

ID 054: Unhinging Paradigms through Praxis: Locating Professional Development and Professionalisation in Recognition of Prior Learning Models

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Abstract

This paper presents a view of how professional development and professionalisation in two different contexts were achieved through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) practices. This paper is contextualised within a critical discourse about RPL, whether and how RPL practices and models have a role to play in a world where change is constant. The purpose in this paper is to provide empirical evidence through case studies, that RPL is a credible and reliable mechanism for professional development. Using the lenses of theory of change, and Actor Network Theory (ANT), current RPL developments both in South Africa and wider afield are briefly considered. The validity of this paper lies in the research methodology underpinning this paper, conducted through a desktop literature review about theories of change, and ANT, the trends impacting the development of RPL and National Qualification Frameworks (NQF's), and finally in short case studies. The empirical evidence from the case studies will provide a valid and strong argument about why and how RPL models can be used to enable professional development and professionalisation.

Introduction

Traditionally recognition of prior learning (RPL) has been applied with caution in contexts which allow people to access formal learning, and sometimes for people to gain credit towards a formal learning programme for their work experience and informal learning. It has rarely been applied in professional development contexts, and to award people professional designations. This paper is about the transformational effect of applying RPL in the professional development of financial advisors and sports coaches, and professionalisation of the sports coaching occupational sector. Two case studies are presented which provide empirical evidence of the transformational impact on people who are on their career and professional development pathways. There are large numbers of people who have relevant knowledge, skills and competences that have been developed through non-formal and informal learning and through experience. RPL is proposed as a mechanism through which an untapped pipeline of knowledgeable and skilled people can achieve professional status, and be awarded professional designations which enhance their career development trajectory.

The discourse in South Africa continues to hinge on whether and how RPL has a role to play in a world where change is constant and trends emerge which shape the operational, transactional and contextual elements of the teaching, learning and quality assurance and assessment systems which surround us.

The validity of this paper, it is suggested, lies in the research methodology underpinning this paper, comprising a desktop literature review about theories of change, and actor network theory (ANT), the trends impacting the development of RPL and NQFs, and finally in two (2) short case studies. The South

African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is also referenced, as RPL in South Africa is enabled through the elements which make up the South African NQF.

The field of education is driven mainly by existing paradigms about what constitutes reliable education and training delivery. A paradigm shift is needed to open up to new ways to recognise and validate learning and experience, which in turn, it is suggested, will provide significant benefits to skills development, professional development and professionalisation through RPL.

Mukora (2008) recognised that RPL is highly contested because of key role players who reflect a range of differing and sometimes conflicting perceptions and approaches to education and training. He also recognised the lack of common ground which made implementation difficult. Other challenges highlighted by Mukora were that basic assumptions about prior learning such as post-school non-formal learning, non-formal training and on-the-job learning were regarded as “incidental, inconsequential, and unrelated to formal tertiary study” and that “This learning is harder to pin down than its formal counterpart” (ibid, 2008: 12).

RPL situated within current learning theories

Formal education seems not to be equipped well enough to fulfill the growth in expectations and the learning and skills development needs of individuals and communities in the rapidly changing global society. There is a growing demand by adults and young people for formal recognition and validation for knowledge, skills and competences they have acquired in a variety of learning contexts.

Fenwick (2010: 2)¹ states that, “The critical problem (which) lies in mistaking learning as a single object, when in fact it is enacted as multiple objects, as different things in different logics and practice”; and asks “What knowledge counts most in a global knowledge society”.

Formal learning is not the only form of learning that has value. Non-formal learning refers to learning that could take place within the workplace, in communities, as part of internships, apprenticeships and in the context of professional continuing education and development (CPD). Informal learning refers to the type of learning which takes place in communities, families, society and cultural environments.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Report (OECD: 2010) on lifelong learning, RPL is viewed as an integral part of the broader *theme* of lifelong learning, as part of the lifelong learning *cycle*, and a key *enabler* to assist people to embark on or continue, to participate in a lifelong learning pathway.

The challenge is to find ways to raise the profile, acceptance and application of RPL through institutions of learning and through overt policy statements from quality assurance bodies and from the government.

¹ Walters (2010) cites Fenwick who spoke at the 7th Annual Julius Nyerere lecture at the University of the Western Cape, 2010.

