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Assessing knowledge claims through the recognition of prior learning (RPL) : a case study in the business faculty at a university of technology (in the Western Cape, South Africa)

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**ASSESSING KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS THROUGH THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR
LEARNING (RPL): A CASE STUDY IN THE BUSINESS FACULTY AT A UNIVERSITY
OF TECHNOLOGY (in the Western Cape, South Africa).**

by

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF EDUCATION (MEd)

in the Faculty of Education

at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)

Supervisor: Professor Terence Volbrecht

Mowbray Campus
15th September 2010

DECLARATION

I, Frederika Hilde de Graaff, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Signed

Date

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ABSTRACT

I decided to undertake this study because as the RPL specialist, I noticed a discrepancy between the interpretation of knowledge presented as part of a RPL application and the interpretation of that knowledge claim by the academic staff members involved in the assessment.

Knowledge claim is the phenomenon that this study is about and I am attempting to answer these two questions:

1. What are the similarities and/or differences in the knowledge claims made by RPL applicants and the knowledge claims recognised by the academics in the RPL process for access into the BTech in Project Management at the institution?
2. How valid is RPL as a means of access to the BTech: Project Management programme at the institution?

For my study I developed a theoretical framework that consists of two components: the knowledge claims made by the RPL Applicants *before* they were given access to the University and the academics' interpretation of the RPL assessment. The second component is the knowledge claim made by the RPL applicants as students *after* they were admitted to the University and the academics' interpretation of their performance. These two components were further developed using concepts such as recontextualization, tacit and explicit knowledge, the usefulness of theory and cognitive ability.

I analysed the RPL theories within the context for *before Higher Education* and *after Higher Education*. I then proceed to discuss the development of knowledge in the workplace and in the academia using the same breakdown. In conclusion I develop a framework to interpret the knowledge claims and for that I used the work of Michael Barnett (2006).

Making a knowledge claim is unique to the individual making the claim and is a detailed process. The most appropriate methodology is the case study approach. I can analyse in depth the knowledge claim being made using a variety of sources. Six successful RPL applicants, who

have already completed their BTech degrees, agreed to be part of my study. Three academics in the Management Department who are involved in the RPL process with these applicants also agreed to participate.

Interpreting knowledge claims is not so easy to do. As I will indicate in my findings, what the RPL applicant claims before entering HE, resonates with what they learn once they are students, but explaining what constitutes the knowledge claim is more an understanding than concrete concepts. During the RPL assessment, the academics have to deal with a lot of vagueness around the knowledge claims resulting in the emphasis being place on an ability to cope with studies in Higher Education rather than describing the knowledge they are looking for clearly. The participants in this study completed their studies successfully, which is the success story of this study. A disappointing finding of my study is the little space that is afforded for workplace knowledge in the curriculum of the BTech in Project Management.

Regarding RPL practices this study indicates that the institution is providing a mechanism to address in inadequacies of the past and provides an opportunity for individuals to improve themselves through obtaining a qualification after being granted access to the University through the RPL process.

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- My employer, to grant me the opportunity to conduct this research.
- My colleagues for their support, especially the Management Department who enabled me to continue with this study.
- My colleague and friend Dr Rejoice Nsibande, for all her advice and sharing her experiences with me, and
- My husband, Kholisile Mazaza, for all his support.

DEDICATION

To my parents

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GLOSSARY

| Abbreviation | Definition/Explanation |
|---------------------|--|
| RPL | Recognition of Prior Learning |
| SAQA | South African Qualifications Authority |
| NQF | National Qualifications Framework |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The RPL applicant¹ smiled and lifted his finger, pointing at the academics on the other side of the table. He said, “I am applying for RPL because your graduates, with a BTech in Project Management, don’t know much. Everything they need to know in our department, I teach them. The problem is that I don’t have the piece of paper they have – I also want it!”

1.1 Introduction

I was at the table with the Project Management academics, when the above-mentioned comment was made. The reaction of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) applicant made me think about the discrepancy between what students learn within Higher Education and what the workplace wants them to know. My concern is that if university graduates do not know what they are supposed to know when they reach the workplace, how do the academics who taught these graduates interpret workplace knowledge as presented in RPL applications? This led me to investigate the concept of knowledge claims in the RPL practice in the field of Project Management.

In this introductory chapter I will explain Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and how this process is implemented at the institution. My study focuses on the RPL process with regard to access into the BTech in Project Management course, which is offered by the Management Department in the Business Faculty at the institution. The RPL assessment process used by the academics involved in BTech is explained briefly, highlighting the implications of the knowledge claims that are investigated. In conclusion, the research process is outlined.

¹ The RPL applicant (student B) agreed to participate in this study. He obtained his BTech degree in Project Management in September 2009.

1.2 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) at the institution

1.2.1 The RPL approach at the institution.

The institution has a RPL policy (2007: 2) which defines RPL as “the process of assessing and, where appropriate, accrediting the acquired knowledge, competences and capabilities of a person, gained in formal, informal and non-formal learning”.

The RPL policy makes provision for “access” and “advanced standing” (2007: 7). “Advanced standing” refers to instances where the candidate can be exempted from specific subjects in a qualification. “Access” refers to a situation where candidates do not meet the formal entry requirements of a programme. My study focuses on access into the BTech in Project Management. The participants in this study all applied for access because they do not have a National Diploma, which is the entry requirement for the BTech.

1.2.2 The RPL process at the institution.

RPL in South Africa “is critical to the development of an equitable education and training system” (SAQA, 2002: 7). The RPL approach at the institution is in line with SAQA’s requirements and consists of four steps: Identifying what the candidate knows and can do, matching the person’s knowledge to a qualification, assessing the person against that qualification and crediting what the person already knows.

The RPL assessment process starts off by deciding whether an individual qualifies for RPL or not. This decision is made by the academics involved in the assessment. Once an applicant is deemed a suitable candidate, this decision is confirmed by the RPL Committee. Prior to the assessment, the applicant is prepared for and briefed on the type of assessment used. The assessment, which is a test in the case of the BTech in Project Management, then takes place. If the assessment has a favourable outcome, the decision to grant the applicant access is passed to the RPL Committee in the Business Faculty. If this committee approves the application, it is presented to the Executive of Senate for final approval.

1.2.3 My role at the institution and the support I provide to the Management Department

My position at the institution is one of support and monitoring. I am part of the Centre of Higher Education (CHED), which provides academic support and development to both students and staff with academic support and development. The work that I do, focusing only on RPL, is in line with the institution's mission.

I screen the applications for RPL and liaise with academic departments in deciding whether these applications can go ahead or not. I support the applicants and assist in preparing them for the assessment. I assist the academic department involved with the development of the assessment. I am involved in the evaluation of the assessment and provide guidance to academics in making a decision about whether to grant access or advanced standing or not. I sign off RPL assessor reports before these are presented to the Executive of Senate.

Due to this position, I have the opportunity of observing the RPL application process and engaging with the knowledge claims being made. I can analyse the reactions to applicants' knowledge claims from the point of view of Higher Education. This places me in a favourable position for conducting research about the interaction between the applicants and the academics.

1.2.4 The RPL assessment in the Management Department

I do the initial screening. Due to my position at the University, the RPL applications are mainly delivered to me. Using the applicant's Curriculum Vitae (CV), I look for relevant work experience that the individual may have. Involvement in appropriate projects is of the utmost importance.

If the person's CV indicates that the person has been involved in project management for a considerable length of time, I ask the applicant to send me a list of the projects that he/she has been involved in, indicating the scope, duration and budget of such projects. The applicant's work experience has to be extensive and also of a managerial nature for the application to be sent to the Department.

I discuss the applications with the Department. The Department regards five years or more in a managerial position as sufficient work experience to consider the application suitable with regard to RPL. The Department also requires applicants to have completed some short courses, especially in Project Management. If their work experience and short courses are perceived as sufficient, they are invited to a test.

The Department of Management decided to compose a test for the RPL applicants as their method of assessment. This approach was developed a number of years ago and the test has been changed over the years. I used this test as one of the sources of information for my study. The test is followed by a panel interview with two or three academics who are lecturers in the Project Management programme. I observe this panel interview. If an individual obtains at least 50% for the test and the panel is positive about him/her, the application is approved. The successful application is then discussed by the RPL Committee. If this committee approves the application, it is submitted to the Executive of Senate.

1.3 The BTech in Project Management

The BTech in Project Management is a NQF level 7 course. It is an eighteen months programme if attended on a part-time basis, which is the option that all the RPL students take, as they are working full time as project managers. The course consists of eight subjects, of which four were used in this study. This programme does not have an in-service learning subject as some other programmes do at Universities of Technology. The impact of Work Intergraded Learning (WIL) is therefore not part of this study.

The BTech is a generic programme and has no National Diploma (ND) underpinning it, presenting a challenge for the RPL assessment. It is this challenge that forms the basis of my study. I wanted to know what knowledge the academics are looking for when evaluating an RPL application without having exit level outcomes of an underpinning ND, as a guide.

If the course did have an ND underpinning it, the assessment of the knowledge claims would have been easier. For example, if someone applies for RPL for access into the BTech in Human Resource Management (HRM), the exit level outcomes of the ND HRM are used in the RPL

assessment to determine whether the applicant's knowledge claims correspond to the level of that ND. This is not an option for the BTech in Project Management.

1.4 The research conducted

1.4.1 Research question

At the institution, I am in a position where I interact with the RPL applicants making knowledge claims. At the same time I also have to deal with academic staff members of the University who do or do not understand such knowledge claims. This led to two research questions:

1. What are the similarities and/or differences in the knowledge claims made by RPL applicants and the knowledge claims recognised by the academics in the RPL process for access into the BTech in Project Management at the institution?
2. How valid is RPL as a means of access to the BTech: Project Management programme at the institution?

1.4.2 Research process

Before starting my research, I had to find a field or discipline to focus on in which I could understand the subject matter itself. Taking my background into consideration, I decided to work with the Business Faculty, as I have done work using management theories and have lectured Management at first-year level. This gave me some insight into knowledge claims made in the field of management. I decided to focus on one qualification, namely the BTech in Project Management, because it lacks a preceding National Diploma and therefore poses a unique challenge for RPL practice.

The number of RPL applications per year is usually between three and eight, thereby providing me with a fair number of research participants to work with. I had six RPL applicants/students from two different intakes who had agreed to participate in my study. I also involved three academics in my study.

1.4.2.1 Theoretical framework

I am working with two sets of knowledge claims, namely claims made prior to the RPL applicant's entry into Higher Education and claims made after the person has become a student. I have based my study on a framework that accommodates these two sets of knowledge claims; I worked around the "knowledge claims made before entry in Higher Education" (Before HE) and "knowledge claims made after Higher Education (After HE)".

In my literature review, I investigated theories and approaches dealing with RPL prior to entry into Higher Education: I discuss the "Credit-exchange model and the Learning-and-development approach, as well as the Radical model. I also found the work of Shalem and Steinberg (2006) of great value, because they deal with RPL before entering Higher Education and focus on the expectations and perceptions of academics dealing with RPL. I found that Harris (1999) and especially Breier (2005), two theorists who deal with RPL after entry into Higher Education, support my investigations.

Using the "Before HE" and After HE" approach, I analysed the work of theorists such as Eraut (2004) in order to investigate learning in the workplace, the development of knowledge and the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge within the framework of "Before HE" .

I discuss the structure of management knowledge and how it relates to RPL in the section on "After HE" ("After Higher Education"), based on my analysis of knowledge structures as theorised by Basil Bernstein (1999). Bernstein's work provided me with a theoretical base for interpreting my findings.

I used the work of Eraut (2004), Michelson (1996) and Barnett (2006) to explain the link between higher education and knowledge developed outside the academia. According to my literature study, some authors do acknowledge that knowledge can be developed outside academia, Michelson refers to this as "Situational knowledge". I find this notion a logical one and in line with the purposes of RPL.

When recognising prior learning I deal with experience of the individual gained in and outside the workplace. I also take learning (formal, non-formal and in-formal) into consideration. The question that arises is what is the knowledge the person can claim to have as a result. To explain what I regard as a knowledge claim I adopted the work of Michael Barnett (2006). Barnett theorises about the use of academic and discipline knowledge in the workplace. I find his approach interesting, realising that I can add the RPL knowledge claim to Barnett's theory. Barnett's theory is about the recontextualisation of academic knowledge for workplace application. This concept is useful for my study, because the RPL applicant claims to have developed knowledge that is equivalent to knowledge developed in Higher Education. I had to decide how would I interpret the knowledge claims, and by inserting the RPL application in Barnett's theory I developed a framework for interpretation. I had to transform Barnett's approach, because Barnett accommodates knowledge recontextualisation from academia to the workplace. The knowledge claims I am looking at is about the recontextualisation of workplace knowledge for the understanding within academia. Michelson's notion that knowledge can originate from outside the academia, supported me in the transformation I did of Barnett's theory. I based my questions to the RPL applicants/students and the academics on the Barnett approach. I used the same framework to develop my Theme Analysis Grid (TAG) for the interpretation of my findings.

1.4.2.2 Collection of data

I used a case study approach within a qualitative methodology. Because my study involves the perceptions of the research participants, I used an interpretative approach to understand the knowledge claims that were being made. This placed me in the hermeneutic paradigm.

Working within the qualitative methodology, I realised that a case study would be the best approach to use. My case study deals with the BTech in Project Management and has two levels: the course itself and the nine participants who agreed to take part in my study.

I used a variety of sources for my data collection, as is required in a case study approach:

- ☞ the RPL test that was written as part of the RPL application;
- ☞ interviews with the RPL applicants once they were students;

- ☞ interviews with three academics who are part of the RPL assessment and who lecture on the BTech;
- ☞ an analysis of the students' work, such as assignments and exams.

1.4.2.3 Interpretation of findings

Once I had collected all the necessary data, I had to interpret the findings, which was quite difficult to do due to the fact that I had to deal with tacit knowledge. I therefore interpreted the information I had collected by identifying themes. I used my adopted version of Barnett's approach to develop a Theme Analysis Grid (TAG). I linked the information that I had collected to the themes and, by doing so, found answers to my original questions.

I based the TAG on "Before HE" and "After HE" approach that I used throughout my study. I linked the data I collected to themes, for example, the "situational knowledge" that I had added to Barnett's theory, become a theme on its own and I could link some of the data to the theme. I discuss my findings within the themes that I identified in detail before I attempt to answer the questions I have set myself. My research does point to other questions, which I highlight.

I reflect on the research process that was undertaken and discuss the limitations that had to be dealt with. Finally, I discuss the implications of my findings for the approach that I adopted from Barnett. I analyse my findings in the context of the RPL practice at the institution and make recommendations for improvements.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss and evaluate various theories of RPL and the nature of knowledge with the aim of developing a framework to evaluate knowledge claims made for RPL in Project Management.

I first discuss various theories dealing with RPL before entry into university and then discuss and analyse theories dealing with RPL after entry into university.

Secondly I discuss the theorisation of knowledge and its development. I analyse the development of knowledge and competence in the workplace, discussing the issue of explicit and tacit knowledge and how the latter impacts on presenting what the RPL candidate knows. This is followed by a discussion of the development of knowledge and its verification within the academic environment. I adopt and use a framework developed by Michael Barnett (2006) to illustrate how knowledge from higher education is used in the workplace and how the individual benefits from this knowledge transfer while working. I also theorise about the knowledge claim of the RPL applicant/student and illustrate where this originates.

The notion that knowledge in higher education is essentially different from workplace knowledge is increasingly being questioned and I engage with authors such as Elana Michelson (1996) in discussing the merits of the arguments in this regard.

I used my adaptation of Barnett's theorisation to illustrate how workplace knowledge and higher education knowledge interact in the learning process of the RPL candidate and student. I used this adaptation as a framework to develop the questions I asked during my interviews with the RPL students and academics also to analyse my data.

2.2 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): Theory and typology

Various theories, approaches or models have been developed internationally to guide the practice of the RPL. Authors such as Cretchley & Castle (2001: 488) see RPL as a movement rather than “a coherent theory”. However, I regard the models or approaches to RPL discussed and debated in the RPL literature review as theories of RPL. Each of the theories provides a framework that can be used to process and make sense of RPL applications. I will discuss the appropriateness of each to this study, highlighting the issues relating to each approach that are of interest to knowledge claims.

2.2.1 RPL theories: Prior to entry into Higher Education

In this section I will discuss three theories or models, namely: the Credit Exchange Model, the Learning and Development Model and the Radical Model. My discussion is concerned with RPL in the context of higher education, with RPL being used for the purpose of access into higher education. These theories are also used for the purpose of recognising workplace learning as creditworthy in relation to the outcomes of such qualifications/programmes, but advanced standing is not the focus of my research.

2.2.1.1 The Credit Exchange model

The Credit Exchange model generally requires the RPL applicant to link their knowledge to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria relevant to the level of the qualification or subjects for which recognition is being sought. The applicant presents his/her knowledge in relation to the curriculum of the programme of a Higher Education Institution. RPL might be done retrospectively, considering whether past learning matches the prior qualification (a National Diploma in this case). At the same time, RPL can be prospective, considering whether prior learning is sufficient for coping with the planned studies (at the level of BTech in this case) (Shalem and Steinberg, 2006: 99).

This model usually benefits people who are in gainful employment and who have access to training or have attended short courses that enable them to develop cognitive skills required by academia (Osman, 2004: 140 and Harris, 1999: 3-4). The credit exchange model does not attempt to develop new knowledge or convert knowledge from one form to another (Trowler,

1996), but if an RPL applicant claims to have certain knowledge and he/she can demonstrate this or provide evidence of this knowledge, recognition is given. For example, if a person claims to have a certain level of computer literacy, he/she can be tested with a view of granting advanced standing for a specific subject, such as End-user Computing.

A problem with this approach is that knowledge becomes invisible if it falls outside what is deemed to be pertinent to the Higher Education Institution (HEI) curriculum, especially when compared to specific subjects within a qualification. As Harris (1999: 3) states, “The site of knowledge production has changed, but not what counts as knowledge.” No challenge is made as to what counts as knowledge; the only knowledge that is regarded as worthwhile is knowledge within the boundaries as defined by the HEI. (Osman, 2004: 141). If the knowledge is not presented in a manner HE understands, it is not recognised in this model. In this approach, there is little flexibility or space to validate knowledge that does not fit into the curriculum and the associated learning outcomes.

In the case of Project Management at the institution, the exact nature of the “credit exchange” value preceding the BTech in Project Management is not clear due to the fact that the BTech programme does not have a National Diploma preceding it. The credit exchange model, in this context, needs to look at equivalence with the entry-level requirements, which are vague. However, the results of the challenge test can be used as “currency” for access in “exchange” for what would normally allow for access. The question that arises is about what criteria is used to determine whether an experienced project manager or coordinator will be given access to the programme.

2.2.1.3 The Learning and Development model

Recognising knowledge in the learning and development approach requires prior knowledge to be linked to the academy in a creative and reflective manner, and provides developmental opportunities to the candidate to make the necessary links. Paul Trowler (1996: 20-21) interprets the “credit exchange” and “learning and development” models as being “twin poles on a continuum”, because the latter merely provides support for the candidate endeavouring to

meet the requirements for credit exchange. The differences are in the experience/reflection distinction, both epistemologically and ideologically. Epistemologically, in the learning and development model, knowledge is seen as “individually constructed, derived from particular experiences”, whereas knowledge in the credit exchange model is interpreted as “objectively measurable content – dependent and permanent” (Trowler,1996:21). The ideological underpinnings associated with the learning and development model are a form of “humanism” rather than “market-oriented vocationalism” of the credit exchange model (ibid).

In this model, the RPL applicant is assisted to meet the relevant learning outcomes by a process of learning and reflection. It is often characterised by the development of a portfolio, where the RPL applicant is required to re-work and interpret his/her own knowledge about specific topics and aspects of his/her experience and to compare it with the curriculum of a level, qualification or programme against which recognition is sought (Butterworth, 1992: 40, Breier,2005:58 and Harris,1999:4). This approach provides the RPL applicant with an opportunity to develop and present a new understanding of and critical reflection on their own knowledge. This process is intensive in terms of the time required to do it, using formative assessment so that the applicant can receive feedback on their experience and knowledge as the portfolio is being developed.

The success of this approach depends on the appropriate use of reflective activities and the use of relevant personal information from informal or non-formal settings in the learning process (Volbrecht, 2009: 20). Critics of this approach have pointed out that a portfolio of learning is unwieldy and time-consuming for both the applicant and the assessor. Reflective essays require high-level language and literacy skills (Castle and Cretchley, 2001: 489), and may place demands on RPL candidates that “mainstream” applicants do not have to meet.

The RPL tests and interview conducted for access into the Btech in Project Management fall within the spectrum that Trowler has identified, leaning towards the Credit Exchange side of the spectrum. The test and panel interview provide an opportunity for the applicant to reflect and interpret their knowledge, although the time available is not enough for the applicants to come to meaningful conclusions, nor is there time for a formative assessment – it is a summative assessment process. This approach reflects a willingness of the Department to evaluate the

experience of these individuals based on the projects they are involved in and see if the person can be given an opportunity to study at the University. During the interviews, the panel reflected on the experience of these individuals to evaluate their grasp of Project Management and whether this will enable them to study at the University.

Both these RPL approaches end in summative assessment standing outside and at the “front end of the curriculum” and do not see RPL as an integral part of the design, implementation and evaluation of the programme (Volbrecht, 2009:18). In addition I analysed the approach of Shalem and Steinberg is a variant of the development model.

2.2.1.3 Retrospective and prospective action of RPL

Shalem and Steinberg (2006: 99-101) analyse the relationship between the RPL applicant and the academic. They used an RPL process that involves the development and assessment of a portfolio of evidence. Although their approach to RPL is different from that of the institution, their conclusions are valuable for my research.

While assessing the portfolios of evidence, they realised that they were dealing with two aspects during the RPL process. One of these is recognising previous learning and accomplishments in a specific area of work; they called this *retrospective action*. The assessor/academic is required to understand what the RPL candidate is bringing and should decide on what counts as knowledge. The second aspect deals with the future demands of the academic study that the RPL candidate is planning to undertake. The academic/assessor tends to make a judgement regarding the readiness of the candidate to undertake studies in Higher Education. Shalem and Steinberg refer to this as *prospective action*. Each action draws on different conceptual resources and embodies different power relations between the assessor and candidate (ibid).

The work of Shalem and Steinberg has implications for my study, because it provides me with a perspective for analysing the questions asked in the RPL test. It is a method of analysing the interpretation of RPL candidates' knowledge before entry into Higher Education by the academics. The issue of readiness of the candidates is discussed by the Project Management

academics during the RPL assessment process. The fourth approach, the Radical Model, also assumes a stance at the “front end” (Volbrecht, 2009: 18) of the curriculum.

2.2.1.4 The Radical Model

In the “Radical Model”, experience is seen as a social product and the foundation for the development of authentic and alternative forms of knowledge, as opposed to knowledge that is seen as accepted within most academic institutions:

Experience, learning and knowledge become closely interrelated in (the) radical tradition. Learning and knowledge borne from analysing experience from a new perspective is recognised, rather than learning gained from dominant social structures and institutions” (Harris, 1999: 6-7).

Michelson refers to “outsider knowledge” that is valuable for its divergence from “academic ways of knowing” (Michelson, 1996: 185). This approach questions the notion of the dominant view that only “learning” can be recognised and not knowledge developed from experience. The first two models interpret learning in the sense that it needs to fulfil academic requirements before it can be recognised. This model acknowledges that knowledge is available from different “standpoints” (ibid) and RPL is seen as a vehicle to recognise and give space to knowledge and experience that may stand outside the conventional curriculum and the knowledge associated with it.

In the radical approach, authors such as Freire (1972) and Illich (1970) view education as a means of transforming society through transforming conventional education, resulting in the transformation of conventional society. Conventional knowledge and conceptions of experience are sometimes seen as inadequate, biased and oppressive. Learning in this context is recognised from new perspectives that challenge the existing paradigms. The aim is to create a society that is inclusive, based on new knowledge and “recognis[ing] subjugated knowledge” with the aim to set individuals “free” within a society (Harris, 1999: 7).

RPL becomes part of a strategy for social redress so that marginalised groups can obtain access to academic institutions. As pointed out earlier, this is one of the reasons for RPL in South Africa. This approach to RPL wants prior knowledge to be recognised on its own terms and not only within a formal academic framework or a curriculum (Harris, 1999: 6-7). However, in South Africa redress has in fact been sought through the credit exchange and development models and not the radical model (Volbrecht, 2009: 22).

In recent years, theorists of RPL have seen “knowing not (as) an objective procedure and the domain of the pedagogue, but instead a process that weaves the private and public lives of human beings into integrated and whole realities” (Osman, 2004: 206). Researchers are calling into question the dichotomies that are assumed to exist between academic and non-academic ways of knowing. It provides the opportunity of considering sites of learning other than the university to become significant and legitimate sites of knowledge production, resulting in new theories and new knowledge.

Drawing conclusions, one can then ask whether the knowledge of the RPL applicant should be seen as “outsider knowledge” or as matching in the “insider knowledge”, or is it possible to bridge this “divide”?

2.2.2. RPL theories: After admission into formal education

Two relatively uncommon theories of RPL dealing with the recognition and incorporation of prior knowledge into the programme that the student is studying are discussed in this section. These have been characterised as “lowercase rpl” or the discipline specific approach (Breier, 2004) and the Trojan Horse approach (Harris, 1999 and 2000).

2.2.2.1 The discipline-specific approach

Breier’s (2004) study is focused on the RPL student studying in a university learning programme and how the person’s prior experience influences the person’s learning in the classroom. In her study of RPL students participating in a law programme, Breier presents a different perspective on RPL, namely a “discipline-specific” perspective. This approach requires “one to consider the nature and structure of the discipline or field concerned”, the relationship between formal and informal knowledge and “the extent to which the pedagogic discourse mirrors the relationship” (Breier, 2005: 59).

Breier named the focus of her study “lowercase rpl”, because while analysing the learning experience of RPL students in labour law courses, she came to the conclusion that “the role of informal knowledge in a formal educational context depends on the purpose and the level of the educational programme and its underlying ideology” (Breier, 2004: 8-10). She analysed how

prior informal experience was “recruited” and “recognised” in a formal context by the student and the lecturer. However, she found that “both pedagogy and curriculum were often not appropriate for students with extensive practical experience in labour law, but little formal academic experience” (Breier, 2004: 23-24).

