recognised for what they already competently know and can do
- qualify for a nationally accredited qualification or work out what additional requirements are needed to meet the requirements of a qualification

The Recognising Competency process emphasises the need for valid, reliable, authentic and consistent evidence in relation to the candidate’s current context, third party testimonials, practical questioning and direct observation of the candidate.

A particular strength of the six step Recognising Competency model is that it provides opportunity for a concrete primary record of the final assessment (i.e., the audio/video interview) of the candidate where the competencies demonstrated and revealed. In most cases this is not necessary, particularly with existing employees, who have access to stronger third party and employer references. But the step is an important component of the model in that it provides a way for otherwise competent workers, but with poor documentation, to generate compelling evidence. Support from assessors to this step is directly proportional to their comfort and competence with recording equipment! Those who are familiar with the equipment and use it as part of their assessment and teaching see no problems. Those who are not familiar with it, tend to assume that the candidate will not be comfortable with being recorded.

**Revealing the recognising competency candidate’s full knowledge, depth of skills, and experience**

The intention of the Recognising Competency process is to get to the stories behind a candidate’s experiences and the framework of underpinning knowledge that is alluded to in the evidence gathered. An assessor using this model is trained to apply deep and pragmatic analysis of all of the evidence presented and to conduct interviews. Within the previously established partnership between assessor and candidate, the candidate is prompted and encouraged in an interview situation to disclose as much detail as possible about their knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes. Validation can occur through employers, past and present, and other referees.

**The key distinguishing features of the model are:**

- It is interview and observation driven. It recognises that most of the key competencies in CS&H (and in service industries generally) are interpersonal and demonstrable. They require real time responses from a worker to a client need. Interviewing is an entirely valid and appropriate way of establishing competency. Such an approach is a familiar validating process to all industries – ‘the job interview’, referee reports and secondary evidence
- a focus on generating evidence as opposed to collecting historical evidence
- evidence relates directly to the competency standards
- the concurrent acceptance of both a validation pathway and development pathway which allows a candidate to bridge the small gaps between partial and full competency before being assessed.

**Questioning the Recognising Competency candidate**

Just as would be expected during a job interview based on contemporary methods, the Recognising Competency assessor will usually use three types of questions:

- Factual questions to create a record of all the important details
- Probing questions to establish details
- Hypothetical questions which invite the candidate to ‘do the job’ within and beyond their experience.

The three types of questions can be framed around:

Knowledge – to get to facts about a topic

Behaviours – about what a person has done or is doing

Attitudes/Opinions/values – about what a person thinks about a topic

Background/demographics – standard background questions such as education, experience, etc. To obtain an indepth understanding of the candidate’s knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes, the Recognising Competency assessor can frame questions in terms of the past, present or future.
This session moves more directly to address audit standards. The assessor reviews the primary evidence demonstrated as part of any developmental path and validates any remaining secondary sources of evidence. The expected outcomes of this session are:

- To make final recommendations to the candidate
- To prepare the candidate for the digital video recording i.e. creating the final primary source of evidence.

This session remains focused on demonstrating the candidate’s competence. But now the assessor makes checks on the evidence against the competency units, elements, performance criteria, essential knowledge and underpinning skills. This session moves more directly to address audit standards.

The assessor uses video technology to create a primary source of the candidate's underpinning knowledge, attitudes and skills. The assessor acknowledges the candidate's contribution to the assessment process highlighting the work undertaken, competencies demonstrated, level of attainment and any additional learning or tasks undertaken by the candidate to achieve competencies.

The candidates provide feedback to the assessor and RTO about the process undertaken and outcomes achieved, acknowledging the assessor and making recommendations for the improvement of the process. Plans are made for any further developmental work and/or further assessment.

Community development builds social capital. The importance of working with people as they define their own goals, mobilise resources, build networks and develop action plans for addressing issues they have identified.

Key points:

- Supported process
- Paper work minimised
- Interview driven
- Empowering.

Candidate receives kit:

- Brochure
- Nomination form
- Self assessment form
- 3rd party assessment form
- Process overview
- Contact numbers.

Where the evidence is not congruent or incomplete the assessor and the candidate will need to develop a plan to develop and/or demonstrate the competencies. In some circumstances it may be necessary to counsel the candidate that RCC is not appropriate.

At the end of this session the assessor should have several pieces of evidence, such as:

- Employer nomination
- Candidate’s CV
- Evidence of any relevant qualifications
- Job description
- 3rd party assessments
- Self assessment of competency
- Record of discussion of some critical aspects of assessment.

To the extent that there is positive congruence between the pieces of evidence it is reasonable to assume that the RCC process should proceed on the basis of validation.
### Assessment focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Briefing</th>
<th>Planning Interview</th>
<th>Evidence Gathering</th>
<th>Assessment Interview</th>
<th>Optional Recording</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation and candidate receive briefing on process and requirements</td>
<td>Develop partnership and assessment plan</td>
<td>Secondary sources focus</td>
<td>Essential knowledge focus</td>
<td>Create primary source record</td>
<td>Debrief candidate receive feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The RTO assessor provides a briefing session for the organisation and the candidate on the process and requirements.

Community development builds social capital. The importance of working with people as they define their own goals, mobilise resources, build networks and develop action plans for addressing issues they have identified.

Key points:
- Supported process
- Paper work minimised
- Interview driven
- Empowering.

Candidate receives kit:
- Brochure
- Nomination form
- Self assessment form
- 3rd party assessment form
- Process overview
- Contact numbers.

At the end of this session the assessor should have several pieces of evidence, such as:
- Employer nomination
- Candidate’s CV
- Evidence of any relevant qualifications
- Job description
- 3rd party assessments
- Self assessment of competency
- Record of discussion of some critical aspects of assessment.

To the extent that there is positive congruence between the pieces of evidence it is reasonable to assume that the RCC process should proceed on the basis of validation.

### Audit focus

- This session moves more directly to address audit standards.
- The assessor reviews the primary evidence demonstrated as part of any developmental path and validates any remaining secondary sources of evidence.
- The expected outcomes of this session are:
  - To make final recommendations to the candidate
  - To prepare the candidate for the digital video recording i.e. creating the final primary source of evidence.

Assessor uses video technology to create a primary source of the candidate’s underpinning knowledge, attitudes and skills.

The assessor acknowledges the candidate’s contribution to the assessment process highlighting the work undertaken, competencies demonstrated, level of attainment and any additional learning or tasks undertaken by the candidate to achieve competencies.

The assessor completes documentation in line with the formal national accreditation framework. (AQTF standards).

The candidates provides feedback to the assessor and RTO about the process undertaken and outcomes achieved, acknowledging the assessor and making recommendations for the improvement of the process.

Plans are made for any further developmental work and/or further assessment.
Lines of enquiry

Structured lines of enquiry are used as guides to validate the evidence and prompt the candidate to demonstrate their familiarity with, comprehension of, and erudition of essential knowledge and skill levels in the areas of law, regulation and policy; work sector knowledge; client focus understanding; and health and safety as they apply to their current work situation.

Four broad lines of enquiry are explored, being: (1.) clarifying experience, (2.) exploring routine and planned responses, (3.) exploring responding to challenges, and (4.) promoting health, safety and well-being. Brief explanations of each of these are provided in the next section.

The four lines of enquiry

Typically, an assessor using the Recognising Competency model will use open ended questions, suggest a scenario to the candidate or the candidate may present their own case study, to illustrate and demonstrate their competency against the specified competencies, elements of competency, performance criteria, essential knowledge, and underpinning skills.

Competency Clusters

1. Clarifying experience

Just as for a job interview, the assessor explores in more depth the candidate’s experiences itemised in the primary, secondary and tertiary sources of evidence. The ultimate purpose is to audit all of the evidence and the candidate’s responses against the specified competencies, elements and performance criteria; especially the underpinning knowledge. Probing questions assist in reaching an in depth understanding of experiences and assisting the candidate to reveal more detail about their experiences.

For example, a candidate may itemise their experience that relates to culturally diverse people. By probing, the assessor should be able to ascertain the candidate’s attitudes towards person-centred service delivery, important underpinning knowledge to effectively work with culturally diverse people, and confirmation of applicable communication skills.

Questions might include:

• Would you give some examples of communication strategies you have used to achieve person-centred service delivery?
• Can you elaborate further on the communication strategy? Please tell me more about that.
• What strategies are important when working with culturally diverse people? Describe how cultural practices and experiences may impact on personal behaviour, interpersonal relationships, perception and social expectations of others?
• Can you elaborate further on the communication strategy? Please tell me more about that.

2. Exploring routine and planned responses

The ultimate purpose is to audit all of the evidence and the candidate’s responses against the specified competencies, elements and performance criteria; especially the underpinning knowledge. Probing questions will assist in reaching an in depth understanding of the candidates underpinning knowledge and how they organise themselves in routine and planned workplace situations.

For example, a candidate may itemise their experience that relates to providing physical assistance with medication. By probing, the assessor should be able to ascertain the candidate’s attitudes towards following instructions and industry guidelines, important underpinning knowledge to protect clients, and confirmation of applicable documentation and recording skills.

Questions might include:

• Describe under what conditions you would provide medication to a client.
• What would you check before administering medication?
• How would you administer medication?
• In what situation would you think a referral may be necessary and to whom?
• What procedures would you follow to make a referral?

3. Exploring responding to challenges

This line of enquiry explores the candidate’s ability to apply and adapt their underpinning knowledge and skills, together with indicating their attitude towards challenging and non-routine situations. The candidate may be presented with a case scenario applicable to their work situation.

Questions might include:

• Would you ask anyone for assistance?
• What legislation, standards, policies or procedures would you draw on?
• Would you ask anyone for assistance?

4. Promoting health, safety and wellbeing

Clearly, this line of enquiry is intended to provide the candidate with the opportunity to demonstrate their underpinning knowledge concerning occupational health and safety, together with protecting their own and a client’s wellbeing.
Lines of enquiry

Structured lines of enquiry are used as guides to validate the evidence and prompt the candidate to demonstrate their familiarity with, comprehension of, and erudition of essential knowledge and skill levels in the areas of law, regulation and policy; work sector knowledge; client focus understanding; and health and safety as they apply to their current work situation.

Four broad lines of enquiry are explored, being: (1.) clarifying experience, (2.) exploring routine and planned responses, (3.) exploring responding to challenges, and (4.) promoting health, safety and well-being. Brief explanations of each of these are provided in the next section.

The four lines of enquiry

Typically, an assessor using the Recognising Competency model will use open ended questions, suggest a scenario to the candidate or the candidate may present their own case study, to illustrate and demonstrate their competency against the specified competencies, elements of competency, performance criteria, essential knowledge, and underpinning skills.

Competency Clusters

1. Clarifying experience

Just as for a job interview, the assessor explores in more depth the candidate’s experiences itemised in the primary, secondary and tertiary sources of evidence. The ultimate purpose is to audit all of the evidence and the candidate’s responses against the specified competencies, elements and performance criteria; especially the underpinning knowledge. Probing questions assist in reaching an in depth understanding of experiences and assisting the candidate to reveal more detail about their experiences.

For example, a candidate may itemise their experience that relates to culturally diverse people. By probing, the assessor should be able to ascertain the candidate’s attitudes towards person-centred service delivery, important underpinning knowledge to effectively work with culturally diverse people, and confirmation of applicable communication skills.

Questions might include:

• Would you give some examples of communication strategies you have used to achieve person-centred service delivery?
• Can you elaborate further on the communication strategy? Please tell me more about that.
• What strategies are important when working with culturally diverse people? Describe how cultural practices and experiences may impact on personal behaviour, interpersonal relationships, perception and social expectations of others?
• Can you elaborate further on the communication strategy? Please tell me more about that.

2. Exploring routine and planned responses

The ultimate purpose is to audit all of the evidence and the candidate’s responses against the specified competencies, elements and performance criteria; especially the underpinning knowledge. Probing questions will assist in reaching an in depth understanding of the candidates underpinning knowledge and how they organise themselves in routine and planned workplace situations.

For example, a candidate may itemise their experience that relates to providing physical assistance with medication. By probing, the assessor should be able to ascertain the candidate’s attitudes towards following instructions and industry guidelines, important underpinning knowledge to protect clients, and confirmation of applicable documentation and recording skills.

Questions might include:

• Describe under what conditions you would provide medication to a client.
• What would you check before administering medication?
• How would you administer medication?
• In what situation would you think a referral may be necessary and to whom?
• What procedures would you follow to make a referral?

3. Exploring responding to challenges

This line of enquiry explores the candidate’s ability to apply and adapt their underpinning knowledge and skills, together with indicating their attitude towards challenging and non-routine situations. The candidate may be presented with a case scenario applicable to their work situation.

Questions might include:

• Would you ask anyone for assistance?
• What legislation, standards, policies or procedures would you draw on?
• Would you ask anyone for assistance?

4. Promoting health, safety and wellbeing

Clearly, this line of enquiry is intended to provide the candidate with the opportunity to demonstrate their underpinning knowledge concerning occupational health and safety, together with protecting their own and a client’s wellbeing.
Questions might include:

- How would you handle the situation where a colleague slipped and fell in the workplace?
- How would you handle the situation where a client slipped and fell in their residence?
- What legislation, standards, policies or procedures would you draw on?
- What procedures would you follow? – e.g. recording and reporting.

Competency Window

Understanding the skills of the experienced worker

The skills and experience of workers presenting for recognition of competency are complex and not always self-evident. Recognising Competency uses a modified Johari Window to explore the candidates skill base.