Unhinging the paradigms through theory of change and reframing

The Logical Framework and the theory of change

The logical framework comprises of five (5) levels:

- **Activities** in the case of RPL, are actions prescribed in policies and assigned to either the education and training provider, the RPL candidate, SAQA, QCs or professional bodies. Activities might be assigned to a specific institution or institutions may share responsibility for an activity.
- **Outputs** are the direct results of activities. Outputs are produced through either the individual effort of an institution or through the collective action of one or more institutions.
- **Immediate outcomes** are the changes brought about by the RPL intervention ; and in particular the immediate benefits that result from these changes
- **Intermediate outcomes** are the changes brought about by RPL on the candidate, the professional space to which he/she belongs and the ability to either access learning or get credit for learning and experience or both of these. Often, intermediate outcomes are the benefits experienced by a specific person or group as a consequence of the immediate outcomes.
- **Final outcomes** refer to the effects of the RPL intervention or project on the candidates and the benefits they experience from having it implemented.
- **Impacts** are long-term societal changes that arise from the implementation of RPL.

Diagrammatically the core elements of a Theory of Change are set out below.

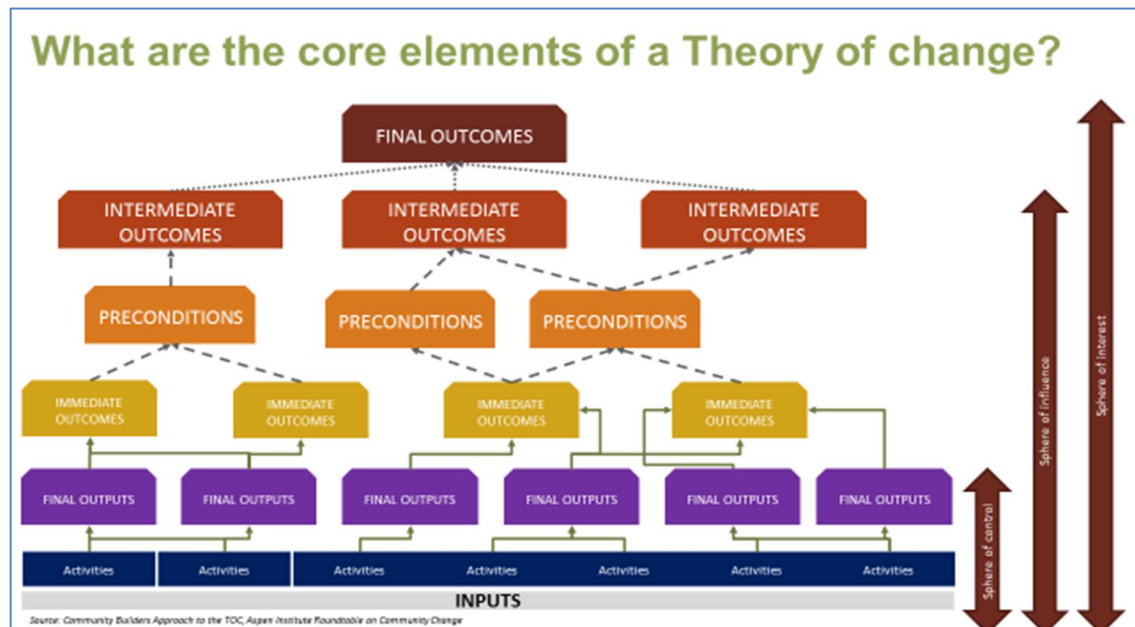


Figure 1: Core Elements of a Theory of Change

It is suggested that the Theory of Change (ToC) process is a very useful tool to reframe and re-imagine RPL and the scope of RPL applications. This paper proposes that RPL processes is appropriate for a

range of different applications including for professional development. The ToC process takes one beyond the usual paradigms and enables one to articulate new possibilities, and processes required to achieve the proposed outcomes and possible impacts. The case studies later in the paper provide evidence of how RPL has been applied in a professional development context with significant benefits.

Actor Network Theory (ANT)

Actor Network Theory (ANT) is used to provide a theoretical underpinning and explanation for the new assemblages and partnerships which support RPL practice in diverse contexts. The notion of ANT in this paper describes the enactment of materially and discursively heterogeneous relations that produce and reshuffle all kinds of actors (both human and non-human) and is seen as essential to opening understanding of how new and innovative assemblages can best describe the diverse approaches to RPL.

ANT asks how a system or structure has been compiled, and “Views all things as assemblies, connected in ‘precarious networks’ that require much ongoing work to sustain their linkages; but also how they can be ‘unmade’” (Fenwick, T, 2010: 113). Fenwick uses ANT to direct the reader to question old paradigms, and to re-think how the interconnectedness of people, systems, and objects can grow the learning organization, and other similar environments. ANT provides a different yet comparable lens, of how each element, object, interaction, human being in an organization is mutually responsible to create ever-changing environments where learning and work happen, or can happen. ANT opens the possibility that for new and unique learning and work environments to continuously be developed.

