

Rethinking the Role of RPL Assessment within an Interactive Activity System

Loffie Naudé, The RPL Hub, Pretoria, South Africa

Introduction

This paper aims to provide an argument to support the idea that recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessment practices need to be reconsidered. The premise is that the RPL candidate represents knowledge gained in the workplace and through life experiences, and should be assessed in a dynamic way. This paper invites the reader to follow the journey through theories and empirical evidence to arrive at the point of reconsidering assessment practices. The journey starts at an important point of departure – the perceived boundaries between two types of knowledge: workplace knowledge and academic knowledge.

Without repeating work that has been done in the past, a snapshot from a previous paper shows the theoretical arguments and a possible model where RPL assessment can meet the challenges made by solid knowledge boundaries. In the previous paper an argument was made for a “third space” (Naudé, 2013). That paper indicated that adults with work experience found it difficult to make a link between knowledge gained through their work experience and knowledge requirements as described by a relevant qualification. To foreground this problem, the previous paper focused on an interplay between an RPL assessor and the RPL candidate to determine the kinds of knowledge that were exchanged by means of the assessment process toward a financial advisor qualification to adhere to the Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services (FAIS) Act in South Africa (introduced in 2002 to regulate the registration of financial advisors in South Africa). The questions posed were: What is required to translate workplace knowledge into academic knowledge? What is required to translate academic knowledge into a workplace context? Are disciplinary boundaries too solid to allow such translations?

The previous study (Naudé, 2013) indicated that disciplines through their theoretical frames not only exercise control, but also set boundaries through content and method. That is, disciplines are about *what* they study and *how* they study reality (Leonardo, 2004). Durkheim referred to the following examples: in the natural sciences, verifiability is established by methodologies that produce results that are replicable in the natural world; in psychology, experimental designs are used to gather data; in sociology, the focus is more on the external, social world using *inter alia* ethnographic studies to gather data. In this sense, secluded and distinctive theoretical frames of knowledge create concepts specific to the discipline and develop a language that excludes those outside of the discipline – creating solid boundaries between disciplines (as cited in Leonardo, 2004).

Wenger’s (2006) notion of communities of practice underpins this kind of boundary setting. He described communities of practice as:

... groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. (p. 1)

It seems fair to indicate that communities of practice manifest themselves as creating boundaries: practitioners work as a community in a specific domain undertaking similar work; and sustained interaction creates discontinuities between participants and nonparticipants. There is efficient communication *within* the community, but at the expense of those *outside* of the community of practice (Wenger, 1998). This means that those inside the boundaries create and use a common language that is unknown or not accessible for those outside of the boundaries.

By setting solid boundaries, knowledge is defined narrowly. The traditional view of knowledge is organized hierarchically into a collection code curriculum, which refers to a strongly classified curriculum maintaining boundaries between contents. The boundary of knowledge has become more and more delineated through years of development: disciplinary knowledge could be described as formal, vertically structured, layered knowledge that is insulated from other content, subject and disciplines (Bernstein, 1971). Within this strong secluded frame, knowledge is owned by those deemed knowledgeable that produce and disseminate knowledge according to the appropriate disciplinary rules.

In contrast to Wenger's notion of communities of practice (emphasising knowledge boundaries) is Knorr-Cetina's (1999) notion of communities of interest (emphasizing the permeability of boundaries). Based on these two polar arguments on the epistemology of knowledge, the broad outlines of a third space become clearer (Naudé, 2013). The third space is the space where the RPL assessor and RPL candidate meet in a "neutral space" to transfer different coded knowledge in a transdisciplinary way.

The knowledge exchange between the RPL assessor and RPL candidate supports the notion of permeability of knowledge boundaries and communities of interests. This applies not only to interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary work but also to the interaction between disciplinary knowledge and workplace knowledge. Drawing on this argument, an RPL model (the need for a third space) could change the traditional understanding of assessment and role of the RPL assessor, and would potentially make transfer of knowledge more meaningful for the RPL candidate.