The things I know

There are things that I know and I am conscious and confident that I know them. Most often these are skills and abilities that have been obtained by a formal process or have been identified and named by others. These skills represent my Confident Self. It is my area of free activity. These are the competencies I will lay claim to and use in my public activities. If offered the opportunity of RPL, it is these competencies for which I will seek recognition.

The things I don’t know

There are also many things that I do not know. If I am interested or my work requires it, these are the areas where I am Open to Learn. I will enroll in a course of study or seek training. Importantly, it is in this area that I recognise the boundaries of my competence and not overstep the mark.

The things I didn’t know I knew

Beyond the things I consciously know, all experienced workers have a body of skills and abilities that they are not aware that they know. Assessors often report that candidates underestimate the extent of their knowledge and skills. In the classroom, mature aged learners frequently exclaim, “I know that, but I call it something else.”

This is the area of Unknown Competency. Candidates will often talk about these skills as “common sense”. Sometimes they call it by another name, sometimes they bundle several competencies together.

Frequently they have these competencies wrongly classified; they consider them part of their private experience and fail to understand that they are relevant workplace skills. A woman working in aged care was being questioned about her knowledge of “Mental Health” issues maintained that she had no experience in this area. Later she revealed that she had a daughter with schizophrenia, and had a very detailed knowledge of the mental health system, the range of support organisations and the impact of mental health issues on family members!

This is a very important area for the assessor to explore. Online, paper based and other unsupported RPL systems will miss this important area of current competency. The candidate may not lay claim to it, but it can be substantial. It is also important to note that if a candidate is lacking confidence (having been made redundant, returning to the workforce) their area of confident competency will shrink. The Recognising Competency model emphasises the importance of a supportive relationship between the assessor and the candidate to draw out this experience.

The things I don’t know that I don’t know

The last quadrant of the Competency Window deals with the things I don’t know and I don’t know that I don’t know them. This can sound silly but it is an important consideration. If I don’t know that I don’t know something, I can be Dangerous. Dangerous to myself and others. I won’t recognise the boundaries of my competence and may be unaware that I am venturing into areas beyond my abilities.

The area also deals with those things I need to unlearn. Sometimes people learn bad practice; they may have worked in poor workplace; practices and philosophies may have changed; they may have known it once, but it is now outdated.

Without significant engagement between the assessor this important area will be missed. Assessors using the Recognising Competency model are able to observe discrepancies between what a candidate says and what they do during workplace visits. Any RPL process that fails to address this area will lack industry credibility.

Case Studies

Alcohol and other drug workers

A Certificate IV level course is mandatory in the alcohol and other drug worker (AOD) sector. A key agency initially adopted the traditional RCC/RCC process, described earlier, with the intention to benefit their staff. The process was deemed too bureaucratic (and too demeaning for Higher Education candidates) by approximately 80% of the prospective candidates and they refused to engage in the traditional RCC process. Of those that did proceed, approximately 50% dropped-out part way through.

The AOD agency requested the Community Services and Health Industry Training Board to train five assessors in the community development Recognising Competency approach to recognising competency in AOD facilities. The feedback since implementation is that there is virtually a 100% uptake of the process and only 5% dropout.

Children’s Services sector

Certificate III in Children’s Services

In 2004, the Program Policy Advisor of the Early Years Program funded a project to customise the Recognising Competency assessment model and for training providers to conduct a pilot in the Children’s Services sector against the Certificate III in Children’s Services competencies. Eight rural and metropolitan registered training providers (RTOs) began the pilot, working with 21 participants but three decided not to continue with the assessment for personal reasons. Of the 18 remaining participants, 11 have completed their assessment and the remaining seven will complete their assessments shortly. At least 11 candidates intend to enrol in the Diploma in Community Services (Children’s Services) qualification in the near future.

Feedback has been very positive from candidates, employers and assessors. Candidates have found
Questions might include:
- How would you handle the situation where a colleague slipped and fell in the workplace?
- How would you handle the situation where a client slipped and fell in their residence?
- What legislation, standards, policies or procedures would you draw on?
- What procedures would you follow? – e.g. recording and reporting.

Competency Window

Understanding the skills of the experienced worker
The skills and experience of workers presenting for recognition of competency are complex and not always self evident. Recognising Competency uses a modified JoHari Window to explore the candidates skill base.

The things I know
There are things that I know and I am conscious and confident that I know them. Most often these are skills and abilities that have been obtained by a formal process or have been identified and named by others. These skills represent my Confident Self. It is my area of free activity. These are the competencies I will lay claim to and use in my public activities. If offered the opportunity of RPL, it is these competencies for which I will seek recognition.

The things I don’t know
There are also many things that I do not know. If I am interested or my work requires it, these are the areas where I am Open to Learn. I will enroll in a course of study or seek training. Importantly, it is in this area that I recognise the boundaries of my competence and not overstep the mark.

The things I didn’t know I knew
Beyond the things I consciously know, all experienced workers have a body of skills and abilities that they are not aware that they know. Assessors often report that candidates underestimate the extent of their knowledge and skills. In the classroom, mature aged learners frequently exclaim, “I know that, but I call it something else.” This is the area of Unknown Competency. Candidates will often talk about these skills as “common sense”. Sometimes they call it by another name, sometimes they bundle several competencies together.

Frequently they have these competencies wrongly classified; they consider them part of their private experience and fail to understand that they are relevant workplace skills. A woman working in aged care was being questioned about her knowledge of “Mental Health” issues maintained that she had no experience in this area. Later she revealed that she had a daughter with schizophrenia, and had a very detailed knowledge of the mental health system, the range of support organisations and the impact of mental health issues on family members!

This is a very important area for the assessor to explore. Online, paper based and other unsupported RPL systems will miss this important area of current competency. The candidate may not lay claim to it, but it can be substantial. It is also important to note that if a candidate is lacking confidence (having been made redundant, returning to the workforce) their area of confident competency will shrink. The Recognising Competency model emphasises the importance of a supportive relationship between the assessor and the candidate to draw out this experience.

The things I don’t know that I don’t know
The last quadrant of the Competency Window deals with the things I don’t know and I don’t know that I don’t know them. This can sound silly but it is an important consideration. If I don’t know that I don’t know something, I can be Dangerous. Dangerous to myself and others. I won’t recognise the boundaries of my competence and may be unaware that I am venturing into areas beyond my abilities.

The area also deals with those things I need to unlearn. Sometimes people learn bad practice; they may have worked in poor workplace; practices and philosophies may have changed; they may have known it once, but it is now outdated.

Without significant engagement between the assessor this important area will be missed. Assessors using the Recognising Competency model are able to observe discrepancies between what a candidate says and what they do during workplace visits. Any RPL process that fails to address this area will lack industry credibility.

Case Studies
Alcohol and other drug workers
A Certificate IV level course is mandatory in the alcohol and other drug worker (AOD) sector. A key agency initially adopted the traditional RCC/RCC process, described earlier, with the intention to benefit their staff. The process was deemed too bureaucratic (and too demeaning for Higher Education candidates) by approximately 80% of the prospective candidates and they refused to engage in the traditional RCC process. Of those that did proceed, approximately 50% dropped-out part way through.

The AOD agency requested the Community Services and Health Industry Training Board to train five assessors in the community development Recognising Competency approach to recognising competency in AOD facilities. The feedback since implementation is that there is virtually a 100% uptake of the process and only 5% dropout.

Children’s Services sector
Certificate III in Children’s Services
In 2004, the Program Policy Advisor of the Early Years Program funded a project to customise the Recognising Competency assessment model and for training providers to conduct a pilot in the Children’s Services sector against the Certificate III in Children’s Services competencies. Eight rural and metropolitan registered training providers (RTOs) began the pilot, working with 21 participants but three decided not to continue with the assessment for personal reasons. Of the 18 remaining participants, 11 have completed their assessment and the remaining seven will complete their assessments shortly. At least 11 candidates intend to enrol in the Diploma in Community Services (Children’s Services) qualification in the near future.

Feedback has been very positive from candidates, employers and assessors. Candidates have found...
the process easy to understand and time-saving as it has avoided attendance at unnecessary classes. Others have found the process has built their confidence and has motivated them to enrol into and work towards their Diploma qualification. Employers have been happy that worker’s skills are being recognised through this process. Assessors from both private and public registered training organisations found participation in the project helped build the trust in each other. They found the model streamlined what has been a cumbersome process and facilitated retention of candidates.

Diploma in Children’s Services

The CS&H ITB is currently (2006) conducting a project for Registered Training Organisations and workplace assessors to undertake training in the use of the CS&H ITB Recognising Competency (RC) model. This takes the model developed and piloted within the Children’s Services industry sector in 2004/05 and streamlines recognition assessment processes for existing workers.

The current project has trained over 40 assessors in the use of the Recognising Competency model to provide existing workers the opportunity to gain the Diploma in Children’s Services through the recognition of existing skills and provision of gap training. Funding for the project and gap training was provided by the Department of Human Services and training will also be assisted by accessing existing worker traineeships in regional areas.

Assessor training workshops were held across Victoria with participants receiving assessment materials on how to apply the RC Model to existing workers against the Certificate III in Children’s Services and the Diploma in Children’s Services. This project also provided an excellent opportunity for professional development of training staff within Registered Training Organisations and organisations who have trained workplace assessors.

Disability work sector

There is now a requirement that all State Government disability workers are certified at the Certificate IV level. The Manager, State Training Strategy of the Disability Learning and Development Unit in the Department of Human Services, is keen to progress this, funding a project to customise the manual for recognising competency of existing workers in the disability sector, for use by RTOs. This involved taking the core and elective competencies in the Certificate IV in Disability Work, customising tools in the manual and developing new tools. The manual was revised during the course of the project to take into consideration feedback from the assessors.

Feedback has been very positive and one assessor in particular indicated that it has allowed people who were unqualified but experienced and lacking confidence to have their skills and knowledge recognised. Where skill gaps have been identified along the way, it has allowed the candidates to take responsibility for their own learning through completing exercises set by the assessor that is allowing them to meet the assessment requirements.

Juvenile Justice

The CS&H ITB worked with Chisholm Institute of TAFE implementing the Recognising Competency model for juvenile justice workers. The aim was to recognise the skills of untrained existing staff against the Certificate IV in Community Services (Juvenile Justice). Twenty-nine staff members at Melbourne Juvenile Justice Centre were signed up under the Commonwealth traineeship scheme to obtain this qualification. All went through the Recognising Competency process and identified gaps were addressed through training, workshops, and other strategies.

Footnotes

1 The terms experiential learning, experienced-based learning and learning from experience are often used interchangeably. Some authors may use them with a specific emphasis, however, the differences are only small.
2 Objections raised against learning outcomes include that they aid education social engineering and some instructors say, justifiably, that they can not predict what students will learn. Hence, the terminology ‘intended learning outcomes’ is often used.
3 Beard, Colin & Wilson, John P. (2002), The power of experiential learning, Kogan Page, p. 16
the process easy to understand and time-saving as it has avoided attendance at unnecessary classes. Others have found the process has built their confidence and has motivated them to enrol into and work towards their Diploma qualification. Employers have been happy that workers’ skills are being recognised through this process. Assessor feedback has been positive with some indicating that it has allowed unqualified but experienced and lacking confidence to have their skills and knowledge recognised. Where skill gaps have been identified along the way, it has allowed the candidates to take responsibility for their own learning through completing exercises set by the assessor that is allowing them to meet the assessment requirements.

**Disability work sector**

There is now a requirement that all State Government disability workers are certified at the Certificate IV level. The Manager, State Training Strategy of the Disability Learning and Development Unit in the Department of Human Services, is keen to progress this, funding a project to customise the manual for recognising competency of existing workers in the disability sector, for use by RTOs. This involved taking the core and elective competencies in the Certificate IV in Disability Work, customising tools in the manual and developing new tools. The manual was revised during the course of the project to take into consideration feedback from the assessors.

Feedback has been very positive and one assessor in particular indicated that it has allowed people who were unqualified but experienced and lacking confidence to have their skills and knowledge recognised. Where skill gaps have been identified along the way, it has allowed the candidates to take responsibility for their own learning through completing exercises set by the assessor that is allowing them to meet the assessment requirements.

**Juvenile Justice**

The CS&H ITB worked with Chisholm Institute of TAFE implementing the Recognising Competency model for juvenile justice workers. The aim was to recognise the skills of untrained existing staff against the Certificate IV in Community Services (Juvenile Justice). Twenty-nine staff members at Melbourne Juvenile Justice Centre were signed up under the Commonwealth traineeship scheme to obtain this qualification. All went through the Recognising Competency process and identified gaps were addressed through training, workshops, and other strategies.

---

**Footnotes**

1. The terms experiential learning, experiences-based learning and learning from experience are often used interchangeably. Some authors may use them with a specific emphasis, however, the differences are only small.

2. Objections raised against learning outcomes include that they aid education social engineering and some instructors say, justifiably, that they can not predict what students will learn. Hence, the terminology ‘intended learning outcomes’ is often used.


Refining recognition of prior learning

Refining the Future is promoting improved approaches to recognition of prior learning that are fairer to the candidate and increase the use of recognition services. The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is one of the most popular topics in VET at the moment, for governments and practitioners alike, and new strategies are required to increase the usage of RPL from its current low levels.

In the current AQTF Standards for RTOs, RPL is defined as the “recognition of competencies currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. RPL assesses the individual’s prior learning to determine the extent to which that individual is currently competent against the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification.”