Trends impacting on the development of RPL

Signals are appearing, and some major shifts are happening that will have an impact on RPL in the future. Fenwick (2010), Werquin (2008) and Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004) identify the growing demand by adults and young people for recognition, validation and formal awards for the knowledge, skills and competences they have acquired in diverse ways. Fullan (2001) notes the significant impact of societal, workforce, economic, political and geo-political changes, which will occur rapidly, will not be predictable and will be non-linear. Collins and Halverson (2009) suggest that the transformation of the education and training system is being driven by the digital revolution; Hesselbein and Goldsmith (2006: 61) note that people who lead in the future will be increasingly more multi-faceted, innovative, varied, and values-focused; and Gergen and Vanourek (2008) suggest that today’s generations are supremely entrepreneurial and are starting to mould the future through unconventional business entities, coupled with their ability to innovate, for example, the growth in social media platform.

Case studies

Case Study One: IISA, Santam and INSETA

The core focus of the project was the professional development and social value of the RPL intervention which benefitted thousands of short term insurance brokers and advisors to be awarded credit for non-formal and CPD learning. By selecting this case study as part of this paper, I demonstrate a RPL model based on mapping CPD programmes to the learning outcomes of formal qualifications by using a curriculum mapping model and then applying RPL assessment for candidates. This RPL model relies on the credibility of the mapping process of non-formal CPD programmes to unit standards for acceptance in professional development contexts. This case study also presents evidence that the equivalence mapping techniques used to arrive at the equivalence map are generalizable and

applicable to other similar contexts.

All advisors in this project sample worked in household short term insurance products and had undergone some or all of the short foundational programmes for the short term industry. The costs associated with delivery and attendance of these courses was significant. It was found that the savings generated by the RPL project were significant and benefitted the sector.

The partnership with trusted industry specialists gave the project credibility. The Skills Development Manager and Training Manager from SANTAM supported the process with technical and subject matter expertise which gave the process legitimacy in the eyes of the companies and advisors. Two industry subject matter experts provided technical and subject matter support as well. The partnership included the compliance officers who endorsed the learners' work and attendance and achievements in the short courses. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) was also a partner in the project. Close cooperation existed between the Insurance Sector education and Training Authority (INSETA) and SAQA to ensure that the credits could justifiably be awarded and the short courses recognized for credit. Communication with the brokers, companies, the Financial Services Board (FSB) and the professional bodies was important in order to address misconceptions about CPD and to grow common understanding about RPL.

1. Project partners	<p>The following were project partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Insurance Institute of South Africa ▪ SANTAM ▪ 2 MULTIMARK III Programme specialists ▪ INSETA
2. Aim and unique context of case study four	<p>The aim of this case study is to demonstrate how mapping CPD curricula to unit standard based qualifications provided a context for RPL to be conducted for people who had undergone formal courses which had not been formally assessed for credit. The context is the short term insurance sector. The CoP, (which covers short term insurance, life insurance and retirement funds), ICiBS (which covers short term insurance, life insurance and retirement funds) and Multimark III were not equivalent to 120 credits, and were not registered on the NQF at that stage. In fact, they were viewed as CPD programmes. The advent of the Financial Advisors and intermediary Services Act changed the way the insurance industry viewed prior learning and experience gained through CPD, short courses and work experience.</p>
3. Implementation of the mapping for credit RPL project	<p>Initially the process comprised three steps which all included agency by the professional body:</p> <p>The first step was to allocate a NQF level to the short term formal courses which had not been registered on the interim NQF. Both courses were mapped against NQF registered qualifications and NQF levels by mapping the curricula of the CPD programmes to learning outcomes of registered qualifications. Job-descriptions, and tasks performed by people with a CoP or ICiBS achievement were also included in the mapping exercise against the NQF level descriptors to establish complexity and graduate profile equivalence. The CoP and the ICiBS were placed at NQF level 4.</p> <p>The second step was to allocate credits to the learning programmes once they had been mapped by comparing the content in the CoP and ICiBS curricula to learning outcomes and assessment criteria in the unit standards. Where there was at least 80% equivalence, the curricula were rewritten in the NQF format and allocated credits.</p> <p>The third step was a consultation process with the industry followed by the RPL process through which credits were allocated to the RPL candidates. Thousands of brokers benefitted from this RPL intervention and retained their professional licenses to practice.</p>
3.1 Credits awarded for CoP, ICiBS and MULTIMARK III	<p>The RPL process for candidates required the advisors to provide evidence of attendance and completion of the in-house CPD programmes and a range of work –related evidence such as how provided professional advice and client services and performance assessment evidence endorsed by the company. The companies’ compliance officers or training divisions managed the RPL assessments in collaboration with the professional body.</p>
3.2 Challenges experienced	<p>Some challenges were experienced which were mainly about communication and systems readiness. The industry confused a NQF registered qualification with a short course, in-house training programme and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The achievement of the CoP or ICiBS gave the advisor a number of points in the CPD programme; financial advisors confused the points and the credits required for FAIS Determination purposes and remained convinced that they needed more points. Because of this they enrolled unnecessarily for expensive and lengthy learning programmes to achieve sufficient points. The second challenge was systems related. The IISA College did not have the mechanism to upload the thousands of records that resulted from the RPL project. The College then worked with Deloitte and the INSETA to begin the task of locating the learner records, verifying authenticity and uploading</p>