According to Pohl (2010), scholars interpret transdisciplinarity in different ways. For the sake of clarity in this article, transdisciplinarity means using constructive ways to use knowledge and insights of one of two or more academic disciplines to solve a problem or to develop an informed understanding of a complex situation (p. 74). To say it more formally, transdisciplinary activities mean an intervention in a social system (the workplace) that should be carefully observed to find a solution or create a better understanding (p. 80).

In the third space, the assessor is open to other views and understandings of subject-specific contents that are formulated and practiced in a different context with different coded language – such as in another discipline. The transdisciplinary approach within the third space opens up the possibility to listen, decode information and relate it to the qualification and disciplinary coded information. This is what the third space is all about: the ability of an assessor to know his or her own subject, but also to know the related workplace with its coded language, processes and procedures. Knowledge of both contexts is required to make a meaningful assessment.

The argument for a third space could therefore change the traditional understanding of assessment and the role the RPL assessor plays. The third space could potentially make transfer of knowledge more meaningful for the RPL candidate. This paper aims to theorize further the requirements for RPL assessment to ensure successful transfer of knowledge between the workplace and the academia, and vice versa. For this purpose the research questions posed here are: Does the notion of a third space require a change in assessment

practices? If so, to what extent should RPL assessment practices change?

To answer these questions, the insights offered by both Cultural Historic Activity Theory (CHAT) as developed by Vygotsky (1986) and further developed by Engeström (1987), as well as the notion of co-emergence as evident in the theory of critical realism as developed by Bhaskar (1993), will be discussed to consider possible changes to RPL assessment practices.

Cultural Historic Activity Theory (CHAT)

An important reason for making use of CHAT as a theoretical frame to reconsider RPL assessment is that Vygotsky incorporates in CHAT the notion of a “zone of proximal development” (a knowledge-making process), which refers to a dialectical movement between experiential or workplace, and scientific or academic knowledge. In this way insight is provided on the workings of the space where activity systems interact with each other (illustrated by Figure 2) (Engeström, 1987, p. 162).

Engeström (2001) used the notion of an “activity triangle” to indicate the interrelationships between two or more activities. Figure 1 shows a network of relationships between a subject (individual or an organization) and its object. It indicates that in order for a subject to achieve its goals, more than a direct relationship is needed. To achieve a goal, mediating tools, rules, communities of practice and division of labor are required. The arrows show how each part of the activity could influence another part within the activity system.

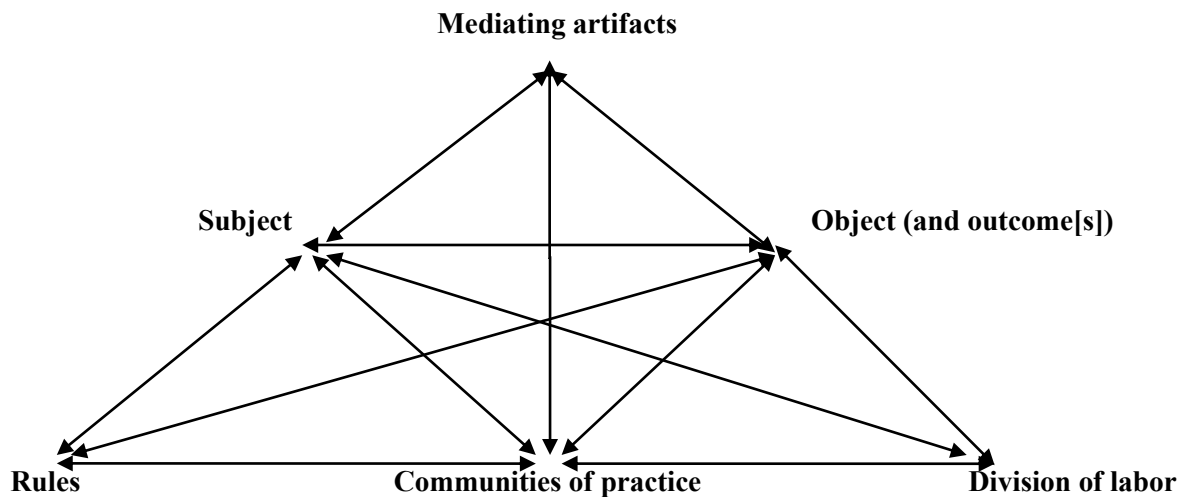


Figure 1 (Engeström, 2001, p. 135)

The elements of each part of the activity system that enable a subject to meet its objective are explained in Table 1.