To meet the need for new RPL strategies, Reframing the Future, the national staff development program for VET, recently conducted forums in five capital cities to encourage participants to engage with current research on skills recognition and assessment, to identify what ‘new practices’ mean or look like and to develop more confidence in applying professional judgment in recognition and assessment practice.

Enabling factors

One of the two keynote presenters at the five forums, Andrea Bateman from Bateman & Giles Pty Ltd, called her presentation “RPL: Yes, we are there!” Her point was that we do have the positive core of capabilities in VET people to deliver RPL effectively, “but that the statistical collection standards (AVETMISS) and an outmoded view of what is RPL may in fact be clouding our VET RPL landscape.”

“The line between ‘pure’ RPL and other forms of assessment, sometimes referred to as ‘fast track’ and ‘partial RPL’ are not clear, nor are they differentiated in the data collection,” says Bateman.

In the field, says Bateman, RPL is practised effectively by many VET practitioners, so our attention needs to shift to the factors which promote or enable an effective RPL process. Research she conducted with Bowman, Clayton and others summarised five enabling factors: effective promotion of RPL, improved processes for RPL, enhanced communication strategies, better support for applicants, and more support for assessors.

For instance, in providing better support for candidates, the candidates can be coached in how to move through the RPL process, mentors can be involved in the overall process and, if appropriate, specific support can be made available in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

Ultimately Bateman believes that the assessor’s skills are critical to the success of the RPL process. “Assessors involved in RPL need to be accepting of the concept of RPL, be highly skilled in their vocational field, have industry currency, be conversant with their Training Packages, be highly skilled assessors and assessment tool developers and have confidence in their judgments.”

Traditionally daunting

The other keynote speaker at the Reframing the Future forums was Brian Spencer from the Community Services and Health Industry Training Board in Victoria. Spencer says the traditional approach to RPL is flawed: “the process involves a time-consuming, retrospective, paper chase. The process is often regarded as too bureaucratic and too demeaning for experienced workers and they tend to avoid engaging in the traditional process.”

“Current processes are surrounded in cost and complexity. People who dare assert that they already have a certain competency by virtue of their life experience, previous work history, a transferable skill or informal learning are often faced with suspicion and daunting demands for documented proof. The current process typically starts with a paperchase: collect a portfolio that will demonstrate that you have that competency. This can be a daunting task to those of us who do not have filing cabinet minds and forget along life’s journey to collect and document every achievement and learning skill that we have acquired.”

“For many people, the request for recognition of current competency ends at this point. The task is not just too big, it is nebulous and protracted. How on earth do I find the proof I need? How do I know when I have collected enough?”

“Sir Humphrey Appleby from the ‘Yes Minister’ series, observed that if you wanted the minister not to do something, it was important to present the issue as complex, costly and controversial. If you wanted him to agree to a proposal, it was important to present it as simple, cheap and popular. This is exactly what we have allowed to happen with achievement of competency. Recognition is presented as complex, costly and controversial. Attending classes is presented as simple, cheap and popular.”

This positioning of recognition as complex is regrettable, says Spencer: “For an industry like mine that recruits mature-aged workers, for an industry that has an enormous backlog of skilled and able existing workers who have no formal certification for their skill base, this is a great tragedy.”

Improved model

In response to these shortfalls, over the last four years Spencer’s organisation has developed and implemented an approach to RPL that overcomes these off-putting aspects.

“The significant difference of the CS&H ITB recognising competency model is that it is aligned to an industry’s familiar practices for establishing validity and is grounded in adult learning theory. Our process aligns to the job interview process without comprising the validity of the assessment. It includes established ways of dealing with paper-based evidence and examples of work.”

“It is considerably less onerous than traditional approaches to recognising competency. Industry is more inclined to support the recognition of competency process and candidates wishing to avail themselves of it.”

Candidates are the beneficiaries of this less onerous approach, says Spencer: “Most people develop skills through their working life which are not always formally recognised. The recognising competency approach facilitates candidates to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes as part of their everyday work through the observations and practical questions posed to them by a trained assessor.”

“The approach also enables the candidate to be formally recognised for what they already competently know and can do, and to qualify for a nationally accredited qualification of work out what additional requirements are needed to meet the requirements of a qualification.”

For both Bateman and Spencer, recognition of prior learning requires that the skilled and knowledgeable assessor be able to balance a rigorous process with the confidence to make informed judgements.

See www.reframingthefuture.net and contact andrea@batemangiles.com.au and Brian@intraining.org.au

Dr John Mitchell is a VET strategist and a consultant to Reframing the Future.
Contact johnm@jma.com.au
Campus Review article
by Dr John Mitchell on Andrea Bateman and Brian Spencer and the forums

Dr John Mitchell’s “Inside VET” column in Campus Review, 14 September 2006

Reframing recognition of prior learning

Reframing the Future is promoting improved approaches to recognition of prior learning that are fairer to the candidate and increase the use of recognition services.

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is one of the most popular topics in VET at the moment, for governments and practitioners alike, and new strategies are required to increase the usage of RPL from its current low levels.

In the current AQTF Standards for RTOs, RPL is defined as the “recognition of competencies currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. RPL assesses the individual's prior learning to determine the extent to which that individual is currently competent against the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification.”

To meet the need for new RPL strategies, Reframing the Future, the national staff development program for VET, recently conducted forums in five capital cities to encourage participants to engage with current research on skills recognition and assessment, to identify what ‘new practices’ mean or look like and to develop more confidence in applying professional judgment in recognition and assessment practice.

Enabling factors

One of the two keynote presenters at the five forums, Andrea Bateman from Bateman & Giles Pty Ltd, called her presentation “RPL: Yes, we are there!” Her point was that we do have the positive core of capabilities in VET people to deliver RPL effectively, “but that the statistical collection standards (AVETMISS) and an outmoded view of what is RPL may in fact be clouding our VET RPL landscape.”

“The line between ‘pure’ RPL and other forms of assessment, sometimes referred to as ‘fast track’ and ‘partial RPL’ are not clear, nor are they differentiated in the data collection,” says Bateman.

In the field, says Bateman, RPL is practised effectively by many VET practitioners, so our attention needs to shift to the factors which promote or enable an effective RPL process. Research she conducted with Bowman, Clayton and others summarised five enabling factors: effective promotion of RPL, improved processes for RPL, enhanced communication strategies, better support for applicants, and more support for assessors.

For instance, in providing better support for candidates, the candidates can be coached in how to move through the RPL process, mentors can be involved in the overall process and, if appropriate, specific support can be made available in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

Ultimately Bateman believes that the assessor’s skills are critical to the success of the RPL process. “Assessors involved in RPL need to be accepting of the concept of RPL, be highly skilled in their vocational field, have industry currency, be conversant with their Training Packages, be highly skilled assessors and assessment tool developers and have confidence in their judgments.”

Traditionally daunting

The other keynote speaker at the Reframing the Future forums was Brian Spencer from the Community and Health Industry Training Board in Victoria. Spencer says the traditional approach to RPL is flawed: “the process involves a time-consuming, retrospective, paper chase. The process is often regarded as too bureaucratic and too demeaning for experienced workers and they tend to avoid engaging in the traditional process.”

“Current processes are surrounded in cost and complexity. People who dare assert that they already have a certain competency by virtue of their life experience, previous work history, a transferable skill or informal learning are often faced with suspicion and daunting demands for documented proof. The current process typically starts with a paperchase: collect a portfolio that will demonstrate that you have that competence. This can be a daunting task to those of us who do not have filing cabinet minds and forget along life’s journey to collect and document every achievement and learning skill that we have acquired.”

“For many people, the request for recognition of current competency ends at this point. The task is not just too big, it is nebulous and protracted. How on earth do I find the proof I need? How do I know when I have collected enough?”

“Sir Humphrey Appleby from the ‘Yes Minister’ series, observed that if you wanted the minister not to do something, it was important to present the issue as complex, costly and controversial. If you wanted him to agree to a proposal, it was important to present it as simple, cheap and popular. This is exactly what we have allowed to happen with achievement of competency. Recognition is presented as complex, costly and controversial. Attending classes is presented as simple, cheap and popular.”

This positioning of recognition as complex is regrettable, says Spencer: “For an industry like mine that recruits mature-aged workers, for an industry that has an enormous backlog of skilled and able existing workers who have no formal certification for their skill base, this is a great tragedy.”

Improved model

In response to these shortfalls, over the last four years Spencer’s organisation has developed and implemented an approach to RPL that overcomes these off-putting aspects.

“The significant difference of the CS&H ITB recognising competency model is that it is aligned to an industry’s familiar practices for establishing validity and is grounded in adult learning theory. Our process aligns to the job interview process without comprising the validity of the assessment. It includes established ways of dealing with paper-based evidence and examples of work.”

“It is considerably less onerous than traditional approaches to recognising competency. Industry is more inclined to support the recognition of competency process and candidates wishing to avail themselves of it.”

Candidates are the beneficiaries of this less onerous approach, says Spencer: “Most people develop skills through their working life which are not always formally recognised. The recognising competency approach facilitates candidates to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, depth of skills, and attitudes as part of their everyday work through the observations and practical questions posed to them by a trained assessor.”

“The approach also enables the candidate to be formally recognised for what they already competently know and can do, and to qualify for a nationally accredited qualification of work out what additional requirements are needed to meet the requirements of a qualification.”

For both Bateman and Spencer, recognition of prior learning requires that the skilled and knowledgeable assessor be able to balance a rigorous process with the confidence to make informed judgements.

See www.reframingthefuture.net and contact andreab@batemangiles.com.au and Brian@intraining.org.au

Dr John Mitchell is a VET strategist and a consultant to Reframing the Future.
Contact johnm@jma.com.au
9 Insights and good practice from interviews with 21 RPL practitioners:
Dr John Mitchell, Suzy McKenna

Background to the interviews
This section showcases the insights and good practice of 21 VET practitioners who have had successful experiences with using RPL. As part of the appreciative inquiry methodology used for the RPL – Done Well Forums in August 2006, prior to the forums interviews were conducted with a sample of participants on their successes.

The selection of interviewees was conducted by co-facilitator Suzy McKenna, on the basis of the written expressions of interest from potential participants, and the interviews were conducted by forum co-facilitator Dr John Mitchell.

The interviewees were then re-interviewed in front of the participants at each forum, to enable the participants to hear these success stories.

Twenty one of these interviews are reproduced here to support the development of increased capability in RPL practice.

Links to appreciative inquiry
The appreciative inquiry methodology provided RPL – Done Well Forum participants a participative, collaborative and systematic method for discovering and building on the positive aspects of successful approaches to RPL that are used in VET.

Appreciative inquiry used within these forums focused participants on the positive aspects of what is happening now in an organisation or sector, and what can be achieved in the future. This positive focus was appropriate for these RPL forums, as the forums were targeted at existing and future good practice, not policies.

Questions
In the interviews, the following five questions were asked:
1. Valuing previous experience. In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
2. Memorable example. I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
3. Drivers. What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
4. Valuing your skills. What skills and attributes helped you with this positive experience?
5. Future opportunities. What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

Key findings
The interviews in this section provide evidence of the following:
• RPL is conducted successfully in a vast range of different fields within VET – from the traditional trade areas to business, hospitality and community services – and for student groups ranging from the mature aged to new entrants, in every state and territory of Australia.
• There is extensive existing expertise in the VET sector in providing RPL, but this expertise needs to extend from one-two leading proponents to whole teams of practitioners.
• The practice of RPL is assisted by the development of assessment tools and resources, flexible
9 Insights and good practice from interviews with 21 RPL practitioners:
Dr John Mitchell, Suzy McKenna

Background to the interviews
This section showcases the insights and good practice of 21 VET practitioners who have had successful experiences with using RPL. As part of the appreciative inquiry methodology used for the RPL – Done Well Forums in August 2006, prior to the forums interviews were conducted with a sample of participants on their successes.

The selection of interviewees was conducted by co-facilitator Suzy McKenna, on the basis of the written expressions of interest from potential participants, and the interviews were conducted by forum co-facilitator Dr John Mitchell.

The interviewees were then re-interviewed in front of the participants at each forum, to enable the participants to hear these success stories.

Twenty one of these interviews are reproduced here to support the development of increased capability in RPL practice.

Links to appreciative inquiry
The appreciative inquiry methodology provided RPL – Done Well Forum participants a participative, collaborative and systematic method for discovering and building on the positive aspects of successful approaches to RPL that are used in VET.

Appreciative inquiry used within these forums focused participants on the positive aspects of what is happening now in an organisation or sector, and what can be achieved in the future. This positive focus was appropriate for these RPL forums, as the forums were targeted at existing and future good practice, not policies.

Questions
In the interviews, the following five questions were asked:

1. Valuing previous experience. In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
2. Memorable example. I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
3. Drivers. What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
4. Valuing your skills. What skills and attributes helped you with this positive experience?
5. Future opportunities. What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

Key findings
The interviews in this section provide evidence of the following:

- RPL is conducted successfully in a vast range of different fields within VET – from the traditional trade areas to business, hospitality and community services – and for student groups ranging from the mature aged to new entrants, in every state and territory of Australia.
- There is extensive existing expertise in the VET sector in providing RPL, but this expertise needs to extend from one-two leading proponents to whole teams of practitioners.
- The practice of RPL is assisted by the development of assessment tools and resources, flexible
processes for handling each candidate such as the use of interviewing, and administrative procedures that streamline reporting.

- RPL is not easy: the VET practitioner needs a deep knowledge of the field involved and the Training Package, a clear understanding of the RPL candidate’s background and context, and an ability to make a professional judgment about a candidate’s capabilities.
- Looking ahead, there are vastly more opportunities for providing RPL than have been taken to date.