Harris (2000:11) supports Breier when she observes, “Concepts and theories around knowledge and curriculum underscore the necessity of a close relationship between context and RPL practice.” The question that I am discussing in Chapter 4 is whether the Project Management programme and lecturers accommodate knowledge and practical experience in the class, assignments and exams.

2.2.2.2. “Trojan horse”

The RPL approach called “Trojan horse” was developed by Judy Harris. This approach links RPL and curriculum development. The RPL process prior to entry is extended into the curriculum, “organised in ways that speak to the social world as well as the academic world and the market” (Harris, 1999: 8). This approach can be used in a changing higher education environment in which the curriculum is flexible and boundaries of knowledge are weakening (Harris, 1999: 8). Mainly used in practice-based learning programmes, this approach recognises non-formal and experiential learning and values prior learning in and of itself, rather than trying to fit outcomes.

It involves the way that a curriculum is organised to support the integration of theory and practice. Harris (1999: 9) explains the aim of the Trojan horse approach as a bridge-building process between disciplinary knowledge (theory) and experiential learning (practice), “considering new methods to integrate theory and practice, using practice to critique theory rather than to exemplify it”.

The Trojan horse approach provides an opportunity of evaluating knowledge as part of a critical dialogue (Harris, 2000: 76-77) rather than for equivalence as is done in the Credit Exchange model. It provides an opportunity for engagement between the design of RPL and the curriculum and a “broader exploration of the relationship between theory and practice, which entails more diversity and divergence in the kinds of knowledge that are recognised” (Volbrecht, 2009: 23-24).

This approach to RPL raises the question whether the RPL students with their experience and knowledge are having an influence on the curriculum and the way the programme is taught. If so, what is this influence? My research will evaluate the link between the RPL applicant's knowledge claims especially "After HE" and the interactions in the class and the work done in the course such as assignments and exams.

2.3 Interpretation of knowledge prior to entry into Higher Education

Like most proponents of RPL, I do not see academia as the only place where knowledge is developed. I regard experience and workplace learning as learning processes that lead to knowledge. In this section, I introduce concepts from theorisations of what is learned in the workplace. I then analyse how knowledge can be expressed and presented by an individual for the purpose of RPL, placing the emphasis on *what* is being learned in the workplace rather than *how* it is being learned.

Learning can be defined as a process whereby knowledge is acquired. When existing knowledge is used in a new context or in new combinations, new knowledge is developed. Eraut makes a distinction between formal learning and informal learning. The latter is seen as any learning that takes place outside a formally organised learning programme (Eraut, 2000: 114).

2.3.1 Learning in the workplace

Analysing informal learning, Eraut (2000:115-117) identifies a "range of learning modes" within informal learning, namely: "implicit learning", "reactive learning" and "deliberate learning". *Implicit learning* (Eraut (2000) quoting Reber) is described as "the acquisition of knowledge independently of conscious attempts to learn and in the absence of explicit knowledge about what was learned". *Reactive learning* is unplanned, but the individual is aware of it within a recent or current situation. Once the individual reflects on the situation and articulates his or her reflection, it becomes *deliberate learning*.

Various authors write about how learning takes place in the workplace, especially Schön, who uses the concept of “reflection-in-action”, which is part of problem solving and which takes split-second decisions using tacit knowledge in a very skilled way (Schön cited in Trowler, 1996: 19). Eraut lists “four main types of work activity that give rise to learning”:

1. Participation in group activities;
2. Working to achieve a set of goals, for example the development of a work plan;
3. Working with others, which provides individuals with an opportunity to observe;
4. Listening to peers tackling challenging tasks which require on-the-job learning (Eraut, 2004: 266).

Eraut found in his research that the success of learning in the workplace is dependent on certain factors including the following: quality of the relationships in the workplace; formal training; workplace resources available, such as books, documents and protocols; and mentorship, especially for new staff members. Problem solving and learning from mistakes were found to be constructive in the learning process, as was receiving feedback (Eraut, 2004: 267).

Learning and the development of knowledge in the workplace are evidently beneficial to the individual and provide the person with strategies to learn and apply the newly developed knowledge, but the question remains: What is being learned?

2.3.1.1 What is being learned in the workplace?

What is being learned in the workplace is broader than in higher education. It is individually focused, workplace or community based and socially orientated. Eraut (2004: 19) and Evans (2002: 88-90) list a variety of competencies that are required in the workplace, such as problem solving, task performance, use of academic knowledge in the workplace, decision making, interpersonal skills, including communication and awareness of diversity, and organisational ability.

The context of learning influences what the person knows. This issue is addressed by Eraut, who deals with the concept of “codified knowledge”, which, in the workplace, deals with an organisation’s specific information records, correspondence manuals, policy and procedures.

Eraut mentions academic knowledge as one of many competencies used in the workplace. He uses the concept of “propositional knowledge” (Eraut in Breier, 2008: 102) which consists of discipline-based knowledge and concepts derived from bodies of coherent systematic knowledge, applied in a field of professional action and including specific propositions about particular cases, decisions and actions. A similar process is discussed by Michael Barnett (2006: 144) in an interesting theory on how academic knowledge is incorporated and recontextualised into the workplace and vocational pedagogy .

Barnett (2006), looking into vocational training and vocational qualifications in the UK and drawing on the work of Basil Bernstein has drawn interesting conclusions about different types of knowledge. Analysing vocational education, he found that it is influenced by “workplace activities” on the one hand, and by “discipline knowledge”. Using the concept of “recontextualisation“ from Bernstein (1999: 159), which Barnett (2006: 144) defines as “ the appropriation and transformation of knowledge for various purposes”, he applies the concept to both academia and the workplace. I find his work applicable to RPL, because in a knowledge claim of an RPL applicant’s knowledge “recontextualised” for the purposes of the RPL assessment which is done within Higher Education.

Barnett (2006:144-146) explains that disciplinary knowledge is transformed from the primary sources to academic subjects that are studied at university. Textbooks, especially in the humanities, are constructed from multiple sources to suit the needs of a particular syllabus. This is what Barnett calls “pedagogic recontextualisation” – making disciplinary knowledge more teachable and learnable in a particular educational context. According to Barnett, a similar process takes place in vocational education and training.

Vocational education relates to “practicalities of occupations or groups of occupations which relate to bodies of knowledge that may not be occupational specific” (Barnett, 2006: 145). Vocational pedagogy occupies a space between subjects and jobs, because it is influenced by workplace activities, as well as disciplinary knowledge. Using the concept of *Pedagogic Recontextualisation*, Barnett explains that there is a link between “vocational pedagogy” and “discipline knowledge reorganised for vocational purposes”.

Analysing the influences on vocational education from the point of view of the workplace, Barnett identifies three aspects: situated knowledge, vocational pedagogy and technological and organisational problems (Barnett, 2006: 146-7):

- ☞ *Situated knowledge* is closely associated with particular job tasks, and is not easily related to disciplinary knowledge. It is mainly tacit, difficult to put into words and hard to codify. It can be very complex knowledge, “trapped within its context of application” Including “practical knowledge which has not (or not yet) been brought into relationship with formal analytical structures which tend to characterize disciplinary knowledge.” (Barnett, 2006: 146, 149).
- ☞ *Vocational pedagogy*: This is influenced by workplace activities as well as discipline knowledge, recontextualised for use in the organisation.
- ☞ *Technological and organisational problems* are unique to a specific organisation and lead to specific jobs and organisational settings.

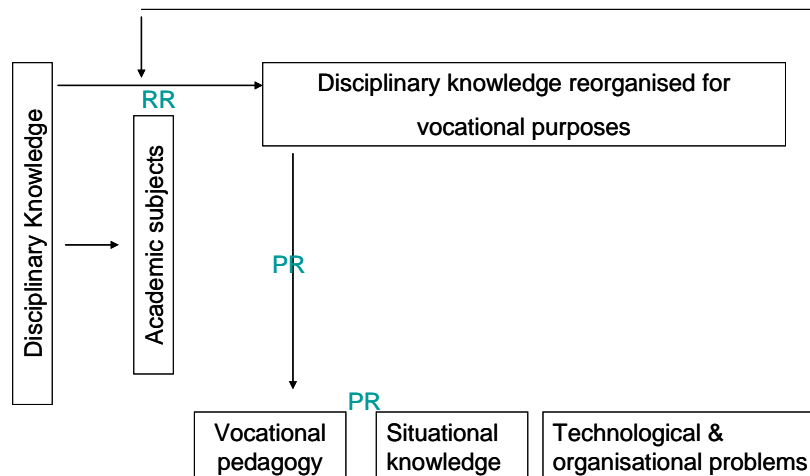


Figure: 2.1: Knowledges, recontextualisation and vocational pedagogy (Barnett, 148: 2006)

Code: PR- Pedagogic Recontextualisation
RR – Reclassification Recontextualisation

In order to conceptualise the links between workplace activity and disciplinary knowledge, Barnett uses Bernstein’s concept of “recontextualisation” of disciplinary knowledge to vocational pedagogy, involving two distinctive recontextualisation processes:

- ☞ Pedagogic Recontextualisation (PR) is done for the purposes of acquisition and learning into vocational pedagogy, for the purpose of learning to perform work and the application of situational knowledge or “know how” in the workplace.

- ☞ Reclassificatory Recontextualisation (RR) is done for the application and real-world application of the academic discipline. Academic knowledge is selectively reconstructed for solving technical or organisation problems “encountered in specialised work” (ibid).

Vocational pedagogy requires recontextualisation from two perspectives (Barnett, 2006: 147) The one type of recontextualisation is done within the academia, for learn ability and teach ability purposes, the other to satisfy the demands of professional practice. When recontextualisation takes place for professional purposes, this done for two reasons: problems solving and situational knowledge. Problems are solved by selectively drawing on disciplinary knowledge. The other is the development of situational knowledge within the company including the development of systems, policies and procedures.

Development of workplace knowledge occurs when an individual manages his or her work, makes decisions and solves problems. Barnett says that the “reclassification recontextualisation” creates a “toolbox of applicable knowledge”(ibid). During the process of analysing the knowledge claims that I am looking at, I think recontextualisation of knowledge takes place when the individual applies for RPL. The aspect I am interested in is how “the toolbox of applicable knowledge” is developed. In addition I am interested in what the knowledge is that is regarded as applicable by firstly the RPL applicant but also the academic who is assessing the RPL application.

This concept of recontextualisation might work the other way around from what is described by Barnett. Barnett describes the process starting at the point of discipline knowledge being recontextualised. However, the RPL applicant might not have been exposed to disciplinary knowledge when the person started to work, but learnt in the workplace how to perform the jobs they are doing. This is important for the knowledge claims that I am looking at because I want to know what knowledge the RPL applicants are using in the workplace to succeed. My focus is on what they know, rather than how did they learn it. Once an individual knows something, the person uses it to perform, converting the knowledge.

2.3.1.2 Knowledge conversion

Learning and the conclusions drawn from the process by an individual become part of the person's memory and influence behaviour, leading to tacit and explicit knowledge (Eraut: 2000, 117). Tacit knowledge is described by Polanyi, (cited in Nonaka 1994: 18-20) as "that which we know but cannot tell". Nonaka linking tacit and explicit knowledge, referring to this as "knowledge conversion". Conversion of explicit to tacit knowledge is a process of internalisation involving action and learning by the individual within (or outside) an organisational context. Tacit to explicit knowledge is a process of externalisation in which a metaphor (can) play an important part (ibid).

Some authors place emphasis on making tacit knowledge explicit, which is an important question for RPL (Eraut, 2000: 120-123). Eraut agrees with Nonaka that the conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge is "not well developed" (Nonaka, 1994: 20) and says that "(the) limits of making tacit knowledge explicit are formidable" (Eraut, 2000: 120-123). This presents a challenges to RPL. If the RPL applicant learns in the workplace, as Eraut and Nonaka suggest, how is tacit knowledge acquired through learning presented and evaluated during the RPL application? Secondly, if the RPL student comes to class with tacit knowledge, how does this manifest in the class, assignment and tests?

2.3.2 Representing knowledge

In dealing with tacit and explicit knowledge, Eraut (2000: 119-120), as a researcher, faced problems with regard to individuals who found it difficult to talk about learning when requested to do so, because many aspects of learning are taken for granted – it was found that it was not easy to describe their personal knowledge and know-how. Eraut suggests a few methods of overcoming this problem:

- ☞ As a researcher, one can facilitate the "telling" and elucidate (clarify or explain) information to infer the nature of knowledge being discussed.
- ☞ Language used in the workplace influences this process of making tacit knowledge implicit – using words and terms within a company or occupational field can enable the person to communicate and interact on a professional level (ibid: 120). This situation presents a challenge to the researcher, because if the latter is not familiar with the

discourse of the occupational field, he/she might be confused or misunderstand what the research participant is saying.

- ☞ Eraut found that if a “mediating object” (ibid) such as a drawing or a diagram is used, respondents found it easier to talk about their knowledge and their work than otherwise. I decided to use figure 2.2 (page 27) as a “mediating object” during the interviews with the RPL students.

Trowler (1996: 24) points out that the capturing or presentation of knowledge has important consequences for the assessor in making judgements. In his research, Trowler surprisingly found that emphasis is sometimes placed on “knowing how” rather than “knowing that” in Higher Education, whereas RPL usually places the emphasis on *what* the person knows.

In this section I have put together the theories about workplace learning that I think are useful to RPL. I will now look at the theories that explain the development of knowledge in Higher Education.

2. 4. Interpretation of knowledge after admission to Higher Education

In the debate about whether academic and workplace learning are compatible, I am using the work of Basil Bernstein as a framework for analysis. Being a student at a university requires the individual to engage with bodies of knowledge that include theories and abstract concepts. I now turn to a discussion of the structure of this knowledge and how it is validated.

2.4.1 Structures of knowledge

Basil Bernstein developed an approach to analyse the format of knowledge, making a distinction between “vertical” and “horizontal” discourses (Bernstein, 1999: 157-9):

- ☞ “*Horizontal Discourse* is described as involving work-based or on-the-job knowledge and common sense knowledge;
- ☞ *Vertical Discourse* is described as involving schooled knowledge, which is series of specialised languages and organised in bodies of knowledge such as the natural and social sciences. This involves “knowledge that is coherent, explicit, systematically principled, structured and hierarchically or horizontally organised”.

Horizontal discourses are “segmentally organised” (Bernstein, 1999: 159), with each segment being context dependent, not equal in importance and not necessarily related to other segments. Due to the fact that horizontal discourse is context bound, all the meanings, knowledge and skills acquired in this discourse are context bound and might not make sense in a different context.

Vertical discourse consists of specialized structures of explicit knowledge, which in turn consist of two different knowledge structures, namely *hierarchical knowledge structures* and *horizontal knowledge structures*. Each of these structures has a different social base, social relations and discursive practices (Bernstein, 1999: 160-162).

a) *Hierarchical knowledge structure*: a hierarchically organised and specialized language integrated at the level of meanings and complexity, i.e. natural sciences. Bernstein suggests that “hierarchical knowledge structures ... attempt[s] to create very general propositions and theories, which integrate knowledge at lower levels”. This structure is seen as a triangle with a broad base, and as it becomes more complex, integrating knowledge from the lower levels, the knowledge operates at “more and more abstract levels” higher up in the triangle (Bernstein, 1999: 161-162). Muller (2009) quoting Biglan refers to this discourse as “hard discipline” where the paradigm is based on high connectness among schools and is less contentious in nature. (Muller, 2009: 211)

b) *Horizontal knowledge structure*: This Bernstein describes as “consist(ing) of a series of specialized languages with specialized modes of interrogation and criteria for the construction and circulation of texts” (ibid). The specialized disciplines in the form of a horizontal knowledge structure are found within humanities and social sciences and are visually displayed as:

L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L6, L7, ... Lⁿ

A horizontal knowledge structure is based on collection or serial codes, which means, according to Bernstein, an accumulation of languages (op.cit: 163). When studying a Horizontal Knowledge Structure, one specialised language is not a prerequisite for another. The process of acquiring knowledge in the horizontal knowledge structure involves language and the recontextualisation of the material/theory. Muller, quoting Biglan, refers to Soft discipline in this

regard, where the paradigm is low in both differentiation and interdependence of the scholarly work. (Muller, 2009: 211)

The acquisition of a language is a process of learning the correct discourse as required by the specific field. According to Bernstein the recontextualisation is social and is based on the adopting of a perspective and power. "Perceptiveness becomes the principle of the recontextualisation which constructs horizontal knowledge structures leading a "gaze" to be acquired." - which is a particular mode of recognising and realising what counts as "authentic". (Bernstein, 1999:164) The power is derived from the teacher and peer group, which develops into a paradigm that is acceptable to the group involved. The individual who is part of a group, will start to share the paradigm.

What is important for RPL, is that Bernstein does "conceive of vertical knowledge structures including elements of horizontality and vice versa" (Young, 2005: 11). Bernstein presents the distinction between vertical and horizontal discourse and structures as ideal types, which, according to Michael Young, "does not *describe* different types of knowledge; they refer to features found to a different degree in all claims of knowledge" (Young, 2005: 11).

Bernstein's distinction between horizontal and vertical knowledge structures deals with the issue of the context of knowledge. Agreeing with Bernstein, Young (2005:15) points out that what distinguishes theoretical knowledge from everyday knowledge is the nature of the context, the extent to which the context is transcendable and the way its users use it. Young's critique on this distinction is that Bernstein places too much emphasis on it, and that "the focus should be on their embeddedness in each other" (Young, 2005: 15).

In a similar vein, Guile and Griffiths (2001: 116-7) question how "horizontal" and "vertical" can best be related to each other. Agreeing with Young, they note that "curriculum frameworks can be developed that will encourage students to make links between work experience, its underlying knowledge, skills and its context" (ibid, 126). RPL students experience this process the other way around – having learnt from work experience, how do they relate this knowledge to and incorporate it into academia?

In my research the concept of recontextualisation is helpful to interpret the link between the knowledge claim before entering Higher Education and the knowledge claims after entering Higher Education. Elucidating the knowledge structure of management theory assists in this process

2.4.2. Structure of management theory

The question that arises now is: Where does management theory fit in? Bernstein makes it clear that in a Horizontal Knowledge Structure one theory is not a prerequisite for another. I understand management theory as a collection of a wide variety of opinions and approaches within a Horizontal Knowledge Structure.

Various management theories have developed over the past hundred years or so. The overall framework deals with four management aspects, namely planning, leading, organising and controlling (Commonly known as PLOC). Theories of management place emphasis on the “productive attainment of goals of an organisation” (Smit & Cronjé, 2002: 36-37). No one theory dominates the field of management; practitioners rather use an eclectic approach when using theory. This is when a manager uses experience and know-how to decide which principle or approach to use in a specific situation (Smit and Cronjé, 2002: 43 and Hannagan, 1998: 17). This provides a manager with a variety of tools to evaluate the internal and external environment of the organisation, scrutinize operations and productivity, appraise constraints facing the company, use human resources optimally and analyse organisational culture.

2.4.2.1 The structure of Project Management Theory

Project Management is part of management – its focus is on the completion of a specific task, for example the construction of a building, with a specific beginning and end. The major tasks of a project are planning, sequencing, co-ordinating and control (Hannagan, 1998: 438). Projects are often used by organisations to get a specific job done. Such projects are tasks that require specified skills and involve interrelated tasks that don't fit into the organisation's operational plans. A project manager assembles a project team consisting of different experts. Once the project is completed, the project team ceases to exist (Adams and Caldently, 2004: 78).

Project managers face “triple constraints”: time, scope and cost (Taylor, 2006: 3). These three aspects need to be balanced during the planning of projects as well as during the implementation phase. If these three aspects are not balanced, quality, budgeting and time of completion can be affected.

Project Management is associated with very specific phases, as indicated in figure 2.2. These phases are accepted worldwide by most project managers as the standard phases used in the management of any project, regardless of its size. Sometimes these phases are named differently, but the approach is the same. Software packages also use similar phases. This is in line with Bernstein’s notion that a language has to be acquired, leading to a “gaze” within a Horizontal knowledge structure, within a particular field (Bernstein, 1999:165).

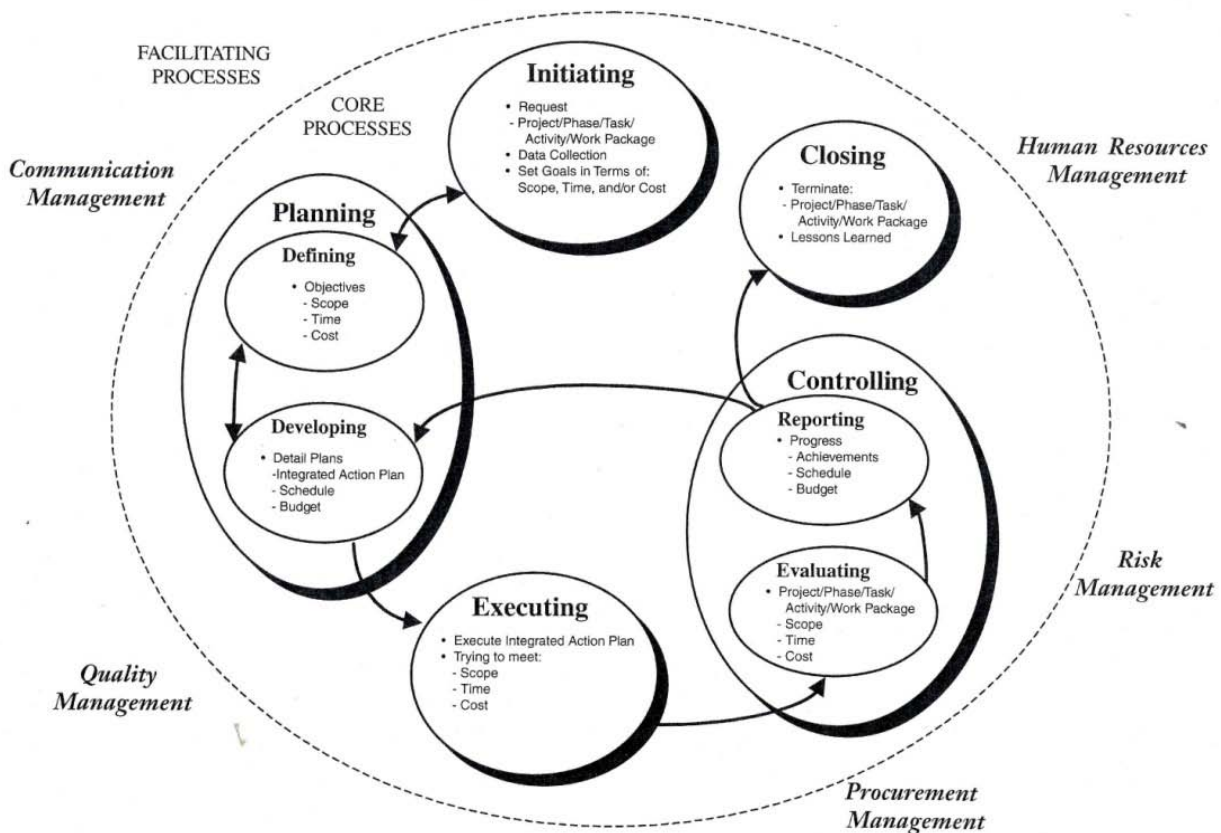


Figure 2.2: Five process groups: Project Management model from Adams and Caldently, 78, 2004 PMBOK²

² Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) from Project Management Institute in the USA

Phase 1: Initiating

A project is initiated, usually by senior management, with specific instructions as to why the project should be done and what the deliverables are (Adams and Caldently, 2004: 78-9).

Phase 2: Planning

Planning takes place at two levels:

- ☞ The first takes place within senior management: receiving the brief and determining scope, time and budget.
- ☞ The second takes place within the Project Management team developing a detailed integrated plan, including action plan, work flow, schedule, task allocation and budget (Adams and Caldently, 2004: 79-80).

Phase 3: Executing

This is the phase when the planned work is done. There is ongoing monitoring by the project manager and the team to make sure that work is done on time and goals are achieved within budget. Not everything goes according to plan, thus the implementation phase is not only about monitoring, but also about adjusting the plan and budget to accommodate the unforeseen and unexpected (Adams and Caldently, 2004: 80).

Phase 4: Controlling

The controlling process provides for feedback for the project plan to be revised. This phase occurs simultaneously within the executing phase, but ensures that time, scope and resources are constantly monitored (Adams and Caldently, 2004: 80-81).

Phase 5: Closing

This involves termination of the project once the goals have been achieved. This phase includes a review of successes and failures (Adams and Caldently, 2004: 81).

Comparing these phases to Bernstein's Hierarchical Knowledge Structure and Horizontal Knowledge Structure, elements of both knowledge structures can be seen. The project phases following on each other, as explained above, present strong elements of a Hierarchical Knowledge Structure. The project manager may use any management theory during all the phases for implementation, and different elements of different Horizontal Knowledge Structures.

For example, during the controlling phase, a project manager will use principles of accounting to control expenditure. (Hierarchical Knowledge Structure) At the same time he may have to deal with a de-motivated bookkeeper who is making mistakes. To motivate the person and provide leadership, the Project Manager might use the Situational Leadership style³ to address the problem. The flexibility that a project manager has in choosing which theories to use in the various phases will depend on the project manager as a knowledgeable manager, the company the person works for and the context of the project.

I have used this framework to establish a clear set of parameters for the RPL process. Project Management work should cover all the phases of a project, but some project managers conduct more work and acquire more knowledge in some phases than in others, thereby influencing their knowledge base and the claims they can make about it.

How does Bernstein's Horizontal Knowledge Structure link to the RPL approaches discussed earlier? RPL is about recognising what the person already knows, regardless of where it was obtained. Once an RPL student studies at the University, a Horizontal Knowledge Structure allows a person to add on theories from the formal academic work to the person's existing knowledge. In chapter 4 I discuss this feature of Horizontal Knowledge Structures in the light of what emerged in my interviews with the students and academics involved.