Table 1: IISA Curriculum Mapping

Case Study Two: The South African Sports Caching and Olympics Committee (SASCOC) professionalisation of sports coaching

The SASCOC Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process in Sport Coaching takes place in the context of SASCOC RPL policy. The ultimate aim of the RPL policy is to bring about rapid transformation in South African sport by acknowledging the knowledge, skills and competencies of the thousands of coaches and coach developers who donate their time and energy for the furtherance of sport in South Africa. The SASCOC RPL process has been designed to assess coaches and coach developers who have a proven track record and are considered by themselves and their National Federations to be sufficiently competent to apply for assessment and (if successful) be awarded a coaching designation or a coach developer designation. All assessments are flexible, fit-for-purpose and customised to measure the specific levels of knowledge, skills and competencies required at each designation level, yet also occurring against the SAQA NQF-aligned level descriptors which circumscribe each coaching designation.

RPL at SASCOC recognises the many and varied contexts in which RPL operates; assessing and accrediting the related specialised knowledge, generic and sport-specific skills, attributes and values of coach developers and sports coaches at varying levels; through a planned, consulted and moderated RPL process, regulated by national and international legislation, guidelines and quality assurance mechanisms. Nine (9) coaching designations were developed and aligned to the seven stages of development in the life of a sport participant from early childhood to late adulthood. This coaching framework affects everything SASCOC does to encourage sport and develop athletes and coaches from an Apprentice coach level to a Master Coach level.

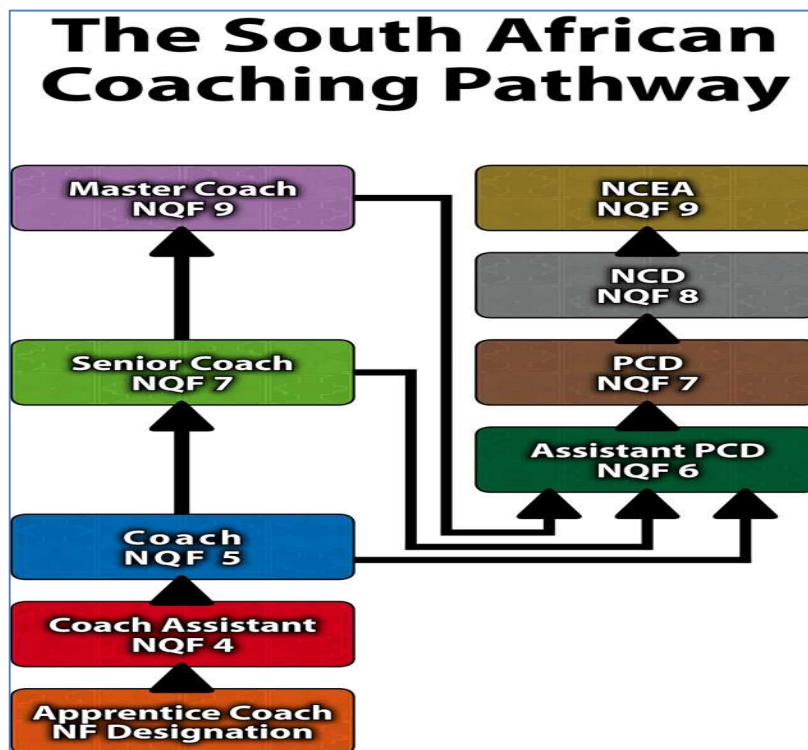


Figure 2: The long term coaching framework with pathways

The LTCD model will enable the National Federations to relate their coaching qualification systems to a common reference point and thus demonstrate the alignment process and relationship between National Federation qualifications and National qualification framework through defining what is the difference between a coaching designation and a coaching qualification.

Coaching Designation	Coaching Qualification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designation conferred by accredited and recognized SASCOC (CASA) and aligned to a relevant qualification on NQF • Comply with SASCOC-CASA requirements as a member • Participate in CPD as prescribed by SASCOC (CASA) • Pay membership fees as per CASA requirements • Participate in CPD as prescribed by CASA • Comply with CASA code of conduct • A designation can be revoked by CASA if member in violation of policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered with a recognized and institution accredited by QC recognized by SAQA • Developed and submitted to SAQA for registration on the NQF • Coaching qualification is offered by a registered and accredited HEI/Service provider by CHE/ QCTO • A qualification cannot be revoked once

Figure 3: Coaching Designations viz a viz coaching qualifications

Furthermore, measures have been put in place to ensure that the RPL programme is aligned with the International Sport Federation.

The RPL process at SASCOC ultimately offers to coaches and coach developers various pathways for advancement. These include, a designated pathway for coaches and coach developers which keeps pace with their training and experience and enables them to reach the highest coaching designation; and careful, considered placement occurring in conjunction with partner Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) institutions to start coaches and coach developers on the path to attaining relevant qualifications in their chosen discipline.

The vision espoused by SASCOC was that coaching is a core function for all national federations. Coach education and professional development of coaches, towards professionalisation of sports coaching is a construct that seeks to foster and facilitate excellence in athletes' performance and contribute to the enrichment of participants in sport that lead to active and healthy lifestyles.

The RPL project was designed to award the designation of National Coach Education Advisor (NCEA) initially to 11 candidates, from 10 different sports codes. The sports codes were rugby, soccer, tennis, volley ball, cricket (2), netball, chess, gymnastics, swimming, and wrestling. The process involved establishing a RPL peer review panel, designing the RPL assessment tool, moderation and then awarding the successful candidates with their designations.

The Long Term Coaching Framework (LTCF)

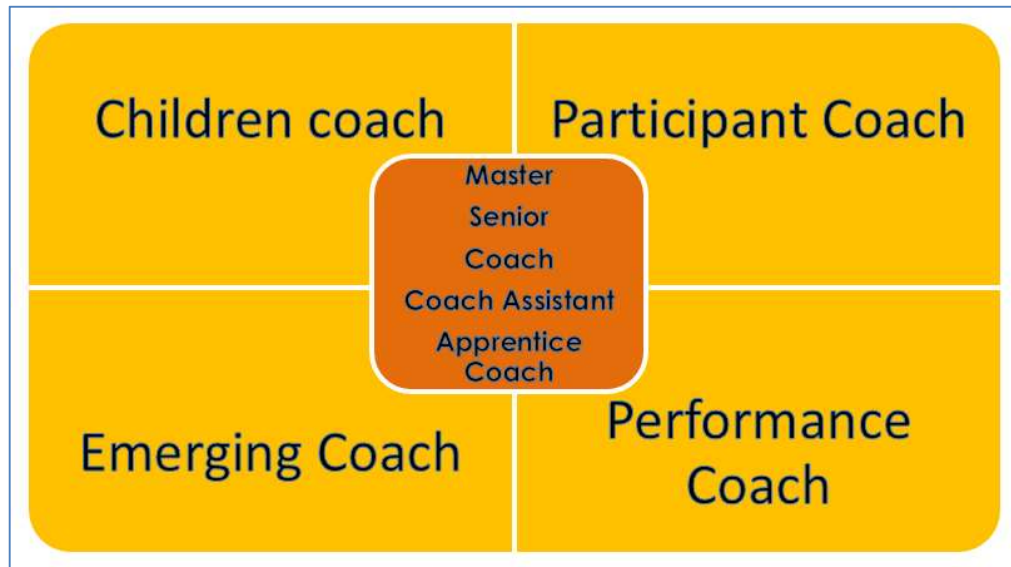


Figure 4: The four domains of the long term coaching framework

We used the Long term coaching framework descriptors to provide the basis of the evidence which each candidate would present. The level at which the assessment tool was pitched was NQF level 9, and the level descriptor at level 9 framed the sections of the evidence that had to be presented. The Portfolios of evidence included submission of a variety of relevant documents showing how they had performed their functions in accordance with the designation requirements; followed by individual oral presentation using digital technology. The RPL peer review panel asked questions to assess the deeper cognitive and analytical and evaluative abilities of the candidates. The final part of the PoE was a site visit to the sports fields to watch actual workplace practice. The entire programme was designed in consultation with the National Federations and the RPL. Part of the RPL project was dedicated to capacity building these 11 people to be able to conduct RPL programmes and assessment with provincial coaches and provincial advisors in their specific sports codes. This cascading model was used first in a pilot project with the newly –designated NCEAs. A number of these initial candidates are conducting RPL assessments for designations across the system.