How to use this section

This section is designed to be used by a variety of individual and groups, in different settings, for a variety of purposes related to increasing capability in RPL in Australian VET.

As a professional development resource, the section is based on the simple belief that the sharing of success stories about RPL can have a profound impact on the confidence and practice of VET practitioners. Success breeds success.

Questions

This section could be read by an individual or groups seeking information on the following questions:

1. What previous experiences of fellow VET practitioners have assisted them in their practice of RPL?
2. What can we learn from the memorable experiences of these practitioners?
3. What factors led to these positive experiences?
4. What skills and attributes helped with these positive experiences?
5. What are some future opportunities for using RPL?

Readers can read section from start to finish; or could read about practitioners from their own state/territory or field; or about particular student or client groups.

Readers could look at just one set of answers: for example, all the answers in the interviews to question 3, ‘What factors led to these positive experiences?’

Professional conversation topics

Groups of practitioners could organise professional conversations around these interviews focusing on issues such as the following:

- Professional conversation No.1: What skills are needed to conduct RPL?
- Professional conversation No.2: What factors contribute to success in providing RPL?
- Professional conversation No.3: What skills and attributes do I already have for providing RPL?
- Professional conversation No.4: How else can we use RPL?

Professional conversation structure

- The professional conversations could be preceded by members of the group reading relevant sections of this section and preparing some discussion points in advance of the structured session.
- The facilitator could open the session by highlighting three ideas raised by the topic.
- The session could focus on each participant relating a personal experience or observation stimulated by one of the success stories in this section.
- The session might close with each participant being invited to share one thing they will do differently in future, in relation to RPL.

I. RPL FOR MATURE-AGED WORKERS

RPL for a mature aged chef: Barrie Cooke, Caloola Skills Training, Canberra ACT

Valuing previous experience

In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?

My main experience as an assessor has been when I was the Executive Director of Tourism Training ACT & Region (the tourism, hospitality and wine industries Training Advisory Board). We conducted trade recognition programs for commercial cooks, bakers and pastry cooks. My role was to interview, assess the worthiness of the candidate, provide advice on the recognition process, conduct the oral and theory tests, examine and check the evidence. The candidates were people with industry experience, and migrants seeking trade recognition. I determined whether the candidate was suitable to go before a panel of industry experts (mostly from TAFE teachers, and I sat on the panel).

Also as a trainer/assessor in hospitality I assessed the students throughout the course.

Memorable example

I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

A candidate working as the Chef in an Age Hostel had 40+ years experience cooking in Italy and various places in Australia. The Director of the Hostel said that it was important for the Chef to receive recognition as a competent Trade Chef. His English was broken but easily understood.

I interviewed the candidate with the Hostel Director and explained the process and the need to provide me with appropriate evidence to be considered and assessed. I provided him with the competencies and told him to undertake a self assessment against the competencies, gather the evidence against the competencies, and return to me for assessment.

The evidence provided included many references from Italy and various employers in Australia. I then arranged to visit him at work and observe him in the kitchen. I did this over two days. During this time he produced sample meals required for the range of the demonstration part of the assessment. Another Chef and I sampled the meals which ranged from Italian to Australian and Chinese dishes.

The candidate then sat for the theory test which he passed easily. The next phase was the interview with the panel of industry chefs, teacher/assessor chefs and me. They asked him various questions regarding cookery, butchery and food presentation. The questions came from German, French and Australian Chefs, all of whom were impressed with the candidate. In fact he received two offers of employment in top restaurants in Canberra from the panel.

The candidate thanked the panel and said that he was happy to continue cooking at the Age Hostel, and that all he had wanted was the recognition of his skills. I had been aware of this from the start of the process.
processes for handling each candidate such as the use of interviewing, and administrative procedures that streamline reporting.

- RPL is not easy: the VET practitioner needs a deep knowledge of the field involved and the Training Package, a clear understanding of the RPL candidate’s background and context, and an ability to make a professional judgment about a candidate’s capabilities.
- Looking ahead, there are vastly more opportunities for providing RPL than have been taken to date.

How to use this section

This section is designed to be used by a variety of individual and groups, in different settings, for a variety of purposes related to increasing capability in RPL in Australian VET.

As a professional development resource, the section is based on the simple belief that the sharing of success stories about RPL can have a profound impact on the confidence and practice of VET practitioners. Success breeds success.

Questions

This section could be read by an individual or groups seeking information on the following questions:

1. What previous experiences of fellow VET practitioners have assisted them in their practice of RPL?
2. What can we learn from the memorable experiences of these practitioners?
3. What previous experiences of fellow VET practitioners have assisted them in their practice of RPL?
4. What skills and attributes helped with these positive experiences?
5. What are some future opportunities for using RPL?

Readers could look at just one set of answers: for example, all the answers in the interviews to questions 3, ‘What factors led to these positive experiences?’

Questions

Readers can read section from start to finish; or could read about practitioners from their own state/ territory or field; or about particular student or client groups.

Readers could look at just one set of answers: for example, all the answers in the interviews to question 3, ‘What factors led to these positive experiences?’

Professional conversation topics

Groups of practitioners could organise professional conversations around these interviews focusing on issues such as the following:

- Professional conversation No.1: What skills are needed to conduct RPL?
- Professional conversation No.2: What factors contribute to success in providing RPL?
- Professional conversation No.3: What skills and attributes do I already have for providing RPL?
- Professional conversation No.4: How else can we use RPL?

I. RPL FOR MATURE-AGED WORKERS

RPL for a mature aged chef: Barrie Cooke, Caloola Skills Training, Canberra ACT

Valuing previous experience

In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?

My main experience as an assessor has been when I was the Executive Director of Tourism Training ACT & Region (the tourism, hospitality and wine industries Training Advisory Board). We conducted trade recognition programs for commercial cooks, bakers and pastry cooks. My role was to interview, assess the worthiness of the candidate, provide advice on the recognition process, conduct the oral and theory tests, examine and check the evidence. The candidates were people with industry experience, and migrants seeking trade recognition. I determined whether the candidate was suitable to go before a panel of industry experts (mostly from TAFE Teachers, and I sat on the panel).

Also as a trainer/assessor in hospitality I assessed the students throughout the course.

Memorable example

I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

A candidate working as the Chef in an Age Hostel had 40+ years experience cooking in Italy and various places in Australia. The Director of the Hostel said that it was important for the Chef to receive recognition as a competent Trade Chef. His English was broken but easily understood.

I interviewed the candidate with the Hostel Director and explained the process and the need to provide me with appropriate evidence to be considered and assessed. I provided him with the competencies and told him to undertake a self assessment against the competencies, gather the evidence against the competencies, and return to me for assessment.

The evidence provided included many references from Italy and various employers in Australia. I then arranged to visit him at work and observe him in the kitchen. I did this over two days. During this time he produced sample meals required for the range of the demonstration part of the assessment. Another Chef and I sampled the meals which ranged from Italian to Australian and Chinese dishes.

The candidate then sat for the theory test which he passed easily. The next phase was the interview with the panel of industry chefs, teacher/assessor chefs and me. They asked him various questions regarding cookery, butchery and food presentation. The questions came from German, French and Australian Chefs, all of whom were impressed with the candidate. In fact he received two offers of employment in top restaurants in Canberra from the panel.

The candidate thanked the panel and said that he was happy to continue cooking at the Age Hostel, and that all he had wanted was the recognition of his skills. I had been aware of this from the start of the process.
Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
After the initial interview of the candidate I knew that he would have the necessary competencies and wanted to help him to achieve his goal for recognition. The candidate’s sincerity, knowledge and demonstrated skills were parts of the process that I had not experienced before or since. To have assisted the candidate in the process was a great pleasure for me. He was even prepared to accept the fact that he may have been deemed not yet competent, but was determined to go through the recognition process no matter how long it took. The process was very satisfying for me.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes helped you with this positive experience?
My knowledge of the competencies in the Hospitality Training Package, as I was involved in the development. I am a qualified trainer/assessor and also possess the Statement of Attainment NQ11 Auditing Supplier Management (Auditor/Lead Auditor Training in Quality Management Systems from the Diploma of Quality Management).

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
As the RTO Manager I rarely deliver training except as a relief, therefore there is no need for me to assess. However, I am currently involved in the RPL of a candidate who is seeking a qualification through recognition.

My experience and knowledge of the RPL process, and involvement in the ACT Assessor Network assist me in providing professional development in RPL for my training staff, and trainers of associated organisations. We have two Memorandums of understanding with community organisations which requires their trainers to attend the PD sessions, and we also have another RTO participating. This keeps me on my toes to ensure that I keep myself up to date on processes.

RPL for mature aged women and community volunteers: Stephen Bolton, Agrifood Industry Skills Council, Canberra ACT

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
8 years experience in both public and private RTO’s. 5 years working for a not-for-profit RTO conducting skills assessments, low level training and employment programs (Level 1 & 2) for targeted equity groups. RPL programs for mature aged women and community volunteers in regional communities.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

After the initial interview of the candidate I knew that he would have the necessary competencies and wanted to help him to achieve his goal for recognition. The candidate’s sincerity, knowledge and demonstrated skills were parts of the process that I had not experienced before or since. To have assisted the candidate in the process was a great pleasure for me. He was even prepared to accept the fact that he may have been deemed not yet competent, but was determined to go through the recognition process no matter how long it took. The process was very satisfying for me.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

- Simple processes

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes helped you with this positive experience?
My knowledge of the competencies in the Hospitality Training Package, as I was involved in the development. I am a qualified trainer/assessor and also possess the Statement of Attainment NQ11 Auditing Supplier Management (Auditor/Lead Auditor Training in Quality Management Systems from the Diploma of Quality Management).

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
As the RTO Manager I rarely deliver training except as a relief, therefore there is no need for me to assess. However, I am currently involved in the RPL of a candidate who is seeking a qualification through recognition.

My experience and knowledge of the RPL process, and involvement in the ACT Assessor Network assist me in providing professional development in RPL for my training staff, and trainers of associated organisations. We have two Memorandums of understanding with community organisations which requires their trainers to attend the PD sessions, and we also have another RTO participating. This keeps me on my toes to ensure that I keep myself up to date on processes.

RPL for mature aged women and community volunteers: Stephen Bolton, Agrifood Industry Skills Council, Canberra ACT

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
8 years experience in both public and private RTO’s. 5 years working for a not-for-profit RTO conducting skills assessments, low level training and employment programs (Level 1 & 2) for targeted equity groups. RPL programs for mature aged women and community volunteers in regional communities.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

After the initial interview of the candidate I knew that he would have the necessary competencies and wanted to help him to achieve his goal for recognition. The candidate’s sincerity, knowledge and demonstrated skills were parts of the process that I had not experienced before or since. To have assisted the candidate in the process was a great pleasure for me. He was even prepared to accept the fact that he may have been deemed not yet competent, but was determined to go through the recognition process no matter how long it took. The process was very satisfying for me.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

- Simple processes
Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
After the initial interview of the candidate I knew that he would have the necessary competencies and wanted to help him to achieve his goal for recognition. The candidate’s sincerity, knowledge and demonstrated skills were parts of the process that I had not experienced before or since. To have assisted the candidate in the process was a great pleasure for me. He was even prepared to accept the fact that he may have been deemed not yet competent, but was determined to go through the recognition process no matter how long it took. The process was very satisfying for me.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes helped you with this positive experience?
My knowledge of the competencies in the Hospitality Training Package, as I was involved the development. I am a qualified trainer/assessor and also possess the Statement of Attainment NQ11 Auditing Supplier Management (Auditor/Lead Auditor Training in Quality Management Systems from the Diploma of Quality Management).

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
As the RTO Manager I rarely deliver training except as a relief, therefore there is no need for me to assess. However, I am currently involved in the RPL of a candidate who is seeking a qualification through recognition.

My experience and knowledge of the RPL process, and involvement in the ACT Assessor Network assist me in providing professional development in RPL for my training staff, and trainers of associated organisations. We have two Memorandums of understanding with community organisations which requires their trainers to attend the PD sessions, and we also have another RTO participating. This keeps me on my toes to ensure that I keep myself up to date on processes.

RPL for mature aged women and community volunteers: Stephen Bolton, Agrifood Industry Skills Council, Canberra ACT

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
8 years experience in both public and private RTO’s. 5 years working for a not-for-profit RTO conducting skills assessments, low level training and employment programs (PLT & 2) for targeted equity groups. RPL programs for mature aged women and community volunteers in regional communities.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I have worked with the staff in kitchens in nursing homes. They were people with thirty years experience but no qualifications; women in their late forties or fifties, who have children doing apprenticeships. They had no confidence and little faith in school. The RPL process was very enlightening for them and for me: it boosted their confidence that they have skills that are recognised nationally. These people now feel they can learn more things: this whole process can be the beginning of a process that involves success. They have learnt that learning is not just about doing exams: it can be about the individual’s growth. Some of these nursing home staff have gone on: one has now completed a full qualification; one has completed a university degree.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
Simple processes

Having an RTO that isn’t apprehensive about RPL
Knowledgeable training and assessment staff

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes helped you with this positive experience?
Knowing exactly what was required at every step of the process

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
With my current role in an ISC, the upskilling of existing workers to meet the needs of industries suffering skills shortages is a priority. Developing simple competency mapping and recognition processes will allow for the upskilling of a considerable number of workers and have a great effect on the production capacity of many enterprises.