Bernstein's interpretation of knowledge structures can reinforce the credit exchange model of RPL. Placing emphasis on theories may be similar to placing emphasis on Learning Outcomes – a predetermined requirement with little, if any, flexibility. On the one hand, it provides an enabling framework for interpretation of RPL (because no theory is a prerequisite to the next theory), but on the other hand, it reinforces the idea that knowledge outside the academy is different from knowledge within. This is a notion that is increasingly contested, as I will show in this study in the field of Project Management.

The link between learning in the workplace and academic theory is central to my thesis. The concepts of knowledge structures and recontextualisation as developed by Bernstein and

³ Situational Leadership Style is a leadership approach developed by P Hersey and K Blanchard (Smit & Cronje, 2002: 291).

Barnett provide me with a framework for interpreting the knowledge claims made by the RPL students.

2.5 Knowledge claims – equivalence or cross-pollination?

The RPL models I discussed all imply that learning from experience may be recognised by an academic institution, as the latter may decide that what has been learned from experience is relevant or similar to what is to be learned in the curriculum. A more recent interpretation of RPL suggests that the RPL applicant brings value to the academic institution and that the process of recognition should be a two-way rather than a one-way process (Harris, 2006: 26-28).

2.5.1 Validation of knowledge

During the RPL process, emphasis is placed on learning in the workplace and how experience can best be interpreted and validated. The theorist David Kolb is often cited to guide this analysis. According to Kolb's experiential learning cycle, the structural basis of the learning processes lies in the transaction among the four adaptive modes and the way in which experience, conceptualisation, reflection and action form the basis for the development of adult thought. It is assumed by some RPL practitioners that the RPL applicant can enter this process at any point, but learning can only take place through a process of conceptualisation (Harris, 2006: 6-7). According to Kolb, "learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from a combination of grasping experience and transforming it" (Kolb, 1984: 26, 38 and 41). This approach is used especially in the learning and development model of RPL to explain why learning in the workplace is different to academic learning.

Michelson (2006: 145-147) questions the notion that knowledge developed in the workplace is different from that developed in the academia. She compares Kolb's cycle with the scientific disciplines as a process of validation of knowledge.

If the scientific process is not followed, knowledge will often not be taken seriously and might be seen as "outsider knowledge". This process is based on a method that is commonly used to verify knowledge, which Elena Michelson (2006:145-47) refers to as "Enlightenment epistemology". According to this approach, knowledge claims are seen as valid once they have

gone through a four-phase evaluation process as listed in table 2.1. Emphasis is placed on who makes the claims and by whom they are verified. This process has been used in science since the Enlightenment, but its objectivity and even correctness are being challenged by writers such as Michelson.

Comparing the Enlightenment and Kolb, Michelson (2006: 147) points out that the steps in these processes are very similar, as summarised in the table 2.1:

| Enlightenment thinking | Kolb's experiential learning cycle |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ the claim being made by a "reliable knower"; ☞ it is abstracted from the place where the experience took place; ☞ using observation, testing and reason, the claim is evaluated and transformed into knowledge; and ☞ the knowledge is finally applied in practice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ "know-how" experience ☞ Collection of data and observations about the experience ☞ Data are analysed and conclusions are drawn, resulting in theory or hypotheses ☞ The theory or hypotheses guides the action and implementation, leading to new experience (Kolb, 1974: 21, 24 & 41) |

Table 2.1 Comparison between Enlightenment thinking and Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

The table draws a comparison between the enlightenment epistemology and the experiential learning cycle of Kolb. Michelson (2006: 147) takes this point further and questions the epistemology within which RPL takes place. According to her, the two are very similar and should not be used in RPL.

Michelson suggests that "situated knowledge" should rather be used as a framework to evaluate RPL applications and Kolb's experiential learning cycle:

"By relocating RPL within an epistemology of situated knowledge we can reconfigure it as a dialogue across alternative modalities of knowledge. All knowledge including academic knowledge is partial; RPL can become an invitation to attend to traditionally marginalised voices, contesting the primacy of any and acknowledging the value of both confluence and divergence in knowledge claims." (Michelson, 2006: 155-156).

This is an important change from seeing RPL as a process of seeking to equate knowledge from the workplace and that in the academia. Adopting the approach that Michelson proposes will enable RPL to influence the academia rather than having to ask for approval. The use of a different basis for comparison, namely situational knowledge, could provide a point of departure

– it is acknowledged that knowledge does develop in different locations (Harris, 2006: 9). Osman and Castle agree with this notion when they say that:

“... the university can both be a site which defines and constructs knowledge and a site which examines and engages critically with different contexts of knowledge creation. RPL facilitates a meeting of different traditions of knowledge emanating for different sites of practice. It brings into the university different and other ways of knowing the philosophical and epistemological framing of RPL will have specific ramifications for the practice of RPL for students, lecturers and institutions.” (Osman and Castle, 2002: 65)

Situational knowledge as Michelson describes it is different from Barnett (2006). According to Barnett situational knowledge is associated with particular job tasks, is mainly tacit. Michelson’s interpretation is broader and she looks at RPL as a method how knowledge can be acknowledged regardless where it originates. I decided to use both interpretations for my study, because Michelson wants to use RPL to accommodate contested knowledge, but when one deals with academics who are sceptical about RPL and the value of the knowledge claims of the RPL applicants, one also deals with contested knowledge. If the knowledge is associated with particular jobs or broader the industry the applicant is from, some within academia will question the value of the knowledge. So the interpretation of “Situated knowledge” by both theorists is used.

If I take the notion that “RPL facilitates a meeting of different traditions of knowledge(s)” as my departure point, and ask the question: How do these “knowledges” meet? Eraut’s concept of “mutual enhancement” (2002: 69) provides valuable insights.

2.5.2 “Mutual enhancement”

The opinions of Michelson, Osman and Castle can be linked to Eraut’s concept of “mutual enhancement” (Eraut, 2002: 69 and 76-77). Eraut states that the transfer of knowledge will only take place if the individual “participates in further learning in the workplace in order to use the knowledge from the qualification” (ibid).

Looking at the interaction between formal qualifications and informal learning in the workplace, Eraut (2002: 63) found that the processes seem to be complementary to each other. Eraut, with his concept of “mutual enhancement”, says that the interaction depended on the purpose and

nature of the qualification, the types of work and the nature of the working context, where work-based learning and learning for a qualification integrate at the point of use. The use of formal knowledge based on a qualification enhances the quality of informal learning in the workplace, but at the same time, experience can be used to modify formal knowledge. He found that mature students with relevant prior knowledge and following a formal course started thinking critically and systematically about their workplace practices with the “guidance of concepts encountered in the formal educational contexts” (ibid).

For the enhancement process to take place, the individual should know what to select and should then transform this knowledge to suit the situation. The problem with this approach is that the individual and the employer need to have space for this process: The individual needs to know how to transform the knowledge and understand the complexity of the situation at hand. Employers need to understand that further learning is required in order to use prior knowledge. I discussed the use of learning in the workplace in the course and vice versa with the RPL students as well as the academics during the interviews in order to evaluate the possibility of “mutual enhancement”.

The above discussion links to discipline-specific RPL, because knowledge from a specific industry or field – Project Management in this case – can best be enhanced within the field itself, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach that some of the RPL models, such as the credit exchange model, likes to promote.

I decide to use the work of Bernstein, Eraut and Michelson to provide me with a framework about the development of knowledge that enabled me to acknowledge that knowledge developed where the individuals is. I will now discuss the work of Barnett in the context of my research

2.6 A framework for analysis of knowledge claims

The discussion of this chapter now leads to the framework for analysis that I have adapted from Barnett. I accept the notion that knowledge can be created outside the academy, and use Barnett's approach in the RPL process that I am involved in. The link between workplace activity and disciplinary knowledge "is (about) selectively restructuring, having regard for technical or organisational problems" (Barnett, 2006: 147).). Barnett's approach, the concept of vocational pedagogy and the process associated with it, are useful for my research. The link between the use of discipline knowledge, vocational pedagogy, the workplace and knowledge to get work done in the workplace encapsulates the RPL applicant. I therefore decided to transform and expand the work of Barnett as indicated in Figure 2.3.

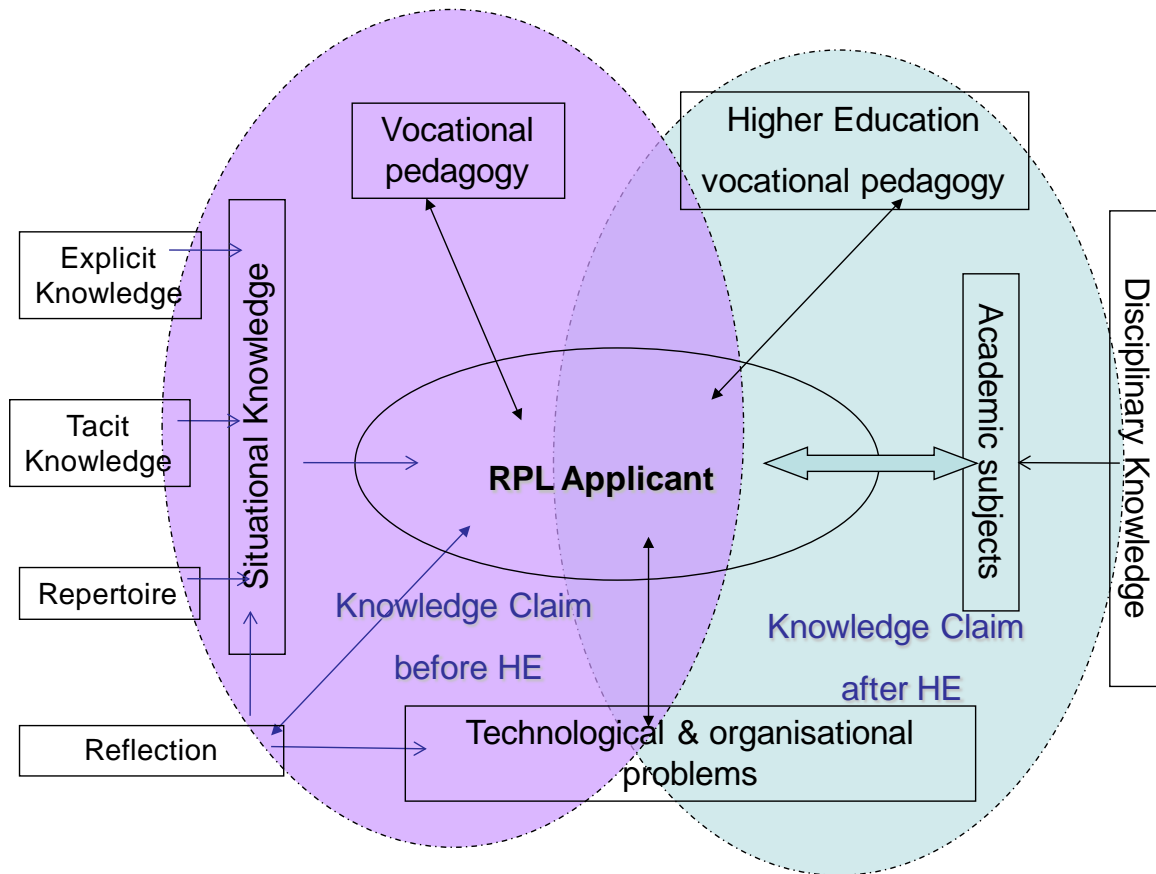


Figure: 2.3 Positioning knowledge claims within RPL

A *knowledge claim* can consist of the two shaded areas encompassing everything the RPL applicant knows. As indicated in the diagram above, the two shaded areas indicate when which

knowledge claim is being made. The discussion so far has dealt with two aspects: knowledge before entry into the university and knowledge claims thereafter.

The purple area deals with the knowledge claims made before entry into Higher Education. It includes the workplace based learning and knowledge that is obtained from:

- ☞ Situational knowledge, based on Barnett's and Michelson's interpretation which is closely associated with specific jobs and tasks, knowledge originating anywhere. I decided to expand this concept: According to Barnett this knowledge is mainly tacit, but I have added explicit knowledge because the RPL process might make some of the tacit knowledge explicit.
- ☞ Specific tasks and jobs are often associated with specific words, terminology, method and paradigms. I have included the concept of "repertoire" referring to the acquisition of a specific discourse as Bernstein explains it. Dealing only with the individual RPL applicants/students I focus only on the concept of "repertoire" and not "reservoir" (Bernstein, 1999: 160) Repertoire is a "set of strategies" which are linked to context and activities including concepts, procedures, equipment and systems (including the use of software packages) that are used by an individual to resolve specific problems. The process is context bound.
- ☞ Closely linked to repertoire is the use of "reflection" in the workplace. Reflection can be a learning process, especially if problems are resolved. The person's reflective capacity influences how the person resolves organisational challenges and what they learn from it, capturing the "trail-and-error" learning that Barnett included in his work.
- ☞ Vocational pedagogy is what the person has learnt in the workplace. Either through short courses or in-house programmes and on-the-job learning. Vocational pedagogy is recontextualised knowledge associated with specific tasks and activities.
- ☞ Technological and organisational problems influence the Knowledge claims both before and after entry into Higher Education. What it is that the person learnt from resolving problems is the aspects that I am interested in.

In my research, dealing with the knowledge claims made before entry into Higher Education, I focus on the “pedagogic recontextualisation” that Barnett talks about. Analysing what the RPL applicant learnt in the workplace, how these knowledge claims are used to study at fourth year level. What is the knowledge that the individual developed in the workplace that enables the person to study at fourth year level?

The turquoise shaded area deals with knowledge obtained within the university, in other words after entry in Higher Education: the interaction between disciplinary knowledge from the workplace, and the knowledge obtained from academic subjects linked to disciplinary knowledge. This section links to the concept of “Reclassification recontextualisation (RR)” developed by Barnett - the real-world application of an academic discipline.

I am interested in the disciplinary knowledge that the RPL student is exposed to and what the person is learning that is new. Linked to the learning process within Higher Education is the knowledge reorganised for vocational purposes - learning in the workplace that is influenced by the requirements of the field of expertise, but is supported by discipline knowledge. I therefore added the block “Higher education vocational pedagogy” to the diagram to make a distinction between learning before entering HE and after entering HE. The RPL applicant might not be aware of this link, but once the person is studying at the university it becomes clear, as my research will indicate.

“Technical and organisational problems” include aspects such as problem solving and methods that the organisation adopts to do its work. Some of these methods might overlap and influence the knowledge claim for RPL applicant/student before and after entry into the University, that is why this aspect is linked to both the purple and turquoise balloon of the knowledge claim

The concept of “recontextualisation” (Bernstein, 2000 and Barnett, 2006) is an important concept for my research. It deals with the transmission and acquisition of knowledge and the expression thereof. The interpretation of recontextualisation is from the academic environment to the workplace. My application is the other way around, the recontextualisation of the workplace knowledge in the academia.

Having developed this framework, I used it to design the questions I have asked the RPL students and the academics which I explain in Chapter Three. I used this framework to guide my analysis of the data I collected and to develop the themes that led to the analysis of my findings.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn on a variety of theories to develop a framework that can assist me in the analysis of the knowledge claims that I am investigating in this study. I based the chapter on two foci: knowledge claims before entry into Higher Education and knowledge claims after entry into the University by the RPL students in the BTech in Project Management. These two foci guided the rest of my study.

I used the work of Eraut(2000), Barnett(2006) and Evans(2000) to develop the questions I asked the RPL students about their knowledge claims as part of their RPL applications, issues such as which competencies they use in the workplace, what they knew about project management and which steps in the project management cycle they used. I used the Michelson's notion that knowledge can originate outside academia in my discussions with the academics regarding what is seen as knowledge in the RPL application and its suitability in Higher Education.

The work of Bernstein and his notion of knowledge structures guided me in the questions I asked the RPL students once they started their studies at the institution. Using the Project Management life cycle as a mediating object, I discussed the knowledge that the RPL students had and which they had developed since starting the course. Using the work of Barnett and Eraut, I analysed the use of workplace learning in the academia. The concepts of mutual enhancement and recontextualisation were of great value in the analysis of my findings.

I analysed the RPL process used in Project Management and compared it to the RPL models discussed in the first part of this chapter. In Chapter Three, I explain how the framework presented in figure 2.3 (page 34) guided me in the development of my methodology and the analysis of data.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

An individual claiming to know something about Project Management is making a subjective and personal claim. Interpreting and recognising this claim is Inter-subjective. I am analysing the inter-subjectivity between the RPL applicant and Higher Education: first outside the academia and secondly, once the person is a student, the inter-subjectivity within the academia as a student in Project Management. Throughout my study I have used a theorised position as explained in Chapter Two, which places me in this inter-subjective space as a third party. In this space, I have involved the RPL students and academics in the use of a qualitative research methodology.

In this chapter, I explain the methodology that I used to answer the question of how RPL is and can be used to assess knowledge claims being made in the BTech in Project Management at the institution. I decided to use a case study approach because the RPL process within Project Management at the institution is very specific. The applicant's/student's knowledge claims are made within the context of Project Management. Using the case study approach enabled me to capture the uniqueness of each individual case, as well as the contextual specifics of the "case" of RPL in Project Management at the institution. The case study has thus been documented within an interpretative paradigm, seeking to understand the case at two levels: the context of Project Management at the institution, and the level of the individuals within it.

Over a period of two years, I followed six RPL applicants/students by analysing the knowledge claims they made during the RPL application and the development of their knowledge in Project Management course once they were studying at the institution. I analysed the documents from the RPL application. This analysis was followed by one-on-one interviews with each of the RPL applicants/students after six months of study, as well as with the academics involved in the process. In this chapter, I discuss how I arrived at the questions I asked and the analysis of the data I collected.

3.2 Philosophical assumptions

My research is about knowledge claims in Recognition of Prior Learning, but the research is essentially about epistemology, which, according to Usher (1997:173) belongs to a “philosophical discourse that concerns itself with different criteria to determine what counts as knowledge”. I had to decide which approach would be appropriate to analyse the knowledge in the knowledge claims involved. I now find myself in a situation where I am dealing with the basis for my own knowledge claims about knowledge claims.

Doing research about knowledge claims is about my interpretation, as the researcher, of what the RPL students and Project Management academics tell me. The positivist approach requires “the researcher (to be) objective, unbiased, value-neutral”, and knowledge is seen as “detached from its source and place where it is made” (Usher, 1997: 174). This is not possible in the research that I am conducting, because I am involving the perceptions of the source of the knowledge claims, the RPL applicant/student and the academics, in my research. These perceptions are used to inform the answers to the questions I have posed. Therefore I cannot be “objective and unbiased” as the positivist approach would require me to be.

My research is primarily about finding out what knowledge is being claimed by the RPL students before and after admission into Higher Education; the aim is not to criticise this knowledge. The critical paradigm is about using knowledge for emancipation, raising of consciousness and awareness of the material or structural conditions that (are) oppressive. (Usher, 1997: 187) Raising awareness of power relations is not my aim with this thesis. I have therefore decided not to use the critical paradigm either. My focus is to interpret what is understood as knowledge by the participants in the process.

I am using the responses of the RPL students in my interviews and various documents, enabling me to interpret the information and explain it within the theoretical framework that I have created in Chapter Two. I have decided to use an interpretative approach, because this approach is most appropriate for the questions I am seeking to answer, it is concerned with the individual and understanding the subjective world of human experience (Cohen, 1994: 35).

I am using an interpretative approach to place me within the hermeneutic paradigm. Usher (1997: 182), quoting Gadamer, points out that it is impossible to separate oneself as a

researcher from the historical and cultural context that defines one's interpretive framework. Interpretation is seen as circular in this paradigm and has become known as the Hermeneutic circle.

“The hermeneutic circle of interpretation and its existence mean that knowledge formation always arises from that which is already known, even if only as a tacit (or) background spiral rather than linear and cumulative as portrayed in positivist empiricist epistemology” (Usher, *ibid.*).

This paradigm is about the interpretation of something depending on the interpretation of the “whole”, but interpreting the whole depends on interpreting the “parts” (Usher, 1997:182). The paradigm involves empathetic understanding of individuals' day-to-day experiences and the meanings given to the routines, problems and events in a specific setting (Bailey, 2007: 53), capturing “insider knowledge” (Henning, 2007: 20). Doing my research within the hermeneutic paradigm and using the interpretative approach provide me with an opportunity to explore the perceptions and interpretations of individual Project Managers/RPL candidates/students and academics.

Research in this paradigm places emphasis on experience and interpretations. Fundamentally interpretative research is concerned with meaning and seeks to understand social situations and the people in them. It deals with deep, interpretative understandings of social phenomena. The assumption made in this paradigm is that most of the knowledge held by individuals is gained and filtered through social construction. Research using this paradigm is an attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings people assign to them (Henning, 2004: 21).

3.2.1 Qualitative research

Using the interpretative paradigm places my research in the qualitative research domain. Using the RPL process within the Project Management course as my starting point, I followed six RPL applicants/students on their journey from applying for RPL up to their completion of their BTech in Project Management. Capturing the knowledge claims made in the process required an approach that could capture the uniqueness and complexity within the natural setting of the RPL process, and qualitative research provided that approach.

Qualitative research is self-reflective and inter-subjective – understanding the topic that is being researched (Stake, 1995: 45-6 and Creswell, 2007: 3). This is in line with the Hermeneutic paradigm – “this means that qualitative research studies things in their natural setting,

attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (Murray, 2003: 2).

Qualitative research “denotes the type of enquiry in which the qualities, characteristics or properties of a phenomenon are examined for better understanding and explanation” (Henning, 2004: 5-6, 40). The phenomenon that I am investigating is the knowledge claim within a natural setting. This required the collection of data directly from the research subjects, interacting face-to-face with them over a period of time (Cresswell, 2007: 38).

In qualitative research, reality is constructed by individuals involved in the research situation. The role of the researcher is to understand the phenomenon by reflecting on and interpreting the topic at hand. In addition, it may criticise it or provide solutions to problems where possible. Qualitative research should reflect the complex nature of society and contexts, with data collected and interpreted in a sensitive and ethical manner.

Creswell (2007: 4) lists a variety of approaches to qualitative research, such as Grounded Theory, Phenomenology, Narrative research, Ethnography and Case Study approach. The difference between these approaches can be found in the focus, unit of analysis, collection of data and analysis. The “narrative” approach focuses on the individual, and “phenomenology” seeks to pinpoint the “essence of experience” (Creswell, 2007: 78). In my study I am interested in individuals as well as their experiences, but I am looking at the individual and their experience within Project Management more broadly. I am using Phenomenology as a philosophical framework, but not as the approach on which I am basing my study, because I want a wider focus than experiences only.

I use theory to guide me in the analysis of my findings, but I am not setting out to develop theory, as required by Grounded Theory approach. Nor am I engaged in ethnography, which requires the researcher to analyse culture and groups of individuals practising a specific culture. I am rather focusing on specific individuals who have applied to be RPL-ed. The emphasis is on Project Management and specific individuals’ interpretations of knowledge within the Project Management programme.

3.2.2 Phenomenology

The interpretation of knowledge within the interpretative approach is a description and analysis of people's intentions, beliefs, values, reasons, meaning-making and self-understandings. The researcher has to look at different "places and things" (Henning, 2004: 20) to understand the phenomenon by means of different sources. The phenomenon I am looking at, the knowledge claim, which is the focus of my study, is divided into two parts: "Before entry in Higher Education" and "After entry into Higher Education".

Critique of phenomenology by Bernstein in Cohen (1994:35) is concerned with how phenomenologists interpret the meaning of situation and the ways in which these meanings are "negotiated" by the actors involved. He points out that the "very process whereby one interprets and defines a situation is itself a product of circumstances in which one is placed". One important factor that should be considered here is the power of the phenomenologist to impose his or her own understanding of the situation on the participants.

Writers such as Gadamer and Heidegger make it clear that one cannot bracket or suspend subjectivity and assumptions, but that one rather sees them as an essential starting-point for acquiring knowledge. It is about being aware of one's pre-understandings, recognising that they impact on one's work and seeing it as a "fusion of horizons" (Usher, 1997: 184). Horizon refers to one's standpoint or situation. The fusion results from seeking knowledge while being grounded in a perspective arising from one's situation, a perspective that cannot be bracketed. I need to explain my own biases which might influence my research.

The researcher's horizon should be open to other horizons, particularly the horizons he/she wants to understand. The fusion of horizons leads to new horizons as well as the enlargement or broadening of one's own horizons. The fusion of horizons is the outcome of inter-subjective dialogue by which different and conflicting interpretations are harmonised by comparing and contrasting various interpretations. A consensus can be achieved despite differences – indeed because of the differences – as a dialogue takes place between the researcher and the object (Usher, 1997: 184-5).

I decided that the case study approach would be the most suitable approach to use within the qualitative paradigm. This approach provides me with an opportunity of studying my "unit of

analysis” (knowledge claims in Project Management) in depth. It provides an opportunity of developing a detailed understanding of a complex process where the individuals involved cannot be separated from the context (Creswell, 2007: 40).

3.3. Design of the case study

As mentioned before, I have decided to use the case study approach because the Knowledge Claim in the context of Project Management is situated within a distinctive process. The definition below sums up my approach to this study:

“Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* [author’s emphasis] (i.e. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes.” (Creswell, 2007: 73)

The aim of the study is to develop a deeper understanding, not to draw generalisations, because I am focusing on the issue of the knowledge claims made by the various participants in my study. The BTech in Project Management at the institution is the frame for my “unit of analysis” (Creswell, 2007: 40 and Yin, 2009: 28-30). As mentioned earlier, the case study has two levels: The first level is the Project Management programme and its relevance to the RPL theories and processes. The second level is the RPL applicant/student, and these cases provide the basis for the interpretation of the knowledge claims made before and after entry into Higher Education.