Table 1: Elements of an activity system

<i>Tools</i>	Tools comprise anything used in the transformation process through which a subject achieves its object, including both material tools and tools for thinking. A tool mediates the relationship between the subject and the object. It can refer to a plan, a policy, an idea and other tools.
<i>Rules</i>	Rules are explicit and implicit norms, conventions and social relations within a community. Rules are imposed by “actors” (individuals) in social groups, including larger organizational and professional communities.
<i>Communities of practice</i>	Communities of practice are groups of “actors” (collectives) that share the same purposes and/or values, and are bound by spoken/documented or unspoken/undocumented rules or criteria. Communities of practice mediate activities. Subjects could be members of multiple communities. Subjects can be positioned differently within communities of practice: leaders and the main members of a community of practice will subscribe most closely to the shared criteria; others will participate more peripherally but this participation is still seen as being legitimate.
<i>Division of labor</i>	Division of labor refers to the allocation of responsibilities within or between collectives. Division of labor shows the organization of a community in relation to the transformation process of the object into the outcome.

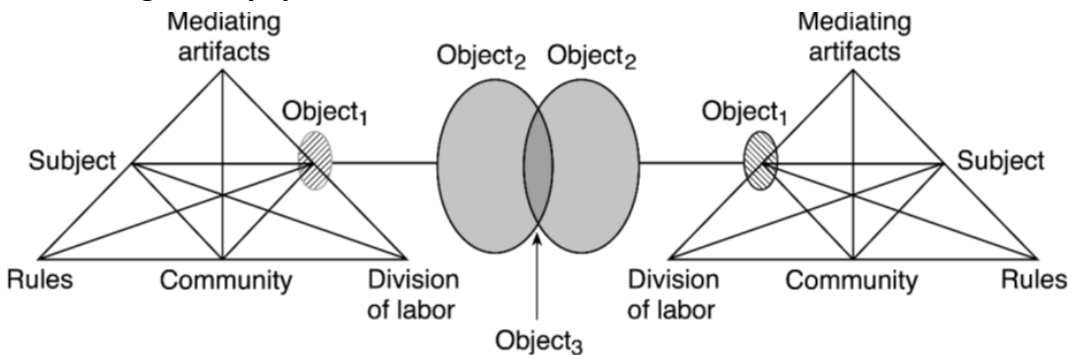
(Adapted from SAQA, 2015, p. 67)

The activity triangle as described in Figure 1 was described as a “second generation” activity triangle, as the first generation activity system as described by a single triangle was critiqued and indicated as too simple, after which Engeström (2001) expanded the single triangle to the multiple triangle (second generation) in Figure 1. On its turn, critique on the second generation triangle led to the development of a third generation triangle that reflects interaction between two or more activity systems. This new development provides insight into the nature of this interaction that could impact assessment practices.

Interacting activity systems

The idea of two or more interacting activity systems is a useful way to see how more than one activity system that is different in culture (i.e., workplaces and academic institutions) could relate to each other. Figure 2 illustrates the interaction of two activity systems. Note the similar object indicated in Figure 2 as Object₃, pointing to the interaction space of the two activity systems, which could have different cultures.

Figure 2: Two interacting activity systems.



(Engeström, 2001, p. 136)

The two activity systems interact when two objects meet. In this example, the unit of analysis is an activity system, which is represented by an academic institution with its qualifications, academic staff, students and assessment practices. The other is the workplace with its management, workforce, work responsibilities and learning opportunities. The object in each case would be the end product: RPL assessment processes leading to a qualification. In this scenario two aspects are important:

First, the two distinct activity systems have processes that could take different forms. Second, activity theory suggests that when two activity systems meet with same objects, a third object or third space is created. The characteristic of this new object or third space is that it is new and represents change or transformation. This indicates that the two activity systems (workplace and academic institution) create a new object or third space that has the potential to influence the objects of each other and redesign their practices.