RPL for mature aged workers in a nursing home: Jo Carling, Drysdale Institute, Hobart TAS

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
My background is in hotels and the hospitality industry. I was thrown in to looking after trainees in 1999, when Commonwealth incentives were announced for apprenticeships for existing workers. There was a huge envelope of people wanting recognition. It was a minefield because we didn’t have the resources to meet the demand for the recognition services: RTOs couldn’t keep up.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I have worked with the staff in kitchens in nursing homes. They were people with thirty years experience but no qualifications; women in their late forties or fifties, who have children doing apprenticeships. They had no confidence and little faith in school. The RPL process was very enlightening for them and for me: it boosted their confidence that they have skills that are recognised nationally. These people now feel they can learn more things: this whole process can be the beginning of a process that involves success. They have learnt that learning is not just about doing exams: it can be about the individual’s growth. Some of these nursing home staff have gone on: one has now completed a full qualification; one has completed a university degree.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
Mutual respect – we respect they are good at their job.
Not applying much pressure.
Showing huge interest in what they do: it is two-way learning.
Giving them credit for a portion of a qualification – they then feel they are half way there.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes helped you with this positive experience?
Being able to listen.
Not being the font of knowledge.
Having knowledge of the industry.
Keeping up to date with how things have changed.
Just being open to suggestions; wanting to learn, all the time.
Having good skills in the area, and broader than that area – so I know how things relate.

Having good judgment.

**Future opportunities**
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

RPL is becoming a much a trigger for how we do things in the future. It shows a maturing of the training system: we are not just teacher-focused, it is learner-focused as well.

There is a big market out there for RPL for mature aged workers. I don’t think RPL has been publicised as much as it could be. There is a huge group for recognition and we are just starting to value it.

RPL for a 66 year old instructor: Jenn Eaton, St John Ambulance, Melbourne VIC

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?

For the past five years I have been the chief assessor for St John Ambulance in Victoria.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

I had to assess a regional trainer who was sixty six years of age, who had been writing manuals for St John’s. He had incredible knowledge and had kept up to date, but had nothing to show for it. The RPL process took 5-6 months but it helped him to articulate his knowledge. He achieved a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

I knew he had the skills and knowledge, but he didn’t have the piece of paper. St John needed him to have the qualification.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes helped you with this positive experience?

Most important are interviewing skills, listening.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

I hope to do more of the same. Working in First Aid, we want to get past the point where people have to sit through an entire course every three years. Some people have been doing it for thirty years. RPL is now possible for First Aid.

2. **RPL FOR YOUTHS**

RPL for youth leaders: Janelle Hollis, Eastlake Skills Centre, Newcastle NSW

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?

Back in 1995 I undertook the Category 2 Workplace Assessor and have used it in my employment services work thereafter. In 2002 I moved into VET and began assessing in the business services and IT fields, using task analysis to develop assessment tools. In 2005 I formed an external validation group within our Hunter Network.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

It was in relation to a GreenCorp Team Leader program for Greening Australia & Job Futures: GreenCorp is a youth program for 17-20 year olds. The Team Leaders were offered the opportunity to undertake a front line management (FLM) qualification. I offered one of the Team Leaders, Anna, the RPL pathway. As a Uni graduate and also a ‘greeny’ she was confused with the terminology - she didn’t know what ‘FLM’ was. As the assessor I explained FLM to her and interpreted the qualification in relation to her current job. I used video to capture her reflection on the RPL process, this also provided further evidence of her depth of knowledge and her understanding of the competencies in relation to her own job and skills.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

• The rapport needed to negate the negatives.
• Trust.
• Plain speaking. Talk the JOB not VET.
• Consistent contact.
• Focus on the big picture: what’s in it for the candidate.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes helped you with this positive experience?

My previous job roles in employment services and industrial relations have given me a broad knowledge of different industries and occupations. My knowledge is fluid: I can draw on a depth of knowledge of different occupations and the skills needed.

I am good at using prompting questions to get more information. I am able to interpret the whole picture for the candidate. NOT using the language of VET: and I am able to promote the benefits -‘what is in it for them’.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

Before I did the above RPL I put myself through an RPL for the Diploma in FLM. I would like to see more assessors do that, walk the walk.

There are many opportunities to provide RPL for disadvantaged / disengaged people. I see it as a motivational tool to encourage people to continue their skill development and to achieve their potential aided by recognition of their life skills and informal learning.

RPL in agriculture for a youth: Judy Gronold, Product Services, Queensland (RPL conducted when Judy was working for a community based RTO in Western QLD)

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?

I have done RPL across a reasonable number of areas, from training and development to business and rural studies, plus I have been called in when there was an appeal against an RPL result. I have delivered training and assessment from pre-vocational to diploma levels.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

A woman from far-western Queensland rang me about her son who wanted to do a traineeship. Her son had never done well at school and was quite happy to leave without a Senior Certificate. However his mother learnt that if he was able to complete a Certificate 11 in Agriculture (Beef Production) he would be able to complete the requirements for a Senior Certificate and she was
Having good skills in the area, and broader than that area – so I know how things relate. Having good judgment.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
RPL is becoming very much a trigger for how we do things in the future. It shows a maturing of the training system: we are not just teacher-focused, it is learner focused as well.
There is a big market out there for RPL for mature aged workers. I don’t think RPL has been publicised as much as it could be. There is a huge group for recognition and we are just starting to value it.

RPL for a 66 year old instructor: Jenn Eaton, St John Ambulance, Melbourne VIC

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
For the past five years I have been the chief assessor for St John Ambulance in Victoria.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I had to assess a regional trainer who was sixty six years of age, who had been writing manuals for St John’s. He had incredible knowledge and had kept up to date, but had nothing to show for it. The RPL process took 5-6 months but it helped him to articulate his knowledge. He achieved a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
I knew he had the skills and knowledge, but he didn’t have the piece of paper. St John needed him.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes helped you with this positive experience?
Most important are interviewing skills, listening.
Helping people to articulate their own skill set: my ability to rephrase what they said.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I hope to do more of the same. Working in First Aid, we want to get past the point where people have to sit through an entire course every three years. Some people have been doing it for thirty years. RPL is now possible for First Aid.

2. RPL FOR YOUTHS
RPL for youth leaders: Janelle Hollis, Eastlake Skills Centre, Newcastle NSW

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
Back in 1995 I undertook the Category 2 Workplace Assessor and have used it in my employment services work thereafter. In 2002 I moved into VET and began assessing in the business services and IT fields, using task analysis to develop assessment tools. In 2005 I formed an external validation group within our Hunter Network.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
It was in relation to a GreenCorp Team Leader program for Greening Australia & Job Futures: GreenCorp is a youth program for 17-20 year olds. The Team Leaders were offered the opportunity to undertake a front line management (FLM) qualification. I offered one of the Team Leaders, Anna, the RPL pathway. As a Uni graduate and also a ‘greeny’ she was confused with the terminology - she didn’t know what “FLM” was. As the assessor I explained FLM to her and interpreted the qualification in relation to her current job. I used video to capture her reflection on the RPL process, this also provided further evidence of her depth of knowledge and her understanding of the competencies in relation to her own job and skills.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
• The rapport needed to negate the negatives.
• Trust.
• Plain speaking. Talk the JOB not VET.
• Consistent contact.
• Focus on the big picture: what’s in it for the candidate.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes helped you with this positive experience?
My previous job roles in employment services and industrial relations have given me a broad knowledge of different industries and occupations. My knowledge is fluid: I can draw on a depth of knowledge of different occupations and the skills needed.

What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
I am good at using prompting questions to get more information. I am able to interpret the whole picture for the candidate. NOT using the language of VET and I am able to promote the benefits -’what is it in it for them’.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
Before I did the above RPL I put myself through an RPL for the Diploma in FLM. I would like to see more assessors do that, walk the walk.
There are many opportunities to provide RPL for disadvantaged / disengaged people. I see it as a motivational tool to encourage people to continue their skill development and to achieve their potential aided by recognition of their life skills and informal learning.

RPL in agriculture for a youth: Judy Gronold, Product Services, Queensland (RPL conducted when Judy was working for a community based RTO in Western QLD)

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I have done RPL across a reasonable number of areas, from training and development to business and rural studies, plus I have been called in when there was an appeal against an RPL result. I have delivered training and assessment from pre-vocational to diploma levels.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
A woman from far-western Queensland rang me about her son who wanted to do a traineeship. Her son had never done well at school and was quite happy to leave without a Senior Certificate. However his mother learnt that if he was able to complete a Certificate 11 in Agriculture (Beef Production) he would be able to complete the requirements for a Senior Certificate and she was...
keen for him to have that opportunity. A traineeship would allow him to work, study and complete his Senior in one package. The young person was employed on a cattle property. I took my husband, a grazier, with me and we drove to the property.

**Drivers**

**What were the factors that led to this positive experience?**

I took an holistic approach: there was no need to go from individual units of competency or to formally address the dimensions of competency since the conversations covered all these. I let the young person lead the process. We spent a day on the property. My husband and the young person spoke the same language, they were able to discuss his job and tasks he had completed. My husband covered the content and I recorded key outcomes. Up to then, the training experienced by the young person was a school based one, and for him had been based on a deficit model. He did not feel he had any valuable experience because it didn’t fit the school framework. For this RPL, the young person drove the process and it started with recognising what he had (rather than what he hadn’t).

**Valuing your skills**

**What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?**

- The flexibility was crucial.
- Confidence in myself to allow it to happen and not control it.
- If I had been less confident it would not have worked: I let the conversation happen.
- I had a commitment to the experience.
- It helped having my husband there, an expert from that industry.
- It helped to have a sense of humour.

**Future opportunities**

**What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?**

The Queensland Skills Plan reinforces that anyone who has some industry experience (not at the base entry level) must participate in a process for skills recognition prior to training. In practice it will need well thought out systems and student support but the philosophy is really exciting.

### 3. RPL FOR EXPERIENCED STAFF AND MANAGERS

**RPL for a truckie supervisor: Kit McMahon, Service Skills Australia, Sydney NSW**

**Valuing previous experience**

**In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?**

I worked for about seven years for an RTO, before joining Service Skills Australia. Using checklists, I assessed demonstrations of skills in role plays and challenge tests and, as I became more used to assessing, I observed the candidate on the job. I ended up doing a lot of RPL in my final two years for the RTO.

**Memorable example**

**I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?**

I had to assess for the Certificate III in Transport and Distribution a truckie supervisor at Waega Wagga. He had had an accident and was earning less as a supervisor than as a driver. His literacy levels were low and he was not academic. In conducting the RPL, I had to re-interpret the competencies and training package requirements for that person, all the time. I believe that RPL is about learning about the whole person. I didn’t assess him on his literacy standards only: I looked at the whole person and the complex job he was performing.

I believe that RPL is a high level, high order activity for an assessor. When I conduct an RPL, I operate at two levels at the same time: first I look for possibly significant and big picture aspects of the person’s life skills through the stories which I encourage people to tell me; secondly I am also making a series of decisions of skills at a micro level. I do a heap of rapport building with the person based on my background in the services industry to encourage them to tell me their stories and open up so that I can witness more of their skills and knowledge.

**Drivers**

**What were the factors that led to this positive experience?**

I was open to the person’s stories. I didn’t make decisions before I got there, so I did not have a disconnect between what I thought it could be and what it turned out to be. His personality. His pride. He was engrossed with his stories. He was also very helpful and told me very clearly when I wasn’t making sense – for instance when I spoke VET jibberish to him! He was also very patient with me as I learnt about RPL and the process and the way that competency needs to be interpreted within the context of the workplace and the business outcomes.

**Valuing your skills**

**What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?**

I am comfortable with RPL and I think that also means that I am confident with large amounts of data. I am happy to let the data float without conclusion before I make a decision. I am a reflector and I think the process of reflection throughout the process not just at the end (on your own agency in the process as well) is crucial. I like people, which I think you need to when doing RPL, because it is – at the end of the day – it is such a people process. I am also drawn to people who work in industry and the ”business of industry” – there are so many genuine and helpful people out there.

**Future opportunities**

**What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?**

There are complaints that RPL is too complex which I understand. My other concern is that RPL process in RTOs is being driven by compliance requirements and not recognised for the complex people based process that it is. I think the policy thinking around it needs to be based more in the educational framework – which to my reading it doesn’t appear to be at the moment.

My hope is that RPL will be interpreted for the high level skill it is: it is not a tick and flick exercise and when it is done well I don’t think it is a paper based exercise. At its essence RPL is about listening to people and their stories. It is about asking people to open up. RPL has to be done by experienced assessors, as you are assessing someone’s capabilities in what is essentially a complex process that may in fact be at one level quite intuitive. I think RPL assessors need to be recognised for the high skill AND experience that they bring to the RPL judgment moment.

**RPL for retail managers: Gwen Moroney, First Impressions Resources, Brisbane QLD**

**Valuing previous experience**

**In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?**

First Impressions Resources is in the Brisbane CBD and offers qualifications from the Retail Training Package, Business Services Training Package (FLM), and selected units from the Training and Assessment Training Package (TAA).

I have been involved in retail training for the last eighteen years. RPL did not exist when I started vocational training. Training delivery and subsequent assessment was focused on attendance for a set number of days per year regardless of current competency. Things have changed significantly as the vocational education system has matured. Currently I am the assessment coordinator for First Impressions and I conduct internal moderation and develop the assessment tools and resources as part of my role.

I have completed RPL assessments with many candidates from a number of different retail companies.
keen for him to have that opportunity. A traineeship would allow him to work, study and complete his Senior in one package. The young person was employed on a cattle property. I took my husband, a grazier, with me and we drove to the property.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
I took an holistic approach: there was no need to go from individual units of competency or to formally address the dimensions of competency since the conversations covered all these. I let the young person lead the process. We spent a day on the property. My husband and the young person spoke the same language, they were able to discuss his job and tasks he had completed. My husband covered the content and I recorded key outcomes. Up to then, the training experienced by the young person was a school based one, and for him had been based on a deficit model. He did not feel he had any valuable experience because it didn’t fit the school framework. For this RPL, the young person drove the process and it started with recognising what he had (rather than what he hadn’t).

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
• The flexibility was crucial.
• Confidence in myself to allow it to happen and not control it.
• If I had been less confident it would not have worked: I let the conversation happen.
• I had a commitment to the experience.
• It helped having my husband there, an expert from that industry.
• It helped to have a sense of humour.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
The Queensland Skills Plan reinforces that anyone who has some industry experience (not at the base entry level) must participate in a process for skills recognition prior to training. In practice it will need well thought out systems and student support but the philosophy is really exciting.

3. RPL FOR EXPERIENCED STAFF AND MANAGERS

RPL for a truckie supervisor: Kit McMahon, Service Skills Australia, Sydney NSW

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I worked for about seven years for an RTO, before joining Service Skills Australia. Using checklists, I assessed demonstrations of skills in role plays and challenge tests and, as I became more used to assessing, I observed the candidate on the job. I ended up doing a lot of RPL in my final two years for the RTO.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I had to assess for the Certificate III in Transport and Distribution a truckie supervisor at Wagga Wagga. He had had an accident and was earning less as a supervisor than as a driver. His literacy levels were low and he was not academic. In conducting the RPL, I had to re-interpret the competencies and training package requirements for that person, all the time. I believe that RPL is about learning about the whole person. I didn’t assess him on his literacy standards only: I looked at the whole person and the complex job he was performing.

I believe that RPL is a high level, high order activity for an assessor. When I conduct an RPL, I operate at two levels at the same time: first I look for possibly significant and big picture aspects of the person’s life skills through the stories which I encourage people to tell me; secondly I am also making a series of decisions of skills at a micro level. I do a heap of rapport building with the person based on my background in the services industry to encourage them to tell me their stories and open up so that I can witness more of their skills and knowledge.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
I was open to the person’s stories. I didn’t make decisions before I got there, so I didn’t have a disconnect between what I thought it would be and what it turned out to be.

His personality. His pride. I was engrossed with his stories. He was also very helpful and told me very clearly when I wasn’t making sense – for instance when I spoke VET jargon to him! He was also very patient with me as I learnt about RPL and the process and the way that competency needs to be interpreted within the context of the workplace and the business outcomes.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I am comfortable with RPL and I think that also means that I am confident with large amounts of data. I am happy to let the data float without conclusion before I make a decision. I am a reflector and I think the process of reflection throughout the process not just at the end (on your own agency in the process as well) is crucial. I like people, which I think you need to when doing RPL, because it is – at the end of the day – it is such a people process. I am also drawn to people who work in industry and the “business of industry” – there are so many genuine and helpful people out there.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I think the policy thinking around it needs to be based more in the educational framework – which to my reading it doesn’t appear to be at the moment.

My hope is that RPL will be interpreted for the high level skill it is: it is not a tick and flick exercise and when it is done well I don’t think it is a paper based exercise. At its essence RPL is about listening to people and their stories. It is about asking people to open up. RPL has to be done by experienced assessors, as you are assessing someone’s capabilities in what is essentially a complex process that may in fact be at one level quite intuitive. I think RPL assessors need to be recognised for the high skill AND experience that they bring to the RPL judgment moment.

RPL for retail managers: Gwen Moroney, First Impressions Resources, Brisbane QLD

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I have completed RPL assessments with many candidates from a number of different retail companies. I conduct internal moderation and develop the assessment tools and resources as part of my role.

Assessment Training Package (TAA).

There are complaints that RPL is too complex which I understand. My other concern is that RPL process in RTOs is being driven by compliance requirements and not recognised for the complex people based process that it is. I think the policy thinking around it needs to be based more in the educational framework – which to my reading it doesn’t appear to be at the moment.

My hope is that RPL will be interpreted for the high level skill it is: it is not a tick and flick exercise and when it is done well I don’t think it is a paper based exercise. At its essence RPL is about listening to people and their stories. It is about asking people to open up. RPL has to be done by experienced assessors, as you are assessing someone’s capabilities in what is essentially a complex process that may in fact be at one level quite intuitive. I think RPL assessors need to be recognised for the high skill AND experience that they bring to the RPL judgment moment.
Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

One RPL success was with an area manager from a large retail chain of stores. He was frightened and felt personally pressured to be successful as he had many staff members who had successfully completed qualifications. It is a fulfilling experience when the assessment tools and processes allow recognition to very experienced people who have not previously had the opportunity to receive a national qualification for their current level of expertise.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

Having a good prior relationship with the business allows the RPL process to start from a position of trust. In this case, the area manager has been involved with First Impressions as he had been the mentor of many trainees who had completed retail certificates. First Impressions is very proactive in offering and supporting the RPL process.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?

I have a degree in adult teaching which has been a very useful base from which to develop within the vocational education system. I am comfortable educationally with RPL.

Personal attribute: Empathy. I have never forgotten what it is like to be a frightened student so I try to be very supportive during the RPL process. The more senior candidates are within their organisations, the more they seem to fear failure.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

There is a wealth of experienced people in industry who have not had the chance to have their knowledge and skills recognised. However they do not want to have to undertake unnecessary training. We need to be proactive in identifying and recognising candidates’ existing knowledge and skill levels so they are not channeled into an inappropriate training and assessment pathway, when assessment-only is clearly the more appropriate option.

RPL for experienced adults: Jennifer Bailey, Gold Coast Institute of TAFE

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?

I was a faculty coordinator for RPL for ten years and the Institute’s RPL chair during that time for 3–4 years. In 2002 I did research for a report on whether to establish an RPL shop front. We didn’t go to the shop front model because of the cost of rental property. So we started a virtual shop.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

Some years ago classes were quite different. In the night time classes the prior experiences of some adults were sometimes quite gobsmacking: it was a catalyst for saying why not offer RPL. I was lucky as I was the RPL coordinator, and saw RPL as a way of valuing what these adults already knew. Other staff were not so sure – they lacked confidence and knowledge – and they’d say to the students “just do the course”.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

I knew what I was doing. Knowledge is power. I knew what I was doing was right.

I never had an RPL proposal rejected.

The RPL experience was always positive for them and me: it was a win-win.

Valuing skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?

My communication skills. I was coordinator of the communication program.

I set time aside. Appointments were made. It was structured. This was in contrast to the teacher in the classroom who has no time scheduled for RPL. I had the time and the expertise.

I was well known and people were referred to me.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

I am currently going through the Training and Assessment Training Package as a student, seeking RPL. It is taking five hours for an upgrade of a fifteen hour component from the previous certificate. I am appalled: it is not meant to be this hard. RPL can be a holistic in its approach. It shouldn’t be boring and repetitive.

RPL in horticulture: Laurie Miller, TAFE Tasmania

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?

I started in 1998 as an assessor developing assessment tools for the Amenity Horticulture Training Package. I then worked with an assessor network at Drysdale Institute as manager for an assessment reference group in Tasmania. I also undertook RPL myself, for the Training and Assessment Training Package (TAA) Certificate IV.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

I managed the RPL process for a group of orchard managers in the stone fruit industry. I helped them to unpack the Training Package and the wealth of evidence they had in their own workplaces.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

• The willingness of participants to participate in this RPL process.
• The flexibility of both parties.
• My having a good understanding of their job roles and the Training Package.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?

• Flexibility.
• My confidence in using the Training Package and my understanding of it.
• Persistence.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

• Building the capability of our own TAFE staff.
• Dispelling the myth that it takes too long and is not valid.
• Using RPL in skill shortage areas.
Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

One RPL success was with an area manager from a large retail chain of stores. He was frightened and felt personally pressured to be successful as he had many staff members who had successfully completed qualifications. It is a fulfilling experience when the assessment tools and processes allow recognition to very experienced people who have not previously had the opportunity to receive a national qualification for their current level of expertise.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
Having a good prior relationship with the business allows the RPL process to start from a position of trust. In this case, the area manager has been involved with First Impressions as he had been the mentor of many trainees who had completed retail certificates. First Impressions is very proactive in offering and supporting the RPL process.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I have a degree in adult teaching which has been a very useful base from which to develop within the vocational education system. I am comfortable educationally with RPL.

Personal attribute: Empathy. I have never forgotten what it is like to be a frightened student so I try to be very supportive during the RPL process. The more senior candidates are within their organisations, the more they seem to fear failure.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
There is a wealth of experienced people in industry who have not had the chance to have their knowledge and skills recognised. However they do not want to have to undertake unnecessary training. We need to be proactive in identifying and recognising candidates’ existing knowledge and skill levels so they are not channeled into an inappropriate training and assessment pathway, when assessment-only is clearly the more appropriate option.

RPL for experienced adults: Jennifer Bailey, Gold Coast Institute of TAFE

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I was a faculty coordinator for RPL for ten years and the Institute’s RPL chair during that time for 3-4 years. In 2002 I did research for a report on whether to establish an RPL shop front. We didn’t go to the shop front model because of the cost of rental property. So we started a virtual shop.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
Some years ago classes were quite different. In the night time classes the prior experiences of some adults were sometimes quite gobsmacking: it was a catalyst for saying why not offer RPL. I was lucky as I was the RPL coordinator, and saw RPL as a way of valuing what these adults already knew. Other staff were not so sure – they lacked confidence and knowledge – and they’d say to the students “just do the course”.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
I knew what I was doing.
Knowledge is power. I knew what I was doing was right.

I never had an RPL proposal rejected.
The RPL experience was always positive for them and me: it was a win-win.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
My communication skills. I was coordinator of the communication program.

I set time aside. Appointments were made. It was structured. This was in contrast to the teacher in the classroom who has no time scheduled for RPL. I had the time and the expertise.

I was well known and people were referred to me.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I am currently going through the Training and Assessment Training Package as a student, seeking RPL. It is taking five hours for an upgrade of a fifteen hour component from the previous certificate. I am appalled: it is not meant to be this hard. RPL can be a holistic in its approach. It shouldn’t be boring and repetitive.

RPL in horticulture: Laurie Miller, TAFE Tasmania

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I started in 1998 as an assessor developing assessment tools for the Amenity Horticulture Training Package. I then worked with an assessor network at Drysdale Institute as manager for an assessment reference group in Tasmania. I also undertook RPL myself, for the Training and Assessment (TAA) Certificate IV.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I managed the RPL process for a group of orchard managers in the stone fruit industry. I helped them to unpack the Training Package and the wealth of evidence they had in their own workplaces.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
• The willingness of participants to participate in this RPL process.
• The flexibility of both parties.
• My having a good understanding of their job roles and the Training Package.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
• My having a good understanding of their job roles and the Training Package.
• The flexibility of both parties.
• My communication skills. I was coordinator of the communication program.

I set time aside. Appointments were made. It was structured. This was in contrast to the teacher in the classroom who has no time scheduled for RPL. I had the time and the expertise.

I was well known and people were referred to me.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
• Building the capability of our own TAFE staff.
• Dispelling the myth that it takes too long and is not valid.
• Using RPL in skill shortage areas.

RPL in horticulture: Laurie Miller, TAFE Tasmania

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I started in 1998 as an assessor developing assessment tools for the Amenity Horticulture Training Package. I then worked with an assessor network at Drysdale Institute as manager for an assessment reference group in Tasmania. I also undertook RPL myself, for the Training and Assessment (TAA) Certificate IV.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I managed the RPL process for a group of orchard managers in the stone fruit industry. I helped them to unpack the Training Package and the wealth of evidence they had in their own workplaces.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
• The willingness of participants to participate in this RPL process.
• The flexibility of both parties.
• My having a good understanding of their job roles and the Training Package.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
• My having a good understanding of their job roles and the Training Package.
• The flexibility of both parties.
• My communication skills. I was coordinator of the communication program.

I set time aside. Appointments were made. It was structured. This was in contrast to the teacher in the classroom who has no time scheduled for RPL. I had the time and the expertise.

I was well known and people were referred to me.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
• Building the capability of our own TAFE staff.
• Dispelling the myth that it takes too long and is not valid.
• Using RPL in skill shortage areas.

RPL in horticulture: Laurie Miller, TAFE Tasmania

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I started in 1998 as an assessor developing assessment tools for the Amenity Horticulture Training Package. I then worked with an assessor network at Drysdale Institute as manager for an assessment reference group in Tasmania. I also undertook RPL myself, for the Training and Assessment (TAA) Certificate IV.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I managed the RPL process for a group of orchard managers in the stone fruit industry. I helped them to unpack the Training Package and the wealth of evidence they had in their own workplaces.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
• The willingness of participants to participate in this RPL process.
• The flexibility of both parties.
• My having a good understanding of their job roles and the Training Package.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
• My having a good understanding of their job roles and the Training Package.
• The flexibility of both parties.
• My communication skills. I was coordinator of the communication program.

I set time aside. Appointments were made. It was structured. This was in contrast to the teacher in the classroom who has no time scheduled for RPL. I had the time and the expertise.

I was well known and people were referred to me.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
• Building the capability of our own TAFE staff.
• Dispelling the myth that it takes too long and is not valid.
• Using RPL in skill shortage areas.

RPL in horticulture: Laurie Miller, TAFE Tasmania

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I started in 1998 as an assessor developing assessment tools for the Amenity Horticulture Training Package. I then worked with an assessor network at Drysdale Institute as manager for an assessment reference group in Tasmania. I also undertook RPL myself, for the Training and Assessment (TAA) Certificate IV.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I managed the RPL process for a group of orchard managers in the stone fruit industry. I helped them to unpack the Training Package and the wealth of evidence they had in their own workplaces.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
• The willingness of participants to participate in this RPL process.
• The flexibility of both parties.
• My having a good understanding of their job roles and the Training Package.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
• My having a good understanding of their job roles and the Training Package.
• The flexibility of both parties.
• My communication skills. I was coordinator of the communication program.

I set time aside. Appointments were made. It was structured. This was in contrast to the teacher in the classroom who has no time scheduled for RPL. I had the time and the expertise.

I was well known and people were referred to me.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
• Building the capability of our own TAFE staff.
• Dispelling the myth that it takes too long and is not valid.
• Using RPL in skill shortage areas.

RPL in horticulture: Laurie Miller, TAFE Tasmania

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I started in 1998 as an assessor developing assessment tools for the Amenity Horticulture Training Package. I then worked with an assessor network at Drysdale Institute as manager for an assessment reference group in Tasmania. I also undertook RPL myself, for the Training and Assessment (TAA) Certificate IV.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I managed the RPL process for a group of orchard managers in the stone fruit industry. I helped them to unpack the Training Package and the wealth of evidence they had in their own workplaces.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
• The willingness of participants to participate in this RPL process.
• The flexibility of both parties.
• My having a good understanding of their job roles and the Training Package.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
• My having a good understanding of their job roles and the Training Package.
• The flexibility of both parties.
• My communication skills. I was coordinator of the communication program.

I set time aside. Appointments were made. It was structured. This was in contrast to the teacher in the classroom who has no time scheduled for RPL. I had the time and the expertise.

I was well known and people were referred to me.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
• Building the capability of our own TAFE staff.
• Dispelling the myth that it takes too long and is not valid.
• Using RPL in skill shortage areas.
4. RPL IN THE TRADES AREAS

RPL for instrumentation: Pat Tierney, Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) Training, Perth WA

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I am the principal instrumentation trainer in CCI and have previous experience in providing RPL.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I provide employment based RPL by going out to companies. I tell them what we will assess them against and ask them to prepare documentation such as testimonials. I assess them on the pressure transmitter and flow transmitter. I ask them to show me the transmitter and then I start questioning them.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
They knew in advance what I would assess them against.
They prepared examples of how they use the transmitter.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I was able to use probing questions because I knew how to use the technology.
Because I have worked in the same environment I know how to speak to them: for example, from a trade point of view, not an engineering point of view.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I want to cross-train. They already have some experience.

RPL for frontline management in transport industry: Wendy Cato, Cato HR, Adelaide SA

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I have been an assessor since the competency based training system started and have been involved in traineeships and have supervised assessors and other staff.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I always believed that RPL should be the first thing that people do. I did it myself for the front line management (FLM) diploma: I achieved the whole diploma by RPL.
To help people obtain the FLM qualification by RPL I have developed matrices, which I have found help both the applicant and the assessor. They find it a really easy process to follow.
I am currently working in the transport field and previously was in the disability field. I am looking to sell more the concept of RPL for FLM to the transport and distribution industry.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
Once I worked out a process for RPL, the ease with which both applicant and assessor can use the process is good.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I believe that RPL should be an easy process and not thrown away by the assessors as too hard. Some assessors say ‘just do the workbooks, it’s easier.’ They say this because they haven’t simplified RPL for the user.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I’d like to see people do RPL before they do anything else, rather than do the course. Where I am working presently we have forty people going through the Certificate IV in FLM. We now specialise in RPL for FLM.

RPL for experienced builders: Robert Coates, Swan TAFE, Perth WA

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I have been in TAFE for 22 years, starting in carpentry and joinery and now in building studies. As acting principal lecturer I am heavily involved in RPL.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I am involved in offering the builders registration course for mature aged people: a course with 27 units. Many people in this course have vast experience and their call for RPL is very high. RPL is offered for areas such as supervision and drafting but not for the legal side or quantities and estimating. We encourage them to undertake RPL and the handbook has a page on it. We use content experts to do the RPL, wherever we can. Most candidates succeed with RPL.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
The units in the course cover a diverse range of subject areas. Many students have expertise in one or two of these areas but not all of them. RPL allows them to have their skills and knowledge recognised without having to sit through classes and be taught things they already know.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?

I am a joiner by trade and had 10-12 years as a foreman in the building industry before starting in TAFE. So I have a fair knowledge of industry; I know whether someone is likely to succeed.
I have access to content experts.
This college has a good grasp of RPL procedures.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
With the reduction in the length of an apprenticeship in WA in areas such as Bricklaying (Housing) an influx of mature aged apprentices is expected. We foresee an increased demand for RPL from this group.
4. RPL IN THE TRADES AREAS

RPL for instrumentation: Pat Tierney, Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI)
Training, Perth WA

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I have been an assessor since the competency based training system started and have been involved in traineeships and have supervised assessors and other staff.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I have always believed that RPL should be the first thing that people do. I did it myself for the front line management (FLM) diploma: I achieved the whole diploma by RPL.

To help people obtain the FLM qualification by RPL I have developed matrices, which I have found help both the applicant and the assessor. They find it a really easy process to follow.

I am currently working in the transport field and previously was in the disability field. I am looking to sell more the concept of RPL for FLM to the transport and distribution industry.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
Once I worked out a process for RPL, the ease with which both applicant and assessor can use the process is good.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I believe that RPL should be an easy process and not thrown away by the assessors as too hard. Some assessors say “just do the workbooks, it’s easier.” They say this because they haven’t simplified RPL for the user.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I’d like to see people do RPL before they do anything else, rather than do the course. Where I am working presently we have forty people going through the Certificate IV in FLM. We now specialise in RPL for FLM.

RPL for frontline management in transport industry: Wendy Cato, Cato HR,
Adelaide SA

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I have been an assessor since the competency based training system started and have been involved in traineeships and have supervised assessors and other staff.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I have always believed that RPL should be the first thing that people do. I did it myself for the front line management (FLM) diploma: I achieved the whole diploma by RPL.

To help people obtain the FLM qualification by RPL I have developed matrices, which I have found help both the applicant and the assessor. They find it a really easy process to follow.

I am currently working in the transport field and previously was in the disability field. I am looking to sell more the concept of RPL for FLM to the transport and distribution industry.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
Once I worked out a process for RPL, the ease with which both applicant and assessor can use the process is good.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I believe that RPL should be an easy process and not thrown away by the assessors as too hard. Some assessors say “just do the workbooks, it’s easier.” They say this because they haven’t simplified RPL for the user.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I’d like to see people do RPL before they do anything else, rather than do the course. Where I am working presently we have forty people going through the Certificate IV in FLM. We now specialise in RPL for FLM.

RPL for experienced builders: Robert Coates, Swan TAFE, Perth WA

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I have been in TAFE for 22 years, starting in carpentry and joinery and now in building studies. As acting principal lecturer I am heavily involved in RPL.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
I am involved in offering the builders registration course for mature aged people: a course with 27 units. Many people in this course have vast experience and their call for RPL is very high. RPL is offered for areas such as supervision and drafting but not for the legal side or quantities and estimating. We encourage them to undertake RPL and the handbook has a page on it. We use content experts to do the RPL, wherever we can. Most candidates succeed with RPL.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
The units in the course cover a diverse range of subject areas. Many students have expertise in one or two of these areas but not all of them. RPL allows them to have their skills and knowledge recognised without having to sit through classes and be taught things they already know.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I am a joiner by trade and had 10-12 years as a foreman in the building industry before starting in TAFE. So I have a fair knowledge of industry: I know whether someone is likely to succeed.

I have access to content experts. This college has a good grasp of RPL procedures.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
With the reduction in the length of an apprenticeship in WA in areas such as Bricklaying (Housing) an influx of mature aged apprentices is expected. We foresee an increased demand for RPL from this group.
5 RPL FOR EQUITY GROUPS

RPL for a Sudanese migrant: Terri Quinn, Axial Training, Brisbane Queensland

Valuing previous experience

In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?

I am involved on both sides, as a student and teacher. I undertook partial RPL as a student, for the Certificate IV in workplace training and assessment. I have also developed written assessment tools in RPL for other organisations.

Memorable example

I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

One that stands out is a gentleman from Africa, from the Sudan region. He had done a fair bit of training but arrived in Australia with no records. He was quite forthcoming in the RPL process when I put to him a range of challenge tests. I didn’t just seek documentation.

He was ecstatic with the result. He picked up a training job with a Sudanese company that delivers training.

Drivers

What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

The way he was open and positive – his attitudes. We were able to sell to him the benefits of RPL. Others find RPL too hard. It was fun designing the challenge tests to meet his needs.

Valuing your skills

What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?

I knew the Training Package inside out. I knew the AQTF standards inside out. My communication skills: he sensed I was relaxed. I was very encouraging: I was able to draw out the right information.

Future opportunities

What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

I’d like to work more on the construction of identity and work organisation identity, so that managers become leaders of learning.

6. HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO RPL

RPL for public servants: Beth de Jong, Centrelink, Perth WA

Valuing previous experience

In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?

I am a learning manager in Centrelink and oversee assessment at Certificate IV and Diploma levels.

Memorable example

I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

Centrelink started with assessments for the Certificate IV Business, one competency at a time, with the person putting a portfolio together. Later on we streamlined the pathway, clustering units. We talked to those doing one unit at a time and got to know them and repackaged what they were doing so that we could cluster units, even if they had started on the traditional path. We made a reasonable adjustment.

Drivers

What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

• Keeping in close contact with the people.
• Being able to build a relationship and a rapport.
• Through conversation, being able to make a good decision with them about which pathway to follow and how to continue with the qualification.
• Able to make changes mid-stream and to do what was best for them.

Valuing your skills

What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?

• Communication skills.
• Being able to acknowledge individual expertise.
• Being able to understand where they fit within clustered competencies.
5 RPL FOR EQUITY GROUPS

RPL for a Sudanese migrant: Terri Quinn, Axial Training, Brisbane Queensland

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I am involved on both sides, as a student and teacher. I undertook partial RPL as a student, for the Certificate IV in workplace training and assessment. I have also developed written assessment tools in RPL for other organisations.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

One that stands out is a gentleman from Africa, from the Sudan region. He had done a fair bit of training but arrived in Australia with no records. He was quite forthcoming in the RPL process when I put to him a range of challenge tests. I didn’t just seek documentation.

He was ecstatic with the result. He picked up a training job with a Sudanese company that delivers training.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
The way he was open and positive – his attitudes. We were able to sell to him the benefits of RPL. Others find RPL too hard. It was fun designing the challenge tests to meet his needs.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I knew the Training Package inside out. I knew the AQTF standards inside out. My communication skills: he sensed I was relaxed. I was very encouraging: I was able to draw out the right information.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I’d like to use RPL more for workforce development.
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I am a learning manager in Centrelink and oversee assessment at Certificate IV and Diploma levels.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
Centrelink started with assessments for the Certificate IV Business, one competency at a time, with the person putting a portfolio together. Later on we streamlined the pathway, clustering units. We talked to those doing one unit at a time and got to know them and repackaged what they were doing so that we could cluster units, even if they had started on the traditional path. We made a reasonable adjustment.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
• Keeping in close contact with the people.
• Being able to build a relationship and a rapport.
• Through conversation, being able to make a good decision with them about which pathway to follow and how to continue with the qualification.
• Able to make changes mid-stream and to do what was best for them.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
• Communication skills.
• Being able to acknowledge individual expertise.
• Being able to understand where they fit within clustered competencies.

6. HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO RPL

RPL for public servants: Beth de Jong, Centrelink, Perth WA

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I am involved on both sides, as a student and teacher. I undertook partial RPL as a student, for the Certificate IV in workplace training and assessment. I have also developed written assessment tools in RPL for other organisations.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

A woman in her late thirties, early forties from an Arabic culture was working as a community educator but had no local qualifications. It took a long time to map out her competencies for the recognition process and she struggled a lot over eight months. With the Certificate IV she kept saying “I didn’t know I knew that.” Subsequently she achieved a Diploma.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
• The relationship between the assessor and the learner.
• The co-construction of meaning.
• Being able to recognise skills that are not evident in a mainstream way.
• Patience.
• Understanding that competencies are very mechanistic.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?

My background in social work – I come alongside people. I have had narrative therapy training.

I have a post-structural understanding of their story and meaning and practice. You are trying to get them to develop their stories.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I’d like to use RPL more for workforce development.

I’d like to work more on the construction of identity and work organisation identity, so that managers become leaders of learning.
Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
We are now in a very busy work environment and we would like to explore more innovative ways of assessing, to minimise time required. We’d like to streamline assessment methods so we can easily recognise competency. People often don’t have time to pull together a large portfolio.