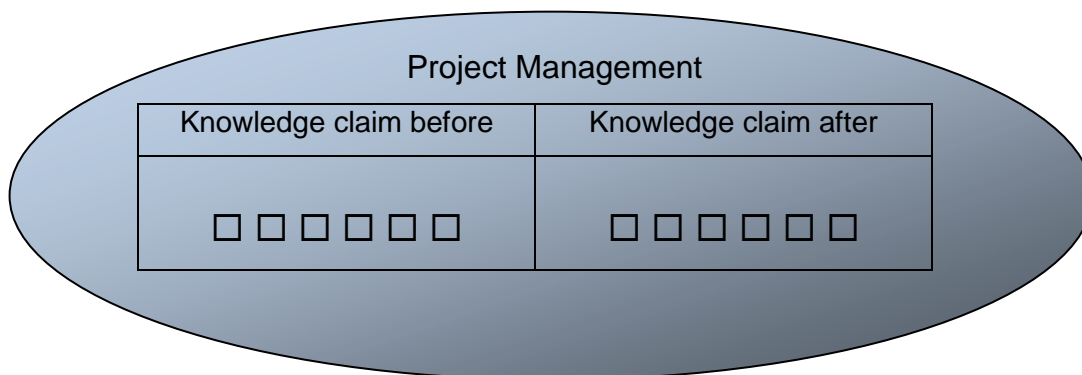


Figure 3.1: Two levels of Unit of Analysis

The questions I am asking are what Yin (2009: 28) calls “what” and “how” questions. “What” is the knowledge claim being made – before and after entry into Higher Education” and “How” is knowledge claim changing from before entry to after entry in HE.

3.4 Research methods

The successful use of my research methods depended on the willingness of the RPL applicants/students and academics to be part of my study. Once they agreed, I could implement my research methods: the review of documentation relevant to the RPL application and studies at the institution. The interviews provided me with an opportunity of finding out about their interpretation of the RPL process and their knowledge claims, making a distinction between their “before HE” and “after HE” interpretation of their knowledge.

3.4.1 Selection of participants

A total of six RPL applicants/students were interviewed for this study, as well as three academics. Perry (1998: 793) indicates that up to 10 “cases” are sufficient before a study becomes too costly and unwieldy. I found working with a total of nine people made sense and managed to collect sufficient information to conduct an analysis in the light of the theories presented in Chapter Two.

3.4.1.1 Students participating in the study

I asked the RPL applicants to participate in my study because they had applied for RPL in Project Management. I approached all the applicants who registered over a two-year period; two did not grant me an interview.

The average age of the six participants in my research is 42 years. The group consists of two women and four men. Four work for Provincial Government, of which three work for the Department of Public Works. One works for a private company and another for a parastatal. See appendix E.

Students A and B have been managing projects involving the upgrading and maintenance of government buildings for the past eight years. They are both in the same position, namely that

of “Chief Works Inspector”. They both completed their trade test: the one in Lifts (student A) and the other in Air Conditioning (student B).

Students B and C are the only two who did not complete school, but student C, like B, did a trade test in Boiler Making. Student C works for a private company repairing oil rigs, diamond mining vessels and barges in the Cape Town harbour. He started off at the company as an apprentice and was promoted several times until he became a project manager eight years ago.

Students D and E started off their careers in positions that are traditionally held by women: D as a receptionist and E as a teacher. Student D ran her own company until five years ago, when she started working for Provincial Government in the Health Department. She manages projects related to ICT upgrading and installations. Student E left the teaching profession for the banking industry, after which she was appointed as a project administrator at a private company. She has been working at the Department of Public Works for the past six years as a project administrator, she has been promoted to Supervisor since being granted access to the BTech and she has two people reporting to her. She supports students A and B in their work and fulfils many administrative and coordinating functions. She has been promoted since she started with the BTech and has three people reporting to her now.

Student F also started off his career as an apprentice. He is a fitter and turner. He has worked in the Navy dockyard for most of his career and is the Senior Project Superintendent. He oversees projects dealing with the installation and maintenance of electrical equipment.

All six the students have completed short courses on a variety of topics such as First Aid (student A and C), Property Valuation (student B), International Standards Organisation (ISO) (student E) and Volunteer Management (student D). All of them have completed a course in Project Management and MS Project (software package).

The importance of short courses is always emphasised by the academics as part of the screening process. They also emphasise the importance of computer literacy and knowledge of MS Project. There are, however, differences between the types of courses done. For example,

student D has done a five-day course, while students A, C and E did theirs over a number of weeks at private colleges. I discuss this discrepancy later on in chapter four.

3.4.1.2 Academics participating in the research

The academics involved in the RPL assessment are those lecturing in the BTech programme. In my study, the course co-ordinator and at least two other academics were involved. The first course coordinator, Academic A in my study, resigned from the University halfway through and academic C took over as the course coordinator. Academic C had been involved in the RPL process before Academic A resigned.

Academic B has been involved throughout and is a part-time lecturer. He is a successful project manager himself, running his own project management company, and is very passionate about the work experience of mature students – not only the RPL applicants.

3.4.2 Collection of data

I collected data from various sources in order to develop a detailed picture of knowledge claims and the RPL process within Project Management. As previously mentioned it is one of the hallmarks of the case study approach to obtain information from a variety of sources (Cresswell, 2007: 78, 95 and Denscombe, 37: 2007). The reason for my using a variety of sources was to make sure that I used all contextual material available to describe the setting of the case and to develop an in-depth understanding of it. (Henning, 2004: 40)

For the knowledge claim before entering HE, I used the documentation that is part of the RPL application including CV and background information of the applicants and the test that was written by the applicants. Due to the nature of my work I am exposed to the interpretation and application of the RPL process within the institution on a daily basis. This results in direct and indirect evidence being included in my study. The direct evidence is the RPL application itself and the documentation that is generated as a result. The indirect evidence is comments made in meetings, in e-mails or on the telephone. Even comments made in the passage or over a cup

of tea had an impact on my findings. I have indicated where this happened and how I have use and interpreted the indirect evidence.

Once the RPL applicants have written their test, it is followed by a panel interview. I observe the panel interview, but I have not included it as one of the sources of information for my study. The panel interview is very informal and most of the discussion is about the candidate and why they are applying for RPL, rather than the knowledge they already have. I have included aspects of the panel interviews where these were relevant as indirect evidence.

After admission into HE, I held the one-on-one interviews with the RPL applicants/students discussing their studies with them and what they are learning in Higher Education. I also analysed their performance during the course and, where I compared their marks to those of the class.

I interviewed the academics involved in the RPL assessment I discussed their interpretation of the knowledge claims made as part of the RPL application and the knowledge of the candidates as it impacts in the course.

The collection of data took place in three different phases:

- ☞ Review of the documentation as part of the RPL application before I held the interviews
- ☞ Interviews with the RPL applicant and the assessors/academics
- ☞ Review of documentation such as assignments and exams completed once the RPL applicants were students

3.4.2.1 Review of documentation before and after RPL

a) Documentation from the RPL application

I used the CV of the RPL applicants for screening purposes. A CV gives me an overview of the work the person does and whether the work experience is relevant to the qualification the person is interested in. If in the case of the BTech, if the person is working as a project leader or coordinator I will ask for more detail on the projects that the person is involved in and what

his or her role is. As confirmation of employment I always ask for a letter of reference. The review of these documents was an important source of information for my study. The documents that were reviewed included:

- ☞ CV
- ☞ List of projects the applicant is involved in
- ☞ Reference letters
- ☞ Assessor report that was generated as a result of the application
- ☞ A test written as part of the RPL assessment

Once the screening process is complete, individuals who have experience in managing projects were invited to a test. I reviewed the tests in an attempt to understand which knowledge claims had been made by each of the applicants as part of his/her RPL application.

The test (Appendix D) consists of six questions based on a case study. The test requires the candidates to indicate how they would plan and implement the project of building a community centre. They were asked to:

- ☞ Compile a project brief
- ☞ Discuss the role of stakeholders
- ☞ Discuss the four stages of the project's life cycle
- ☞ Discuss the importance of team composition
- ☞ Discuss important characteristics of a project manager
- ☞ Discuss how to best manage risk

I also reviewed the assessor reports written by the academics involved in the process. This prepared me for the interview with the academics and gave me insight into their interpretation of the knowledge claims being made.

b) Documentation from the students

After the RPL process and once the applicants are students, they participate in the class as students: writing tests and exams, submitting assignments and participating in group work. The BTech in Project Management consists of eight subjects and I was provided with copies of the syllabuses of all of them. I managed to collect information on the students' work for three of the

subjects: Entrepreneurship 4, Strategic Management 4 and Project Resources 4. I would have liked to collect information about more subjects, but was unable to do so due to the departure of academic A and B, being a part-time staff member. I also collected exam scripts on another subject, Operational Research, but due to my own lack of mathematical knowledge, I could not analyse this information. I was able to analyse the other three subjects because of my own knowledge about management. I analysed the following subjects for each student:

| <i>Student</i> | <i>Subjects</i> | <i>Information</i> |
|----------------|---|--|
| A | Entrepreneurship | Assignment |
| B | Entrepreneurship | Assignment |
| C | Entrepreneurship Project Resources Strategic Management | Exam Script Exam Script Assignment |
| D | Entrepreneurship Project Resources Strategic Management | Exam Script Exam Script Assignment |
| E | Entrepreneurship Project Resources Strategic Management | Exam Script Exam Script Assignment |
| F | Entrepreneurship Project Resources Strategic Management | Exam Script Exam Script Assignment |

Table 3.1: Subjects from the BTech: Project Management evaluated

I did a review of the marks each of the participants obtained and drew a comparison drawn with the class average where I was able to get the class average - the information is listed in Appendix F

3.4.2.2 Interviews

I used two questionnaires: one for the RPL applicants/students and another for the academics. Figure 2.3 (page 34) based on the work of Barnett, guided me in the development of these questionnaires. I based my approach on Hewson (1995: 509), who suggests using a theoretical framework when designing the questionnaire and conducting interviews.

a) Type of interviews and questionnaires

“Questions in qualitative research usually explore cases or phenomena” (Stake, 1995: 41-42, 67), seeking patterns in unanticipated as well as expected relationships. Due to the fact that I, as the researcher, was in direct contact with the research participants and interpretations, the interviews are inter-subjective, and my theoretical framework served as a guide. I constructed my questions carefully so that the same questions were used with everyone. Using the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two, I divided the questionnaire in two main parts: “before entering HE” and “after entering HE”.

A combination of the “interview guide approach” and “standardised open-ended interviews”, as described by Cohen (2000: 271), was used. I decided on a set of basic questions that I asked all the participants, and I modified questions to the specific individual’s background and context. Open-ended questions were used in face-to-face interviews (Denscombe, 2007: 177), which provided the opportunity of modifying questions and unpacking any comments that needed clarification. The purpose of the interviews was not only to gather information but to get the participant’s opinions (Cohen, 2000: 269) and understandings of the knowledge claims that they had made.

b) Questions to the RPL applicants/students

Six months or more after they had started their studies, I interviewed the RPL applicants, now students. Having reviewed the documentation that had been generated as part of the RPL application, I prepared myself to interview these individuals.

The questions concerned were asked so that each interviewee could share their unique experiences and tell their own story. The aim of these questions was not to get a simple “yes” or “no” answer, but a description and an interpretation (Stake, 1995: 65). Using figure 2.2 (page 27) I developed a space for the RPL applicants/students to reflect on their knowledge of the project life cycle before and after entering Higher Education. Their answers provided me with detail regarding situational knowledge in accordance with my understanding of Barnett’s approach.

The generic questionnaire is in Appendix B, but it was adjusted to each candidate because each person is unique. I could do this because I know them from the RPL application process and I had their CVs and RPL tests on file. I think this assisted greatly in building rapport. The questionnaire has three sections.

The first part is about background: I decided to include a question on their own background and experience as project managers. Although I was familiar with their background from the RPL application, this provided an opportunity for them to update me on their work. It also established rapport. Although we had met before, it was good to re-connect. I also asked about short courses they had done and why they had applied for RPL. In conclusion, I asked what they thought of the RPL process itself. This last question is not directly relevant to my study, but I decided to include it because it impacts on my work as a RPL practitioner.

The second part of the questionnaire concerned knowledge about Project Management before applying for RPL. Using the concepts from the Barnett theory figure 2.3 (page 34), I asked questions regarding the knowledge and competencies used in the workplace with the aim of getting answers with regard to “situational knowledge” and “vocational pedagogy”. I asked how these competencies are used in relation to “technological and organisational problems” (Barnett, 2006: 148). I wanted to know what it was they knew about project management before entering the University. With these questions I tried to get a handle on what their knowledge claims were. I used the detail of the phases of project management because this involves essential knowledge related to project management. Before I conducted the interviews I thought that the knowledge and information might be tacit although I was hoping some would be explicit knowledge. Being aware of the problems associated with tacit knowledge I decided to follow the advice of Eraut and use “a mediating object” (Eraut, 2000:120) (figure 2.2) page 27 to prompt them.

I used figure 2.2 as “a mitigating object” (Eraut, 2000: 120) to prompt them. I asked them if they had developed a unique method of working as a project manager, because I wanted to know if they had developed a specific or unique approach to project management. If this was indeed the case, I wanted to know how this would influence their knowledge claims. I used this question to develop insight into the knowledge claims of the RPL candidates with regard to their method of

working. This question links to the concept of “recontextualisation” and I was hoping to get a sense of how the RPL applicant had developed his/her knowledge in the workplace.

The last part of the questionnaire focused on knowledge developed at the institution. I wanted to know what knowledge the RPL applicant/student had developed since he/she had started studying at the institution. I used figure 2.2 again and asked what knowledge the person has now which they did not have before. I was interested in possible changes that might have occurred to the knowledge claims made as part of the RPL application. This question also links to the influence of academic subjects in the workplace, as explained by Barnett (2006: 146-7). I wanted to know if this was also the case with the RPL students who have prior knowledge from the workplace. It links to the concept of recontextualisation and how the RPL applicant, now student, transfers from one gaze to another. (Bernstein, 1999, 164)

I wanted to know if the theory that they are being introduced to at the institution resonates with their work experiences. I wanted to explore if what they already knew is influencing their interpretation of the work they are doing within academia. If they have their own framework or paradigm around project management which works for them in the workplace, how does that affect them in the class?

In addition I turned the question around and I asked whether they are applying what they are learning at the institution in the workplace. If they were able to apply it, I asked how that was influencing them on a daily basis.

I asked if workplace knowledge is used in the class, in assignments and in the exams. I was concerned about their ability to cope with academic reading and writing, This links to Barnett’s notion of reclassification recontextualisation. I wanted to see to how are the RPL students using their prior knowledge in the class.

c) Questionnaire for academics

My second questionnaire was used for the academic staff members who were involved in the assessment of the RPL applications (appendix C). These individuals also teach in the BTEch in Project Management programme, interacting with the RPL students after admission to the University.

The first set of questions deals with the RPL application itself and the motivation for the assessment method that is being used. I tried to determine what knowledge it is that the academics are looking for during the RPL assessment. I realised from the first time when I dealt with a RPL application for access into the BTech Project Management that this qualification is presented with a challenge because there is no National Diploma underpinning it. It is a generic programme aimed at people from any profession who are involved in projects. I wanted to know how the academics determine if the RPL applicant's knowledge is at the level of any ND.

I needed to understand for this study the motivation for the assessment method used, namely the test and panel interview. In addition I discussed the importance of Project Management theory and workplace experience with them. I wanted to know whether the influence of vocational pedagogy in the workplace is important or not. The importance of short courses was also discussed.

The second set of questions is about the RPL students and their performance in the course. We discussed their contribution to the class and how they are coping with academic work. I asked these questions to understand the academics' interpretation of workplace knowledge in the class room and in the formal course. I wanted to know if there was space for the recontextualisation that Bernstein and Barnett talk about. If there is space, I wanted to know to what extent that space accommodates both the academic and the RPL student.

3.5 The interviews

I interviewed six RPL applications/students and three academics. I had to think about the various sources of information available and how I could use these when I conducted the interviews. Being part of the RPL process at the institution placed me in an ideal position for building rapport, but also contributed to the validity to the process.

3.5.1 Validity, and reliability.

Reliability is “the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions in all occasions”. (Bell, 1997: 64) I think the adopted Barnett approach (figure 2.3, page 34) can be repeated and used with other RPL students as well as in other department, especially in the Business Faculty.

Validity, according to Henning (2004: 20, 147-151), is about “measuring what we are supposed to measure”. Quoting the work of Kvale (2002: 309 in Henning, 2004: 148) Henning explains validity as follows: “Validation depends on good craftsmanship in an investigation, which includes continually checking, questioning and theoretically interpreting the finding.”

To validate is to accomplish three main aspects:

- ✎ Elimination of bias, neglect or lack of precision;
- ✎ Critical questioning of all procedures and decisions;
- ✎ Theorising by addressing theoretical questions in the process.

Using the points above I have been careful to reflect what I was told in the interviews and indicated my own interpretation thereof. I explain how I have done that during my research. I have used the theories in Chapter Two to interpret and explain my findings at the end of Chapter Four and in Chapter Five

5.2 Conducting the interviews with the RPL applicants/students and the academics

Conducting the interviews was fun and produced many useful insights. Because I knew everyone involved from the RPL process, it was not difficult to organise the interviews or to get the participants to answer my questions.

The first aspect I had to decide on was whether I wanted to use one-on-one interviews or not. I decided that this would be the best option, because each RPL application is unique and this uniqueness can only be understood in a personal, face-to-face interview. I decided to use only open-ended questions, not only to provide space for the participants to answer in detail, but also to build rapport.

The second aspect I had to decide on was when I would conduct the interviews and when I would give the questions to the participants. Henning (2004: 75) suggests not giving the

questions beforehand, but I decided to give them to the RPL students/applicants. This would give them an opportunity to think about the questions and prepare answers if they wanted to. Three of the six interviewees completed the questionnaire before I conducted the interview. During these three interviews, information was added, clarified and explained. This added value to the reliability of the interviews and gave me an opportunity to check if the question had been understood correctly and whether I understood the answers. If a question was not understood, I explained the question by “rewording it” (Cohen, 1994: 121).

The third consideration concerned the space and circumstances under which the interviews were held (Cresswell, 2007: 133). Four of the six participants arranged for me to come to their offices and arranged a quiet room where the interview was conducted. The other two interviews, as well as those with the academics, were done in either an office or a committee room at the institution. All spaces used were suitable for interviewing. I had no interruptions from outside parties during any of the interviews.

My role at the institution and in the RPL process might have influenced the answers I got. As Henning (2004: 53) points out, the power of the interviewer regarding the questions that are being asked needs to be kept in mind. I therefore had to consider the relationship between the participants and me. They shared their opinion and experiences with me frankly, as far as I could tell. They reflected on their work and how they were using it to complete their studies. They also shared their frustrations and the challenges that they faced in this regard. I reviewed their answers and looked for contradictions. Using different sources of information assisted me in looking for contradictions. For example, I used the RPL test in which there is a question dealing with the phases of a project. I asked a similar question in the one-on-one interviews. I compared the two answers for each of the applicants. This way I could pick up discrepancies, if there were any.

When analysing the interviews, I had to keep in mind “What (was) not being said” (Henning, 2004: 53-55, 67). I thus had to look out for any hidden meaning. This became clear during my interaction with the academics. During their interviews, they were appreciative of workplace-based experience, although other data did not confirm this, as explained in my findings.

3.5.3 Transcribing

All the interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, as is recommended by many researchers (e.g. Cresswell, 2007: 133 and Cohen, 2000: 171) and transcribed by me afterwards. I used the transcriptions to develop the analysis the TAG (Appendix H). Using the digital recorder gave me the opportunity of listening to the interviewee and prompting when necessary without having to worry about note taking during the interview.

Cohen (2000: 281-2) makes mention of tone of voice, emphasis, speed of speech and other events taking place. I made a note of these aspects in the transcripts where and if they had occurred. After analysing the transcripts, I realised that tone of voice and emphasis had not affected the meaning of what was being said significantly.

Denscombe (2007: 198) points out that interviewees do not always talk in “nice finite sentences”. During the transcribing process, I sometimes had to add punctuation or words to for the sake of readability – this was indicated in brackets. Sometimes they used Afrikaans words to express themselves. This was recorded as is and the translation was placed in brackets. The above occurrences did not affect the summaries that I made.

3.6 Method of data analysis

I used the framework developed in Chapter Two to guide me during the interviews. I used the same framework to guide me in the analysis and assist me in identifying concepts and themes.

3.6.1 Identification of themes

Using the basic temporal structure of my research – before entering Higher Education and after entering Higher Education, – according to the approach I developed in Chapter Two, I found myself in a situation where “the theory (that) has framed the enquiry seeped into the process” (Henning, 2004: 105).

I decided to reduce the data I collected to themes. (Creswell, 2007:154) Having developed the approach as I presented in Chapter Two “Positing knowledge claims within RPL” (figure 2.3) (Page 34) and having linked my questions to the same approach, I now linked themes to figure 2.3. I linked codes to the themes. (As indicated in figure 3.2) For example; I used the concept of “situational knowledge” from Barnett and expanded it to include “tacit knowledge”, “tacit knowledge”, “repertoire” and “reflection”.

As I was analysing my findings and allocating themes to them, I started to realise that the knowledge claims made are interlinked across the “Before entering Higher Education” and “After entering Higher Education” divide.

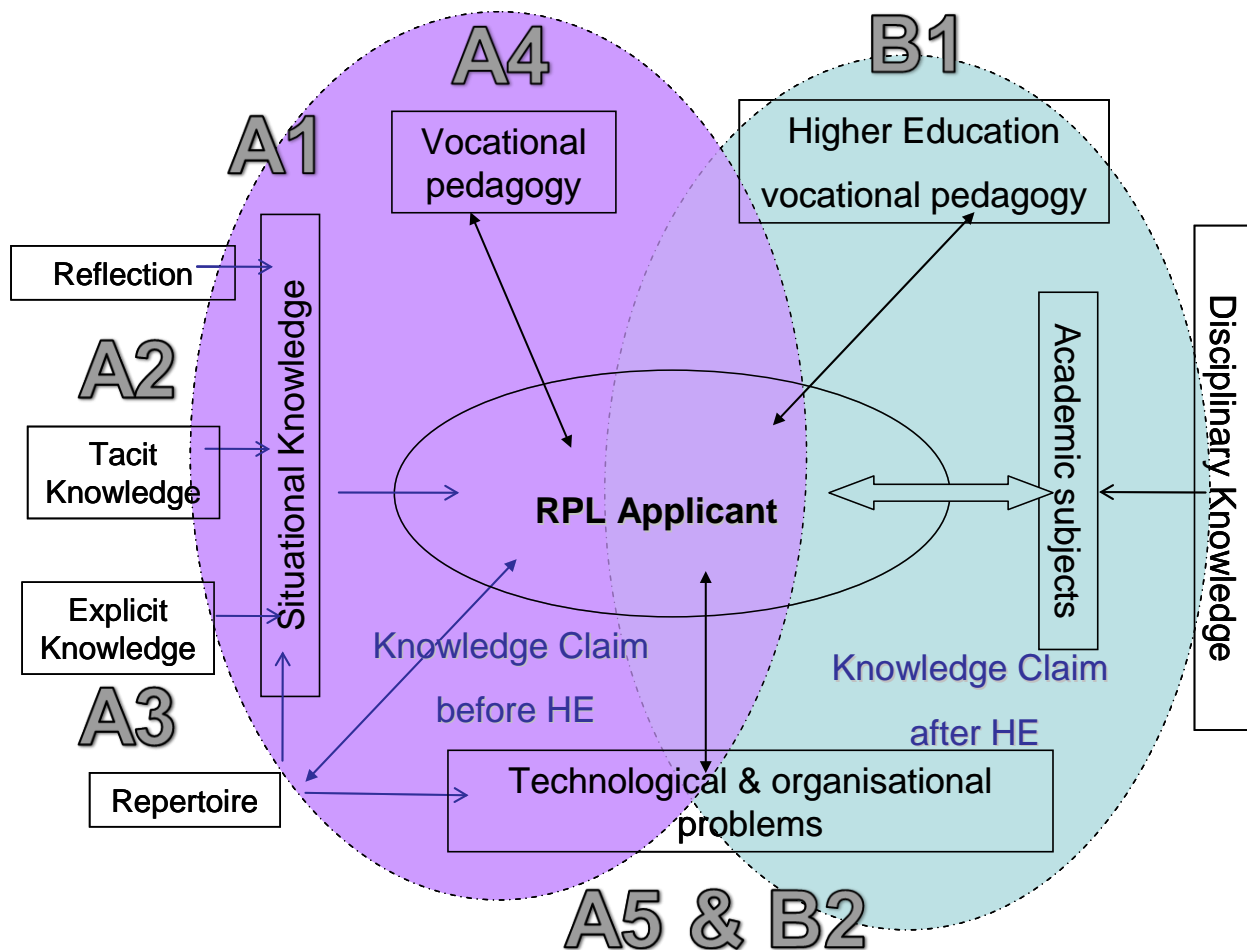


Figure 3.2: Positioning of Knowledge Claims in RPL including codes and themes

The codes, in figure 3.2 indicate the interlinked nature of the knowledge claims being made. I decided to combine A5 and B2, dealing with “Technological and organisational problems”, across the two balloons.

I developed the descriptions below (in table 3.2) based on Figure 2.3 to guide my in the analysis of my findings. Once I started to analyse my findings I realized that the link between tacit and explicit knowledge is not clear as writer such as Nonaka would like me to believe. I therefore changed the position of tacit and explicit knowledge in the Figure 3.2 compared to the one developed as part of my Literature review (Figure 2.3) page 34. I combined Tacit knowledge with reflection (A2) and Explicit knowledge with repertoire (A3).

| <i>Code and Theme</i> | <i>Explanation</i> |
|---|--|
| <i>Part A: Before HE</i> | |
| A1: Situational knowledge | Broad category including theme A2 and A3. Emphasis falls on the knowledge that enables the RPL applicant to work and perform in the workplace. All work that is related to Project Management. |
| A2: Tacit knowledge and Reflection | Comments made that reflect know-how that is implied. Tacit knowledge is difficult to express and is sometimes mentioned as part of reflection rather than naming the knowledge specifically. Tacit knowledge and reflection are under the same code. |
| A3: Explicit knowledge and repertoire | Answers dealing with approaches to management and project management specifically. Wording, jargon, language and methods of working that are job specific is included in this theme. |
| A4: Vocational Pedagogy | Short courses or in-house training that the person undertook and reference that is made to that type of knowledge. Mentorship he/she might have received |
| A5: Technological & organisational problems | Answers about organisational issues and problems that the interviewees talks about. |
| <i>Part B: After HE</i> | |
| B1: Higher Education Vocational Pedagogy | The subjects completed at the institution. Answers dealing with work based experience and the impact on academic study. |
| B2: Problems solving | Answers dealing with the application of decision making within the academia. Approach to Project Management after entry to HE |

Table 3.2: Theme and codes linked to the RPL Knowledge Claims

Once I had linked the data to themes, I could interpret the information I had collected. This is a process of “de-contextualisation” and “re-contextualization” (Cresswell, 2007: 154). Using my approach reflected in figure 2.3. I found this a systematic method to link “bits of data to an idea

that relates to the analysis” (Denscombe, 2007:292). These themes form the basis for an emerging story. (Cresswell, 2007:154) The story being that of the RPL candidate’s progression from RPL applicant, to student resulting in graduation.