This dynamic nature of the third space (Object 3) aligns with the theory of co-emergence as embedded in critical realism (Bhaskar, 1993). The notion of co-emergence suggests that when two actors or systems coincide, they respond to each other in such a way that a new unity is formed. This new unity is called “complicity” to describe the interaction of two systems that results in changing one another, and perpetuates something new (Bhaskar, 1993). Interaction between two activity systems is required to create something new; co-emergence activities cannot be achieved independently by participants.

The dynamic nature of the third space needs to be interrogated further in terms of what it means for assessment strategies and whether it has the potential to change RPL assessment practices. To arrive at this point, each of the two activity systems (workplace and academic institution) is now described in terms of the tools, rules, the community and division of labor, which constitutes an activity system within the interactive activity system (Figure 2). This analysis is important to indicate the differing processes of the two activities in building an argument around understanding of RPL assessment.

Activity systems compared: Academic institution/the workplace

Both the academic institution and the workplace as activity systems are compared in Table 2 below using the categories of an activity system:

Table 2: Activity systems compared

Activity system	Academic Institution	The Workplace
<i>Tools</i>	The tools governing the academic institution are policies, procedures, manuals, job description, workplace learning, working in teams, meetings and other events, reports, academic journals, academic books and research papers.	The tools governing the workplace are policies, procedures, manuals, job description, workplace learning, working in teams, meetings and other events, reports and research documents.
<i>Rules</i>	The rules are explicit in policies and procedures, a specific discipline with its boundaries, and implicit in work environment, and workplace culture such as protocols and academic traditions.	The rules are explicit in policies and procedures, and manuals and implicit in work environment, and workplace culture.
<i>Communities of practice</i>	Communities of practice are constituted by faculties and departments, study teams, professional bodies, subject matter work groups and conferences/seminars.	Communities of practice are constituted by divisions, project teams, and organizational-wide activities organized around shared purposes.
<i>Division of labor</i>	Responsibilities to individuals are allocated within faculties and departments and/or across divisions within the academic institution.	Responsibilities of individuals are allocated within divisions and teams and/or across divisions within an organization.

The academic institution as an activity system uses the components of the activity system to generate new knowledge and disseminate disciplinary knowledge with strong rules and boundaries. The disciplines are strongly coded within a community of practice, which does not allow the less-informed to get behind “the walls.”

The workplace could be described in terms that are partly similar, but also different. The tools, rules, communities of practice and division of labor do have similarities (policies, procedures, manuals, etc.) but also clear differences (absence of journals, academic traditions, disciplinary boundaries and different communities of practice) when compared with the academic institution.

The nature of the workplace needs to be interrogated further. The workplace as an activity system is a learning environment where staff is exposed to knowledge embedded in policies, procedures, reports and other documents developed by an individual staff member or by a team. Within a specific work environment, knowledge is coded according to the specific field of operations (engineering, social services, accountancy, etc.). Knowledge is developed through interaction with each other as well as through in-depth research on themes or issues required by the workplace. The learning culture in the workplace could be described as “learning by doing” with a variable link to theory.

Fenwick (2001) supports the notion of “learning by doing.” She examined the link between experience, reflection and knowing, and indicated that a learner is believed to construct through experience a personal understanding (constructivist) of relevant structures of meaning derived from his or her action in the world. This understanding contributes to the ability to learn in the workplace through “reflection on practice.” Reflection after doing is considered an important mental process required to transform experience into knowledge, which can then be represented, generalized and applied to new contexts. She argued that “situative perspectives” of workplace learning maintain that learning is rooted in the situation in which a person participates, not in the head of that person as intellectual concepts produced by reflection only (cognitivist). Learning cannot be separated from its practice and the particular community that makes it legitimate (p. 5).