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I have been involved in training and assessment systems in public and private organisations – from Education to IT. I started as an ACCESS assessor for the hospitality industry, and was a test case for RPL in commercial cookery in NSW. I also studied work based assessment at UTS (part of BA Ed), and portfolio process at UWS (part of Masters Ed): I did just about every version of train the trainer and work based trainer/assessor there is as these qualifications evolved and were reviewed. I have had practical experience utilising RPL from my experience as ACCESS hospitality assessor to corporate and public trainer/assessor, to manager of RTO training and assessment process and head assessor against TAA package qualifications.
I have had experience applying assessments against training packages, curricula and organisational standards in isolation from any nationally recognised standard/qualification. Most importantly my application of assessment in a variety of contexts has enabled me to look at assessment as a part of a holistic organisational learning and HRM platform, as well as a rewarding and empowering process for participant and assessor.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
Currently, I am concluding an RPL process which has run over the last 12 months over two properties in the hospitality industry. During this time I have seen growth and restoration of faith in life long learning and empowerment as participants find how important it is to set targets, interpret requirements and define themselves against set standards in effective ways. This process was the result of a handover of an entire traineeship program and involved quite a few senior management and staff. About 18 participants have or are soon to complete. The process was entirely participant driven and basically took one of 3 forms:

• Full RPL (taking from 3 – 6 months to complete)
• RPL process focusing not only on the collection of evidence, but professional development in areas identified during the process. Development achieved through coaching by facilitator, training and arranging work based extension/mentoring.
• Combination of RPL and training in the specific qualification (according to established training plan, traineeship training and assessment processes, and the participants wishes).

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
• Relationship building, rapport, empathy and willingness to participate on both sides
• Trust, discovery and acknowledgement of the knowledge and experience on both sides
• Steady sharing of knowledge and experience (growth on both sides)
• Individualised and participative approaches
• Organisational skills, and the ability to find practical solutions

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
Currently I am involving my contract trainer/assessors in operational areas of the RTO to ensure a practical expression of certain TAA40104 package requirements, e.g. the validation process. This is a conscious link to the RPL process I am building for my assessor/trainers for TAA40104.

More than anything I want to take time out to address areas I have noted in our current process. I want to map, track and refine processes, and get it to a point where I can document the entire process. I want to refine it to a point where I am confident that my knowledge is sound enough to pass on.

7. RPL IN REGIONAL AREAS

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I have had fifteen years in TAFE, conducting classroom based assessments in the community services and health industry. Around 2000 I started thinking about industry driven training and doing RPL.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

The big transition for me was in 2000 when our Renmark Campus was approached to help home carers. The company involved wanted a quick and snappy assessment, which really forced our hand at doing things differently. It was a turning point. It involved going and talking to the home carers as a work group and then setting up one-to-one sessions, where each person brought along documentation. This way we got evidence straight away, identified any skill gaps and delivered shared training with their work supervisor.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
Them being proactive. They’d empowered their staff to seek assessment.
• Taking into account access and equity issues and the business environment, as we have staff and offices in many major country, regional and remote areas: a very diverse staff including people with NESB and indigenous staff. I take into account this broad range of factors.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

We are now in a very busy work environment and we would like to explore more innovative ways of assessing, to minimise time required. We’d like to streamline assessment methods so we can easily recognise competency. People often don’t have time to pull together a large portfolio.

RPL in two hospitality businesses: Gabriella Peters, Hostec IDR, Sydney NSW

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?

I have been involved in training and assessment systems in public and private organisations – from Education to IT. I started as an ACCESS assessor for the hospitality industry, and was a test case for RPL in commercial cookery in NSW. I also studied work based assessment at UTS (part of BA Ed), and portfolio process at UWS (part of Masters Ed): I did just about every version of training the trainer and work based trainer/assessor there is as these qualifications evolved and were reviewed. I have had practical experience utilising RPL from my experience as ACCESS hospitality assessor to corporate and public trainer/assessor, to manager of RTO training and assessment process and head assessor against TAA package qualifications.

I have had experience applying assessments against training packages, curricula and organisational standards in isolation from any nationally recognised standard/qualification. Most importantly my application of assessment in a variety of contexts has enabled me to look at assessment as a part of a holistic organisational learning and HRM platform, as well as a rewarding and empowering process for participant and assessor.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

Currently, I am concluding an RPL process which has run over the last 12 months over two properties in the hospitality industry. During this time I have seen growth and restoration of faith in life long learning and empowerment as participants find how important it is to set targets, interpret requirements and define themselves against set standards in effective ways. This process was the result of a handover of an entire traineeship program and involved quite a few senior management and staff. About 18 participants have or are soon to complete. The process was entirely participant driven and basically took one of 3 forms:

• Full RPL (taking from 3 – 6 months to complete)
• RPL process focusing not only on the collection of evidence, but professional development in areas identified during the process. Development achieved through coaching by facilitator, training and arranging work based extension/mentoring.
• Combination of RPL and training in the specific qualification (according to established training plan, traineeship training and assessment processes, and the participants wishes).

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

• Relationship building, rapport, empathy and willingness to participate on both sides
• Trust, discovery and acknowledgement of the knowledge and experience on both sides
• Steady sharing of knowledge and experience (growth on both sides)
• Individualised and participative approaches
• Organisational skills, and the ability to find practical solutions

• Lateral thinking, seeing other possibilities coming out of the process and capitalising on them to develop the participant
• Going the extra distance – not always expecting the participant to be able to drive the expression of skills and experience and the collection of evidence
• Ability to fit this process within organisational constraints (budget, profit, human resources, and time)

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?

• Establishing rapport, being totally honest, open and earning trust
• Written communication skills
• Specialist knowledge of package/subject/industry
• Knowledge of RPL and the experience of applying RPL in a variety of contexts
• Knowledge of adult learning principles, AQTF and evidence requirements
• Instructional design and the ability to construct appropriate communication and instructional strategies
• Mentoring/coaching skills
• Design and strategy – mapping, schemas and document design

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

Currently I am involving my contract trainer/assessors in operational areas of the RTO to ensure a practical expression of certain TAA40104 package requirements, e.g. the validation process. This is a conscious link to the RPL process I am building for my assessor/trainers for TAA40104.

More than anything I want to take time out to address areas I have noted in our current process. I want to map, track and refine processes, and get it to a point where I can document the entire process. I want to refine it to a point where I am confident that my knowledge is sound enough to pass on.

7. RPL IN REGIONAL AREAS

RPL for home carers: Sue Baker, Adelaide North Institute of TAFE, Gawler SA

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?

I have had fifteen years in TAFE, conducting classroom based assessments in the community services and health industry. Around 2000 I started thinking about industry driven training and doing RPL.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?

The big transition for me was in 2000 when our Renmark Campus was approached to help home carers. The company involved wanted a quick and snappy assessment, which really forced our hand at doing things differently. It was a turning point. It involved going and talking to the home carers as a work group and then setting up one-to-one sessions, where each person brought along documentation. This way we got evidence straight away, identified any skill gaps and delivered shared training with their work supervisor.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

Them being proactive. They’d empowered their staff to seek assessment.
8. RPL FOR A VARIETY OF CLIENT GROUPS

RPL for recreation leaders: Andrew Barkham, Queensland Outdoor Recreation

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I was involved in writing the Outdoor Recreation Training Package. We wanted a national outdoor leader recognition scheme. RPL was the middle step we needed to achieve this goal.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
As we were not an RTO, we signed a memorandum of understanding regarding RPL with Cairns TAFE. We designed an RPL tool and gave it to the people to assist with their evidence collection. We then conducted peer recognition workshop.
The most positive thing was getting people through the RPL process: in Queensland, fifty people went through.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
The demand for an industry registration scheme.
The desire to make the good operators in the industry stand out.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I had been an instructor in the past and now I am in the office and am more strategic.
My interest, because I was involved in designing the Training Package and the tools, right through to running the workshops.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I am looking at ways to make the RPL process easier, to increase throughput and to streamline processes.

RPL for Singaporeans: Margaret Gannaway, Challenger TAFE, Fremantle WA

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I was principal lecturer and then skills recognition coordinator in the Business School of our Institute. The position of coordinator is a focal point for RPL.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
In 2004 we won a tender to develop an assessment and curriculum framework for national trainer competency standards being introduced in Singapore. I developed an RPL model so that a number of the trainers could gain the new qualification for trainers and begin to deliver it. We conducted a three and one half day workshop on RPL. As cultural issues arose it was important that I established my credibility as I was an outsider. The trainers were already highly qualified and to

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
The demand for an industry registration scheme.
The desire to make the good operators in the industry stand out.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I am open minded.
I am flexible.
I have confidence about knowing where I could and couldn’t be flexible – by knowing the Training Package well.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I am looking forward more to linking RPL to HR systems, starting when they do their induction.

RPL for trainers of indigenous learners: Mark James, NT Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Darwin NT

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I am a workforce development officer. I was made a quality assessor in 1999 and have been active in assessing the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA) and Frontline Management (FLM) throughout the Northern Territory.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
A staff member put in for RPL for the Certificate IV TAA. He was a bit sketchy in his written submission, so I went to watch him deliver the TAA in the outback, at Oenpelli, 600km south east of Darwin, to a group of indigenous students. That gave me confidence to approve his application.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
The person was passionate about teaching and the group of students.
The locality: seeing the person teaching in his normal locality.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
Being able to communicate what was expected, so the person knew the criteria I was using.
Knowing the competencies.
My willingness to travel to him.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
There is much scope for RPL in rolling out the Certificate IV TAA as well as moving staff from the Workplace Training and Assessment (WTA) qualification to TAA.
More opportunities will arise from the Government’s RPL projects.
8. RPL FOR A VARIETY OF CLIENT GROUPS

RPL for recreation leaders: Andrew Barkham, Queensland Outdoor Recreation

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I was involved in writing the Outdoor Recreation Training Package. We wanted a national outdoor leader recognition scheme. RPL was the middle step we needed to achieve this goal.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
As we were not an RTO, we signed a memorandum of understanding regarding RPL with Cairns TAFE. We designed an RPL tool and gave it to the people to assist with their evidence collection. We then conducted peer recognition workshop.
The most positive thing was getting people through the RPL process: in Queensland, fifty people went through.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
The demand for an industry registration scheme.
The desire to make the good operators in the industry stand out.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I had been an instructor in the past and now I am in the office and am more strategic.
My interest, because I was involved in designing the Training Package and the tools, right through to running the workshops.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I am looking at ways to make the RPL process easier, to increase through put and to streamline processes.

RPL for Singaporeans: Margaret Gannaway, Challenger TAFE, Fremantle WA

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I was principal lecturer and then skills recognition coordinator in the Business School of our Institute. The position of coordinator is a focal point for RPL.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
In 2004 we won a tender to develop an assessment and curriculum framework for national trainer competency standards being introduced in Singapore. I developed an RPL model so that a number of the trainers could gain the new qualification for trainers and begin to deliver it. We conducted a three and one half day workshop on RPL. As cultural issues arose it was important that I established my credibility as I was an outsider. The trainers were already highly qualified and to

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
The demand for an industry registration scheme.
The desire to make the good operators in the industry stand out.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
I am open minded.
I am flexible.
I have confidence about knowing where I could and couldn’t be flexible – by knowing the TrainingPackage well.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
I am looking forward more to linking RPL to HR systems, starting with where people are at; starting when they do their induction.

RPL for trainers of indigenous learners: Mark James, NT Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Darwin NT

Valuing previous experience
In a few sentences, can you please tell me about your experience as an assessor?
I am a workforce development officer. I was made a quality assessor in 1999 and have been active in assessing the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA) and Frontline Management (FLM) throughout the Northern Territory.

Memorable example
I understand from your Expression of Interest (or other source) that you have had a positive experience with RPL. Could you please describe one such experience?
A staff member put in for RPL for the Certificate IV TAA. He was a bit sketchy in his written submission, so I went to watch him deliver the TAA in the outback, at Oenpelli, 600km south east of Darwin, to a group of indigenous students. That gave me confidence to approve his application.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?
The person was passionate about teaching and the group of students.
The locality: seeing the person teaching in his normal locality.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?
Being able to communicate what was expected, so the person knew the criteria I was using.
Knowing the competencies.
My willingness to travel to him.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?
There is much scope for RPL in rolling out the Certificate IV TAA as well as moving staff from the Workplace Training and Assessment (WTA) qualification to TAA.
More opportunities will arise from the Government’s RPL projects.
a large extent resented having to do the new qualification but by acknowledging the value of their skills and knowledge I won their respect. I positioned the RPL process as a new opportunity for them: they could be the first trainers to deliver this new qualification.

Drivers
What were the factors that led to this positive experience?

Developing the relationships first of all: really getting to know how they were doing it; getting to know their strengths, so I could link them to the qualification. It is important to build on their existing knowledge.

I needed an understanding of their qualifications (which Challenger had assisted to develop) and their philosophy.

Valuing your skills
What skills and attributes of yours helped you with this positive experience?

The knowledge and confidence in myself that I did understand the qualification.

It was a new experience for the participants in a competency based training system, and I had a good understanding of it.

Being able to communicate.

Good interpersonal skills: I respected them.

Future opportunities
What are some future opportunities you look forward to, for using RPL?

We are looking overseas, where we have done work previously, beginning in 2007.

Closer to home, we are doing a lot of work with TAFEWA’s skills recognition project. We are developing a broader approach to recognition, looking at job roles and job tasks first, then mapping them back to the units of competency. Currently we are driven by units. We have to break away from compliance and build up confidence; we need to think more holistically.
If you are interested in conducting a program of professional development on the topic of RPL – Done Well in VET, a range of additional materials developed for the Reframing the Future forums are available from the Reframing the Future website http://reframingthefuture.net/RPL_Done_Well_Aug06.htm
Some selected materials are also on the CD ROM RPL – Done Well in VET and available from the website http://reframingthefuture.net/Publications.asp
ENGAGING VET PRACTITIONERS FORUMS

RPL – DONE WELL IN VET

Suzy McKenna  Dr John Mitchell

Resources generated for the Reframing the Future national forums conducted in 2006