When I started with my analysis, I ended up being confused, because various answers, (to different questions) in the test and the interviews were sometimes similar or the same. At first, I did not know how to interpret this situation and felt that it was difficult to interpret some of the answers given. Some of the questions were understood quite differently by the various participants in my study, and I realised that I might not have been critical enough during the interviews.

For example I asked in the one-on-one interviews what competencies they (the RPL applicants) used in the workplace. Student A mentioned leadership and student E made reference to the “9 knowledge areas of PMBOK” which are answers referring to theory and I included it in theme A4. Students B mentioned how he learnt and not what he learnt, I linked this to Theme A2 and Student C explained shipping terminology - I linked his answer to Theme A3. Student D talked about the legal requirements of her job – this I linked to A3 as well.

I also realised that I was interpreting the data obtained differently now, compared to during the interviews. I wondered why this was the case and realised that during the interview, I understood the context in which the answers were given. Afterwards interpreting the answers that had been given in a different context – I was now working in an inter-subjective space, which was also impersonal because I was not focusing on one participant only. I then decided to look at the answers only and not emphasise the questions. This approach links to Hewson (1995: 510) when he says that “a theme is an idea a person uses when talking about different instances.” I now had to decide how I would bring these themes together in a comprehensive unit, which would be manageable.

3.6.2. Theme Analysis Grid (TAG)

Having decided to emphasise the answers, I decided to use my themes as the basis for analysis, rather linking each answer to a theme than looking at the question. I developed a Theme Analysis Grid (TAG) (Hewson, 1995: 513) based on my original theoretical framework. The TAG is matrix of columns formed by the themes of my basic approach to my study and a column for each of the six RPL applicants/students who participated in my study. For each student I could analyse my data and list and categorise them in the Theme Analysis Grid.

For example, looking at the theme “vocational pedagogy”, code A1, (TAG in appendix H), student A made reference to the phases in the project management cycle in his answers to questions 1, 4, 5 and 6, which I all linked to A1. Student B mentioned vocational pedagogy only in his answer to question 6, which I linked to A1.

Using the themes that I had already described, I developed the TAG based on the table below.

| Theme Analysis Grid (TAG) according to “knowledges and RPL” (K&RPL) in Project Management | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Concepts according to K&RPL | Student A | Student B | Student .. |
| <i>A: Knowledge Claim before entering Higher Education</i> | | | |
| A1: Situational Knowledge | | | |
| A2: Tacit knowledge and Reflection | | | |
| A3: Explicit knowledge and Repertoire | | | |
| A4: Vocational pedagogy | | | |
| A5: Technical and organisational Problems | | | |
| <i>B: Knowledge Claim after entering Higher Education</i> | | | |
| B 1: Vocational purposes in Higher education | | | |
| B2: Technical and organisational problems | | | |

Table: 3.3 Theme Analysis Grid (TAG)

I analysed the information I had collected for each participant studying each document or interview I had and at this point I linked the information to the codes and themes, using the

summaries I had developed, I included this information in the TAG. Now I had sentences containing information from various sources, per theme and per student on one piece of paper – the TAG (appendix H). I could now start the process of interpreting my findings.

3.7 Ethical issues

While I did the interviews, I kept the following ethical considerations (Bell, 1992: 53-55) in mind. I based my research on these principles:

- ☞ Due to the fact that this research involves human beings, informed consent was sought and participation was fully voluntary, with the participants being able to withdraw at any stage of the research. (See the letter in appendix A)
- ☞ All participants remained anonymous.
- ☞ All information was treated with the strictest confidentiality. All documentation was completed in such a manner that the participant could not be identified.
- ☞ The research was used for a paper at a Conference on Researching Work and Learning (RWL6) in Copenhagen, Denmark from 28 June – 1 July 2009. Responses from three of six of the participants in this study were used in the paper. The paper was send to them for comment before it was published in the Conference proceedings

3.8 Limitations

I had a few limitations that I had to deal with.

The first was the fact that I could not analyse all the subjects in the BTech in Project Management. I thought this restricted my findings once the RPL applicants were students, because I think if I could have analysed especially the subjects “Project Management Process” and “Project Quality” a deeper analysis could have developed regarding the use of prior knowledge within the course.

Once I busy with my analysis I realised that I should have been more critical in my questions while I was doing the interviews. I discuss the implications of the limitation in greater detail in Chapter Five.

3.9 Conclusion

Working in an interpretive paradigm, was challenging and interesting at the same time. Once I had managed to develop the themes that I identified they provided me with a method of analysis, to make sense of what I was working with. Being in an inter-subjective space - I had to be fair to everyone who is part of the space. Analysing knowledge claims required me to also think of my own knowledge claim and what I regarded as knowledge. I sometimes felt confused, especially after I had done an interview, but having the theme analysis grid, gave structure to my thinking.

In this chapter I have explained the process I went through to determine the research approach that is the best suited for my topic. I discussed the motivation for the questions that I asked the participants. I highlighted the problems I had when analysing my findings. In conclusion I explained the Theme Analysis Grid (TAG) that I developed. The next chapter I will be discussing my findings and the implications for knowledge claims and RPL.

CHAPTER FOUR INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with my findings regarding my research question. I analyse my findings in relation to the theories that I discussed in Chapter Two and the methodology explained in Chapter Three.

In this chapter, I apply the Theme Analysis Grid (TAG) that I developed based on the theoretical framework in Chapter Two. The first part of this chapter deals with the analysis based on the TAG. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss the applicability of the various theories (from Chapter Two) to my findings. Most of these theories are helpful in explaining my findings.

4.2 Project Management – the case

The question that I asked when I started with this study was how knowledge claims in Project Management are being assessed for the purposes of RPL. I wanted to know how knowledge is interpreted by the RPL applicants and if the academics' analysis of these interpretations is the same, similar or different. I wanted to know what the knowledge is that academics are looking for. What is regarded as sufficient knowledge in order to be admitted into the BTech: Project Management?

In order to answer this question, I had to analyse the knowledge claims at two levels.

1. What are the similarities and/or differences in the knowledge claims made by RPL applicants and the knowledge claims recognised by the academics in the RPL process for access into the BTech in Project Management at the institution?

2. How valid is RPL as a means of access to the BTech: Project Management programme at the institution?

I opted for a case study approach as my methodology to be able to analyse my unit of analysis as explained above. In this chapter, I discuss my findings regarding this unit of analysis. I present my findings in my framework of the Knowledge Claims *before* entering Higher Education and the knowledge claims *after* entering Higher Education

4.3 The knowledge claims before entering Higher Education

In this section, I analyse what the RPL applicants/students shared with me regarding their RPL application and knowledge claims before becoming a student. I used the information that made up their RPL applications to start my analysis. I focussed especially on the answers given in the tests that were written as part of their RPL applications (summarised in appendix G). The second part of my analysis was of the answers the applicants gave me during the one-on-one interviews I had with them. I analysed all their answers and linked them to the themes that I identified in Chapter Three to complete the Theme Analysis Grid (TAG) (Appendix H).

The knowledge claims of the RPL Applicants are assessed and this is done by the academics involved in the RPL process. In the second part of this section, I reflect on the interviews with the three academics who participated in my study, using the questionnaire in appendix C. Their answers are analysed and discussed in this chapter.

4.3.1 Perceptions of the RPL applicants

Using the Theme Analysis Grid (TAG), I analysed the answers obtained in the test as well as during the one-on-one interviews. I linked the answers to the following themes (as was indicated in Figure 3.2 (page 57)) situational knowledge (Theme A1), with two sub sections namely: tacit knowledge and reflection (Theme A2) and explicit knowledge and repertoire (Theme A3). Vocational Pedagogy (Theme A4) and technical and organisational problems (Theme A5) make up the rest of the knowledge claim “before HE”.⁴

⁴ Themes refer to the Theme Analysis Grid (TAG) developed in Chapter three and populated for analysis in Chapter 4. The completed TAG is in appendix H and themes in brakes in this chapter can be found in the Appendix

As I was analysing the answers, I realised that linking the answers analytically to the TAG was not that easy. Some answers were in line with some of the themes, while others were not. To illustrate what I mean one can look at the TAG in appendix H, Student A in his answers in the test mentioned aspects of project management such as “Gantt chart”, “WBS” and “role of the project manager” in his answers to four different questions in the test. I decide to link all these answers to the Theme A4 – Vocational pedagogy, because these answers reflect a knowledge of project management theory and knowledge of methods used in Project Management.

4.3.1.1 Interpreting workplace knowledge, skills and ability

The first theme I worked with was “Situational Knowledge”, which is closely associated to particular job tasks and is not easily related to disciplinary knowledge (Barnett, 2006: 146-147). When I analysed the answers from the interviews, I found answers reflecting various tasks – management as well as project management orientated.

“Projects is what I do!” student B exclaimed in the one-on-one interview I had with him. The nature of the work is project management.⁵ As indicated before, students A, C and F have worked in project-based industries since the beginning of their careers. These are industries such as the construction industry (students A and B) and maintenance projects (students C and E). Students D and E have been working with projects for about six to eight years. The RPL applicants are working in a project management based environment and managing projects is what they know. Their interpretation of management is based on a starting point and an end point for them. I analysed all their answers keeping this in mind

I asked my participants during the one-one-interviews to reflect on Figure 2.2, (page 27) the project life cycle and tell me which of the phases they use in the workplace (Question B1 in the questionnaire in Appendix B). Students A and B both said that “the nature of our work is project based” and they explained that they determine their own projects. Due to the work they do for government they develop a list of projects they think should be undertaken, once approved they implement them and outsource the work itself, which they oversee and monitor. Student A indicated that he draws up a “scope” to ensure “quality”, does the “resourcing and “monitors

⁵ Project management is different from operations management: A project has a beginning point and an end point, which differentiates it from operations management which is ongoing

cost” as the phases he works with. Student B listed three phases: “Initiation”, “Implementation” and “Execution”, although the difference between these phases is not clear!

Student C who works in the private sector and undertakes projects on request of a client, undertakes the entire project. He explained the “Planning is done on site”, “monitoring is done through progress meetings” but closure does not always happen.

Student D, who also works for government and also outsources the work itself indicated that she does “scooping” as a first step, followed by “initiation” resulting in her “controlling and reporting” She also indicated that closure mostly does not happen and this was a course of concern for her.

Student E who works with a software package that enables her to monitor all projects of the Department where she works gave a very clear answer when she looked at Figure 2.2 She indicated: “Initiation”, “Definition”, “Planning” and “Execution”

Student F who works for a parastatal and is involved in all aspects of a project indicated that “planning is developing:” and “Controlling is reporting”.

The situational knowledge that the RPL applicants/students shared with me regarding the project management cycle before they became students is broad, even fuzzy and not very detailed. They all could relate their work to the cycle, but it is clear that they do not cover all the phases explicitly. What is important for RPL here is that they are familiar with phases and it is not something new.

This knowledge is also reflected in the RPL test. In the test the answers are management orientated, reflecting the nature of the work they are doing. Underlying these answers is the tacit knowledge that supports the RPL candidates in their work. (Question 1 and 4 in the test). In their answers various tasks are listed as aspects of project management such as: budgeting, appointment of staff, identification and involvement of stakeholders, communication, strategic

planning and the holding of a “bosberaad” (Planning workshop or conference) (Student D). These answers reflected the work they do and the tasks they are involved in, I gathered that these RPL applicants knew how to start a project and manage it. The knowledge demonstrated in these answers is basic managerial skills such as planning and budgeting. These skills are learnt many times in the workplace and are done in an organisational specific manner.

In support of knowing basic aspects of management, I wanted to know how the RPL applicants succeeded in the workplace without having a National Diploma or equivalent qualification. In the one-on-one interviews I asked what skills and competencies are being used in the workplace (Question B2 in the Questionnaire). I assumed that they had to have developed knowledge and competence in the workplace to make up for this shortfall. The answers to this question turned out to be mainly tacit and reflective, so I analysed it as part of Theme A2. Student B mentioned that he learnt from his peers by “Stealing with my eyes”.

During the one-on-one interviews I asked what skills and competencies were being used in the workplace. This question caused confusion and all six students answered it differently: Student A referred to leadership styles, and E to “Nine knowledge areas of PMBOK”⁶ (theme A4) PMBOK has leadership styles included. Referring to theories the way that Student A and E did indicate formal knowledge of management theories. From their background I know they have both done a number of short courses and this was reflected in their answers. It is interesting that both, indirectly they seem to be applying these theories in the workplace, although they have difficulty explaining this aspect to me.

Answering the question about competencies learnt, Student D referred to her knowledge about legislative requirements (theme A3). Student B discussed how he learnt from experience (theme A2). Students C and F did not answer the question. I was surprised at how difficult it was to get answers. The problem here might be in the nature of tacit knowledge. Competence and skill are things that one is unaware of and it is more about “how you do things”. This is often difficult to

⁶ Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) from the Project Management Institute provides managerial guidelines to project managers and administrators. The “nine knowledge areas of PMBOK” are: Project Integration Management, Project Scope Management, Project Time Management, Project Cost Management, Project Quality Management, Project Human Resource Management, Project Communications Management, Project Risk Management, and Project Procurement Management (PMBOK, 2004: 70).

speak about when asked to do so. I realised after the interviews that the question might have been too broad and difficult to answer, I should have developed a more detailed question.

I decided to ask about problem solving, because this requires an ability to evaluate alternatives, think logically and make a decision. (Question 3 in the questionnaire in Appendix B) I tried to analyse the answers as part of theme A5 dealing with “technical and organisational problems”. In response to this question, students A and C referred to the short courses that they had done and the method of evaluating different alternatives which placed their responds in theme A4 and not A5. Students B and E avoided the question. Student D claimed, “I look for alternatives; not aware of any specific approach”. Especially Student D’s answer suggests the presence of tacit knowledge, because she seems to think that she knows how to solve problems, but she cannot express how she goes about it.

Asking if they think that their approach to Project Management is *unique*, I wanted to know if they had been aware of different approaches to Project Management before the RPL application. This links to A1 Situational knowledge, Question B5 in the Questionnaire in appendix B. Students A and B thought that their approach is unique, because they develop their own briefs. Student C indicated that his company has a “cowboy style of management”, which he did not regard as unique. Student C was frustrated with his employer because there were few management principles being applied in the company and he has no space to apply what he knew. This issue is discussed later in this chapter again. Students D and F replied negatively (theme A3). These answers gave me little information about the approach to project management, because only three of the six participants had given their approach to project management any thought. I had expected that they would be more aware of their approach to project management, but I was mistaken.

The various approaches discussed by the RPL applicants links to theme A3 the explicit knowledge and repertoire. I summarised the repertoire used by the RPL applicants in the one-on-one interviews reflected the approaches and terminology they use in their everyday work, for example: “initiation, implementation and execution”, “scope”, “definition”, “planning”, “resourcing and cost”, “budgeting” and “quality”. Student C works in the shipping industry, which has its own terminology. A wall, for example is a “bulkhead” (theme A3). The analysis of these responds is

easier because it involves explicit knowledge. I did not ask for detail from the RPL students, such as “What do you mean by quality or definition?”, although this might have provided me with more detail. These words do reflect a method of working that makes sense to the individuals and is context bound to their work environment.

The words listed above indicate the type of knowledge used in the industry and their ability to work in a project management environment within their own organisation. Their responses are linked to organisational requirements, culture and the way things are done. This knowledge enables the RPL applicant to work in the industry. This workplace knowledge outside the academia links to situational knowledge (Michelson, 2006: 155-156), enabling the RPL student to use their knowledge gained in the workplace and, as I will indicate later on, also use it in Higher Education. The knowledge discussed here is within the discourse that the RPL applicants work in, reflecting the repertoire that the person uses

4.3.1.2 The acquisition of vocational knowledge

I was interested to know how the RPL applicant learnt to manage and run a project. I knew from the screening process what formal education they had completed and which short courses they had done. This section links to the workplace vocational pedagogy from Barnett’s theory and which has become Theme A4 in my figure 3.2 (page 57). I discussed what they had learnt in short courses and also what was learnt on-the-job in the workplace. This section overlaps with the previous section on situational knowledge because it is difficult for the RPL applicant to recall what was learnt where.

Discussing the short courses they had completed, I asked about the impact of these courses on them. Student F stated it well when he said, “Doing a short course gave me a holistic idea of how a project is supposed to run and what it entails. I used to focus on getting the job done and did not take cost into consideration.” The others shared his opinion and found that doing short courses gave them a better understanding of management and what is involved in running a project. As student A said, “It created an awareness of the work done at management level.” Students C and E referred to PMBOK training as part of the short courses they had completed. These answers reflect awareness that course work can provide information on how to work, which enables the person to apply this at work.

4.3.1.3 Use of project management knowledge.

During the RPL application process, emphasis is placed on managerial experience and the ability to implement a project. I wanted to know what it is that the participants knew about the project management phases before they entered the University.

As discussed in Chapter Two and based on the findings of Eraut that individuals struggle to talk about knowledge, especially tacit knowledge, I used the project management life cycle (from PMBOK) (figure 2.2) (Page 27) as a “mediating object” to guide the discussion during the one-on-one interviews. Referring to the figure, I asked if they use these phases when planning and implementing a project. All six individuals answered affirmatively. Each explained how they used the cycle in the workplace, as is summarised in the following table:

| <i>PMBOK phases</i> | Student A | Student B | Student C | Student D | Student E | Student F |
|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Initiating</i> | Scope | | Invited by the client | Scoping | Initiation | |
| <i>Planning: defining and developing</i> | Budget and time | Develop plans based on list | Develop a plan | Planning | Definition and planning | Developing |
| <i>Executing</i> | Outsourced | Outsourced | Ongoing onsite meetings | Outsourced | Outsourced | Reporting and executing |
| <i>Controlling: reporting and evaluating</i> | Resourcing and quality control | Oversees implementation | | Controlling and reporting | Controlling | |
| <i>Closing</i> | | | If something goes wrong | Not always | | |

Table 4.1: Comparison of interpretation of the project life cycle

The first aspect of the answers that I noticed when looking at the table was that they are involved in initiating a project, but it is done through “scoping” (students A and D) or “initiation” (students C and E). Planning is the development of a “definition” for student E, and F called it “developing”. It is clear from the answers I received that the detail is not always considered in the workplace: “Functional managers know their work; they just get on with the job” (student C). Students A and E pointed out that they use project management software and that this software

is based on the phases of PMBOK. This strengthens their knowledge about project management.

I found similar answers in the test: Students A and B mentioned the Work Breakdown Schedule (WBS), although this occurred in answers to different questions, and student E mentioned PMBOK.

When student C looked at the project management life cycle, he summarized it nicely when he said, "We do this, but not all of them!" The answers reflect some kind of phases that are being used in the workplace: They make a start, some activity and sometimes an end, thus indicating only three of the basic concepts of project management, whereas PMBOK indicates five. This is an aspect that I will discuss later on, but the levels of detail in the workplace differ from that in theory.

Four of the answers do not include a closing. Student D talked about this in her interview and said that senior management does not always sign off projects, sometimes resulting in projects not being finished.

It is significant that four of the participants are involved in outsourcing. Academic B elaborated on this aspect and indicated that the nature of project management in the civil service does not require a project manager to be involved in the execution of the project. The result is that they monitor the work and oversee various projects running at the same time. They use more managerial competence in their work than technical competence.

Learning theory by completing short courses is not sufficient without application in the workplace. Vocational pedagogy, theme A4 required further expansion and I discussed the application of short courses in the workplace with my participants.

4.3.1.3 Incorporating organisational know-how

The organisation the applicant works for frames the mindset and approach of the individual. Originally I did not anticipate this when I started with my study. However, I realised that this is important during my analysis of the RPL candidates' answers.

The RPL candidate's level of involvement in a project was also raised as part of the answer to the question (in the test and the interview) regarding the phases used in the workplace. Students A, B, D and E are all employed by Government and are not involved in the execution of a project. Students A, B and D oversee the implementation of projects and are responsible for the deliverables. Students C and F, however, are responsible for all the steps in the project life cycle. The answers they gave focused more on the planning of a project and the quality control than the implementation. Students A and B realised that they run projects differently from those in the private sector. Students C and E are not working for companies where they are afforded the space to apply all the PMBOK phases, although they are familiar with them.

The interpretations of the RPL applicants' knowledge, based on organisational know-how, reflect three aspects:

- 2 The knowledge claim is influenced by an approach such as PMBOK;
- 3 The knowledge claim is based on practical work experience, which in turn is based on the type of projects the person is involved in and the nature of the work that they do; and
- 4 The knowledge claim is linked to the position the person holds and his/her level of involvement within the organisation he/she works for.

What knowledge is reflected here? I could see a link between some project management theory and the workplace. Referring to the phases and also PMBOK, indicates an awareness and possibly of knowledge of project management theory. What I needed to think about was the level of complexity. The answers I was given by the RPL applicants were sometime vague and had little detail. At the same time, they were successful project managers. I started to think about the concept of recontextualisation (Bernstein: 2006) knowledge associated with specific tasks and activities is transferred and adopted from another type of knowledge. The answers

from the RPL applicants are from the context of the organisation that they work for and reflect the activities they engage in. I return to this issue at the end of the chapter.

The following question now arises: To what extent do the knowledge claims described above meet the assessment criteria of the entry level requirements of the BTech? As mentioned in the introduction, the BTech in Project Management does not have a National Diploma underpinning it and the entry requirement is any M+3 qualification (a three-year post-matric qualification). To what extent do the answers above indicate knowledge that is at the level of three years of study? I discussed this issue with the academics.

4.3.2 Academic perceptions of prior learning

The academics involved in the RPL process make the decision of whether to grant an applicant RPL or not. I therefore have to consider how an academic interprets an RPL application and what knowledge they look for.

4.3.2.1 Development and the use of the RPL assessment

I discussed the motivation for the RPL test with the two academics involved in the process, namely academic A and C. Academic A explained that the test had developed over a period of time and that it had been reviewed recently, adding a question about numeracy.

I asked what the motivation was for using the test and he explained that the Department felt that this was a fair and valid way of evaluating applicants. He said, “The test is a baseline assessment of the candidate’s knowledge and interaction with project management in practice, in industry.” The focus of the panel interview was “to (evaluate) the interaction of the candidate with project management on a daily basis”.

Academic B could not answer this question, because he is a part-time lecturer and is not involved in the design of the test. Academic C said that the test is so successful that the Department is considering using it for all the candidates who apply for the course, not only the

RPL applicants. The reason for this approach is that the RPL students are not dropping out of the course, but some of the students, who do meet the entry requirements, are dropping out.

The answers by academic A and C do not indicate an awareness of any RPL approaches such as the credit exchange model or the learning and development model. As a department, they decided on their own approach to assessing RPL applications and use a test because this is an assessment method they are familiar with.

4.3.2.2 The “importance” of theory

I was interested in the knowledge that the academics are looking for when they are marking the RPL tests.

Academic A gave a basic answer: “Looking for skills, i.e. budgets, knowing when a project starts and stops.” Academic C was more detailed in his answer, demonstrating a deeper understanding of the importance of prior learning. He said, “In the test we are looking for numerical skills, numeric acumen, and the ability to write and put an argument across.”

When I asked them about the importance of theory, academic A explained that he is not interested in theory or “in jargon like Gantt Chart”. I found this answer interesting because if one looks at the questions in the test, they do require some background knowledge of theory. For example, the question about phases does require the applicants to indicate that they are aware of the project life cycle. It is not clear from the academics what is regarded as sufficient knowledge about the project management phases in the test. There seems to be a contradiction here: On the one hand, some background theoretical knowledge is required, but on the other hand, this is not seen as important. The confusion deepened when I asked the academics about the importance of short courses.

The short courses are being used as a screening mechanism and academic C pointed out that this is important. Academic A said that having completed short courses “indicates if the person will be able to make the transition from the workplace to the academic environment”.

When I analysed the test, I was a bit confused when I noticed that no answers were being marked as incorrect. As I have all ready mentioned that test elicited quite different answers to the questions. The academics seemed to mark everything correct, although the marks differed:

| | |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Student A | 66% |
| Student B | 50% |
| Student C | Found competent |
| Student D | 57% |
| Student E | 59% |
| Student F | Found competent |

Table 4.3: Comparison of the RPL test results

Students C and F were assessed at a different time than students D and E, although they are in the same class. Academic A decided to describe them as being “competent” rather than awarding a mark – I do not know the reason for this. I find this situation problematic, because there does not seem to be consistency regarding the marking of the tests. I have also never seen model answers for the questions. Nor am I aware of moderation being done on these tests. How this test is regarded as meeting the entry requirements of the BTech?

Based on my analysis so far I do not have a clear answer to the question due to vagueness of the answers of academics. As will be explained later on this makes the interpretation of the knowledge claim difficult.

4.3.2.3 Ability to cope in Higher Education

I asked the academics how they evaluate workplace-based experience and did not anticipate the answers I received.

Academic B said that he looks for two things: scope and ability: “Scope is the applicant’s ability to grasp the scope so that they can deliver a project.” He continued by saying, “I am more interested in ability than theory knowledge; the applicant must be analytical in (their) thinking – that is why the numeracy skills are important.”

Academic C reflected on the information that is discussed during the panel interview and highlighted the fact that the panel interview provides an opportunity of finding out how many projects the candidate is involved in, the size of the projects, and how many people they coordinate. He pointed out that the broader the managerial experience is, the better. He reflected on some of the RPL candidates, such as student C, and commented, "Being more mature, having five to ten years of what they have been up to, they usually come in and fly!"