Amin and Roberts (2008) reported on several studies done regarding how learning takes place in different workplace settings. One study that they report explored knowing, as demonstrated by technical, craft and construction environments. The study found that learning takes place through codification in manuals (technical environment) and kinaesthetic and aesthetic activities (craft and construction). In all three workplace environments, innovation was evident based on knowledge gained through practices – innovation that could not be possible based on theoretical knowledge only.

Based on these results, two critical aspects should be considered to inform assessment in the third space:

- The workforce in an organization could be well-informed on theories through formal or non-formal academic engagement (i.e., management, human resources, production, engineering, research).
- The nature of the workplace has changed to a learning organization, which is not mainly procedural anymore, but the site of transdisciplinary knowledge production (Gibbons et al., 1994, p. 6).

The changing nature of workplaces into sites of knowledge production has an impact on RPL assessment; that is, traditional assessment practices have to accommodate a learner who is not an empty vessel, but one who enters the RPL assessment process with knowledge already gained and practiced, and who is a full participant in the assessment process.

Assessment as mediation tool

Deliberations on assessment theory and practices show that assessment practices are traditionally slow to adopt innovative practices or to make changes to accommodate new challenges, and to influence curricula in innovative ways. Gibbs (2006a) indicated that the move in the United Kingdom to specify curricula in terms of learning outcomes has required new kinds of assessment practices designed to assess “key skills,” “transferable skills,” “generic skills” or “graduate attributes” rather than assessing solely the acquisition of knowledge (p. 19). Despite the challenge posed, innovations are focused on matters such as economies of scale, cost involved in writing exams, the nature and frequency of test and assignments, and consistency in assessments.

CEDEFOP (2010) also indicated that methods to identify people’s knowledge and skills have not undergone much development over the past 10 to 15 years. Written examinations on particular subjects, portfolios of evidence (PoE) using reflective practice and competency-based assessment of discrete skills have been the major vehicles used to identify learning acquired from formal education.

The slow pace to consider innovative practices prevails despite the acknowledgement that assessment is as important as the curriculum and delivery of contents. Gibbs (2006b) made an apt comment on how assessment influences learning:

Assessment frames learning, creates learning activity and orients all aspects of learning behaviour. In many courses it has more impact on learning than does teaching. Testing can be reliable, and even valid, and yet measure only the trivial and distorted learning which is an inevitable consequence of the nature of the testing. (p. 23)

The theoretical approaches to assessment in general do not deal adequately with the contribution an RPL process and activity system perspective could offer to assessment practices and innovation in curricula – with negative consequences to relevance and responsiveness of curricula design.

The study done by CEDEFOP (2010) of nine European countries indicated signs of innovation in the required direction: assessment methods go beyond the curriculum and were designed to be as close as possible to professional contexts. Assessment situations were chosen to be as close as possible to “real” work situations to ensure that competences observed are transferable to the professional context. The emphasis on professional context led to real or simulated work situations that are assessed using a written examination (CEDEFOP, 2010). Although the assessment practices of the nine European countries shows some innovation by incorporating the professional context, the focus of assessment is still a *one way* assessment: from academic learning to workplace practices, which leaves little room for assessment practices that could assess workplace knowledge toward recognition academically.

Assessment as mediation tool has more to offer. A very important finding was made in a study conducted by Ralphs, Cooper, Moodley and Deller (forthcoming). This study investigated four sites of RPL practices in South Africa ranging from postgraduate study, and access into higher education, to trade union learning and workplace learning. They found signs of hybridity in the knowledge production in the workplace. Knowledge discourses at the workplace reflects elements of discourses at academic institutions, thus weaving together different categories of knowledge and permeating the solid boundaries between the two distinct communities of practice under discussion in this paper, the workplace and academic institution.

The above exclusionary practices, with signs of hybridity, suggest that a process of mediation (referring to mediating artifacts in Figure 2) is required to transfer knowledge from one community of practice to the

other (Bernstein, 2000 refers to transfer of knowledge as “recontextualisation”). In this sense, mediation is an important characteristic of the third space where the assessor/RPL advisor operates.