A second RPL project was undertaken through which 22 candidates from a variety of sports codes underwent RPL for access to the newly-developed Master's Degree in either Sports Coaching or Coach Education Advisor roles. Some of the RPL candidates had a Grade 12; some had a first degree. Their RPL assessment tool was pitched at NQF level 9 as well, and the PoE comprised a written/typed paper, a file of their previous work, and an hour-long oral defense of their portfolio. Their work was presented to a peer review panel comprising 2 academics with PhDs, a SASCOC senior official, the university Vice-chancellor, and the National Federation representative. 15 of the 22 candidates eventually enrolled in the Master's programme, although only 1 of the 22 was considered to be not ready for the rigours of a master's degree.

These two projects have provided a sound empirical basis from which SASCOC is developing a roll out programme for the future. There are many current coaches at different levels who have been coaching for many years, and who may now be able to undergo a RPL assessment to be awarded their designation. There are large

numbers of coaches who can be RPL'd for access into a number of currently registered qualifications, starting from a NQF level 4 (for assistance coaches) to the Master's qualification.

Coaching Association of South Africa (CASA)

CASA is the Professional Body for coaches in SA operating independently under the aegis of South African Sport Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC). The eight (8) Coaching designations are aligned to the NQF and the ninth coaching designation of Apprentice coach will be conferred by the National Federation. CASA will align to the National Qualifications Framework and complement the work of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). A Memorandum of Understanding will be agreed with the relevant Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) and other organizations annually to determine the support of coaching programmes and defining the inter-relationship between the South African Coaching Framework, the LTCD and NQF, as well as setting out protocols to ensure effective and coordinated working arrangements. This alignment will recognize the specific needs of each sport and the coaching occupations, domains, roles and status categories outlined in this document.

CASA Role as a Professional Body includes the regulation of coaching as a blended profession; licensing and accreditation for Sports Coaches; standards are maintained and meet the international federations' benchmark for sports coaching; policy and quality control of Continuous Professional Development (CPD); and necessary process in addressing breach of professional conduct and other discipline related matters are properly exercised

The objective of the CPD programme is to assist members to develop and maintain professional competence in order to provide to sport coaches of high quality serving the interest of the broader public and the country at large at all sport forums, nationally and internationally. The primary responsibility for competence lies with the coaches. All members have an obligation to develop and maintain their professional competence, relevant to the nature of their work and professional responsibilities.

Closing comments

The central question here is how competences and knowledge developed in a disparate range of learning contexts can be valued equally? Part of the answer to this question, can be found through the pursuit of outcomes-based recognition. But another crucial aspect of the response must rely on the establishment of clear standards and reference points for the assessment, validation and certification of learning. What should these standards look like? Reference points prevent the overall quality of qualifications from being reduced by opening up towards non-formal and informal learning. It needs to be very clear that a qualification awarded on the basis of non-formal and informal learning has to meet the same demanding quality criteria as learning taking place in the formal system. At the same time formal system standards need to include elements from the non-formal education and informal learning.

The nature of the qualifications system, therefore, is important. National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) are overarching frameworks that define all qualifications recognised nationally in terms of workload, level, quality, learning outcomes and profiles in a way that makes the relationship between them transparent. The relative placement of qualifications should be comprehensible through the use of specific descriptors for each qualification covering both its breadth (competences associated with learning outcomes) and its depth (level). It is structured horizontally in order to cover all qualifications awarded in a system and vertically by levels of qualification (CEDEFOP, 2008a).

Through this paper and the case studies, it is hoped that the transformational agenda which underpins RPL has been given a voice. This paper uses theories and case studies to start the discourse about unhinging existing paradigms about RPL, especially RPL for professional development and for professionalisation of occupations. The case studies have been presented specifically to show that RPL can be applied in professional development environments and that RPL can and has already started to transform and disrupt traditional paradigms about what knowledge counts.

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