The emphasis that these two academics place on the ability to cope with studies at the level of NQF 7 was very interesting to me. I had not picked this up in my interactions with them during the RPL assessment process. I had the impression that they regarded the completion of short courses as very important. Now, during my interviews with them, they are placing the emphasis on academic acumen and the ability to study. I realised that this approach is in line with the approach of Shalem and Steinberg (2006: 101), who indicate that RPL assessment includes "a prospective and a retrospective action". It is interesting that these answers seems to be a bit contradictory to those given earlier on about theory, but if I analyse this within the RPL paradigm, it makes a bit more sense. The academics need to be "retrospective" and look at knowledge that they can recognise. Knowledge of theory can be used in this regard. At the same time, the academics are being "prospective", because they want be able to explain why the person will cope with studies at the level of NQF 7.

If theory is not that important, which seems to be the approach of the academics, it is in line with the SAQA definition of RPL. RPL is described in the SAQA Act (Act 58 of 1995) as: "Recognition of prior learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner *howsoever* obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements" (SAQA, 2002: 7). The academics give the applicants space to demonstrate their knowledge "howsoever obtained".

The RPL test as the RPL assessment provides a space for the applicants to substantiate their knowledge claim. What knowledge do they present? I have already mentioned that part of the knowledge claims is situational knowledge learnt through vocational pedagogy. Where the RPL applicant has learnt how to run and manage a project, of reasonable size, in the workplace

through adhering to organisation systems and procedure, learning from others and attending short courses. The fusion of all this knowledge is now presented as part of the knowledge claim for entry in the BTech in Project Management. Do the knowledge claims of the applicant's measure up against the academics assessment? This question is difficult to answer because the assessment criterion is not clear. What has become clear is that the academics seems to be more concerned about the RPL applications ability to cope with studies at fourth year level than the knowledge they already have.

4.4 Knowledge claims inside the University

Having unpacked the knowledge claims made as part of the RPL application, I am interested in knowing what happens to the knowledge claim of the applicants once they become students. As mentioned before, I interviewed the RPL applicants once they were students. In this section, I analyse the responses I got in the second part of the questionnaire (appendix B) I am interested in how the RPL applicants, now students, experience university life. I also asked the academics during their interviews how the RPL students are coping with higher education (appendix C)

4.4.1. Perceptions of the RPL students

In this section, I reflect on the second part of the one-on-one interviews I had with the RPL applicants/students. I was interested in what has changed with regard to their knowledge about project management; I wanted to know how they were using their workplace-based knowledge in the course, if they did. I also wanted to know if their studies was influencing their work, and if so, how.

4.4.1.1 Changes to the interpretation of the project life cycle

"We use to have three (project) phases; now we have five!" This was student B's comment when I asked him if he had learnt anything new about the project life cycle since he had started his studies. The answers in this section reflect the area in Figure 3.2 "Knowledge claims after HE" and I have two themes that I am dealing with in this section: B1 Higher Education Vocational pedagogy, including the work done by the RPL applicants, now students, in three of the academic subjects. The other theme is B2 – Technical and organisational problems.

a) Detail added

I deal in this section with the influence of academic subjects in the knowledge of the RPL students. To facilitate this process I used the PMBOK diagram (Figure 2.2 page 27) again and asked what had changed in terms of the project life cycle. Students A, C, E and F indicated that the BTech programme was enhancing their existing knowledge. Student C explained that in the past he would not pay a lot of attention to the finances of a project, leaving this to the “financial guys”. Now he can talk to them – he understands cash flow and knows the detail.

Student E said that she has a “clearer grasp of PMBOK”. She uses an IBM-developed software package for her work. Reflecting on the IBM software, she commented that it is based on the project life style phases, but that the terminology is different. “Initiation”, for example, is “concept”, “executing” is “tending” and “procedure” is “controlling”. The course has helped her to make these links and to understand the phases better.

b) Learning about all the phases in the project life cycle

The students who work for Government, namely students A, B, D and E, are not involved in the execution phase of the projects they manage. Being exposed to all the phases of a project is important for them, because now they know what each phase entails, although they might not have had the opportunity of applying the theory. Student E said that she now understands “what fits where and how”, and she also “knows what happens everywhere”.

c) Development of leadership and managerial skills

The course provides the RPL students with knowledge on leadership styles and managerial techniques. Student B pointed out that he now tries to use a more participatory management style with his contractors rather than an authoritative one, as he had done in the past. Student F indicated that his problem-solving skills have improved. Student D indicated that she had learnt specific skills, such as applying the Labour Relations Act (LRA). The course provides the RPL students with detail, which enables them, as academic A said, “to contextualise the work they deal with in the class”. From these comments I gathered that the RPL students gain more detailed knowledge from the academic subjects. Although they did not say so explicitly I have the impression that some of the work was not new, but more complex.

4.4.1.2 Interpretation of academic work

The RPL students are all mature students who have never studied at a University before, and now they are participating in a NQF level 7 course. This is an unusual transition and I was interested in how they were coping. Part of the RPL Assessment's emphasis is placed on the ability of the applicants to cope with studies in Higher Education, with the academics wearing a "prospective hat" (in line with the approach of Shalem and Steinberg) as I have explained. Interviewing the students was an opportunity of analysing this aspect of the knowledge claim a bit further. Analysing their interpretation of the Project Management course complements the knowledge claim after entry into higher education.

a) *Class work*

I asked them how they were coping in the class. They all indicated that they struggled initially. Student E said that academic B, whom she works with professionally, confused her, because words that they use in the Governmental office had a different meaning in the class: "My interpretation and that of the lecturer was different. For example, the understanding of opportunities and constraints was the opposite for how we understood it here at work." This comment of student E was interesting and links to Bernstein concept of a "gaze". It also links to Barnett's idea that academic subjects are adjusted for use in the workplace. She has to analyse what she is learning within the context of her work, so that it can make sense to her. Recontextualising it in the process, acquiring knowledge and "gaze" as it is required in the profession that she is part of.

The BTech in Project Management requires the students to work in groups. The group work was mentioned a few times during the interviews and it was clear that they all appreciated being part of a group and getting support from the group. Students A and E had been group leaders for some of the assignments completed as a group. Student F said that he does not like taking a leading role, but that he felt obliged to take it on when asked to do so by the group.

b) Assignments

Of the eight subjects offered in the BTech in Project Management, I managed to analyse three. I would have liked to analyse more, but was not able to do so because I was unable to obtain the relevant information from the academic Department. The subjects that I did analyse were: Entrepreneurship, Strategic Management and Project Resources.

The RPL students use their work experience to complete assignments. Student F, for example, said that he likes using his workplace-based knowledge and experience in his assignments “because the lecturers like seeing that you know what you are talking about”. This comment indicates that the academics place emphasis on workplace-based experience and possibly knowledge to complement the course. This issue is discussed in greater detail in the interviews with the academics.

I analysed the assignments done by students C, D and E for Strategic Management 4. I could not get hold of student F’s assignment. This was a group assignment – they were asked to apply a case study to the theories they had done in the class. In all the assignments that I analysed, the same theories were applied, based on a template that everyone was required to use. The result is that the method of analysis used was similar in all three assignments. For example, everyone was required to apply a SWOT analysis to the company, resulting in a similar analysis being done (appendix H). The explanation given in the analysis was not descriptive but cryptic, especially student C’s group, which made it difficult to understand it because little explanation was given.

I found it strange that the case studies used did not deal with projects, but rather with corporate companies in South Africa, such as a big retail store and a large investment company. The requirements of the assignment are such that if the RPL students wanted to use their knowledge of project management, they were unable to do so.

I asked academic C for the motivation for using corporate companies rather than project-based case studies. He explained that one reason was that it was difficult to get hold of information on especially large projects. I am not sure if this is the case, especially in the light of the fact that South Africa has just completed six soccer stadiums in preparation for the Soccer World Cup

2010 tournament I think it would be valuable to use project-based case studies in a course aimed at project managers.

His second reason was that the assignment prepares the students for the workplace. He felt that it prepared the students for working in large companies, because these companies often initiate projects within the company or for clients. I agree with this notion for full-time students, but the RPL students (and many other mature students in the class) have been working for a number of years and his reasoning is therefore not applicable to the great number of part-time students. I will discuss the implications of this assignment further in the conclusion of this chapter.

Students A and B worked together in a group and submitted an interesting assignment for the subject Entrepreneurship. The assignment is a business plan for a new company, dealing with all aspects of setting up a company. Students A and B decided to set up a construction company, which is in line with the industry they are working in. The type of services the company would provide deal with escalators and air conditioning, amongst others – the field of expertise of these two students. Although this assignment also does not deal with project management explicitly, the students did have the space to use their work-based knowledge and experience in the assignment. Academic A referred to this assignment when he said that “they clone” their knowledge from the workplace for assignments. He accepted this and said that it gave the RPL students an advantage.

c) Exams analysed

I analysed scripts of two exams: Entrepreneurship and Project Resources. I was very confused when I analysed these exams, because no reference was made to projects. I did find some questions that did have applicability to Project Management, although there was no explicit link to projects.

I analysed the exam scripts in Entrepreneurship of students C, D, E and F. This exam consisted of four questions. The first question consisted of five unrelated sub-questions dealing with traits of entrepreneurs, lateral thinking and reasons for having entrepreneurs in large companies. I did not analyse these answers, because I could not see any relevance to project management.

The second question was based on a case study, dealing with theft in business. The answers reflected knowledge of the legal issues applicable to theft and copyright. These are important issues to know about for a project manager, but factual with no application in the workplace.

The third question is a case study about a corporate bank. The question is about the company's competitive advantage and the growth of dividends paid to shareholders. No reference is made to project management and I could not understand the logic of using such a case in a project management course.

The fourth question concerned the simulation of running a small business, which had been dealt with as part of the course work. 45 of the 100 marks consisted of a reflection of the simulation, with eight sub-questions guiding the student through this reflection. The question dealt with all aspects of the business from setting it up to its cash flow. In this question, there is no space for the RPL students to use their workplace-based experience.

Although not directly linked to project management, project managers do deal with small companies that can do work for them, especially when they are involved in outsourcing (especially students A, B, D and E). I could not determine application of project management knowledge in the simulation – the Entrepreneurship course was completed after I had interviewed students C, D, E and F.

For Project Resources, I analysed the exam written by students C, D, E and F. This exam consisted of five questions: organisational structure continuum, a cartoon reflecting different styles of management, procurement bureaucracy, leadership models and cash flow.

I could see the relevance of two of the questions to project management, namely the one about leadership models and the other about cash flow. The leadership model question was theoretical with no space being provided for the inclusion of workplace experience. The cash flow question dealt with a financial problem that needed to be calculated. Students D and E had incorrect answers for this question, which can be explained if one looks at the nature of the work

that they do: both students are in coordinating positions and do not deal with finance often. Student C, who said that he had not understood the financial aspects of a project before the course, having left this to the financial department, obtained 80% for this question, which is in line with his comment that he can “now talk to the financial guys”.

The curriculum has been designed for full time students and not taking mature students with work experience into consideration – if they were RPL-ed into the course or not. The nature of the questions is theoretical, not requiring practical experience to be brought into the answer. So even if the RPL students wanted to bring in their project management knowledge, there is not space for them to do that.

d) Academic language

I asked the students how they found academic language. Students A and E had no problem with this, but students B and F found work with academic language a challenge. Student F found doing research a bit difficult. Student C found critical thinking difficult. However, they all indicated that after a while they “were OK”, as Student B said. Student D struggled to understand the work in one subject, namely Project Resources 4, but she did understand it once she realised that she was using what she was learning on a daily basis in her work.

4.4.1.3 Impact of academic studies on vocational knowledge

I asked the RPL students if the theories that they study in the class resonate with the work they do. (Question C3 in the RPL applicant/students questionnaire (Appendix B). The answer was a resounding “yes”. Below I have summarised the students' explanation of how the course content is influencing them at work and how they are using it.

Students C and F were a bit frustrated because they do not have the opportunity of applying everything they are learning. Student F, who is not in a managerial position, found it hard to apply the concepts that he is being taught in the workplace. He explained that the approach to project management taught in the class is “not how we do things around here”, referring to his workplace. He was hopeful that he would be able to apply what he is learning when he is in a managerial position.

Student C, who complained about “cowboy style management”, finds himself in an interesting position during his studies at the institution. He has the opportunity of applying what he is learning in the BTech at his company, because he was asked to assist with the implementation of changes to the management methods in the firm. This provides him with an opportunity of integrating “management by projects”, as the company calls it. The emphasis is being placed on organisational structure, work processes and a Management Information System. During my interview with him, student C was very excited about this opportunity and saw it as a golden opportunity to replace the “cowboy style management” with a system based on sound principles.

Student E finds that she is using the management and leadership theories that she is exposed to. Although Government “has its own way of doing things”, she finds that she uses what she has learnt “when a challenge comes up and I have to report back to Management”. Student B found that his report writing has improved. The project Student C is busy with and the comments about government illustrate how the academic subjects are being used and adjusted for purposes in the workplace.

Being experienced and having a job as a project manager enables the RPL student to contextualise the work that is done in the class into their work situation. Application is immediate.

What is the knowledge being presented here? It is disappointing that little space is provided for project management knowledge within the subjects that I analysed. However, the opinions and perceptions of the RPL students suggest that what they already knew is being enhanced and expanded by the course work.

4.4.2 Interpretations of the academics regarding RPL students’ performance

The academics involved in the RPL assessment also lecture on the BTech programme. I was interested in how they interpreted the RPL students’ performance in the course and their

interaction in the class. I found an appreciation for workplace-based knowledge to a certain extent.

I decided to ask the academics what they thought of workplace based knowledge and experience coming into their classroom. I wanted to know if the RPL students influence the class and the discussions in the class. I thought that this might be based on their work experience and their prior knowledge of project management.

4.4.2.1 Interaction in the class

The six students who participated in my study were in two different classes: Students A and B were together and have already graduated a year ago. Students C, D, E and F are in another class, 12 months later than A and B. The part-time class for Project Management has a total of 70 students, which is a relatively big class.

Academic C commented on the size of the class in his interview with me and acknowledged that keeping track of the RPL students was not being done. Later on in the interview, he mentioned that the RPL students were not dropping out, but students who did meet the entry requirements were. From this comment I realised that he does keep an eye on the RPL students, although this is not done formally. Academic B said that students C, D, E and F fared “better than the others”. I realised once again that they do monitor the RPL students informally.

I asked the academics if the RPL students were experiencing problems as students and they indicated that the problems experienced were the same for everyone – they thus did not apply to the RPL students only. Academic B showed me a list of the results of tests written in the first semester in his subject and all the students had an average of 50% for the first test, which increased to about 55% for the second test and 60% for the third test. Academic B explained that the majority of students in the part-time class had not studied for some time and everyone struggled to get into “the academic swing of things”. Academic A concurred with this comment when he indicated that student B struggled with writing, but said that “writing skills are poor overall”.

Talking about the participation of the RPL students in the class, academics B and C concurred, and academic C commented that students A and B “are impressive guys – a pleasure to have them in the class”.

4.4.2.2 Interpretation of workplace knowledge in the academia

On participation in the class, the academics agreed that having RPL students and students with work experience in the class was beneficial for everyone – to them as the academics and to the other students in the class. Academic C told me that they have debates “between industry and Government (employees)”.

Talking about the assignments that the students are required to do, academic A commented that “their work experience give them an edge”. They use their work experience in group assignments. He said that “one can say they have ‘cloned’ their work for the group assignments to a certain extent” (as indicated earlier in the Entrepreneurship assignment of students A and B), because the figures they present are realistic, legal requirements are correct and the project is developed realistically – the requirements for the workforce have thus been met. Academic B pointed out that the type of projects they are involved in influences the assignment they submit with “a better expanded view of a project”. Student E’s group obtained a distinction for their group assignment.

I asked the academics if they thought that the RPL students had any views about project management that were either affirmed or challenged during the course. Academics A and B did not express such an opinion, but academic C said that the opinions of the RPL students were not different from those of a student with a National Diploma or a BTech: “What they have done in industry has pointed them in the same direction.” This comment made a contribution to my findings that the RPL process is valid and that the knowledge claims being made by the RPL applicants is valid and should be acknowledged by the institution.

I found it interesting to see how the academics embraced the students' experience and knowledge from the workplace. Focusing on realistic projects and referring to some of the assignments, they support the use of workplace-based knowledge in the assignments, and

equipping students with the correct knowledge for the workplace. The RPL students support this approach (unknowingly) through their experience and practical knowledge.

The knowledge claims that I discussed with the academics focused on practical work-oriented knowledge supported by theory, whereas the academia is traditionally seen as the place where emphasis is placed on theory, but this is not what the academics told me in the interviews. However, according to the assignments given, space is not always provided for Project Management knowledge to be applied. The Strategic Management assignment is such an example, being about corporate companies.

What counts as knowledge? I initially thought that the emphasis would be on theory. However, after my interviews with the academics, I realised that what counts as knowledge is broader: cognitive skills, theory, experience, workplace-based learning and maturity. The question I asked myself was: What knowledge is this? Or is it only about an ability to cope with studies in Higher Education? What role does recontextualisation play in this process?

The importance of theory was emphasised before entering HE to a certain extent. Afterwards it is not because now every one is being taught theory. Emphasis is now being placed on the ability to cope with studies at Higher Education level. This is in line with the comments made about Prospective action (Shalem & Steniberg). I decided to explore these issues further and I analysed the results of the students. All students managed to complete their studies regardless of they type of short courses they did before.

4.4.2.3. Academic results

All the students passed all their subjects, except student F, who failed one subject, namely Project Research. Everyone except student F⁷ graduated. The results I analysed were the marks per subject for each of the participants in my study. I managed to get hold of the class averages for three subjects and thus could compare the results of the RPL applicants/students to that of the class. These results are listed in appendix F.

⁷ Student F indicated that he is repeating the subject

Student A obtained two distinctions and E obtained one. Student E's score for five subjects was above 70% – she is the top achiever among the six participants. Students B, C and D each scored above 70% for one subject.

Concerning the participants' results compared to the class averages, the results vary. Student C scored above the class average for one subject, on class average for one and below average for one. Student D has two subjects above and one on class average. Student E is above the class average with her results. Student F has two subjects below and one on class average. When one analyses the results a bit further, one can see that the RPL students scored on the level of the other students, as indicated in the course average:

| | <i>Course average</i> | <i>Detail on subjects</i> |
|------------|-----------------------|---|
| Student A | 68% | One subject in the 50s, three above 60% and four above 70% |
| Students B | 61% | Two subjects in the 50s, five in the 60s and one above 70% |
| Student C | 62% | Three subjects in the 50s, four in the 60s and one above 70% |
| Student D | 65% | Two subjects in the 50s, five subjects in the 60s and one above 70% |
| Student E | 68% | One subject in the 50s, two above 60% and five above 70%, of which one is a distinction |
| Student F | 55% | Six subjects in the 50s, two in the 60s and one failure |

Table 4.3 Results of the RPL students

The results as listed in table 4.3 indicate that except for students A and E, the RPL students are on par with the class average. I decided to look at their background to see if there is a link between the short courses and the results: Student A had completed quite a number of short courses and student E is a teacher by profession. This seems to indicate that having done more courses, even if it is not in the field of management, enables one to get better marks.

In the case of student D, who has done very few short courses, has results that are either on or above the average. Students B and C, who do not have matric, are also on or above the average. Having done few short courses does not mean that the person will fail – an argument that is sometimes used by academics in the faculty of Business who are sceptical about RPL.

The nature of their work and the students' results are further aspects that I considered. As indicated earlier, students A, B, D and E work for Government and are not involved in the execution of projects. Students A and E are among the best, while the results of students C and F, who are involved in executing projects, are average. The nature of students' work does not seem to influence their results.

RPL is a mechanism for redress. All the students in my study could not study at University after leaving school for political and financial reasons. They are grateful to be given an opportunity to obtain a BTech without having to complete an ND first. They told me this on a number of occasions, not only during the interviews. They work hard and this is reflected in their results and their success.

4.5 Knowledge claims: A summary

Having analysed the data I had collected, I am summarising it here to provide an overview before I link it to the theoretical framework that I had developed.

- ☞ Vocational knowledge is linked to the workplace activities and tasks that they are familiar with before entry into Higher Education. That knowledge is recontextualised (Barnett and Bernstein) for the purposes of work, but influenced by the discipline. The fact that the RPL applicants can explain project phases in the test and the interview before entry into Higher Education, demonstrated that link.
- ☞ The knowledge that the RPL students are learning in Higher Education adds detail to what they already know. It is a “top-up” – broadening and deepening of their existing knowledge. The interpretations of the project life cycle have become deeper. For example, student B, is now using five phases for his project rather than three, as he did before. Student C can now deal with the finances of his projects and student E has a “better grasp” and understanding of the terminology that she is using.
- ☞ The theory that is being learnt at the institution is being implemented in the workplace, for example the management improvements project that student C is busy with.

- ☞ The terminology used in the workplace might differ from that used in higher education, as student E pointed out: She uses the same project management phases on the software in the workplace, as is taught in class, but the terminology is different. The principles underlying the work are the same – “they are pointing the same way”, as academic C said.
- ☞ The theory that students are introduced to in Higher Education resonates with the work done in the workplace such as the phases of the project life cycle, for example, being reflected in the work being done. Another example is student D's comment about the subject Resources, namely that her understanding of the subject improved once she linked it to her work. This finding contributes to the validation of the knowledge claims made after entry into Higher Education.
- ☞ The improved knowledge leads to improved work ability in the workplace, for example in the case of student E having better managerial and leadership skills than before and student B indicating that his writing skills have been enhanced.
- ☞ The RPL students use their work experience extensively in the classroom, and to a lesser degree in assignments and exams. The assignments were described as “realistic” by academics B and C.
- ☞ In Higher Education, the RPL students do struggle with academic language, writing skills and research, but these problems are not unique to the RPL students. These problems are overcome after the first semester of study, which is reflected in their results.
- ☞ The RPL students are mature and work hard. They took on leadership roles in the classroom and in the groups in a number of cases.
- ☞ There is appreciation of the knowledge that the RPL students and mature students bring to the class. Unfortunately, space is not always provided to include workplace-based knowledge in assignments and exams.
- ☞ The knowledge claims made during RPL application are valid based on the fact that the RPL students are passing the course - they are doing well academically. It also indicates that these RPL students, although they have never studied at an institution of Higher Education, have adapted to student life and integrated well within the culture of Higher Education.

4.6 Impact of findings on theory

From the above summary, the interesting interaction between the workplace and higher education is evident. In this section, I discuss how the theory that I used to develop my theoretical framework in Chapter Two can clarify some of my findings.

4.6.1 Cross-pollination and mutual enhancement

The knowledge of the RPL applicants prior to entering higher education and the knowledge that develops once they participate in the BTech in Project Management interact and resonate with each other. It is a matter of cross-pollination – they both support and enrich each other. This is in line with what Eraut called “mutual enhancement” and what I called “cross-pollination”. The workplace is being enriched with theory and an academic approach.

Provided the student has space in the workplace to apply what they are learning in Higher Education, it can be an enriching exchange, as Eraut pointed out. This was highlighted in the interviews, when some of the students, such as student F, indicated that they understand the work and know where to apply it in the workplace, but do not have the space to do so. Student C, on the other hand, has the space to apply this knowledge in the improvement project he is involved in, although this was not the case in the past, an aspect that had frustrated him.

Listening to the academics, I have developed a sense that the University is being enriched too, although to a limited extent, by practical experience and knowledge from the workplace. The influence of the RPL students’ knowledge within Higher Education is limited to the classroom and the academic who is willing to give it space. Workplace knowledge is not influencing all the subjects, as was discussed in the analysis on the assignment for Strategic Management 4.

4.6.2 Knowledge claims and the link to Bernstein

Basil Bernstein (1999: 157-9) described the Horizontal Knowledge Structure as “consisting of a series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and criteria for construction and circulation”. In this knowledge structure “one theory is not a prerequisite for

another". My finding that the RPL students are able to study at NQF 7 level successfully confirms this notion of Bernstein that one theory is not a prerequisite for another. Management is a field as was explained in chapter 2, of a variety of theories and approaches. Successful managers, in operational management or project management, pick and choose the appropriate approach based on the situation. This structure of the knowledge enables the RPL student to successfully work at NQF 7 level .

Bernstein's notion of recontextualisation is being used successfully by the RPL students. Once they get used to the working within higher education they are able to use what they knew from the workplace in the academia. They have also found that once they understanding the work, it resonates with what they already knew as Student D explained when she did not understand the one subject. Unfortunately the academic curriculum has not opened itself to the same extend to recontextualisation.

4.7 Approaches to RPL

In Chapter Two, I discussed various RPL approaches. The fact that the academics interviewed did not seem to be aware of any of these approaches was a bit disappointing to me. Thinking about what the academics said, I realised that their approach does fall within two of the models, although they are not aware of this.

The credit exchange model is being used to a certain extent by the academics involved. Due to the fact that the BTech in Project Management does not have an ND underpinning it, there are no learning outcomes that can explicitly be used as is required in the credit exchange model. However, the test and the panel interview do present the academics with evidence that they then evaluate against the entry requirements of the BTech. As mentioned earlier, the entry requirements are vague and it is not clear what knowledge is regarded as sufficient and equal to that of a three-year diploma, but the test does provide a space to asses the knowledge of the RPL applicant. This is "currency" against the entry level requirements that the RPL applicant presents and is assessed by the academics. Interpreting the process as "currency" places it in the credit exchange model. The question is whether this "currency" is sufficient as "exchange" for the entry requirements to the programme. As mentioned already the fact that the RPL

students have graduated, the answer to this question is a yes. The only problem I have in this regard is that none of the academic interviewed stated this explicitly, I have concluded it.

The learning and development model is also not being used – as mentioned, there is too little time during the test for the RPL candidates to reflect on and develop the knowledge they have. The academics' approach has much in common with the approach of Shalem and Steinberg. Although Shalem and Steinberg's approach is regarded as a version of the learning and development model, it is not used in that context at the University.