Mediating tools play an important role in determining whether an RPL advisor could unlock the knowledge that candidates have obtained in the workplace. The concept of mediating tools provides a starting point for transferring workplace knowledge into academic knowledge. In this sense the RPL Advisor acts as a boundaryless worker (Fenwick, 2008) that is able to move between workplace knowledge and academic knowledge, mediating understanding of knowledge concepts and practices *both ways*, an aspect that could even unlock innovation in curricula. Ralphs, Cooper, Moodley and Deller (forthcoming) found in their study that transfer of knowledge between the workplace and the academic institution requires an element of learning or pedagogy (or rather andragogy) to perform assessment as a learning opportunity. This means that assessment practices could combine assessment with limited learning opportunities to ensure that knowledge gained is appropriately linked to a qualification.

The innovation in assessment practices to accommodate RPL and to promote lifelong learning requires assessment that could *assess both ways* – from theory to application; and from workplace to theory, including an element of teaching and learning.

Assessment methods that support mediation

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicated in their RPL country report to South Africa that there is a need to develop a wider range of credible RPL assessment methods and instruments for use in the South African context. Currently, the portfolio is the preferred method, which privileges candidates with fairly high literacy levels (Gunning, Van Kleef, & Werquin, 2008, p. 19). While creating portfolios is indicated as an enriching experience for RPL candidates, interviews and demonstrations would assess practical skills in a more valid way. Simulations, oral tests, electronic portfolios, context-based observations and questionnaires are all potentially successful methods (p. 19).

In re-thinking assessment methods for RPL, some useful assessment methods could be considered in particular to *assess both ways*. For the purpose of discussing innovative assessment methods, we focus on two assessment methods that have the potential to assess both ways: competency conversation, and heuristic assessment.

Competency conversation

The concept of a “competency conversation” was used by the Industry Training Authority in Australia as an assessment method in technical occupations and trades, and further developed by Van Kleef (2011). Competency conversation is a methodology for identifying individuals’ knowledge and skills related to a particular occupation. It is a deep conversation between the assessor and candidate about what the candidate knows and can do. This form of assessment requires capacity to cluster elements of learning and examine work experience, workplace-oriented settings, assessor expertise and judgment, and the capacity not only to show-case evidence, but also to generate evidence together with the candidate.

Competency conversation allows the RPL assessor to make sense of knowledge gained through experience as well as making visible tacit knowledge – knowledge that the candidate could initially not link to a specific topic, issue or theme. It also allows the RPL assessor to become familiar with the context and to understand the language, concepts and understanding displayed by the candidate through the use of open questioning techniques. Competency conversation is semi-structured – it requires formal written reporting after the conversation has been completed.

The heuristic assessment method

The term “heuristic” is derived from the Greek word εὐρίσκω (literally, *heuriskow*, pronounced as *evriskow*), which means “find” or “intellectual discovery based on reflection, observation, examination or investigation” (Arndt & Gingrich, 1952). A heuristic approach to find or discover meaning varies in application. It ranges from “thumb sucking” to a formal research process. Kleining (1982), and Kleining and Witt (2000) referred to heuristic research as using qualitative methods – and aims at discovering information. Kleining and Witt (2000) identified four basic rules of heuristic research:

- an openness to new concepts and language used within a specific context
- the main topic for discussion is preliminary and may change during the conversation
- questions posed should be varied to avoid just one answer
- the discussion is directed toward discovery of similarities.

The heuristic approach has not yet been theorized to include the RPL context, yet since RPL assessment involves an element of discovery, this methodology would apply well. RPL assessment is not linear as in academic assessments (assessment following curriculum) but rather dialectical – it is a flexible fact-finding exercise to discover the candidate’s knowledge and skills and relate these to requirements for formal knowledge and skills. In addition to the above four basic rules of heuristic research methodology, one important rule could be added: the art of listening – the ability to listen to the RPL candidate.

What follows are two scenarios. The first scenario illustrates how decoding of academic language was used to stimulate a competency conversation. An RPL process was designed for coaches in South Africa to assess knowledge and skills gained through experience toward a professional designation on National Qualifications Framework Level 8 (professional degree level). A tool was developed to guide and facilitate a conversation between the candidate and the RPL panel. The assessment tool initially used the academic language of the designation.

During the discussion it became apparent that the candidates were not familiar with the academic language, but used workplace or coaching language in describing what was required. The use of workplace language provided the opportunity to engage with both worlds: by way of explaining academic concepts the link was made between coaching language and academic language. During this discussion the opportunity presented itself to inquire further and discover knowledge obtained by the candidate.

The way the questions have been formulated was revised after the first RPL session to integrate coaching language with academic language and to provide a different angle to the same knowledge categories. For example:

First RPL Session

SCOPE OF KNOWLEDGE	Demonstrate an understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• theories, research methodology• methods and techniques relevant to your field of practice. <u>Workplace language:</u> How do you use management theories to inform and/or understand the way you are doing your work?
---------------------------	--

Revision of First RPL Session

SCOPE OF KNOWLEDGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How you do research? What methods are you using to gather and report on information? (<i>question about research methodology</i>) • Do you use the perspectives of or inputs made by a leading person in your field of practice? If so, which perspectives? (<i>question about theories</i>) • Which methods are you using in instructing coaches? (<i>question about methods and techniques</i>) • How do you use information on techniques when instructing coaches? (<i>question about applying knowledge in context</i>) • How does your approach to instruction differ from the traditional approach? (<i>question to allow candidate to share innovative practices</i>) <p><u>Workplace language:</u> How do you search for information that could inform decisions to be taken in your work? Do you regard a view by a recognized scholar/academic as important? When training coaches, which methods of training are you using? Are these innovative and do they improve upon traditional approaches?</p>
---------------------------	---

The above revised questions allowed for an open-ended discussion (competency conversation) that provides the RPL candidate the opportunity to share knowledge and innovative practices. In this manner, knowledge is discovered and linked to academic requirements.

A second scenario illustrates heuristic assessment as a learning process. A workshop on RPL was conducted at the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Part of the workshop was to take the participants through an RPL process. A unit standard on business writing was used as the standard against which they would be assessed. One of the knowledge requirements in the unit standard was to provide insight into writing styles. As in any summative examination, the question was posed: What is discursive writing? Provide an example of a discursive style to illustrate your answer. The participants were all employees of SAQA – they have practical knowledge and experience, but did not follow a formal course to obtain academic knowledge on writing skills. They could not answer the question. In any examination they would have scored 0 on the question. The RPL advisor stepped out of the academic space into the third space and started to mediate the question taking the workplace into consideration. An element of teaching was used to describe in workplace language (decoding) what discursive writing means in practice; according to the *Collins English Dictionary's* (n.d.) definition of the word “discursive,” discursive writing would mean that a paper is written providing different arguments about a topic including a recommendation for further action.

After decoding academic language, the question was revised: Can you provide evidence that you have written a document for the attention of your line manager that provided different viewpoints and included some recommendations?

After this mediation and recontextualization of the writing style into the workplace setting, the responses were positive: Yes, we have done this many times and we can provide evidence!

The coded academic language formed a barrier to demonstrate knowledge gained through experience. By decoding meaning, the participants were able to discover and demonstrate their knowledge. In this scenario, heuristic assessment was used to mediate knowledge – an important activity of the third space.

This experience indicated three aspects of a heuristic approach to RPL assessment within the third space:

1. A heuristic approach to RPL assessment could be integrated into assessment tools to allow for discovery of knowledge.

2. A heuristic approach facilitates RPL assessment as a mediation tool to allow for assessment as a learning event by integrating workplace language with academic language.
3. A heuristic approach to assessment could inform the curriculum with workplace knowledge.

Concluding Remarks

Activity theory and critical realism assisted the argument toward rethinking RPL assessment practices. The consideration of revised assessment practices is closely linked to the understanding of knowledge, knowledge production and the view held on the acceptability of both academic and workplace knowledge. Workplace knowledge theorists supported the validity of knowledge production in the workplace, which could enrich the curriculum as a transdisciplinary and boundary-crossing exercise. This interdependency leads to the reconsideration of RPL assessment practices. Indeed, changing the assessment approach could and should lead to changes in the curriculum.