During the RPL application and assessment process, the knowledge of the RPL applicants is analysed by viewing it from two perspectives: evaluating the knowledge developed in the workplace “retrospectively”, referring to it as “scope” (academic B): emphasising what the applicants know and understand as project management and acknowledging that learning does take place in the workplace. At the same time, they are placing emphasis on the ability to “cope with their studies at the University – the “prospective” approach. A lot of emphasis is being placed on cognitive ability rather than theory. The sense that the person will cope with studies in higher education is important to the academics.

Appreciating knowledge obtained in the workplace, as the academics seem to be doing, gives the impression that there is an “opportunity for knowledge, learning and experience to become closely related” (Harris, 1999: 6-7). I am concerned about the contradiction in this regard, which I have already explained: The academics are appreciative of the contribution of workplace-based knowledge in the classroom, but at the same time the assignments and exams provide little space for it.

The finding mentioned above is partly in line with the findings of Breier (2004: 230-24). She found that curriculum and pedagogy were often not appropriate for RPL students with extensive practical experience (ibid). I found the same scenario in subjects such as Strategic Management, and the opposite in the case of students A and B, where the application of workplace-based experience is appropriate in a subject such as Entrepreneurship. Academic A called it “cloning” of workplace knowledge into the assignment. This shows the limited space

that the course offers to students for using their workplace-based knowledge within the curriculum. Harris (2000: 11) pointed out that the relationship between the RPL practice and the curriculum should be enhanced. In my study, having difficulty understanding what knowledge it is that the academics are looking for, underlines this issue. If the relationship between the workplace and the curriculum was closer, the requirements for RPL would (properly) be clearer.

In conclusion, the Trojan horse approach is not applicable to this RPL process. The curriculum is not being adapted, nor is a “spine module” (Harris, 1999: 9) being developed for the RPL applicants. I have the impression that the curriculum is developed for full-time students with no working experience, although it is offered to part-time students who may have a lot of working experience, as in the case of the RPL students.

4.8 Conclusion

I found it very challenging to interpret and reflect on the information I collected because it deals with knowledge, tacit and explicit. I interpreted my findings in the context of situational knowledge, using a broader framework myself to interpret the knowledge from the workplace. I realised that because the RPL applicants are successful in their careers and they have now completed the BTech in Project Management successfully, they have knowledge that is valid. Within the institution of Higher Learning using the RPL process provides a space to validate that knowledge and allow the person to complete a BTech in Project Management.

I adjusted the theory of Michael Barnett (Figure 2,3)(page 34) to guide my theoretical interpretation of what constitutes a knowledge claim. This approach guided me in my questions to the participants as well as the interpretation of my findings. In Chapter Five I reflect on the usefulness of my approach and how my approach the knowledge claims can be evaluated now that the findings have been interpreted.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

Having completed the analysis of my findings, I now return to my original questions and discuss my findings in relation to them. In addition I discuss other questions that this research has highlighted and possible research projects for the future that are indicated in this chapter. I also discuss the limitations of my study, as these relate to my research questions.

5.2 Conclusions drawn about the interpretation of Knowledge Claim

In this section, I refer to the original research question whether RPL provides a mechanism of assessing knowledge claims in the case of project management. The answer concerning the RPL before entering Higher Education is yes. However, the scenario after entering Higher Education is not so clear.

5.2.1 Knowledge claim in a knowledge claim

My interpretation of knowledge and the discussion on what counts as knowledge in Chapter Two are based on the work of Michelson and Barnett. The approach I adopted was that of situational knowledge, an acknowledgement that knowledge develops from different locations (Harris, 2006: 9 and Michelson, 2006: 154). Knowledge from outside the academia is thus seen as being on the same level as knowledge within the academia.

During my research, I came across a bit of a contradiction in trying to find an answer to the original question. The knowledge of the RPL applicant according to the knowledge claims made before entering higher education was accepted and valued by the academic involved in the RPL assessment. However, once the individual is a student within the academia, the space for making a knowledge claim based on prior knowledge is greatly reduced. Although the academics say that they value workplace knowledge, the work done during the BTech course and which was evaluated in my research does not provide a lot of opportunities for that.

During my interviews with the RPL applicants/students, they indicated that knowledge in Higher Education is deeper and richer and that theory provides a framework for greater understanding. Talking about their knowledge before admission to the University, they indicated that they knew about various project management concepts and processes although at a different level of complexity. Having acknowledged that they knew various concepts, they had difficulty expressing it. As students their knowledge was “topped-up” and enriched. From the perspective of the RPL applicants/students the knowledge claims are complementary to each other.

As regards the RPL practice of assessment in the institution, I don't think that this aspect of process has not been given much thought by the academics involved in my study, which is unfortunate. It suggests that I as a RPL specialist of the University need to engage the academics more in the theoretical aspects of RPL as pedagogy and an assessment process with various theoretical approaches underpinning it. My study has pointed out that the process is valid. I think I now have an opportunity to use my findings to reflect on the practice with an aim of improving it.

5.3 Reflections on the theories used and the research question

As I have already explained in my thesis so far, the theories that I used in my literature review, supported me in the analysis and interpretation of my findings. In Chapter Four I explained how Bernstein and Eraut's work supported my analysis. In this chapter I want to elaborate on the value of Barnett's work and the framework I developed using his theory as a backbone to my thesis. Having completed the analysis of my findings, I realised that I had to adjust the framework I had developed based on Barnett's approach.

As I have explained throughout my study, I used figure 2.3 (page 34) based on the work of Barnett, as a framework. Having done my analysis, I had to look at it again and fine-tune it. Most of the diagram remained as it was, but a few changes have been made; I elaborated the concept of Situational knowledge and broke it down into tacit knowledge linked to reflection, and explicit knowledge linked to repertoire. I placed the RPL candidate in the middle of the diagram to indicate that the person is exposed to the types of knowledges that I have discussed in

Chapter Two. I identified a sphere of knowledge (purple balloon) as the knowledge claim before entering Higher Education, which include situational knowledge. I identified a second sphere (turquoise balloon) that encapsulates the knowledge claims after entry into Higher Education

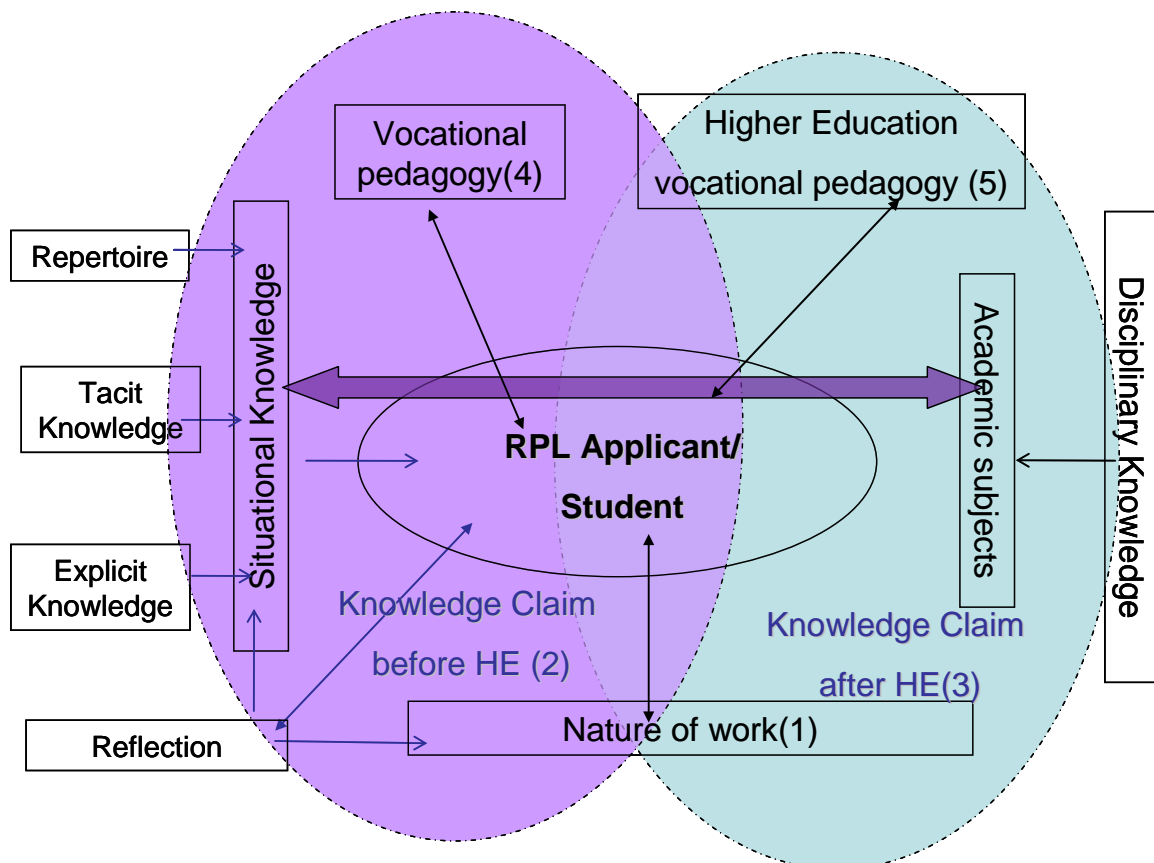


Figure 5.1: Adjusted positioning of the knowledge claim in RPL

Once I had completed the analysis of my findings, I realised that I was correct with the two spheres of the knowledge claims. The interpretation of knowledge did confirm that the knowledge before entry into higher education is different to a certain extent than in academia, but the two support each other and are complementary to each other. I had the two balloons overlap, because the knowledge overlaps between the workplace and academia. This was illustrated by the discussion around the project life cycle with the six RPL applicants/students. The fact that as RPL applicants, the individuals in this study were aware and used the project life cycle although in an organisational context, indicates the overlap. Once they were students,

they could identify the life cycle, although terminology was different, but once they understood the work, the connection was made.

I made a few changes to the diagram to illustrate my findings:

- ☞ The applicants are involved in different aspects of projects and in different organisations. Due to this situation, I decided to change the “technical/organisational problems” as identified by Barnett to the “Nature of work”(1). This covered both balloons, indicating that these factors impact on the knowledge claim before and after HE. One needs to bear in mind that this is applicable in the context of project management. It now has (1) with it to indicate this is point where the knowledge claim originates from for RPL Before HE (2), the point where the RPL claim is being made. The knowledge claims after HE (3) is then made also based on the nature of work and the academic work influencing the claim. .
- ☞ Underpinning the nature of work is the “vocational pedagogy”(4) because the RPL applicant/student has methods of work that are associated with the organisation they work for. At the same time, my analysis has shown that this knowledge links to and influences the academic environment Higher Education Vocation pedagogy (5)
- ☞ The arrows on both sides of the RPL applicant/ student indicate the recontextualisation that takes place in this process - the interaction between “real-world application of academic discipline” (Barnett, 2006: 148). The RPL applicants/students confirmed this notion of Barnett in the interviews. I think that the “real-world application” takes place in the class and to some extend in some the assignments. Unfortunately, as mentioned before, little space is created for the application of workplace knowledge in the curriculum.
- ☞ The impact of academic subjects on the RPL students is profound, what they learn in Higher Education, adds detail to what they already knew. The recontextualisation taking place for the student is what Barnett called “reclassification recontextualisation”. This process, is very limited for the academics

In conclusion, the arrow used to link the RPL applicants /students to the academic subjects is now enlarged to cover situational knowledge and the academic subjects so as to reflect the cross-pollination that is taking place between the workplace and Higher Education. The arrow is

the same colour as “RPL before”, because the individual's knowledge prior to entry into Higher Education influenced the knowledge gained as a student.

Reflecting back to chapter 2, Barnett makes reference to the development of a toolbox due to “reclassification recontextualisation” (Barnett, 2006: 147) developing a “toolbox of applicable knowledge”. The interaction, growth and deepening of knowledge of the RPL applicant/student as discussed in my findings has demonstrated this point. The toolbox of applicable knowledge has been enlarged and enhanced with theory.

When I started with this study I set two questions:

1. What are the similarities and/or differences in the knowledge claims made by RPL applicants and the knowledge claims recognised by the academics in the RPL process for access into the BTech in Project Management at the institution?

I have developed picture as to what is being taken into consideration when someone is making a knowledge claim in project management, with the help of the theoretical framework of this research. What is not easy to describe is what aspects of project management make up that claim. What is being claimed by the RPL applicant is broader than theoretical knowledge.

The interpretation of the academics of this knowledge claim is also difficult to describe. During the research it was evident that the academics are looking for more than theoretic knowledge, the ability to “cope with studies in Higher Education” was seen as important. The academics have an appreciation that the knowledge claim being made is broader than just theory.

2. How valid is RPL as a means of access to the BTech: Project Management programme at the institution?

The process is valid and the only reason that I have to say so is the fact that the six RPL applicants, were successful students, some of them taking up leadership roles in the class, having graduated by now. One needs to keep in mind that the support from the class contributed to their achievement. Being given an opportunity to study at an institution of Higher Education motivated them and provided a context to succeed.

5.4 Implications for policy and practice

5.4.1 Policy

The RPL policy of the institution requires the academic department to determine the assessment tools that will be used. The academics involved in my study did just that and provided me with concrete material to use in my research. The academic department is best situated to determine the assessment tools that they can use to evaluate the knowledge claim being made. The policy in this regard is sufficient.

5.4.2 Practice

The RPL practice at the institution can be improved, using the approach of Shalem and Steinberg (2006: 99-100) with its Retrospective and Prospective actions. This approach provides the institution with an opportunity to define what knowledge is required as part of an RPL assessment and prior to entering higher education. My findings with the BTech in Project Management could be used as a reference point for other qualifications, especially in the Business Faculty.

If the RPL candidate can be afforded more opportunities to reflect on his/her knowledge claim during the RPL application, the institution would move into the learning and development model of RPL. The use of the test in its present form provides the learners with access into the BTech in Project Management.

If the academics involved in the Project Management test and panel interview as it is done currently want to provide space for the RPL applicant to reflect on their knowledge, as is

required in the Learning and Development model, a method will have to be found to require more time. One possibility is to change the panel interview to include a presentation. This presentation could be about a project the individual is involved in and a briefing session could possibly be held to assist the RPL applicant in preparing of the presentation.

5.5 Limitations and challenges faced during the research

I had a few limitations that I had to work with:

- ☞ Not all subjects were included, and the conclusions that I have drawn are based on the four subjects that I analysed, rather than all the subjects of the BTech programme. This situation is partly due to academic A leaving and C taking over from him.

- ☞ It was difficult to get the RPL students to explain what they knew about project management, because a lot of this knowledge is tacit. Once they entered Higher Education, it became more explicit, and the work at the University assisted them in expressing what they knew and learnt. The “mediating object”, that I used during the interviews, although it did serve its purpose, I could consider using more detailed diagram of the project life cycle. Perhaps I should have considered using more than one diagram to elicit more detailed answers.

- ☞ During the interviews with the RPL applicants/students, I could have followed up certain questions with more probing questions. The questions that I asked could also have been more detailed. For example, I asked about problem solving, but the answers were vague. Perhaps I should have asked for examples of problem solving in one of the phases of the project life cycle.

5.6 Future research

Describing and interpreting knowledge and the knowledge claims that are involved in RPL applications are difficult. I found using a case study approach appropriate within the qualitative methodology useful, because it provides an approach for conducting an in depth study of a specific matter, in my case the BTech in Project Management. I would like to continue basing

my research on case studies. Having to use a variety of sources to build a case provides me, the researcher, with more information about a knowledge claim.

5.6.1 RPL students

For future research involving RPL students I could change my focus in two ways: The first option is to narrow my focus: I could focus on knowledge claims made within specific subjects in the BTech in Project Management. I would like to look into this possibility, because it would enable me to work in detail and perhaps address some of the challenges I faced with regard to tacit knowledge.

Looking into one specific area of project management, one could then ask more specific questions and use “mediating objects” that are more precise than the PMBOK diagram (figure 2.2 (page 37) that I used for this research. I could continue to use the diagram of Barnett, because it provides a handy framework for analysis.

The second option would be to broaden the research: The concept of a “knowledge claim” could be evaluated in other programmes in the Business Faculty at the institution, such as Management, Human Resources and Marketing. A number of programmes do have RPL applications as well and have developed various assessment processes to evaluate the applications. Comparative research could be done, using the before and after scenario, to determine whether RPL applicants’/students’ knowledge claims are confirmed and broadened as in the case of the Project Management students.

5.6.2 Academics

Further research could investigate the academics’ interpretation of the knowledge claims made as part of the RPL application. I would like to investigate the knowledge that is gained and developed in the workplace further, as well as the way the academics understand and interpret this knowledge. Such research could best be done using RPL applications, as I have done in this thesis.

More long-term research related to the academic interpretation of workplace knowledge would promote the link between workplace knowledge and the curriculum of the BTech in Project Management. What is the current relationship between these, and could workplace knowledge influence the development of a programme? This is linked to the work of Judy Harris, her concept of the “Trojan horse” and whether the RPL applicants/students can include their workplace knowledge in the programme.

I am thinking of research that explores the Trojan horse approach of Judy Harris (1999: 9) as a bridge-building process between disciplinary knowledge (theory) and experiential learning (practice), “considering new methods to integrate theory and practice, using practice to critique theory rather than to exemplify it”. The changes that have to be made to the qualifications in Higher Education to come in line with the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF), will provide such an opportunity.

5.7 Conclusion

I think that my study has indicated that RPL at the institution is providing an opportunity for people who don't meet the entry requirements of a programme to gain entry into the University and if successful, obtain a qualification. This is the aim RPL in South Africa. The fact that the institution is using the RPL guidelines of the government and its policy to admit individuals into a BTech programme, goes a long way in redressing inadequacies from the Apartheid past of our country.

I hope that my research will contribute to refining and improving the RPL practice at this institution.

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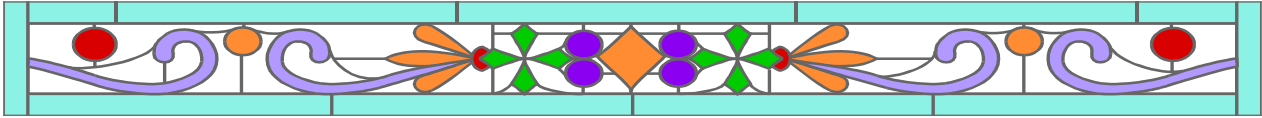
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter to successful RPL applicants



FREDERIKA de GRAAFF

Researcher's address and contact details

To: RPL student (participant's name)

Address

Date

Dear

I hope you will be able to assist me with my research. You applied for RPL and were given (RPL decision) I would like to discuss the RPL process with you, as well as your studies at the institution.

The aim of the research is to evaluate the knowledge claims made as part of an RPL application. I am also comparing the knowledge that was gained in the workplace and which was part of the RPL application with the knowledge that is now being developed as a student of an Institution of Higher Education.

I would like to interview you after your first set of exams at the institution. This interview will consist of two sections: Firstly, I would like to discuss the RPL process and how you experienced it. The second part will be about your studies and how you are experiencing this. I would also like to discuss how your workplace experience and knowledge impact on your studies. In conclusion, I would like to know the impact your studies have on your work and perhaps changes in your personal life. .

I would like to ask you permission to use your RPL application as part of this research. The results of this research will be used within the institution to improve the RPL process currently used by the University, and will also form part of my studies towards a Masters Degree in Education at the same institution. I will show the results of the research to you and will discuss them with you before I include them in either my studies or any paper that I might want to publish, or at any conference that I address. I would also like to ask you permission to interview the academic staff member,(name)....., who did your RPL assessment.

I will be in touch with you soon to discuss this letter and, if you agree to be part of this study, arrange a date and time for our interview.

Thank you.

.....
Frederika de Graaff

Appendix B:

The following questionnaire was given to each RPL applicant/student once they agreed to participate in my research. Each questionnaire was modified to accommodate specific questions. A1, for example, includes the person's specific background.

QUESTIONS TO SUCCESSFUL RPL APPLICANTS

The aim of these questions is to try and determine what you as the RPL applicant know about project management as part of your RPL application. The last set of questions concerns your experiences as a student and explores the knowledge developed/gained as a student at an Institution of Higher Education.

| <i>Qualification:</i> | <i>Date of interview:</i> |
|--|---------------------------|
| A: Background | |
| A1: You are involved in governmental projects since (adjusted for each applicant). How did you get involved in projects of this nature? | |
| A2: You did various short courses, including one on Project Management – how did this assist you in your work? Did you receive any mentoring? | |
| A3: Why did you decide to apply for RPL? What prompted you to think that your knowledge is on the level of a National Diploma for access into the BTech in Project Management? | |
| A4: How did you experience the RPL assessment ((A) the test and (B) the interview)? Especially during the interview, there was some confusion with regard to the theory-oriented question – how did you experience that? | |
| B: Knowledge about Project Management | |
| B1: Referring to the project management cycle (Handout), which aspects did you learn about in the workplace? Use the handout to list what was learnt in the workplace. | |
| B2: Explain the competencies/skills that you use to do your job. What have you learnt in the workplace with regard to project management? | |
| B3: What is your approach to problem solving? Have you used concepts from the project management cycle? | |
| B4: Do you reflect on previous experiences when you make a decision? Do you do this consciously or subconsciously? | |
| B5: Reflecting on your work, do you think you have developed knowledge that is unique to project management and your company? | |
| | |

| |
|---|
| C: Knowledge at the institution |
| C1: Looking at the project cycle again, what have you learnt at the institution that you did not know before you started your studies? |
| C2: Do you use your workplace knowledge in the class, for assignments and in the exams? Please explain. |
| C3: How do you find the theories that you are being introduced to? Do some of these theories resonate with your workplace experiences? If so, how? |
| C4: How do you find academic language? Do you understand it or did you struggle in the beginning? Did you feel that you were missing any academic abilities, such as critical thinking or writing skills? |
| C5: Did you hold any opinion or assumptions about your job/field of expertise prior to attending classes that is being affirmed or challenged in the class or in the texts that you are reading? |
| C6: Do you find that you have gained new knowledge or learnt new competencies since you have been at the institution? Have you applied these in your job? |
| C7: Is there anything else that you would like to add? |
| |

Thank you for your time.

Appendix C:

This questionnaire was given to each of the academic staff members who agreed to participate in my research. The questions were adjusted to accommodate specific RPL students who were familiar to the academics concerned.

QUESTIONS FOR ACADEMICS INVOLVED IN THE RPL PROCESS

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Name: | Department: |
| Qualification: | Date: |
| The RPL application | |
| (insert students' names) were given access into the BTech in Project Management. You decided to use a CV, test, interview and reference letters from the employer as your assessment tools – why? | |
| When reviewing the applications of (Students' names), what knowledge were you looking for? (Students' names) do not have matric – what implications did this have for the RPL assessment? | |
| During the RPL assessment, do you regard project management theory as important? | |
| How did you assess workplace-based experience? | |
| How did you take workplace learning into account, especially the short courses that the applicant had completed? | |
| Studying at the institution | |
| How is (student's name) coping in the class? Does he/she make a contribution? | |
| Did you, being part of the academic Department, provide any support or assistance to the RPL students after their admission into Higher Education? | |
| In the classroom | |
| Is (student's name) using and/or sharing his/her workplace experience and knowledge in the class? | |
| Completing assignments and exams | |
| How does (student's name) manage with the assignments given and the completion of exams? | |
| Does (student's name) use their workplace experience and knowledge in completing the assignments and exams? | |
| Where any abilities lacking while doing the assignments, such as the ability to find sources, critical reading skills or writing skills? | |

| |
|-------------------|
| Reflection |
|-------------------|

| |
|--|
| Do the RPL applicants (<i>students' names</i>) hold any prior opinion or assumptions regarding this field of expertise that is now being affirmed or challenged in the class, assignments or exams done? Please explain your answer. |
|--|

| |
|----------------|
| Results |
|----------------|

| |
|--|
| What do you think of the results of (<i>student's name</i>)? |
|--|

Thank you for your time.

Appendix D: Project Management Test Questions

This concerns the test given to the RPL applicants as part of the RPL application.

CASE STUDY:

As project manager, you have been tasked to manage and facilitate the building of a new multi-purpose community centre in the rural town of Swellendam in the Western Cape Province. This project should be completed in 12 months with a budget of R 12 000 000. The completed multi-purpose centre should add value to the livelihoods of the people in Swellendam and should contribute to the local economic development. You may make assumptions and deductions from the case study.

Answer the following questions based on this fictional project.

1. Compile the Project Brief for the project which would set an agenda for the kick-off meeting and act as a checklist to ensure that discussions will cover all the major issues of this project. 20
2. Discuss the role that stakeholders can play in this project and how they will impact upon this project. 10
3. Discuss the four stages of the project life cycle, and indicate the key steps or actions within each phase of this project in Swellendam. Discuss the deliverables at the end of each phase of this project. 30
4. Discuss the importance of team composition for this specific project and the role of the project manager in the team dynamics. 10
5. The task of the project manager is vital to the success of any project. Discuss the characteristics of a competent project manager for this specific project in Swellendam. 15
6. Risk is any event that prevents or limits the achievements of your objectives as defined at the outset of the project. Discuss how the project manager would manage the possible risks in this project. 15

Appendix E: RPL applicants'/students' project work and background data

Summary of the RPL applicant's background. Obtained from their CVs and other relevant documentation that had been submitted as part of their RPL applications. I am including this information because the decision of allowing the applicant to continue with the RPL application was based on this documentation.

| <i>Student</i> | <i>Project work being done</i> | <i>Formal and informal education</i> |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Student A (39 years old) | Started his working career as a lift mechanic and inspector and did this work for 15 years. Due to limited scope, he changed jobs and started working for Government. He now works as Chief Works Inspector, overseeing a variety of projects concerned with upgrading and maintaining Government properties. Project budget varies from R20 000 to R3,5 million. Projects include: the installation of fire-fighting equipment, installation of new lifts, replacement of water-reticulation system, upgrade of security system and installation of fire-detection system. Involvement in these projects entails determining the scope, budget, WBS and contract consultants and overseeing the project. Does not implement the project, but monitors progress and checks quality of work. | Matric, lift mechanic (apprenticeship) and inspector, completed short courses in Management, sales and project management. Informal training includes computer skills, amongst others MS Project, ISO courses, first aid and OHS Act. |
| Student B (47 years old) | Worked in Air-Conditioning for 20 years, which includes running his own company for eight years. Due to limited opportunities, he started working for Government eight years ago. He is the Chief Works Inspector responsible for the refurbishment of Buildings. Projects he oversees include Project budget varies from R20 000 to R3,5 million. Projects include: the installation and /or upgrading of air conditioners in various buildings, replacement of water-reticulation system, etc. | Grade 11, Mechanical National N Certificate (NTC 5) and Trade test in Sheet metal. Short course in project management, management, property investment, OHS Act, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning, Welding and Electrical motors. |
| Student C (49 years old) | Project Manager for 24 years, specialising in ship repair. Repairing Oil Riggs, Bargers, Seismic vessels, work boats and small luxury vessels. Started working as an apprentice welder/boilermaker, was appointed as Training Officer, than as Quality Controller and was promoted eight years ago to Project Manager. Manages projects such as mechanical and steel repairs on a Diamond Mining vessel with a budget of R4 million, fabrication of additional ballast tanks on a semi-submersive vessel with a budget of US\$4 000 and thrusters overhaul and general engine repairs on a service vessel with a budget of US\$300 000. | Completed N3 before qualifying as a welder and than boilermaker (trade test), computer skills, OHS Act, offshore survival and first aid. Short courses in project management and management. |
| Student D (36 years old) | Started her working career as a data capturer and receptionist. Was self-employed for four years doing various contracts, mostly administration based, including bookkeeping and data capturing. She works as a project administrator in provincial Government for the past five years, focusing on IT projects. She processes the application of specific projects such as the installation of a LAN or digitisation of patient records. She monitors and controls the project deliverables, assists in the coordination of the project and ensures close-out of the project. | Matric, one short course in project management, computer courses, volunteer management and secretarial course. |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| <p>Student E (46 years old)</p> | <p>She worked first as a teacher and then as a help-desk analyst at a bank before getting involved with projects more than 12 years ago. At first she was a Project Support Administrator at a private company for six years. Six years ago, she was appointed at Government as a Senior Project Administrator and was promoted to supervisor after she was RPL-ed into the BTech, she has three people reporting to her. She is responsible for tracking progress of projects and providing progress reports. She updates the project plan for each project as well as the risk matrix on a weekly basis. She also organises workshops and meetings, making sure that the scope of projects are documented and distributed to all stakeholders</p> | <p>O-levels and Teacher's Diploma. Computer skills, including MS Project. Short courses in project management, PMBOK, ISO and management.</p> |
| <p>Student F (37 years old)</p> | <p>Started his career as an apprentice at a mine, after which he worked as a Marine Fitter, at the Naval Dockyard. Eight years ago, he was promoted to Senior Project Superintendent. He plans and monitors the projects within the harbour, such as the installation of substations and maintenance. Project included installation and upgrading of electrical equipment.</p> | <p>Matric, National N Diploma in Mechanical Engineering, Fitter & Turner (Trade test), computer skills, including MS Project, OHS Act, quality management, project management and HRM.</p> |
| | | |

Appendix F: Marks of the Project Management RPL students

All the results of each RPL applicant/student who participated in this study are summarised in this appendix. Class averages have been included if these were available.

| Student | Results | | Class av. | Comparison |
|-----------|------------------------------|------|-----------|---------------------|
| Student A | Project Resources 4 | 71% | | |
| | Project Management Processes | 58% | | |
| | Entrepreneurship 4 | 60% | | |
| | Operational Research 4 | 78%* | | |
| | Strategic Management 4 | 70% | | |
| | Project Quality 4 | 61% | | |
| | Project Accounting 4 | 85% | | |
| | Project Research 4 | 68% | | |
| Student B | Project Resources 4 | 60% | | |
| | Project Management Processes | 53% | | |
| | Entrepreneurship 4 | 50% | | |
| | Operational Research 4 | 76% | | |
| | Strategic Management 4 | 62% | | |
| | Project Quality 4 | 60% | | |
| | Project Accounting 4 | 67% | | |
| | Project Research 4 | 64% | | |
| Student C | Project Resources 4 | 61% | | |
| | Project Management Processes | 58% | | |
| | Entrepreneurship 4 | 62% | 58% | Above class average |
| | Operational Research 4 | 64% | 64% | On class average |
| | Strategic Management 4 | 59% | 65% | Below class average |
| | Project Quality 4 | 66% | | |
| | Project Accounting 4 | 58% | | |
| | Project Research 4 | 70% | | |
| Student D | Project Resources 4 | 68% | | |
| | Project Management Processes | 60% | | |
| | Entrepreneurship 4 | 69% | 58% | Above class average |
| | Operational Research 4 | 64% | 64% | On class average |
| | Strategic Management 4 | 73% | 65% | Above class average |
| | Project Quality 4 | 59% | | |
| | Project Accounting 4 | 59% | | |
| | Project Research 4 | 69% | | |
| Student E | Project Resources 4 | 74% | | |
| | Project Management Processes | 68% | | |
| | Entrepreneurship 4 | 72% | 58% | Above class average |
| | Operational Research 4 | 70% | 64% | Above class average |
| | Strategic Management 4 | 78%* | 65% | Above class average |
| | Project Quality 4 | 70% | | |
| | Project Accounting 4 | 65% | | |
| Student F | Project Resources 4 | 56% | | |
| | Project Management Processes | 58% | | |
| | Entrepreneurship 4 | 57% | 58% | Below class average |
| | Operational Research 4 | 57% | 64% | Below class average |
| | Strategic Management 4 | 65% | 65% | On class average |
| | Project Quality 4 | 59% | | |
| | Project Accounting 4 | 52% | | |
| | Project Research 4 | 38% | | |

Code: * indicates distinction, those marked in blue are above 70% and orange indicates a fail

Appendix G: Project Management Test: Answers and link to TAG

In this appendix I have paraphrased the answers given by the RPL applicants in the RPL test as part of the RPL application.

| Project Management RPL Test: Questions and Answers | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Case study: As project manager, you have been tasked to manage and facilitate the building of a new multi-purpose community centre in the rural town of Swellendam in the Western Cape province. This project should be completed in 12 months with a budget of R12 000 000. The completed multi-purpose centre should add value to the livelihoods of the people in Swellendam and should contribute to the local economic development.</p> | | |
| Questions and answers | Theme | Comment |
| <p>Question 1: Compile a project brief for the project which would set an agenda for the kick-off meeting and act as a checklist to ensure that discussions will cover all the major issues of this project.</p> | | <p>This question is asking for three different things. Not very clear!</p> |
| <p>Answer A: Detailed answer referring to theory, i.e. WBS, Gantt chart, clear starting and end dates. Lists the steps involved such as feasibility study, community consultation, budget, appointment of contractor and labour, quality parameters, implications of delays and stakeholders' involvement.</p> | Vocational (A4) | <p>Reference is made to theory.</p> |
| <p>Answer B: Indicates which aspects should be looked for, such as start and end date of the project, plans of the building, aspects such as electricity supply and workforce to be used.</p> | Situational knowledge/ tacit (3) | <p>Practical answer; no mention of theory</p> |
| <p>Answer C: Lists the members of the project team and the role of each, i.e. project manager – oversees the project, delegates tasks and works within budget; quantity surveyor – deals with cost and variables; line managers – deal with managing staff, procurement and quality; admin and architect. Mentions the roles and responsibilities of each.</p> | Emphasis on how work should be done – situational knowledge (A1) | <p>Answer from a different perspective and does not deal with brief explicitly</p> |
| <p>Answer D: Layout of the answer is that of an agenda. Matters discussed at the meeting: role of the project manager, the importance of putting together a competent team, stakeholder involvement. Weekly meetings to be held; at the weekly meetings progress should be discussed, tracking and control procedures, changes and budget. Role of the project team: to assign team leader. Team leader should report to project manager daily on progress; status reports: time, procurement and contract management, budgetary status or constraints.</p> | Situational knowledge(A1) | <p>This answer is in line with the work student D does. Very brief answer, but to the point. Administratively orientated.</p> |
| <p>Answer E: "Building of a multi-purpose community centre ... adding value to the livelihoods of the people in the area ... and contributing to economic development." Steps, time frame and cost indicated.</p> | Reflection (A2) | <p>Crisp definition based on the description given in the test – not answering the question.</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Answer F: Stakeholders clearly identified: Government, residence, disadvantaged and unemployed people. Activities identified: Need to decide from the start how tenders will be awarded. Preference will be given to who and why, community involvement, finalization of the building plan. | Situational knowledge (A1) | |
| Question 2: Discuss the role that stakeholders can play in this project and how they will impact upon this project. | | |
| Answer A: Detailed answer, reflecting the various aspects that need to be kept in mind. Lists four stakeholders clearly: the client, the tenant, the contractor and the community. | Repertoire (A3) | Drew own conclusion on parties involved not given in the case study. |
| Answer B: Reflects on the various aspects that need to be kept in mind when dealing with stakeholders, such as the changes they can request, monitoring of progress made and involvement in payment. | Repertoire (A3) | |
| Answer C: Role of stakeholders is listed; oversight regarding the budget and completion of the project; working closely with the Project Manager; importance of the community and municipality is pointed out. | Situational knowledge (1) and Repertoire (A3) | Practical answer, reflecting detail and complexity of the project. |
| Answer D: Community is seen as the stakeholder – requires input from them regarding the services that they want the centre to provide. Also wants the project to create jobs for the unemployed, for example brick laying. In this way the centre can benefit the community. | Reflection (A2) | No mention of any other stakeholders. |
| Answer E: Lists the stakeholders as follows: community leaders, local council, project sponsors, local people who will use the centre, project team members, suppliers/contractors and the PM. Points out the importance of the PM in getting the buy-in and support of all stakeholders, including home owners around the site. | Repertoire (A3) | Does not indicate the role of the stakeholders, but rather that of the PM |
| Answer F: Identifies three main stakeholders: Government – guidelines for tendering; the development of the community should be incorporated into the project. Business community of Swellendam – businesses will benefit from project and should employ local people. Community – Get the buy-in of the community; the benefits of the project should go to the local community; acquiring skills. | Situational knowledge (A1) and Repertoire (A3) | |
| Question 3: Discuss the four stages of the project life cycle, and indicate the key steps or action within each phase of this project in Swellendam. Discuss the deliverables at the end of each phase of this project. | | |
| Answer A: Uses formal and academic terminology to list the four phases: conceptual stage – needs assessment phase; design phase – design of the building, taking the needs of the clients into account and approval by the authorities; implementation or construction phase – responsibility lies with the project manager, use of Gantt Chart to monitor the project, referring to the entire building process using critical path; handover phase – signing off and inspecting the building, handing over to the client and possible completion of snag list. | Vocational Pedagogy (A4) | Indicates practical experience. |
| Answer B: Has phases but in layman's terms, little detail: start date, cost, quality and end date. | Vocational pedagogy (A4) | Practical answer – little detail |

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| Answer C: Four steps listed: Conception – planning phase, breaking the project down into various activities; Budget – distribution of the allocated money; Time – has been allocated as well and must avoid run-over; project duration (incomplete answer). | Approach to Project Management | Taking the case study into consideration, theory is tacit |
| Answer D: Four phases: Planning, Initiation, Execution and Closure. Planning includes the establishment of the team, and the (allocation of) various functions to be performed. Identify stakeholders, business case to be identified, quality management implemented, team deployed to look at HR, Contract, procurement, time, scope and cost. Initiation for the project to proceed, deploy smaller teams, deliverables and the project manager ensures that everyone stays within the scope of the project. Execution teams are deployed to their respective areas, (keeping to) time lines. Deliverable - tick to 12 months time frame. Closure: project comes to an end and lessons are learnt. | Vocational pedagogy (A4) | Clear phases; content of each phase not so clear. Emphasis on implementation. |
| Answer E: Lists the following stages: Concept, Design/Development, Implementation and Close out. Concept: Brief to be finalized, role players agree, need to agree on what needs to be done. All the deliverables and objectives to be agreed upon and a project charter to be signed. Design/Development: PM to develop a project plan, identifying the tasks to be carried out, each with its deliverable. Sub-project managers assigned to each task, including the cost of each. Lists five distinct deliverables for the project: site, landscaping, building, electrification and furniture. Implementation: PM monitors progress, controls (work) and reports back to stakeholders, including risk management. Close-out: PM makes sure that the building is complete according to the expectations of the stakeholders and it is handed over to the local authority. Paper work should be complete. | Vocational pedagogy (A4) | Clear phases, detailed answer |
| Answer F: Identifies the phases in the building process. Clearing of the land, Foundation phase referring to the physical building of the centre, Erecting walls and roofing, including the certificate of approval. Includes a broad time line. | Vocational pedagogy (A4) | Did not identify the phases of a project, but rather those of a building project. |
| Question 4: Discuss the importance of team composition for this specific project and the role of the project manager in the team dynamics | | |
| Answer A: Lists the various teams that will be involved, i.e. Engineering, Senior management, HR etc. Uses a matrix structure to indicate the complexity of project. | Repertoire (A3) | Indicates appreciation for the complex nature of a project. |
| Answer B: Reflects on the complexity, refers to WBS and the role of each team member, but little detail. | Repertoire (A3) | Mentions theory late in the test! |
| Answer C: Brief answer about the project manager choosing the team and having a participatory management style. Little detail. | Reflection (A2) | |
| Answer D: Team put together. Have “bosberaad” to do strategic planning and discuss any issues the team might have. Team leader to identify strengths and weaknesses in the team. Working together and being a team are important. | Repertoire (A3) | Talking about team dynamics rather than who should be in the team. |
| Answer E: Refers to the phases of group forming: <i>forming, storming, norming, performing</i> and <i>maturing</i> . PM should lead the team through these phases and encourage them to come up with new ideas. She warns against demotivation and states that if team members are not motivated, it could de-rail the project. | Repertoire (A3) | Indicates leadership skills and knowledge of motivational theories |
| Answer F: No answer. | | |

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| Question 5: The task of the project manager is vital to the success of any project. Discuss the characteristics of a competent project manager for this specific project in Swellendam. | | |
| Answer A: Detailed, book answer listing the various roles of the project manager, i.e. problem solver, peace maker, advisor and mentor. | Vocational pedagogy (A4) | |
| Answer B: Understands the aspects explained in simple terms, listing aspects such as communication, time management, remaining within budget, holding regular meetings, making payments. | Repertoire (A3) | Management skills |
| Answer C: Project Manager has complete control over the project: managing the project, delegating, controlling the budget and interacting with all team members. | Repertoire (A3) | Management skills |
| Answer D: Lists various characteristics: synchronize the team, supportive to team members, HR skills in terms of team member selection, good communication skills and a passion for community development. | Repertoire (A3) | Emphasis is placed on soft skills and interpersonal skills rather than managerial skills. |
| Answer E: PM should have management skills such as leadership, communication, organizational skills and apply the “9 knowledge areas of project management”. PM should be able to work with people from different backgrounds and involve community members. | Vocational pedagogy (A4) | Theory or workplace reference to terminology, but reflects the complexity of the PM's job. |
| Answer F: Competent: Work within budget, work with deadlines, according to legislation, problem solving, people skills. | Vocational pedagogy (A4) | Only mentions the competencies – not discussed or any detail added. |
| Question 6: Risk in any event that prevents or limits the achievements of your objectives as defined at the outset of the project. Discuss how the project manager would manage the possible risks in this project. | | |
| Answer A: Lists activities, i.e. plan, review, lead, budget, evaluate and communicate. | Vocational Pedagogy (A4) | |
| Answer B: Practical answer – no detail. Links to WBS, indicating the shortest route, weekly progress reports and regular meetings. | Vocational Pedagogy (A4) | Same indication of theory. |
| Answer C: No answer. | | |
| Answer D : Project manager and team to consider risks and manage these. One risk is access to reliable electricity. Weather might also be a risk in the building phase of the project, as well as the individuals involved. | Reflection (A2) | Writing skills sometimes difficult to read – I edited the answers as I understood them. |
| Answer E: Risks should be identified and managed throughout the project by classifying the risks and monitoring them. | Vocational Pedagogy (A4) | General answer is theory based rather than speaking from a practical perspective. |
| Answer F: Strike action: involvement of the community will promote a feeling of ownership in the community. | Reflection (A2) | Identifies two specific risks – not saying how to manage it. |
| | | |

Appendix H: Theme Analysis Grid (TAG) According to "knowledges and RPL" (K&RPL) in Project Management

In this appendix I have summarised the data collected for my research. The information presented here was mainly used in Chapter Four of my study

| Concepts according to K&RPL | Student A | Student B | Student C | Student D | Student E | Student F |
|--|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| A: Knowledge Claim before entering Higher Education | | | | | | |
| A1: Situational knowledge | <i>Test:</i> Lists steps clearly: feasibility study, budget, appointment of staff, and implications of delays. Stakeholders clearly listed, list of teams involved. (Q1 and 5) ⁸ | <i>Test:</i> Aspects involved, such as the plans for building and electricity supply, aspects that stakeholders can get involved in (Q1), roles of team members (Q2) and quality, start date and end date (Q3), time management, budgeting and regular meeting (Q5). | <i>Test:</i> "How to". Clear on how to approach a project, roles and responsibilities are spelled out, including the stakeholders, team members (Q1 and 2). | <i>Test:</i> "How-to". Operational approach, i.e. progress meetings, roles and responsibilities, analysis of community involvement and benefits, team building, i.e. holding a "bosberaad", project manager's, characteristics, including communication and other soft skills, risk management (Q1 and 4). | <i>Test:</i> detailed list of stakeholders and their roles, phase identified (Q2 and 3). | <i>Test:</i> Lists stakeholders and their roles; project manager is a controller with budgetary powers and meeting deadlines; lists strike action as a risk (Q1, 2 and 6). |
| | <i>Interview:</i> Initiates project; develops scope and oversees implementation; outsourcing work to contractors (Q: B4). | <i>Interview:</i> Project is identified, planned; oversees implementation with emphasis on costing and time lines. Develops own brief (Q: B1 and B4). | <i>Interview:</i> Project work focuses on the entire project (Q: B1). | <i>Interview:</i> Focusing on procurement, staying in budget and closing (Q: B1). | <i>Interview:</i> Work focuses on coordination of projects (Q: B1). | <i>Interview:</i> Plans and controls projects; some work is outsourced (Q: B1). |
| A2: Tacit knowledge and Reflection | | | | | | |

⁸ Test question answered with the question number

| Concepts according to K&RPL | Student A | Student B | Student C | Student D | Student E | Student F |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| | <i>Interview:</i> Nature of work is project based (Q: A1) ⁹ . | <i>Interview:</i> "Stealing with my eyes!" Learnt from others and from mistakes (Q: B2). | <i>Interview:</i> Nature of work is project based (Q: B1). | | <i>Interview:</i> Nature of work is project based (Q: B4). | <i>Interview:</i> Nature of work is project based (Q: A1). |
| A3: Explicit knowledge and repertoire | <i>Test:</i> List four phases (A3) Team composition and interaction between different teams are discussed in a matrix (Q4). | <i>Test:</i> Lists three concepts (A3) Complexity of WBS (Q5). | <i>Test:</i> Stipulates the steps as concepts (Q3) Management style (Q4). | <i>Test:</i> Four phases (Q3) Community and job creation (A2), HR skills (Q5), risks (Q6). | <i>Test:</i> Four phases (A3) Contribution to economic development (Q1), stakeholders (A2). | <i>Test:</i> List the phases of construction and budget (Q3 and A 5) |
| | <i>Interview:</i> Nature of work is project based. Uses words such as "scope", "quality", "resourcing" and "cost". Identification of own projects (Q: B1). | <i>Interview:</i> "Projects is what I do!" Using words such as "implementation", "initiation" and "execution". Identification of own projects (Q: A1 and B1). | <i>Interview:</i> Nature of work is project based. Uses the phases, but they are not that clear: "planning is done on site", "monitoring is done in progress meetings". Works in shipping industry; has its own terminology. No, working for a company that has a "cowboy management style." (Q: B1). | <i>Interview:</i> Uses words such as "scooping", "initiation" and "controlling/reporting". Knows a lot about legislation and procurement (Q: A1, B1 and B2). | <i>Interview:</i> Stipulated clearly: "Initiation", "Definition", "Planning", "Execution (monitor and control)" and "Close out" Sees each project as unique (Q: B1 and B2). | <i>Interview:</i> Uses words such as "Planning"/ "developing", "controlling"/"reporting" (Q: B1). |
| A4: Vocational pedagogy | <i>Test:</i> Refers to theory, i.e. WBS, Gantt Chart. Builds theory into a number of answers to questions, i.e. role of the project manager (Q1, Q4, Q5 and Q6). | <i>Test:</i> Reference to WBS; little detail; deals with aspects such as time management and budgeting (Q6). | <i>Test:</i> Reference is made to participatory management style; explains role of the project manager clearly (Q4 and Q5). | <i>Test:</i> Phases listed (Q3). | <i>Test:</i> Reference made to phases of group forming; includes PMBOK and the "9 areas of knowledge" (Q3 and Q5). Risks (Q6). | |
| | <i>Interview:</i> Short course created an awareness of the work that is done at managerial level (Q: | <i>Interview:</i> Short course improved his ability to do his work better (Q: B2). | <i>Interview:</i> Did short courses, which created an awareness, but had little opportunity to | <i>Interview:</i> Did short courses, want more doing the BTech (Q: A2) | <i>Interview:</i> Did short courses and training on PMBOK (Q: A2). | <i>Interview:</i> Short course gave him a "holistic idea of how a project is supposed to be |

⁹ Interview question answered with the question number

| Concepts according to K&RPL | Student A | Student B | Student C | Student D | Student E | Student F |
|---|---|-----------|--|---|---|---|
| | A2). | | apply this at work (Q: A2). | | | run and what it entails" (Q: A2). |
| A5: Organisational and technical problems | <i>Interview:</i> Leadership, resourcing and communication. Lists steps in problem solving process (Q B4) | | <i>Interview:</i> Has problems implementing project management principles at work (Q: A2). | <i>Interview:</i> Has problems closing projects. Uses alternatives to try and resolve problems (Q : B1 and B3). | <i>Interview:</i> Uses different approaches in different circumstances (Q: B3). | <i>Interview:</i> Did not have an approach before the course (Q B4) |

| Concepts according to K&RPL | Student A | Student B | Student C | Student D | Student E | Student F |
|---|--|-----------------------|---|--|--|--|
| B: Knowledge Claim after entering Higher Education | | | | | | |
| B 1: Academic subject: Entrepreneurship | <i>Group Assignment:</i> Business plan of a construction company that will provide a range of construction facilities i.e. air conditioning, lifts, maintenance and building. Included cash-flow, structure of company. Student A group leader, Student B a member | | <i>Exam script:</i> Knowledge of topics such as legal requirements, incomplete answer on the simulation. No mention of Project Management | <i>Exam script:</i> Knowledge of topics such as legal requirements, although little detail. Simulation question can't apply input-output model | <i>Exam script:</i> Sound knowledge of topics for example legal requirements, detailed answer on the simulation with good application of business principles | <i>Exam Script:</i> Some knowledge on topics such as legal requirements, good application of business principles in the simulation |
| B1 : Academic subject: Strategic Management | <i>No information</i> | <i>No information</i> | <i>Assignment:</i> Analysed mission statement, structure and strategy, makes recommendation for improvements | <i>Assignment:</i> Analysed mission statement, external and internal assessment, competitor analysis and SWOT, but little or no interpretation or recommendations given. | <i>Assignment:</i> Interesting evaluation and recommendation regarding the mission statement, Recommendations made on objectives and competitors is vague. | <i>No information</i> |
| B1: Academic Subject: Project Resources 4 | <i>No information</i> | <i>No information</i> | <i>Exam script:</i> Failed the exam with incomplete answers and little theory | Exam script: Theory application is good, although some answers, including calculations are not correct | <i>Exam script:</i> above 70% for exam, good explanations supported with theory has, calculations are incomplete | <i>Exam script:</i> Interesting theory application to some answers, critical thinking, but calculations incorrect |

| Concepts according to K&RPL | Student A | Student B | Student C | Student D | Student E | Student F |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| B1: Vocational pedagogy in Higher Education | <i>Interview :</i> Research methodology, leadership skills and team work (Q: C6). | <i>Interview:</i> Writing reports better and applying leadership theory (Q: C1). | <i>Interview:</i> Limited space at work to apply theory; is hoping to initiate a project that will lead to application and improved management practices at work (Q: C3 and C6). | <i>Interview:</i> Has a clear understanding PMBOK now , wording is quiet different. Uses administrative aspects of her work in the class (Q: C2). Once she understood the subject Resources she realised that she uses it in her work (Q: C3). | <i>Interview:</i> (Q: C1) Uses the knowledge from project plans that she developed at work in the class and assignments (Q: C2). Uses knowledge from tendering in group assignment; uses leadership theories (Q: C3). Found terminology confusing (Q: C6) | <i>Interview:</i> "initiation phase" and "execution phase being used. (Q: C 1) Has mainly Has little opportunity to apply theory at work. Hopes that once he is in a managerial position, he will have such an opportunity (Q: C6). |
| B2: Problem solving (Links to A5 | <i>Interview;</i> Uses all the phases, but from a quality control perceptive. (The theory enabled him to work in greater detail than before.) "Now I know were the project life cycle is!" (Q: C1 and C3). | <i>Interview:</i> "Project phases – a lot of detail is being added" (Q: C1). "Used to have three steps in a project – now we have five" (Q: C2). | <i>Interview:</i> "I'm learning the detail now." Participates in discussions regarding finance now (Q: C 1 and C3). Knowledge is being contextualised (Q: C2). | <i>Interview:</i> Only involved in the execution stage of the project cycle, not applying the others. (Q: C1). Works in greater detail now. (Q: C6). | <i>Interview:</i> Use leadership theories to solve problems (Q: C1). More detail, especially regarding PMBOK and the software package she uses. Different terminology is being used, but can see the overlap (Q: C1). Has legal knowledge now i.e. LRA that supports in the work that is being done (Q C6) | <i>Interview:</i> Uses theory to resolve problems (Q: C1). Implements "initiation phase" and "execution phase" in own area of responsibility. Has developed a more holistic view (Q: C1). |