The third space could become the transdisciplinary space where innovation in the workplace could inform the academic curriculum, and theory could assist the workplace to better understand processes. Having said this, the intention of this paper is not to uphold the one form of knowledge at the cost of the other. The third space brings people together to listen and learn from both forms of knowledge.

We need to acknowledge the role of RPL as a change agent: It tends to question traditional views and opens up alternative ways of thinking, learning and looking at the world in a holistic manner. It might be apt to define RPL in this manner:

RPL is a boundary-crossing agent aiming at recognition of knowledge gained informally and non-formally to enrich organizational and institutional knowledge production processes.

References

- Amin, A., & Roberts, J. (2008, March). Knowing in action: Beyond communities of practice. *Research Policy*, 37 (2), 353–369.
- Arndt, W., & Gingrich, F. (1952). *Greek lexicon*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Bernstein, B. (1971). *Class, codes and control. Volume 1: Theoretical studies towards a sociology of language*. London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Bhaskar, R. (1993). *Dialectic: The pulse of freedom*. London, UK: Verso.
- CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training). (2010). *Learning outcomes approaches in VET curricula. Research paper no. 6*. Luxembourg, EU: Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5506_en.pdf
- Discursive [Def. 2]. (n.d.). *Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged, 12th Edition 2014*. Retrieved from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/discursive>
- Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by expanding: An activity theoretical approach to developmental research*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133-156.
- Fenwick, T. (2001, Winter). Tides of change: New themes and questions in workplace learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 92(2001), 3-18.
- Fenwick, T. (2008). Women's learning in contract work: Practicing contradictions in boundaryless conditions. *Vocations and Learning*, 1(2008): 11-26.
- Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P., & Trow, M. (1994). *The new production of knowledge*. London, UK: SAGE.

- Gibbs, G. (2006a). Why assessment is changing. In C. Bryan, & K. Clegg (Eds.), *Innovative assessment in higher education* (pp. 11-22). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Gibbs, G. (2006b). How assessment frames student learning. In C. Bryan, & K. Clegg (Eds.), *Innovative assessment in higher education* (pp. 23-36). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Gunning, D., Van Kleef, J., & Werquin, P. (2008). Recognition of non-formal and informal learning: Country note to South Africa. Paris, FR: OECD.
- Kleining, G. (1982). Outline of a methodology of qualitative social research. *Cologne Journal of Sociology and Social Psychology*, 34(1982), 224-253.
- Kleining, G., & Witt, H. (2000). The qualitative heuristic approach: A methodology for discovery in psychology and the social sciences. Rediscovering the method of introspection as an example. *Qualitative Social Research*, 1(1). Retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1123/2495ECHO>
- Knorr-Cetina, K. (1999). *Epistemic cultures: How the sciences make knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Leonardo, Z. (2004). Theme issue: Disciplinary knowledge and quality education: Editor's introduction. *Educational Researcher*, 33(5), 3-5.
- Naudé, L. (2013, May). Boundaries between knowledges – does recognition of prior learning assessment represent a third space? *International Journal for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning*, 5(2), 57-69.
- Pohl, C. (2010, December). From transdisciplinarity to transdisciplinary research. *Transdisciplinary Journal of Engineering & Science*, 1(1), 74-83.
- Ralphs, A., Cooper, L., Moodley, K., & Deller, K. (Forthcoming). Crossing the lines: RPL as specialised pedagogy. Pretoria, SA: SAQA.
- SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). (2015). *Assessment of the impact of the South African National Qualifications Framework*. Pretoria, SA: SAQA. Retrieved from http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/papers/2016/2016%2002%2004%20FINAL%20DRAFT%20FULL%202014%20NQF%20Impact%20Study%20Report1.compressed_Part1.pdf
- Van Kleef, J. (2011, February). *Competency conversation: A quality-focused approach to alternative assessment methods in recognition of prior learning (RPL)*. Paper presented at the National RPL Conference, Benoni, SA.
- Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language* (A. Kozulin, Ed.). Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2006). *Communities of practice: A brief introduction*. Retrieved from <http://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/06-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf>