ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR EXPERIENTAL LEARNING AS A KEY TO LIFELONG LEARNING

Evaluating European Practices

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Edited by Peter Alheit
and Dorothea Piening

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THE APEL DISCOURSE IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

PREFACE

A central aspect of the struggle for equality of opportunity and integration of socially excluded groups is the development of strategies of increasing and widening access routes into further and higher education for adults, in particular those who have been rejected by the formal education system. As suggested by the recent commissions *White Paper on Education and Training* (November 1995), one significant means of achieving this goal is the introduction of new methods of valuing the relevant skills and knowledge which these people have actually acquired but have never been granted as a formal qualification. In this sense a new SOCRATES research project was approved in 1996 under the title "Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning" (APEL). The basic assumption underlying this project is that APEL provision could be both more widely developed and improved in through (a) the exchange of knowledge and good practices across institutions and countries with different types and levels of experience in the areas and (b) the co-operation between universities and other adult education institutions and agencies in the development of co-ordinating APEL policies.

The European Conference "Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning as a Key to Lifelong Learning" which took place at the University of Bremen from 5-6 June 1998 was organised in order to disseminate the results of the research, to promote innovative models concerning to APEL policies in Europe and to involve researchers and key persons in this field. It focused on a series of problems as far as the recognition of prior experiential learning (in the sense of non-formal learning) is concerned.

BACKGROUND OF APEL POLICIES

In the course of the last few years a number of countries, inside and outside Europe have introduced methods and systems for the identification, validation and recognition of prior and non-formal learning. Special attention has been given to learning acquired outside formal training and education as it is accepted that an important part of learning takes place in the workplace, at home or in leisure activities. Skills acquired outside the formal education and

training system have always been and still are indispensable to any individual, enterprise and society. This has not been reflected in traditional approaches to validation and certification, exclusively focusing on learning within the context of formal education and training.

Since the 1970s several changes have occurred leading to a rethinking of validation and certification procedures, stressing the importance of non-formal learning:

(a) The changing economy and labour market in post industrial society has led to discussions at policy level about the need for lifelong learning and a learning society. A biographically limited model of education is no longer felt to suffice if a society is to compete globally. The new market economy requires skills to be constantly updated and new ones acquired. Working patterns are changing: a job is no longer for life. People can expect to have a series of jobs perhaps interspersed by periods of short-term contracts or unemployment. European governments view education as a key to economic success. Widening access for adults to education, therefore, becomes a political imperative.

(b) Big companies are calculating that they will make their future profit with half of the employees of today who will have twice the level of competence and provide three times the added value compared with the employees of today. More and more people belong to "the half" outside the core business. The barriers to entry carefully erected around professions over centuries are being dismantled by globalisation in services, the freer flow of knowledge and reforming governments. Just as the comfort blankets are being removed, professionals have a concurrent challenge of combining a strategy of managing information overload and fighting personal obsolescence. In any case they need to renew, upgrade and update competence. For the individual, personal success looks set to rest not within one firm, but in the ability to be relevant to a number of firms; for the organisation, methods of harnessing individual knowledge in increasing the "organisational IQ" (Eric Sandelands, http://www.irdc.com) have already become the competitive agenda.

(c) The functioning of labour markets has changed. An increasing part of recruitment has been externalised, thus replacing internal recruitment mechanism capable of recognising non-formal as well as formal skills.

(d) Increased international co-operation and competition have led to a new appreciation of the importance of developing lifelong learning, including not only skills training, but also "second chance" education. In this context, validation and certification have assumed greater significance, including the validation of non-formal skills.

(e) The emergence of new organisational perspectives and practices within enterprises. Concepts such as "learning organisation", "quality circle" and "work team" point to the need for a more diversified approach to the questions of learning and qualification.

WHAT DOES APEL MEAN?

The Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is the process of assessing and then credit rating learning which has its source in some experience prior to entry onto the course. It is used to award credit to learning which has not previously been formally assessed and credit rated at higher education level. This learning may have been gained at work, through voluntary activities, hobbies or other interests. Where APEL is used to gain access to e.g. a university programme, candidates must demonstrate that they have achieved through their learning from experience the normal entry requirements for a mature student. These requirements often refer to the general skills or abilities required for higher education rather than previous qualifications. The Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning requires that the applicants can reflect upon their experience, identify the learning which has resulted and produce evidence to demonstrate that learning. In order to do this the applicants must fully understand their experience and be able to communicate it to others. The credit that may be awarded within higher education on the basis of prior learning may take the form of entry into a programme of study, advanced standing within a programme of study or credit towards an award. Decisions about

the type and amount of credit may be based on certificates the learner has gained which demonstrate that learning has been assessed or may take into account learning from experience which is considered worthy of credit.

APEL has the potential to widen access, increase flexibility in the curriculum and enable a positive value to be placed on off-campus learning. It can also serve as a vehicle for learners to integrate theory with practice, for promoting reflective practice through the identification of learning from experience and the application of this learning in changed practice. APEL claims may involve the presentation of evidence of learning from prior certified learning, prior experiential learning or a combination of both.

Where appropriate, APEL enables learners to design and present individual packages of learning for assessment, not only to match their learning against existing modules or courses. Some programmes, e.g. in UK, are now being designed in such a way that learners may negotiate their own pathway to an award. This may involve the extensive use of APEL, work-based learning, distance learning and taught modules. In such areas APEL claims tend to be set in the context of the aims of the programme as a whole rather than individual modules.

The situation of APEL in the field varies widely both across and within countries. Some countries, e.g. great Britain, have acquired a wide experience in that area for years, partly through the impetus of national agencies devoted to the development of APEL policies. In other countries like Belgium such policies have never been implemented on a large scale, but significant APEL experiences do exist locally. Therefore: What does "APEL" (in practice and theory) actually mean in the different European countries? What are the basic ideas for implanting APEL policies into the formal educational systems? Who gains the main profit or benefit through APEL? Do the out-comes of the intensive APEL procedure justify the costs in terms of time and finance? And last but not least: What is the specific way of learning from experience?

The conference proceedings will follow up these questions and show that in all countries there exists an indisputable acceptance of informal or non-formal learning and demonstrate that the principle of APEL is far from being utopian. Considering the fast development of the information technologies and the new media there is even now a great need for involving qualifications which - till now - are not provided by the formal educational systems. In this sense the outlook for the discussed trends in Europe is by no means bad.

The papers collected in this volume represent the European rather than the German discussion. We are extremely grateful to all of the contributors, and we hope that the studies prepared here will enrich the current international discourse on lifelong learning.

We would like to thank all who have contributed to the objectives of this conference through speeches, papers and discussions. We would like to thank particularly our supporters Charlotte Rieger, Hendrik Bunke and Mark Patel. Last but not least we would like to express our gratitude to those institutions which supported this conference actively through financial grants: in particular The European Commission, Brussels, and the University of Bremen.

Bremen, April 1999

Peter Alheit and Dorothea Piening

INTRODUCTION TO THE APEL RESEARCH PROJECT

Etienne Bourgeois[1], Université catholique de Louvain

INTRODUCTION

The research project (APEL - Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning) is funded by the European Commission Socrates Adult Education programme. It involves 5 research teams :
- Belgium: University of Louvain (co-ordinator) and CREAFORM (*Centre de Recherche et d'Animation en Formations Nouvelles*)
- Spain: University of Barcelona and AEPA (*Associacio d'Educacio Permanent de Persones Adultes*-Association of lifelong education of adults)
- UK: University of Warwick and CAN (Central Access Network)
- Germany: University of Bremen and *Arbeit und Leben Bremerhaven*
- Sweden: University of Stockholm and the Nordic Folk Academy

PURPOSES AND OBJECTIVES

Rationale and background of the project

As emphasised in the 1993 European Social Policy Green Paper and the 1994 European Social Policy White Paper, universities have a key role to play in the struggle for equality of opportunity and integration of socially excluded groups. A central aspect of this mission is the development of strategies for increasing and widening access routes into further and higher education for adults, in particular those who have been rejected by the formal education system. As suggested by the recent Commission's White Paper on Education and Training (November 1995), one significant means of achieving this goal is the introduction of new methods of validating the relevant skills and knowledge which these people have actually acquired but have never been granted any formal qualification,

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1 Etienne Bourgeois is the Project Co-ordinator of year II

through a reliable accreditation system that maintains the quality standards of paper qualifications.

This approach has already materialised in several member states in what is usually called "Assessment of prior experiential learning" (APEL) policies. APEL is specifically defined as a procedure through which someone can gain academic certification for previous learning which has not been formally assessed for or towards a recognised qualification — work experience, on-the-job training, private reading and study, informal learning acquired through social experience, domestic work, informal knowledge networks, adult education and training, etc. Such academic certification can be significant either for admission to academic programmes or for credit towards an academic qualification. APEL schemes may also be used by other institutions than universities within the formal education system (e.g., Further Education colleges in UK).

The development of APEL policies can also be seen as a strategic means for strengthening co-operative links between universities and other adult education providers. It is a keystone in the development of more global and co-ordinated adult education and training policies involving different types of partners (higher and further education institutions, adult education and training organisations, and less formal learning providers such as education co-operatives, knowledge networks, etc.).

APEL is also becoming a crucial issue for those adult education organisations whose missions include helping adults (in particular adults with low qualifications) to clarify their personal needs and objectives, and design a personal project, either for further study or employment purposes.

More generally, it is also a significant means to enhance adults' — in particular socially disadvantaged adults'— self-confidence as learners and engagement in lifelong learning.

In the field, the implementation of APEL schemes has proved to be difficult, however. In particular, (i) the identification and operational definition of the specific competencies required for admission to a given formal education programme and (ii) the development of reliable and valid accreditation procedures for assessing experiential learning are complex matters. Therefore, it is assumed that the institutional actors confronted with these problems

would greatly benefit from an exchange of experience with others (in other countries and/or institutions).

The situation of APEL in the field varies widely both across and within countries. Some countries, e.g., Great-Britain, have acquired a wide experience in that area for years, partly through the impetus of national agencies devoted to the development of APEL policies, although wide discrepancies can still be observed across and sometimes within educational institutions. In other countries, like Belgium, such policies have never been implemented on a large scale, but significant APEL experiences do exist locally. One of the consequences of the low level of development of APEL policies is that it makes it difficult to develop co-operation between universities and other institutions in the promotion of co-ordinated adult education policies.

In such a context, sharing the experience acquired in APEL across European countries and various types of institutions could be extremely useful to all. It would obviously benefit those countries and institutions where APEL remains quite underdeveloped, but also those that are more advanced in that matter, by exposing them to different practices and implementation strategies.

In summary, the basic assumption underlying the proposed project is that APEL provision could be both more widely developed and improved through:
- exchange of knowledge and good practices across institutions and countries with different types and levels of experience in the area;
- co-operation between universities and other adult education institutions and agencies in the development of co-ordinated APEL policies and in the dissemination and exchange of good practices.

Particular objectives

Development (design, compilation and assessment) and dissemination of a European-wide database of APEL good practices and institutions with APEL schemes, on the basis of a comparative survey of APEL policies and practices implemented in universities and other adult education institutions in EU member states.

Development of a European-wide APEL resource network based on the database aforementioned, using new telecommunication technologies (Internet), and fulfilling two complementary missions:
- ongoing monitoring of further developments of APEL policies in European adult education (ongoing updating of the database)
- provision of training, technical, and institutional assistance to local initiatives aiming at the development of APEL schemes in the EU member states.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Intended outcomes and final products

Year 1 (1996-1997)

Intended outcomes:

Development and dissemination of a database of the existing APEL schemes implemented in universities, other higher and further education institutions, and other adult education organisations, in Belgium, Spain, and United-Kingdom.
- Each APEL scheme included in the database will be described and classified according to several parameters, such as field and level of study, target-competencies, assessment procedures and material, institutional actors involved, costs, feasibility, efficiency, effectiveness, etc.
- The database will be disseminated in a portfolio format.

Development and dissemination of a database of all the institutions (universities, other higher and further education institutions, and other adult education organisations) providing APEL schemes in Belgium, Great-Britain and Spain.
- Each institution included in the database will be described and classified according to several parameters, such as type of institution (missions, size, etc.), target student constituency (nature and size), programmes and subunit providing an APEL scheme (field and level of study, formal qualifications delivered, etc.), type of APEL scheme provided, etc.

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- The database will be delivered in a portfolio format, together with the APEL schemes database described in section 1.

Year 2 (1997-1998)

Intended outcomes:

Extension and integration of the two databases developed in Year 1 to all European member states, and European-wide dissemination of the extended databases
- The same type of data as those initially compiled in Belgium, Spain, and UK, will be compiled and compared in all the other EU member states, and be incorporated into the initial databases.
- The extended databases will be integrated (hypertext linkage) and delivered in computer disk format.

Year 3 (1998-1999)

Intended outcomes:

Development and implementation of a European-wide APEL resource network
- This network will associated various partners across the EU on a permanent basis. It is expected to fulfil four complementary missions:
- delivery of the integrated database on Internet;
- ongoing updating of the database;
- provision of various services to support local initiatives of APEL scheme development (training and technical assistance);
- stimulation of regional, national, and European initiatives regarding the development of APEL policies in the education system.

The language of the database and other deliveries of the project will be English in Year 1. Later on, translation into other EU languages will be provided if additional financial support can be found.

NATURE AND SIZE OF THE TARGET AUDIENCE

The audience directly targeted by the project is the various types of education institutions actually or potentially addressing adults and interested in the development of APEL policies across the EU (universities, higher education colleges, further education colleges, community schools, basic adult education and training institutions, vocational training and guidance centres, educational resource centres, etc.). The audience targeted by these institutions is the teachers (or trainers), the admissions tutors, as well as the programmes leaders and policy-makers.

The audience indirectly targeted by the project is the adult population which would benefit from the implementation of APEL schemes in the institutions aforementioned (that is, those adults who actually have the competencies required for entering the programme but do not have the formal entry qualifications, hence who would be denied access without the existence of an APEL scheme).

This population can also be seen as a direct audience to the extent that the database can help a potential applicant to identify those institutions and programmes offering an APEL scheme in a given geographical area, field and level of study.

PRELIMINARY INDICATIONS FROM THE QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE IN THE APEL DATABASE

Stephen Hill, University of Warwick (UK)

The following tables may serve to give clues to the relative importance of different purposes of APEL in different countries as they emerged from the early returns collected for the database. The figures have been presented as percentage figures only in terms of valid returns for each individual country which was surveyed. Table 1 shows the extent of the material collected by May 1998, but it should be understood that the survey is being extended both within countries where survey has been undertaken and also to further countries in 1998-1999. Following recent administrative/political changes the samples for the UK have been split, though this has resulted in some extremely same samples which will be extended in due course.

TABLE 1: SIZE OF SAMPLES	
Country	*Sample*
Belgium (Flanders)	51
Belgium (Wallonia)	58
France	52
Germany	102
Ireland	9
Portugal	23
Spain	30
Sweden	55
UK (England)	62
UK (Northern Ireland)	13
UK (Scotland)	11
UK (Wales)	3
Total	**469**

TABLE 2: PURPOSE OF APEL							
ADMISSION	*%*	*ADVANCED STANDING*	*%*	*CONTRI-BUTION TO LEARNING*	*%*	*ACCREDI TATION*	*%*
Belgium (Wallonia)	79.3	UK (England)	72.6	Sweden	74.5	UK (England)	56.5
Ireland	77.8	Sweden	67.3	Germany	60.8	UK (Scotland)	54.5
Belgium (Flanders)	76.5	UK (Scotland)	63.6	UK (Northern Ireland)	53.8	UK (Northern Ireland)	46.2
Sweden	74.5	Spain	60.0	UK (England)	50.0	Germany	38.2
UK (Wales)	66.7	Ireland	55.6	UK (Scotland)	45.5	UK (Wales)	33.3
Germany	65.7	Belgium (Flanders)	49.0	France	42.3	France	32.7
UK (England)	56.5	France	40.4	UK (Wales)	33.3	Ireland	32.6
UK (Scotland)	54.5	UK (Wales)	33.3	Belgium (Wallonia)	17.2	Portugal	22.2
France	53.8	Portugal	30.4	Belgium (Flanders)	15.7	Sweden	10.9
UK (Northern Ireland)	23.1	Germany	28.4	Ireland	11.1	Spain	3.3
Portugal	4.3	Belgium (Walloon)	25.9	Portugal	4.3	Belgium (Flanders)	2.0
Spain	3.3	UK (Northern Ireland)	23.1	Spain	0.0	Belgium (Wallonia)	1.7
AVERAGE	**61.8**		**45.4**		**34.0**		**24.9**

Analysis of Table 2 provides preliminary information about the relative popularity of the different purposes of APEL as revealed by the survey. Clearly APEL procedures are most commonly used to support applications for entry to educational institutions, whereas its use to support learning is relatively limited and actual accreditation of prior learning is still less common. Consideration of the results reveals clearly that there are differing institutional priorities in the various countries which result in varying student experience of APEL.

TABLE 3: FIELDS OF STUDY (total number of cases in the survey)	
Social Sciences & Humanities	172
Business	151
Engineering	147
Construction	129
Basic Education	129
Art & Design	113
Agriculture	80
Health & Community Care	76
Sciences	70
Hotel & Catering	60

Similar imbalances emerge from table 3 which reveals how APEL procedures are most commonly available in social science and humanities disciplines and are substantially less available to students wishing to register for courses based in sciences and vocationally oriented areas.

These early conclusions from the quantitative material are extremely tentative, but they may serve as indicators for possible lines of enquiry as the survey develops, and, in the end, the directions suggested by the analysis of the quantitative data may help to point line of qualitative research which will help to suggest lines of institutional policy development relating to the implementation and embedding of APEL within the European Community.

AP(E)L AND LIFELONG LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS FROM THE UK CONTEXT

John Storan. South Bank University, London (UK)[1]

This paper deals with the connection between the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (AP(E)L) in higher education and the growing significance of lifelong learning. I begin with an examination of the immediate background to the development of AP(E)L in UK higher education. Some debates and policy developments relating to "lifelong learning" will then be explored. At the time of writing it is only possible to guess as to what impact the Government Green Paper "The Learning Age" might have on the areas under discussion. Notwithstanding this, I will finish with a view of how these important developments might shape the higher education landscape and what in turn this might mean for AP(E)L developments in the immediate future. I would be fascinated to hear from colleagues about how my account of AP(E)L developments and "Lifelong Learning" compares with experience from other EU countries.

INTRODUCTION

Writing this paper has given me the chance to revisit some questions and issues which, because of the nature of my day-to-day work at South Bank University, I find I have increasingly less opportunity to explore. Through the process of revisiting some of the points to be discussed in this talk, I have begun to make different sense of the issues. This business of "making different sense", in turn, reminded me of a piece in the SRHE publication *Using Experience for Learning* In the introductory section David Boud, Ruth Cohen and David Walker write:

"Learning involves much more than an interaction with an extent body of knowledge: learning is all around us, it shapes and helps

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[1] John Storan is Director of the Centre for Continuing Education and Development and Chair of the SEEC AP(E)L Network. He has been closely involved with AP(E)L for more than fifteen years and is now regarded as one of the foremost authorities in the UK.

create our lives - who we are, what we do. It involves dealing with complex and intractable problems, it requires personal commitment, it utilises interaction with others, it engages our emotions and feelings, all of which are inseparable from the influence of context and culture".

What strikes me about these comments is that in trying to make some useful sense of my prior thoughts and conclusions about AP(E)L developments in English higher education, it has been necessary to re-learn in a new way at least some of the points and matters that I thought were known to me. This is precisely what Boud, Cohen and Walker are raising when they say that learning involves much more than an interaction with an extant body of knowledge, which for me, amounts to a close involvement with AP(E)L developments in higher education in the United Kingdom over about the last 15 years.

The other point to be made about this extract, is that it reminds us (and we need reminding) that learning is both **personal** and **public.** Sometimes, when that learning is more personal than public, challenging issues are raised both for adult learners using AP(E)L in higher education institutions, but also for the providers of such services. Assessment and Accreditation, of prior experiential learning services for higher education require, in their implementation re-interpretation and, possibly, transformation of experiential learning, a move from personal to public learning.

The title for this lecture "From Classes to Codes" (I realised after I had thought of it) is, but for one word, identical to the title of a set of volumes written by the English sociologist, Basil Bernstein in the 1970s. The missing word is "control". Perhaps we need to ask of our AP(E)L provision where control resides?

The first section of this lecture deals with the development of AP(E)L in the UK. It is divided into three parts, each representing a different phase of the spread of AP(E)L arrangements in higher education. Limitations of time allow only a brief summary of each phase; additional information on some of the issues touched upon here can be found in the publications list. Secondly, I will deal broadly with what I term the "implementation phase" and draw on examples of different approaches that have been adopted in many AP(E)L schemes. Finally, some comments on the current position

of AP(E)L as I see it and how it might develop in future. This in turn, leads into a discussion of the significance of the AP(E)L process in the context of so called "Learning Age".

This three part discussion is of course, an organising framework through which to examine AP(E)L. Inevitably, in adopting such a framework, divisions overlap and bump into each other at various points. Although many universities would certainly consider that they have well-developed policies and approaches to enable prior experiential learning at higher education level to count, there is always room for further development. In this regard, development is not so much a distinct phase but more a permanent condition of AP(E)L schemes, and, for that matter educational processes more broadly.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE

The Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (AP(E)L) in higher education began in the United Kingdom (UK) in the early 1980s. The principles that inform much of AP(E)L practice have, of course, been present in higher education for a great deal longer; I am thinking here, for example, about the role of experiential learning in practice based professional courses. The first AP(E)L programme in higher education "Making Experience Count" began in 1982/83 and was based at two London institutions, Goldsmiths College and Thames Polytechnic (now University of Greenwich). AP(E)L developments in the USA have a much longer history and were initially, at least, looked to for support and, to some extent, as potential models for the early pilot work in the UK with which I was actively involved.

It can be argued with some justification that American approaches to AP(E)L schemes were a solution looking for a problem. It was no accident that AP(E)L arrangements began to spring up from the mid-1980s onwards. The rumblings towards a "mass" system of higher education were to be felt even at that time in the UK, and began to find further expression in a whole range of other related developments.

Access programmes, modularity, credit accumulation and transfer developments and franchise links between education providers are

all examples of these rumblings of a "mass" higher education system that continued to spread into the reformed university sector after the disappearance of the binary line in 1992. At the start therefore, AP(E)L schemes developed within institutional arrangements dedicated to improving access for non-traditional students (Storan 1988).

The link between the various developments just mentioned has also been important. One example here is the symbolic relationship between AP(E)L schemes and Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) whereby both developments derived support and mutual benefit from each other.

Critical to this developmental phase, with the benefit of hindsight, was the introduction of the 1987 Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) regulations as these sent the message to higher education institutions that AP(E)L had an legitimate part to play in helping to establish a credit frame-work.

The CAT regulations boldly stated "that appropriate learning at higher education level, wherever it occurs, provided it can be assessed, can be given credit towards an academic award" (CNAA 1986). The recognition and legitimisation that these regulations conferred on AP(E)L activities and activists in higher education was highly significant and begins to explain, at least in part, why AP(E)L developments began mushrooming throughout the sector.

Indeed, these centrally established regulations were, until recently, the only extra-institutional reference point for AP(E)L which is, in some ways, perhaps very surprising, yet in other ways to be expected, given the autonomy which UK higher education institutions enjoy. This enables them to behave as they wish with regard to access arrangements. Accurate figures are difficult to find but it is estimated that by the end of 1990 at least twenty polytechnics had, or were developing, AP(E)L schemes.

More recent figures from a Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) survey indicate that of those institutions which replied over 80% said they either had an AP(E)L system or were in the process of establishing one (UCAS, 1996). My best guess would be that perhaps a quarter of higher education institutions are active in AP(E)L.

Although it can be argued that the rate of development of AP(E)L schemes across UK higher education has declined and that, as I suggested earlier, the optimum point of growth was probably reached in the early 90s. Nevertheless, it is clear that AP(E)L in various forms continues to feature prominently in the academic profile of some universities, both for the purpose of entry as well as entry with credit at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Some of the main factors which influenced the spread of AP(E)L during the 1980s include:

- The expansion of higher education student numbers
- The access movement
- Concern about changing demographic conditions, i.e., an anticipated reduction in numbers of 18 year-olds expected to enter higher education
- Financial support from various government agencies to fund AP(E)L developments
- Impact of the NVQ model.

The most significant factor is the first. Without a general increase in overall higher education numbers it is hard to see how AP(E)L arrangements would have developed at all during the period being discussed. Taken with the demographic changes which were forecast by Evans (1992), AP(E)L services were regarded at least by some higher education institutions as, arguably, a second resort, recruitment strategy. Over recent years funding for higher education expansion and related developments has been reduced, thereby limiting the need for higher education institutions to attract as a diverse a range of recruits as perhaps was once the case. As Trowler (1996) argues:

"this will probably limit the spread of AP(E)L across those parts of the Higher Education system which are in a strong market position. Those in a weaker position may be concerned about the loss of funding that follows from giving students credit through AP(E)L arrangements." Source: Trowler (1996)

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The emphasis for the pilot AP(E)L initiatives from the early 1980s was, I have suggested, broadly developmental. However, it can be argued that these were not only developmental in the sense of generating different approaches to the identification and assessment of informal learning in the higher education context, but also in another sense. Some AP(E)L initiatives were developmental in relation to the personal growth and development of the learners involved. This "personal growth" model has been an important focus for a number of AP(E)L schemes.

The role and significance that is placed upon learning here as a process is often a defining feature of such schemes (Storan 1988). The purpose of assessment is seen as a means of encouraging and increasing an individual's insight into the ways prior learning has given rise to attitudes and behaviours (Weil and McGill 1990). AP(E)L schemes with a personal development approach often stress individual empowerment and self-reflection as central. This developmental model is also one in which prior experiential learning is understood as a resource for personal growth and not as a subject for accreditation. Such schemes may experience a renaissance as a consequence of the proposals contained within the "Learning Age" document (DFEE 1998) with its emphasis on learners rather than providers.

The spread of credit-based learning programmes, in which course modules or units could be accredited separately, offered the opportunity for AP(E)L arrangements to begin to be integrated with accreditation arrangements leading to the award of credits and qualifications. As noted earlier, the impetus for what has described as the "Credit Exchange" model of AP(E)L derived in large part from the impact that the CNAA CATS regulations had on that section of the higher education sector referred to usually as the "new universities".

The "Credit Exchange" AP(E)L Model began to be implemented first in those institutions which introduced modular systems and credit arrangements. It became apparent that curriculum reform and in particular, the restatement of courses in learning outcome terms, was viewed as a necessary condition if not for some a sufficient condition for a credit exchange approach to work. This move to

what some considered to be a more transparent curriculum, described in outputs not inputs, was itself part of a wider change to make higher education more accountable, a move which has been paralleled in other parts of the state education system with, it has to be said, mixed results.

For those institutions which put in place a credit exchange model and established a learning outcomes infrastructure, the opportunities for students to be assessed and accredited brought with it a set of other issues to do with resourcing, quality assurance and control which are still being worked on today. The English higher education system was never designed with AP(E)L in mind and, in many ways, its structures, conventions and dominant epistemologies are in conflict with such arrangements. Traditionally, assessment has played a much lesser part in universities than, say, teaching or research. It has to be said, however, that in a great many cases credit exchange arrangements involve as much prior certificated learning as they do experiential learning.

The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) report *Choosing to Change* (1994) sums up this point about AP(E)L when it states: "This brings us to an important principle of all credit systems: Credit is only awarded for demonstrated learning achievement and never for attendance or experience alone". This principle, which involves the separation of learning from experience, is the defining difference between the personal development and the credit exchange models. As we have seen, in the former, process is given priority over outcome and seen as intrinsically worthwhile of itself.

In the credit exchange model the overriding concern is with the achievement of credit, and process is usually a secondary matter at best. It must be said that, like all conceptual models, the reality of institutional practice is usually a mixture of both. Perhaps, as a result of the current debate in the UK around the notion of "added value", we might also begin to see an even greater convergence between these two models.

PRESENT AND FUTURE PHASE

Finally, let me say a few words about the present and what lies ahead for AP(E)L in England.

The developmental phase in higher education began with the "Making Experience Count" a class-room based initiative. Such initiatives existed at a time of much less regulation in higher education. The onset of an increasingly "quality assurance driven" culture has impacted on AP(E)L schemes in a number of interesting ways. One way this has manifested itself has been through the production of the Higher Education Quality Council's *Guidelines on the Quality Assurance of Credit-Based Learning* and the *Code of Practice for AP(E)L* (SEEC 1996).

This Code contains contributions and endorsements from a substantial number of universities and colleges. In many ways the production and, indeed, the contents of the Code are an expression of this quality assurance culture, in which the Code becomes a way of standardising a set of principles which have been significant features of AP(E)L practice for some time in a number of higher education institutions.

The advent of the Code is, for some, evidence that AP(E)L developments have become, or are becoming, an integral feature of the higher education landscape. Yet for others, the Code is further evidence of the incorporation of the potential radical and transforming implications that some AP(E)L initiatives were described as possessing (Usher 1989).

Whichever view you take about the impact of this Code, it does represent the first collective articulation of some shared principles for AP(E)L in higher education. The historical progression indicated in the title of this paper "From Classes to Codes" certainly deserves far more explanation. Given this, and some of the other points highlighted earlier in relation to the broader context in which AP(E)L developments took place up to the early 90s, it could be argued that on every one of the five key factors mentioned previously, the immediate outlook for further AP(E)L development seems not very promising. Financial consolidation was the situation for a number of years, and growth in part-time students has not been anywhere near the levels of growth present in the 80s, a time when AP(E)L developments were rapid.

The access movement in its various forms has also changed significantly, becoming fragmented by an ever-increasing array of entry qualifications. These and other indicators would seem to

suggest, as Trowler (1996) argues, that the prospects for AP(E)L to be available to students across higher education are reducing. There may be individual institutions or groupings of institutions who will continue to develop and promote AP(E)L and provide compelling reasons why others should do so. It may be that the impact of a broader array of assessment arrangements, some involving IT developments, will lead to the credit exchange AP(E)L providers to offer access to assessment when AP(E)L students wish it rather than when institutions decide they can have it. This leads to a thought about the need to think more in terms of AP(E)L students or users and what sorts of learning might future AP(E)L students want to get accredited?

While, therefore, it is far from clear how AP(E)L is likely to develop beyond the immediate future, there can be no doubt that it will be doing so in a higher education system increasingly moving to a "lifelong learning" approach. In this regard, the growing significance of lifelong learning as a key feature of the educational landscape can be expected to shape the broader policy context within which AP(E)L schemes and services will operate.

Much has been written about lifelong learning since the European Union (EU) White Paper Teaching and Learning Towards the Learning Society appeared in 1995. Government advisory groups, EU committees, pressure groups and a variety of other bodies and organisations have been actively engaged in the debates about lifelong learning. Largely, but not entirely, these debates and the growing collection of documents which they have given rise to have been preoccupied with formally provided learning. The publication of the UK Government's Green Paper, The Learning Age represents the latest set of emergent policy proposals attempting to articulate policies and initiatives which are lifelong in both character and impact.

Before turning to the Green Paper, which, it will be argued, may have important implications for AP(E)L provision, it is relevant to consider some background issues from the EU White Paper. For the purposes of this talk, the EU White Paper is important because it began explicitly to highlight both the political and socio\ecomic reasons of lifelong learning, making the now familiar, if uncontested, link between economic prosperity and continuing learning.

The White Paper makes a number of interesting observations about the ways structural changes across Europe in relation to IT and the internationalisation of the economy, for example, are manifesting themselves in different understandings of the place and significance of all kinds of learning. This proposition is also to be found in different places in the UK Government's recent Green Paper. It is interesting to consider, on this point, to what extent AP(E)L developments linked to professional and vocational qualifications can be seen as a response to such structural changes. The following quotation from the EU White Paper captures this broad point about change and learning, quite well:

In 'yesterday's Europe, irrespective of whether it was rooted in rural life or in manufacturing industry, learning was naturally directed at the acquisition of abstract concepts to round off practical skills absorbed from day-to-day life, outside school. The greater part of this practical knowledge base has been modified and has regressed in our urbanised, automatic, media dominated society. It needs to be brought back into a broader knowledge base as a way of preparing individuals to master the technical instruments they will have to use, so that they, rather than the technique, are in charge." (Teaching and Learning - Towards the Learning Society 1995).

This is particularly relevant to a consideration of the role that AP(E)L might play. It is clearly attempting to recognise the interrelation between different kinds of learning and, in doing so, the relative value attributed to each, for example, of abstract knowledge over practical knowledge. There is a parallel to be made here with some of the judgements involved in AP(E)L processes which lead to institutional accreditation.

Furthermore, it is possible to understand these processes in one sense as a challenge to the dominant concept of knowledge present at any given time. A key aspect of this involves the conferment of formal recognition by a higher education institution that learning achieved in the past outside of the formal structure of higher education provision has a higher education value.

Here again, it is possible to show how AP(E)L can be seen as a means within higher education of adjusting or accommodating the different kinds of learning referred to in the EU White Paper. This issue of different kinds of learning achieved in different contexts, is

of course, a key point of the underlying rationale for the various developments mentioned in the earlier part of my talk.

Traditionally, higher education has been concerned with only certain kinds of learning, notably academic learning, over which it has had control through, for example, the right to confer academic awards. The significance of the impact of the "lifelong learning" approach for the existing higher education system may be that its position in holding a virtual monopoly on making academic awards is now being called into account, as is its role as the only source of higher level learning.

The UK "Learning Age" Green Paper has a number possible implications for higher education AP(E)L. The first point to make is that AP(E)L does not feature explicitly in the document. The analysis presented here draws upon the broader approach and policy framework for lifelong learning.

The language used throughout the paper is important to note because it is the language predominantly of the learner rather than of the provider. It can be argued that one of the barriers to learning for many adult learners has been the language used. There is an important parallel here with AP(E)L developments in the sense that the language of AP(E)L provision is, in many instances, also learner-centred and therefore, very much in keeping with the Green Paper. It is possible to see within the definition of learning broadly adopted in the document the beginning of a paradigm shift away from providers to learners or users. One implication of this shift is for AP(E)L providers could be that it will encourage a broader range of learning to be recognised throughout higher education. A specific illustration of this shift is contained in the "Recognising Achievement" chapter where it states:

"We propose that the qualifications system should be developed to recognise that learning can take place in many different forms, and that it may not always be appropriate for everyone to be pushed along the same qualification 'tram-lines'." (The Learning Age 1998)

This could be seen as an endorsement of an underpinning characteristic of AP(E)L, namely that learning from different experiences should be embraced within the new qualifications framework referred to within the Green Paper. A further example of an indirect, but nevertheless important, reference to AP(E)L

contained within the Green Paper is found in the chapter entitled "Realising the Learning Age?":

"Many people's life experiences and knowledge should entitle them to recognition and accreditation which they have not received in the past." Source: The Learning Age (1998).

This passage illustrates an important, if understated, strand running through much of the Green Paper which is that it embraces a view of learning which extends beyond that which is formally provided. However, it should be noted that the paper stops short of making AP(E)L a central feature of the policy framework.

In conclusion, I have attempted to set out the background to AP(E)L developments in the UK and also suggest what links are to be made with the emerging policy framework for lifelong learning. I noted in doing this, a convergence between the UK Green Paper and the 1995 EU White Paper, at least in some key respects.

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APEL IN EUROPE - NEW CHALLENGES

Sue Georgious - Director of the Open College Network for Central England (OCNCE)[1]

To be an effective mechanism for change, APEL cannot afford to remain on the periphery in either the applied or the academic agendas of education and training sectors across Europe. In the past, processes which enabled people to learn and reach their potential focused on traditional application systems as the access route into education establishments. In best practice, these application and admission processes involved a verification of proven academic success through the achievement of formal qualifications linked to a supportive interview/guidance system used to establish suitability for a chosen course or programme of study. More commonly, a paper based process based only on verification of previously gained academic qualifications has been the norm. Consideration of life experiences related to an individual's personal, vocational or community circumstances were rarely acknowledged as valid in making a claim for entry to education or training or for fast tracking individuals through an education or training programme, except where an individual required entry to foundation or entry level programmes. The use of APEL has thus often been regarded as expensive, unreliable and lacking in rigour and has therefore not been routinely used as an alternative method .

In his recent report "Learning for the Twenty First Century", Professor Bob Fryer stressed the importance of putting the learner at the centre of the Learning Revolution. In establishing a set of core principles for moving the learning revolution forward, Fryer places equity and inclusion at the heart of policy making and clearly identifies that current barriers of access for individuals must be removed. The question for us all therefore is, can APEL be regarded as one of the liberating mechanisms we as educators can employ to enable individuals to lift barriers to learning and policy makers to reach targets for lifelong learning ?

In posing this question, it is important to recognise that APEL has moved forward, though not consistently, in many areas. In the UK the introduction of National Vocational Qualifications triggered early debates on APEL/APL and led to some significant and valuable activity in this work, particularly in the Further Education sector with adult learners. In the context of Higher Education, APEL for access has also developed significantly in some institutions. Here, the application of APEL is often patchy and in many cases may only be an established mechanism in certain departments or schools. There is still a significantly large area of the Higher Education sector where APEL/APL is not considered a legitimate admissions activity. Moreover, institutional models for the application of the APEL/APL process are variable across both sectors with no established or approved national model either for application and use of APEL or for it's quality assurance. Nevertheless, APEL has been successful in bringing many individual learners into education and training in those institutions where the models are particularly strong.

The accreditation of prior learning or experiential learning must, if it is to perform a liberating function, be given credibility across all sectors. It must be regarded with equal esteem by practitioners, policy makers and most importantly, learners themselves, if the resources to ensure it's development and rigour are to be obtained and it's validity established. Any method for accreditation of achievement must primarily be supported by quality assurance systems which are both transparent and rigorous and which are fully endorsed by those in authority.

The assumptions, outlined above, for the future development of APEL as a mechanism for change, begin to highlight common global challenges for all the stakeholders; practitioners, policy makers and learners. If we wish to examine the challenges in closer detail, it is necessary to consider our perspectives, not only as individuals but also as organisations, operating within current external agendas. Clearly, each of us brings a context and mission to the consideration of APEL which is formed as a result of our particular cultural, social, economic and educational background and heritage. In presenting my own set of challenges to you ,it is therefore incumbent that I

outline my own context and mission in the larger agenda of lifelong learning.

The mission of the Open College Network (OCN) is to promote access to education and training at all levels, including entry to Higher Education, especially for those adults who have benefited least from opportunities in the past. In addition, the OCN aims to offer opportunities for adults to gain credits for their learning wherever it takes place and to improve the quality and flexibility of learning opportunities for adults. I therefore work, with a team of committed practitioners, across both the statutory and voluntary and community sectors of education and training to promote the mission and aims of the organisation in developing good practice and providing accreditation for adult learners. Pivotal to the work we undertake is a consideration of the needs and requirements of the learner and in the development of programmes of study or accreditation activities, the appropriateness of the provision or methodology to the particular target groups is the key factor. A central and unifying tool within OCNs throughout the UK to achieve their mission is the use of credit and a national credit framework consisting of a common currency for the value of credit and four commonly specified credit levels. The accreditation of learners within this framework is dependant on an individual learner's achievement of a set of learning outcomes evidenced against an associated set of assessment criteria specifying the appropriate level.

It is against this personal background and the national agendas in the UK for widening participation and lifelong learning that I have considered the current and future challenges for the development of APEL. The initial questions which need to be asked in this context are about the methodology of APEL and the motivation for it's implementation. How are we approaching the development of good practice in APEL ?, Who is engaged in the activity ? And what are the motivating factors for the stakeholders ?

In terms of the political agendas locally, nationally and internationally, directives to progress lifelong learning are being signalled strongly by governments and other political lobbies. In the UK, the last year has seen the publication of a series of significant consultation documents focused on both lifelong learning and

widening participation, instigated at government level and receiving significant political attention. The culmination of these has been the most recent publication of a Green Paper, "The Learning Age", which presents clearly the rationale for lifelong learning in terms of national economic, social and cultural arguments. Many of these arguments have been rehearsed consistently by practitioners and researchers in the field of adult education and training for many years but it is interesting to note that within the paper structural mechanisms are emerging to accomplish the objectives for achievement of a learning society. Clearly throughout Europe, similar debates are occurring simultaneously which stem for the same key motives for economic, social and cultural regeneration. The role of APEL within this particular perspective is implicitly linked to the need to acknowledge the skills and experiences of individuals through a more formal mechanism in order to encourage those individuals to move forward and engage in the enhancement and development of new skills and understandings in order to reach their potential. At the root of this argument is the premise that without an understanding of their particular and unique requirements, based on a review of their previous life experiences and achievements it will not be possible to engage individuals uals in the learning revolution. In order to achieve this, a supported structure for advice and guidance which includes accreditation of prior learning and experience must be considered as a necessary pre-requisite.

Despite fragmentation in the field, the application and use of APEL/APL within institutions is established as a tool for both access and credit. The wide variety of approaches however has meant that across different sectors and within institutions themselves a coherent rationale and methodology has been slow to emerge. One of the key barriers to significant and widespread development has been a lack of clarity in understanding the terminology of APEL and the motivation for it's use.. In many cases using APEL as a tool for increasing access and widening participation is only now being realised and as developments in the past have often been customised to particular needs and circumstances, bringing together initiatives to provide a clear and coherent methodology and rationale must involve a close

examination of terminology and interpretation of the APEL process itself both within and across institutional frameworks.

As practitioners we must ask ourselves whether we are using the same terms for the same process or whether there needs to be a dissemination and debate of the terminology in much greater detail in order to bring the clarity and coherence which is required. This does not assume however, that the cultural and social contexts of the application of APEL/APL processes can be ignored. It is evident that across national boundaries the structural organisation of the education and training sectors and of accreditation systems preclude a uniformity in framework structures. This is particularly evident in articulating a framework of qualifications and levels of achievement. This should not however prevent an exploration of commonality in terms of process and quality assurance. As practitioners we share a common rationale if we assume a commitment to providing opportunities for adult learners to participate at whatever level is most appropriate for them in the particular context in which we operate. This should provides us with sufficient incentive to pursue our understanding of APEL and to provide a language for the process which can be applied in a range of contexts. It is therefore the process which we must see as the key to successful implementation and it is within this area that commonality can be achieved. At the heart of the process, we must consider such elements as; how do we present APEL opportunities to adult learners? who provides advice, guidance and support? how is the outcome of the APEL process presented to the learner and to the wider community? how valid is the accreditation process and outcome(the qualification achieved through APEL) to the learner and within the wider context of qualifications? what quality assurance mechanisms are in place to ensure validity and credibility? Regardless of context all of these are areas where coherence and clarity can be achieved providing there is a thorough understanding and common language.

It is my view however, that at the heart of the successful use of APEL as a liberating mechanism, the essential challenge for practitioners and policy makers is an examination of the learner's perspective . In doing this the fundamental questions must be, "Who is APEL for?, Who are the groups for which this particular

key can unlock learning opportunities ?". The Fryer Report puts the learner at the heart of the learning revolution and if we are to translate this core principle for APEL then we must consider whether the systems we are creating and the structures we are putting in place to support the process are truly ones which are accessible to learners. For those currently not participating in education and training, there are clearly identified barriers which prevent access. We must be single minded in ensuring that we do not create further barriers to access by specifying common attributes and structures to another educational process which preclude the very adults we wish to engage and that the core principles of inclusivity and equity are applied.

We must therefore examine at this point in the development of APEL, what potential barriers we may be creating. As practitioners, our experience of working with adult learners, particularly those re-entering education after a period of time, will inform us of those fundamental barriers perceived by learners themselves . These include :

- Educational barriers - including poor performance at school, bad experiences of education in the past, lack of qualifications for entry, fear of formal examinations.
- Formal Qualifications - a lack of understanding of the world of qualifications, lack of paper- based qualifications.
- Formal Learning Systems - time requirements in the formal sector, full-time courses of study and the financial implications of embarking on these. The methodology employed in formal education and a feeling of inadequacy to cope with these methodologies, lack of self confidence.
- Employment barriers - unwillingness of employers to invest in an individual's education and training, lack of access, types of work patterns.
- Economic barriers - personal financial security, the cost of courses/fees, additional costs associated with education, for example child care.

This indicative list could certainly be extended by any competent adult education practitioner and developed with a myriad of case

studies to support the claim that these barriers in themselves can and do prevent the majority of non- participants from considering learning opportunities as adults. In addition however are two further barriers which are pertinent to the discussion of accessibility of APEL as a process. These include :

THE LANGUAGE OF ACCREDITATION

Educational structures

The question we must address is whether we have paid sufficient attention to these fundamental considerations. Those practitioners engaged in successful application of APEL/APL will already have considered how to present a process which uses an academic language of accreditation through traditional structures of education and training institutions to adult learners. It may be argued that those individuals who have achieved access or credit through APEL processes are those for whom the language and structures are less daunting, either because of previous experience or because of other personal preparations prior to embarking on the process. Highly motivated and candidates are traditionally those who return to learning most successfully and these may be the most successful in terms of benefiting from APEL/APL. This does not however reflect the characteristics of a large cohort of adults for whom APEL could offer access to learning opportunities. For this group, successful achievement through APEL relies currently on the resourcing of adult guidance systems which are well resourced and supported within institutional frameworks, which can provide one-to-one support for individual's wishing to go through an APEL process.

If we agree that methodologies and structures for APEL should focus on the need to ensure the ease of accessibility of the learner to the process, a set of principles emerge which address all three perspectives outlined; political, practitioner and learner. These principles can then be used as a mechanism to transcend differences in the cultural and political contexts in which we place APEL through an acknowledgement that it is the common barriers of adult learners which we need to remove when considering the methodologies and systems which can be implemented.

The first set of principles concern the presentation of APEL opportunities to the stakeholders. The establishment of a common language of APEL/APL which demystifies the terminology is essential in providing access and this debate must begin to address the technical terminology attached to accreditation and assessment. Regardless of existing qualification structures, it may be possible to bring together the various understandings of level of achievement and assessment in order to present to learners a clear framework within which APEL processes operate. If we can detach the specifications for particular qualifications from the matrix and focus on the level of learner achievement then we may begin to create opportunities for an accessible and clearly understood framework for APEL. For the learner to be able to contexturalise prior experiential learning within established educational structures then an understanding of where their individual learning experiences fall within a framework of levels is essential. In providing the signposts on level we must however be cautious that we do not create a new and more complex language or indeed an inflexible structure which prevents all learning experiences to be accounted.

In looking at individual learning experiences it is clear that each case will demonstrate achievement at a range of levels in different contexts. The experienced IT assistant may well be achieving at higher education levels for this particular skill but could also be achieving at much lower levels for other key skills such as study skills required for entry to higher education. An APEL process which cannot articulate sympathetically the various levels for accreditation of prior learning does a disservice to the learner and becomes a purely mechanical device.

Emerging models in the UK for articulation of levels of achievement within a credit framework which spans learning from school through to higher education and beyond may prove to be the most flexible and accessible to all stakeholders. Clarity in the use of words such as "foundation", "basic", "advanced" may be problematic and the challenge must be to establish a vocabulary on level which is accessible and which is supported by agreed descriptors so that application of level to learning achievement is understood and valid.

A further principle which naturally follows on from an agreement on language must be transparency of process. A process conducted on the basis of clear learning outcomes for the learner is essential. The statement of outcomes must relate to level and must be made available to all participants in the process. Too often decisions on APEL/APL have relied on subjective judgements or the particular agendas of the institution or individual department. If the underlying principle about process is that it should be transparent and available in the public domain, then variations in the methodology of application become acceptable. Indeed, many would argue that in order for APEL to be universally useful a degree of variation must be acceptable as the progression routes for those achieving through APEL will be varied and will require acknowledgement and assessment of different skills, understandings or knowledge. In order to move forward on process therefore ,an agreement that transparency and "fitness for purpose" should be the key guiding principles. If these are applied consistently across all APEL schemes then questions about validity within either the curriculum, vocational or institutional context can be addressed.

If both of these principles of language and transparency are accepted then a third principle relating to application in practice also emerges. Any APEL process which is accessible and non-threatening requires significant investment in providing rigorous and skilled advice, guidance and support for those participating in the process. It is becoming increasingly common in the UK for large amounts of resource to be invested in services which provide on-going guidance to learners within institutions. The tradition in the voluntary and community sectors is well established though clearly under resourced. The quality of the service provided in these sectors, despite lack of resources, has in the past served as a model for many of the publicly funded institutions. As the momentum for lifelong learning initiatives in the UK gathers speed; guidance, support and advice are seen as key areas which need reinforcement through funding mechanisms. This in itself should encourage practitioners to ensure that these services and the experience within them can be harnessed in the application of APEL across all sectors and in a range of settings.

The second set of principles must look at the wider context in relation to the economic restraints on a mass development of APEL as a liberating process. As noted earlier, for the individual financial considerations are all too often a barrier to participation. APEL must therefore be seen by adult learners as a way in which the potential financial burden of education and training either through direct costs or through the reduction of income while participating can be reduced. It is not in the remit of this agenda to consider financial support mechanisms through grants, sponsorship or other direct funding of individual learners but a logical view of the APEL process is that it can reduce significantly the amount of time a learner may take to achieve a qualification or learning goal. in the example cited earlier, the learner who can APEL there experience in IT may be able to reduce time on an access to higher education course by having this achievement accredited and the credit accounted for in the final qualification. This would only apply for APEL which is physically accessible to learners in a setting which relates to their individual circumstances. This may be for example, in the workplace, at home or in a local community centre or library. Indeed there should be no legitimate reason why APEL could not be offered to learners through electronic communications or as a distance learning package. Provision of APEL opportunities in a range of appropriate settings and in a mode appropriate to the individual must therefore form a key objective underpinned by the principles of transparency and support. Implicit in the establishment of these objectives is the notion of partnership. As providers and practitioners we should be therefore guided by the principle that effective partnerships across all sectors are the key to providing equity and inclusiveness in the provision of APEL opportunities.

The arguments presented have also reflected briefly on the financial barriers to provision of APEL for institutions. APEL processes which are rigorous and supportive do require significant investment of resources. The funding methodology in the UK for work in the Further Education sector already acknowledges the value of APEL by providing units of funding for all learners accessing learning opportunities through this route. More importantly there is no reduction in the number of units of funding for this route compared to other more traditional routes. In addition

new measures to provide additional funding units to support those learners with additional support needs or those which meet the widening participation agenda can greatly assist in this process by giving additional resource to advice and guidance structures. An overarching principle must be that there should be parity of funding for accreditation of prior learning and that where this allows access to those disadvantaged in the past additional funding for this mechanism, as well as other legitimate mechanisms, should be provided.

The most fundamental of all principles in establishing APEL as a mechanism must necessarily be in establishing quality standards which underpin the process. Universal acceptance of an agreed set of quality assurance standards which draw together the mission, objectives and systems of the APEL process ensure that the credibility and transferability of achievement gained through the APEL process, for the individual participant, stands up to both internal and external scrutiny. Credit achieved through this route for whatever purpose must be valued as highly as that achieved through more traditional and accepted routes if it is to contribute to lifelong learning for all. In establishing common standards for quality assurance, collaboration between all the participants can provide benchmarks of good practice from which principles may be established and reviewed. If accessibility, transparency and validity are therefore regarded as core principles benchmarks and standards which take account of a range of contexts can be articulated to underpin flexible structures and inform all those wishing to offer APEL opportunities.

In conclusion we should reflect on the mission of APEL within the perspectives and agendas for lifelong learning. APEL as a liberating mechanism can address widening participation by recognising, within a quality assured framework, the life experiences of adults who have gained least from formal educational opportunities in the past. In addition, if we agree that equality of opportunity and inclusivity are the cornerstones of the learning revolution, then an acknowledgement of people's life skills through the process of APEL/APL must be part of local and national agendas.

People must be at the heart of our agenda for APEL and we must present APEL structures and mechanisms which lift barriers, invest in guidance and support and allow for shared responsibility through partnerships and which remain sensitive to individual need and circumstances. These are the key challenges which the APEL agenda presents us with. We can meet these challenges through practical measures which take account of our shared experiences of adult learners and which must include developing an accessible common language, a flexible framework of levels, a valid currency for accrediting learning, appropriate and responsive assessment methodologies and funding parity for learners and institutions. All of these must be accomplished through collaboration and partnerships which acknowledge the political, cultural and social contexts within which partners operate in order to present opportunities for achievement and transferability of achievement across all areas of education and training.

APEL IN ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Günther Dohmen, Tübingen, Germany

In the team we assumed that there are three APEL aims above all in the European countries. About the evaluation of these three aims there are partly controversial discussions:

1. The development of new access rules and admission procedures to higher educational institutions aiming at informal competencies based on experience more than at expert knowledge, especially admission to scientific universities.

2. The general acceptance and support of informal learning by experience which has hitherto received too little attention as a basic form of human self-assertion learning and survival learning, which makes up 70% of human learning processes and is equivalent (not similar) to institutional learning and studying. This form of learning has its own value. It does not depend on admission criteria to organized formal learning and has to be accepted and supported as a specific form of learning.

3. The possibility of putting into practice realistically the politico-educational basic aim of "Lifelong Learning for All" by the inclusion of informal learning by experience which is already practised by virtually all human beings in their everyday life, and which has to be encouraged, accepted and supported.

As the first aim obviously is dominating at the moment in all European countries (except in Spain), we discussed mainly the aims 2 and 3 and their relation to aim 1.

There were animated debates, above all about the following questions/problems:

- What is particular in learning by experience? Is it above all the more marked situational and practical reference?

- Which estimations, consequences and problems are connected with the basic concepts "assessment", "creditation" and "recognition"?

- In whose interest is APEL practised above all, and who has the most profit from it? That means: Does it help?

- The learning subjects with their career, their self-confidence, their development of competence?

- The institutions which are trying to win new students?

- Society and economy which are improving their competitiveness and survival ability in the global competition through a wider development of new human competences which are left unexploited so far?

- Or are they all making profit from it, only with a different evaluation?

- How far should and could the acceptance, support and assessment of learning by experience in future be related to the people who are up to now not taking part in further educational arrangements, instead of only opening up further chances to those who are sufficiently provided with further education anyway?

- How far is the present standard method of acceptance and classification of the results of experience learning – the proof of one's own competences by self-reflective objectivations in personal learning-books ("portfolios") – orientated too one-sidedly towards a corresponding writing ability?

- What is in this context the special thing about the new Swiss concept of the "qualification book" or the "learning diaries"?

- Which other "gauges" are important for compensation/completion? Does the Spanish dialogue approach offer new possibilities for the inclusion of "uneducated" sections of the population to a general acceptance of other forms of learning – independent of admission criteria and "smuggling in" (Einschleusungen) into traditional educational institutions?

- How will and should APEL develop in the area of conflict between (1) the guarantee of the general human right to learning, (2) support of the individual right to decide what to learn and how to learn it, and (3) the right of society to establish learning

priorities in the interest of securing the future of the community as a whole?

• To what extent should APEL be referred to a general basic education, and what are the most important components of knowledge and competence for a basic elementary education for "lifelong learning for all"?

• What possibilities are there for a more pronounced disengagement of assessment standards from the admission, examination and classification criteria of the traditional education system – especially of universities?

• What dangers of instrumentalisation are discernible on the basis of present APEL experiences? (Devaluation of the formalised education system? Inadequate mechanisms of selection?)

• Which new supporting possibilities for the specific competencies from experience learning are developing in the context of APEL – besides the present education system?

RESULT

Besides the central aim of an opening of the access to university studies for "practicians without Abitur" through APEL, the attempt should be made to secure more attention and recognition for informal experience learning and its results in the future – without reference to the admission criteria of the present school and university system. This should also be a starting-point for the practical translation of the politico-educational leitmotif "Lifelong Learning for All".

This result also found its concretisation in the suggestion of using more often the open term "recognition" in the future – besides the term "assessment" which is partly associated with "examination" and "classification" in traditional education systems.

ACCREDITING PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Sam Bailie / Celia O'Hagan, University of Ulster, Jordanstown, Northern Ireland

PREFACE

Higher education is not exempt from the rapidly changing climate of modern times and evaluations such as the latest review of higher education in the United Kingdom. Changes, including easier access and greater opportunities in higher education are beginning to affect the learning culture, learning organisations and employment markets across the province and indeed the rest of Europe. This paper aims to demonstrate how APEL may be used in various ways by institutions and learners by including new tools for assessment and flexible approaches to accreditation. A six-point typology will be presented as a set of methodologies for APEL in higher education. Each method will be explored against traditional models of APEL practice in the UK whilst corresponding to other international approaches.

APEL: TOWARD A DEFINITION

The notion of learning from experience is nothing new. The mere fact that learning may take place outside an educational or training environment cannot and has not been disputed. The recognition of such informal and uncertificated learning experiences, however, has led to the unofficial acknowledgement of prior learning over the years. The fact that mature and adult students were (and still are in some institutions) interviewed during the admissions process, provides evidence of the informal assessments that offer unquantified recognition for prior experiential learning in further and higher education. Challis (1993) claimed such procedures demonstrated the value placed on the learning, which until recent years remained unaccounted. This, she states resulted in informal

acknowledgements such as exemption (allowing students to gain specific credits for modules or units without having completed the assessment) and advanced standing (where students are permitted to enter a programme at an advanced level or stage through the award of general credit). Such unformalised procedures place no value on the experiential learning; rather it presents a case for its existence.

The accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) in higher education has evolved as a recognised idiom across the British Isles, together with the notion of frameworks for credit and qualifications. In 1992 Christine Butterworth dichotomised APEL approaches into two models: the "credit-exchange model" and the "developmental model". The first model is based on the notion of awarding credit for informal learning through the assessment of competence, or what has since become known as the "matching process" where evidenced prior learning is used to demonstrate and claim learning outcomes within an accredited programme (Trowler, 1996). This model is concerned primarily with the award of specific credit (within an existing accredited programme in an educational institution) for informal learning. Achieved competencies will be assessed through evidenced learning following the rigorous process of defining, reflecting and conceptualising, on the part of the individual student. This process usually involves the learner in a self-audit of individual experiences and subsequent competencies.

The developmental model of APEL has been referred to by Trowler as the "credit-exchange plus" model. Using Kolb's learning cycle (see Kolb, 1983), the student will explore their personal experiences following a series of reflective exposures (both individually and in working with others) e.g. keeping a diary/journal, writing a biography, storytelling, picturing, analysing documents, letter writing and interviewing (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988: 33-57). The additional element in this kind of APEL approach requires the individual to reflect on, evaluate and identify previous experiences by demonstrating the learning derived both from the prior experiences and the subsequent personal reflections.

In working toward a definition of APEL, it is worth noting that many institutions offer a range of methodologies that fall somewhere along the credit-exchange and developmental continuum leading to many different definitions of the term APEL. Acronyms

like APA, APEL and RPL have, and continue to be used interchangeably. Nigel Hart discussed the Australian concept of RPL in a light akin to the credit-exchange model of APEL in the UK. It focuses on the award of specific credit for learning outcomes achieved

and evidenced (Hart, 1991). He claims an RPL system will only operate in an "outcome-orientated" environment, where performance can be demonstrated and evidence acceptable for credit-exchange (referred to as status in Australia). In line with this, are the newly constructed British National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish National Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), where evidenced achievements are assessed and credit awarded. The term assessment of prior achievements has been used in competence-based processes, where outcomes (or national standards for NVQs and SVQs) are used as a kitemark for learners during the process of reflection.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING - TOWARD PERSONAL GROWTH

Barkatoolah (1998) explains the French structure and denounces the acronym RPL used elsewhere. She describes the R in RPL as the key to the philosophical base where the student is central to the process, like the developmental model or student-centred learning prescribed by the late John Dewey (see Dewey, 1938). The emphasis here is on the "quantifying" nature of the learning rather than commencing with the "outcomes-based" approach of the credit-exchange model. It begins with individual recognition and need not always lead to accreditation. The process of reflection empowers the student by providing the opportunity for learning conversations (with peers and advisers) and in depth analysis leading to the conceptualisation of prior learning and planning for new experiences (Candy et al, 1985 and Butterworth, 1992). Where an individual wishes to make a learning claim within an educational establishment, the product (portfolio or bilan de competence in France) may then be used for accreditation. This is the second stage of recognition, social recognition in the form of credit-exchange.

Trowler's discussion of the concept of APEL is useful in that it demonstrates the reflective nature of APEL irrespective of which model we use. He places the developmental approach (or reflective learning) and credit-exchange (accreditation) model on a continuum in the APEL process. He argues that APEL reflection takes on a different meaning when we apply it to the higher education context. Arguing that conceptual confusion exists within the sector, he shows how exponents of APEL confuse the two models. Trowler describes this confusion as a move away from the developmental aspect of reflective learning toward the credit-exchange or "outcomes-based" approach.

Interestingly, such moves appear to be driven by demand-like forces, such as student needs, employer requirements and calls for new product-development.

Challis (1993) typified this when she said:

Where the portfolio identifies skills which can be independently assessed and accredited, then adults are able to compete on equal footing with their younger counterparts in having demonstrably tradable assets in the education and employment markets. (P.19).

It is clear that this comment can and has led to calls from government and industry for a more qualified workforce, as an achievable objective. The National Committee of Inquiry, in their recent review of British higher education have demonstrated the needs of graduates, for transferable skills and the recognition of prior learning (Dearing, 1997). Evans (1992) admits that the need for APEL (implying the use of the credit-exchange model) is the result of the fortuitous combination of national circumstances and a few people who have backed what they thought was a good idea (for whatever reason).

APEL: MEETING THE NEEDS OF USERS

Although universities in the UK believe they have well-developed policies and practices which recognise prior experiential learning, there are as always areas which require further development. Storan (1998) suggests that this development is not a distinct phase of

APEL but more a permanent condition of APEL schemes. He offers three phases for the overall involvement of APEL in higher education: developmental, implementational and the present and future phase. It becomes apparent, from Storan's discussion that practitioners and exponents of APEL have developed together with demands and social pressures.

Storan categorised some of these circumstances as: the expansion of higher education student numbers; the access movement; concern about changing demographic conditions, that is, an anticipated reduction in numbers of eighteen year olds expected to enter higher education; financial support from various government agencies to fund APEL projects and the impact of the national vocational qualifications (NVQ) model in the UK, now also being developed in the Republic of Ireland.

In considering methodologies employed in APEL for credit-exchange and APEL for developmental means, that is, using the reflective model of experiential learning as a method of facilitating learner projection (Freire, 1994), it may be useful to incorporate some of the above views with that of Barkatoolah (1998). She has argued for an approach based on the notion of the existential philosophy of self under creation. In addition, it is worth noting the remarks of Trowler who suggests the developmental model is more applicable to higher education. He shows how fundamental educational tasks are applied during the APEL process such as: social interaction through the discussion about portfolio development; personal commitment in the identifying and defining of individual experiences and reflective thought which develops the mind and involves values and openness in the development of propositional knowledge (Barnett, 1990: 44). This may be the case, given a certain epistemological base of education, nonetheless the current work being carried out in APEL pertains to qualifications and retraining schemes designed to fit the credit-exchange model (Butterworth, 1992).

In addition, Le Goff (1994), though supportive of such approaches, presents a different perspective when he claims the traditional route to employment is the "paper qualification". He explains that young people throughout Europe, believe, they should

remain, as long as is possible, within the education system. Clearly, their rationale is justifiable, owing to the fact that levels of study and experience together with paper qualifications remain the best means of competing for employment.

THE PORTFOLIO AS A REFLECTIVE TOOL

Records of performance and the use of profiling for the assessment of prior experiential learning claims has become widespread over the last decade (Paczuska and Turner, 1998). Tools that assist reflective practice have seen a greater demand (Dearing, 1997; Fryer, 1997) shifting the emphasis towards formative rather than summative assessments.

Over recent years in the UK there has been a growth in the assessment of informal learning for credit-exchange purposes. Such provision, it is believed, has taken the emphasis of "personal growth" from the process of formative assessment (Paczuska and Turner, op cit) demonstrating how the shift in prominence from the individual's development, to certificating frameworks for profiling, has had an abating effect on the reflective learning process. Criticisms have prospered within the literature, adding a ray of scepticism over the potential reductive implication of using reflective tools when matching learning experiences to pre-determined criteria, as a means of assessment (Assiter and Shaw, 1993). Barkatoolah (1998) describes such effects when she claims APEL should be qualifying but not certifying, in that the process need not lead to accreditation unless it is appropriate for the individual learner.

THE PROJECT MODEL

In a changing world, with an ageing population and changing educational and employment structures, the appropriateness of accreditation becomes a question of the utmost importance. The reality is that students require "qualifying" dividends in their search for employment (Le Goff, 1994). The Association of Graduate Recruiters, for example, has focused on the perspectives of employers in relation to their demands for a more structured, ability-

based curricula that will provide learners with the desired competencies and individual autonomy that will result in a more proficient workforce of the twenty first century. (EDEXCEL, 1996).

The University of Ulster, APEL project has developed a set of APEL schemes that enable learners to acquire recognition through a range of rigorous procedures.

Central to each scheme is the reflective model of the university APEL programme that offers learners the opportunity to identify and reflect on their experiences using a range of reflective tools and modes of flexible assessments.

A SIX-POINT TYPOLOGY

A set of six APEL systems is available to departments on an opting-in basis. Each system has been identified by the team after an audit of APEL policies across the UK (including Northern Ireland) and the Republic of Ireland. The methodologies employed and rationale for each system reflects the models outlined earlier which focus centrally on the development of the individual and social recognition (accreditation) where learners require it.

Each method relies on the notion of "personal-reflection". This enables the individual to become familiar with their learning whilst recognising the value of their experiences. The development of the individual focuses on the existential model of self under creation. Using Kolb's learning cycle this model facilitates learner recognition, similar to the audit of prior learning used in France. Figure 1 shows the model in practice.

Figure 1: An Existential Outlook of APEL
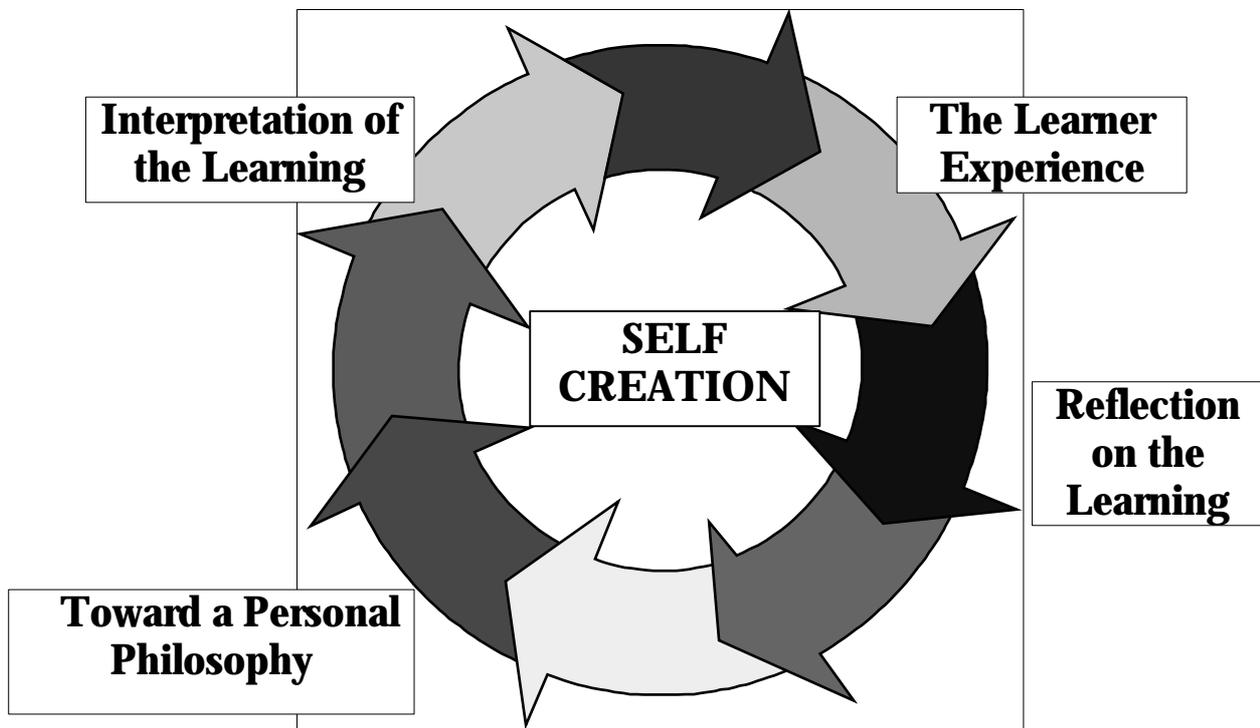
System 1: APEL for Accreditation

Focused on the award of general credit, this method of APEL is not linked to the matching of learning to programme or course outcomes. General credit may be defined as informal learning that is evidenced from experience usually in order to assist student entry at advanced levels. It entails individually negotiated contracts for students describing which part(s) of an award can be claimed using general credit.

System 2: APEL for Assessment

This system moves the learner toward the pre-determined programme or module outcomes and therefore credit-exchange. The aim of this scheme is to offer learners the opportunity to gain formal (specific) recognition by demonstrating experiential or certificated learning. This approach has already been seen to have its uses. It is necessary, however, to state that it is not focused specifically on the learner and their learning, rather it lends itself to the NVQ model of

what learner should know or be able to do in order to be deemed competent. Nonetheless, learners who have appropriate evidence that may be matched to specific learning outcomes may make use of this system in an attempt to gain formal accreditation.

It has been said that the process of matching learning to outcomes is trivial and does little to develop the learner. Profiling, however, encourages learners to "foster creative interaction" through writing (Walker, 1985) learning conversations (Candy et al, 1985), sometimes referred to as "reflective commentaries" (Butterworth, 1992) or "learning accounts" (Dearing, 1997 and Fryer, 1997). Such approaches are said to increase learner autonomy and "interaction" (Bailie, 1998).

System 3: APEL for Access

The purpose of the system is to widen participation across Higher Education programmes. The intention is to enable students to demonstrate their learning abilities and their capacity to undertake a course of study based on learning acquired informally (Fraser, 1995). An APEL programme is essential in order to provide a means whereby learning can be identified and codified. Assessment focuses on the "process of learning from experience" and underpinning knowledge identifies specific areas of competence.

System 4: APEL for Awards

This system could be defined more appropriately as "work-based learning", which can be identified as past, current or planned experiential learning, as distinct from prior experience and subsequent reflections. The award itself may be an existing award, though not gained wholly through a taught syllabus, or the award may be devised specifically to meet changing needs and circumstances of the candidates. Such a development needs the negotiation and support of employers. The University of Ulster has an incorporated module for work-based learning. Little or no formal teaching takes place and all or most of this would be in the workplace based on contract negotiation and related needs and tasks. The completion of an award relates specifically to work-based achievements and may carry such a reference in the title.

System 5: APEL for Diagnosis

A first year undergraduate APEL programme is central to this system. It offers learners the opportunity to use APEL as a means of diagnosing their "learning achievements" by auditing their life, work and prior study experiences. Whilst the scheme focuses on the process of learning, there is emphasis on the content of the evidenced learning, both in terms of the standard of achievement and the direction in which it points. Credit is given on completion of the programme and the evidence of learning from experience. Additionally, where the learning equates to specific outcomes further credit may be achieved within or toward an award (APEL for Assessment) through further portfolio development.

System 6: APEL for Progress (Social Vision)

This system focuses on the programme of reflective learning. It could be used to assist disadvantaged or marginalised groups to participate in Higher Education, perhaps in order to progress into further or higher studies and students may be empowered within their own life situation. Such programmes have been highly documented across the UK and within community settings throughout Ireland (see Storan, 1998 and Connolly et al, 1996).

The six systems of APEL can be seen below in the six-point typology of APEL. This typology is designed around the notion of an APEL programme where individuals are subjected to the model seen in figure 1. This approach incorporates the developmental and existential philosophy of self-growth into the process of APEL.

STAR DIAGRAM:

Level 0 (Access to higher education)

Progress
(Social Vision)

Level 3/4
(Final year/Postgraduate)

Level 0 (Access to
higher education)

Awards

Access

AP(E)L
PROGRAMME

Level 1/2
(First/second year)

Level 1
(First year)

Accreditation

Diagnostic

Assessment

Level 1/2 (First/second year)
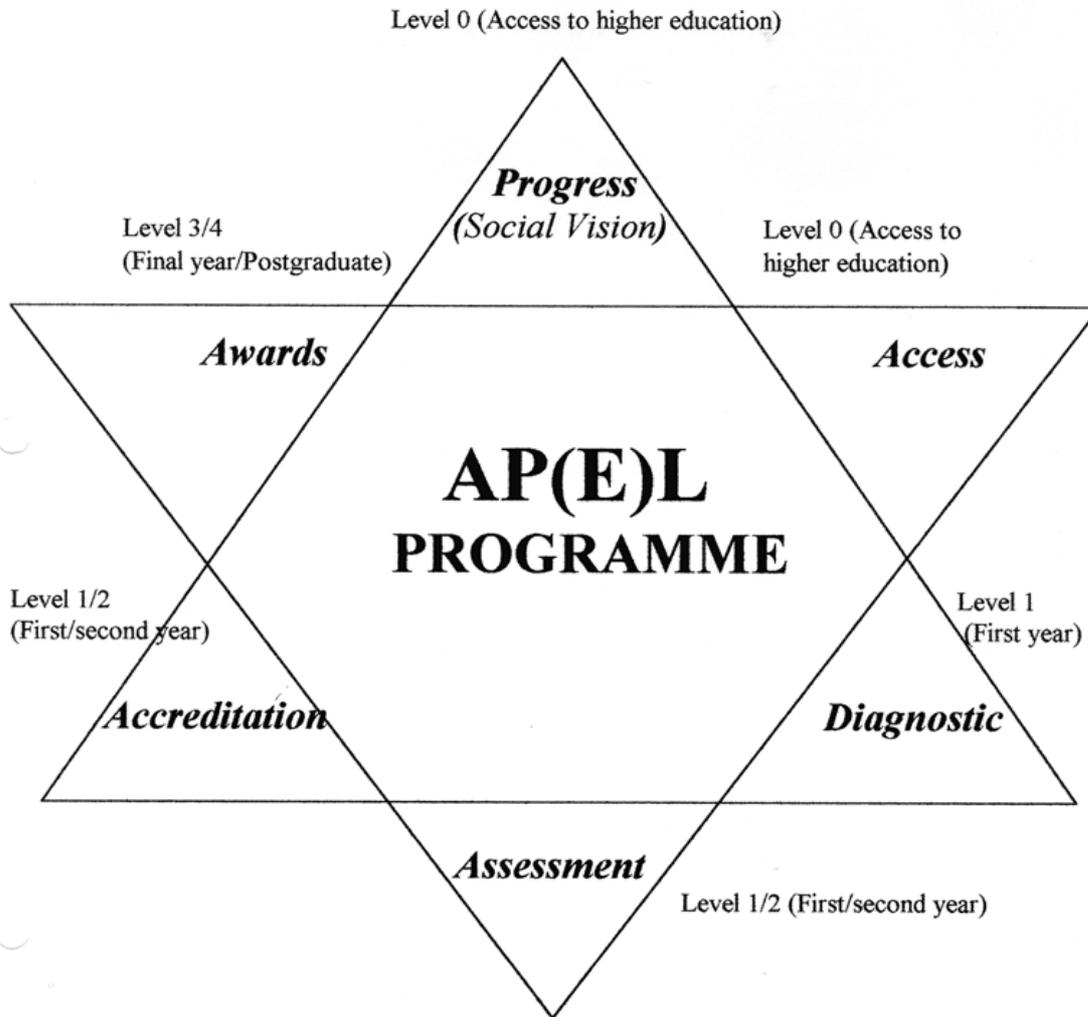
*NB.   Years outlined in the diagram refer to a typical three-year baccalaureate honours degree programme.

LIFELONG LEARNING

The economic well being of the UK appears central to the recent consensus for a lifelong learning strategy. In a global economy advantages such as skilled, adaptable and learning workforces offer prospects of growth to changing cultures. In 1996, the Delors White Paper suggested the learning skills needed for the new economy were exactly those skills needed for community development and for the pursuit of individual growth (Delors, J., 1996). Fryer, (1997) explains the outcomes-based approach which has developed in the

UK as a strategic response to such calls, such that much learning goes unrecognised, unregistered and unrecorded. He claims national systems for recording progress; frameworks for achievement and qualifications remain problematic and unresolved. Measuring achievements appears a priority of government, with the newly developed NVQs and recommendations which suggest student achievements must be counted and equated to programme outcomes (Dearing, 1997). Unfortunately, current methods of indicating and measuring achievements do not embrace all forms, varieties and levels of learning (Fryer, op cit).

THE DEFICIT AND ACHIEVEMENT MODEL

As Trowler (1996) demonstrated, many confuse the credit-exchange and developmental model of APEL by omitting the developmental strategies explored in reflective learning. A target, such as that of governments, where strategies attempt to match individual learning achievements to an outcomes-based scheme (e.g. NVQs) will only result in a reductive and unquantifiable set of learning experiences. When the developmental APEL systems are put in place the process that follows the "reflective learning cycle" will empower learners by enabling them to value the learning they already have prior to any matching exercise (accreditation). This offers the student the opportunity to have their personal learning (gained from experience and previous study) counted. They will then decide if they wish to be assessed and subsequently accredited whatever their programme of learning. In following this APEL route individual learning will be based on the achievements of the learner and not a deficit in learning. This methodology also offers social support for learning that does not lead to credit (Fryer, 1997:81).

Essentially it is important to remain within the realm of APEL systems which focus on developmental systems, the National Committee of Inquiry in the UK has demonstrated that learners will have to become more responsible for their own learning in many ways. Their strategy appears to be one of supporting the needs of a credit-based system which will facilitate learner mobility between professions/courses, flexible approaches to the assessment of learning, stopping-off points within programmes and value for

money (HEQC, 1994). The committee claim feedback and general teaching practice must be developed to take account of the fact that the learning society is widening and demanding customised programmes. Such calls are clearly for flexible approaches to learning. While new technologies clearly have enormous potential for increasing flexibility in relation to student needs, the absence of substantive research into the curricular possibilities suggests the need for caution in the application of new communication-focussed solutions.

It is important therefore to note that while many see the APEL procedure as one that is essentially predicated on the concept of assessment, either on the part of the individual learner (for personal awareness and growth) or the educational institution (for accreditation) the "reflective cycle" remains the important aspect in the assessment process, beginning with the achievement model or learner recognition. Various flexible approaches intended to enhance the assessment of learning are under development through the work of the APEL project and the RAVE (Remote Access to Vocational Education) project within the University of Ulster. Both concepts will be explored using APEL students within the University of Ulster in partnership with Further Education Colleges across the province together with Universities, Institutes of Technology and community based organisations in the Republic of Ireland. Using ISDN links, teleconferencing facilities and online support software, the University of Ulster will advise and support both assessors and advisers of APEL and students going through the APEL process across a range of educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

Essentially, it is important to distinguish between the conceptually confusing notions of APEL across the UK and the rest of Europe. In practice, such perplexity appears to reflect the commonality of either the "developmental" aspects of APEL or the "credit-exchange" procedure, which has largely become acceptable in many Further and Higher Education Institutions. The feature of "personal growth" and "learner autonomy" is the focus of recent debate, also with an element of confusion. Many treat APEL portfolio construction as the developmental aspects of individual empowerment. The importance of individual acceptance and

formative assessments has led to the view that learning opportunities should be increased to the extent that university programmes will help students to become more familiar with work-based experiences helping them to reflect on such experiences, together with learning from other life and prior study encounters (Dearing, 1997; Fryer, 1997).

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REFLECTING ON PRACTICE: MAKING OUR EXPERIENCE COUNT

Iain Jones, APL Co-ordinator, Education Development Unit, University of Salford (UK)

INTRODUCTION

This paper is designed to encourage colleagues to reflect on and to share their perspectives on managing innovation and change and, specifically, of developing institutional frameworks for the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). Although the focus of the paper is on the co-ordination of APL within a UK University, in the North West of England, it also provides an opportunity to identify and evaluate the significance of specific issues including the value of collaboration and partnerships, the impact of curriculum frameworks on APL and APEL, and processes for staff and curriculum development . Our reflection should also encourage us to understand the values that inform practice and recognise the opportunities and limitations that are provided by the institutional structures that we work within. In particular, we need to recognise *"how beliefs, goals and practices are changed and affected by the influences of ideology, institutional structures and political constraints."* (Ecclestone, 1996: p155) Therefore the paper will also draw on literature that analyses strategies for the management of innovation and change within higher education and compares these findings with the specific experiences of developing a framework for the introduction and integration of APL.

The UK Government Green Paper (1998) defines their perspectives on lifelong learning and employability. However, the Lifelong Learning Conference; *The Learning Age: Towards A Europe of Knowledge* (Manchester, May 1998) also emphasised the value of lifelong learning for citizenship; *"Learning's contribution to community development and social inclusion, to fostering a sense of citizenship, responsibility and identity is as important as its contribution to the economy."* Although this recognition of the multiple purposes of adult learning is not new (Benn,1997), it has significant implications for the development of APL in higher education.

It reinforces the need for collaborative work *within* an institution, work *across* sectors, the partnerships that have been built *between* higher and further education ,and the value of collaborating with the voluntary sector. Each of these elements are also significant within the University's strategy for widening participation.

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

The importance of collaboration and progression through education has been central to the production of an Institutional Framework for APL and APEL at the University of Salford . Work on APL has focused on the Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning with adult learners at all levels of provision from Access/Foundation to Postgraduate level. The priority has been to plan and develop an Institutional Framework that is informed by each element of the University. In 1996, the University of Salford and University College Salford merged with the Northern College of Nursing and Midwifery. Although the mergers were the culmination of long standing partnerships, where each of the institutions had already worked in close collaboration, experiences within them differed. The University also established an FE/HE Consortium in 1993. It is a partnership between the University and Colleges of Further Education in the North West of England providing opportunities for progression through curriculum innovation, guidance, and learner support that supports the transition of learners from further into higher education. APL is consequently developing within a University that is undergoing significant institutional change; reflected in an expanding and changing student population. The University is also now undertaking an institutional review of academic Departments and support structures.

The literature on managing innovation, including Becher and Kogan's work on strategies for change in higher education (1980), provides a framework for reflection within which to analyse the institution and its relationship to the development, implementation, and integration of APL. Becher and Kogan defined four levels of organisation; central authority, institutional, basic unit (Departmental) and individual. Each level is defined by a distinct combination of values and tasks and processes of interaction. The

normative mode is concerned with the maintenance of values and the operational mode with the execution of tasks. The normative mode is sub divided into intrinsic (essentially personal) values and extrinsic values which are those that are transmitted by the next level in the hierarchy of the organisation. The interaction between levels within the organisation is then negotiated by the normative mode through the expression of judgements and the operational mode via the allocation of tasks and resources. Whereas this represents a Structural Model, the work of Lindquist (1978) and Berg and Ostergen (1977; 79) provides a Social Model as defined by Rutherford, Fleming and Mathias (1985).

Lindquist identified five factors that are critical in the introduction of change within complex organisations. These are the interpersonal and informational linkages; active openness; leadership that was initiating, guiding and involving; ownership of an initiative; and the rewards that are then offered to those involved. Berg and Ostergen studied radical innovations in course developments and teaching methods in Sweden and argued that each innovation was developed in a unique organisational context and that, therefore, any analysis needed to identify the social and organisational groups concerned and the inter relationships between them. They identified four "decisive factors" that determined the success or relative failure of innovations; gain and loss, ownership, leadership and power.

A third model, the Personal Model, is concerned with putting theory into practice and increasing personal effectiveness (Argyris and Schon: 1974, Fleming and Rutherford: 1984). The notion of the Theory-in-Use is based on values and behavioural strategies that we are largely unaware of. Whereas routine problems can be solved using Model 1 or 1a, complex problems require a more sophisticated Model 2 approach. The strategies that are used include Model 1 where there is evidence of the control and manipulation of colleagues and their environment, Model 1a where colleagues may be, or appear to be, pragmatic or even diffident and Model 2, by contrast, where although there is evidence of a strongly advocated personal position, there is also an environment for others to challenge and question the validity of positions that are adopted (Rutherford, Fleming and Mathias 1985 pp 433-445). Each of these factors are relevant to the analysis of APL.

Simosko recognised the importance of collaboration "The implementation of APL/APEL requires the involvement of many different kinds of people who bring to the process a wide range of professional skills and knowledge. It also requires that people work effectively not just as isolated individuals but as a team."
(Simosko: 1991: 28). However, the work of Rutherford, Fleming and Mathias on strategies for change in higher education (1985) suggested that although there may be an insight into, and recognition of, what should be done to solve a particular problem there was often an inability to produce effective action to secure change.

Specific research undertaken in Canada by Wolfson (1997), identified two sets of critical factors in the analysis of how to manage APL that relate back to how an institution can move from problem identification to problem solving.

1. Staff must believe the change is in their best interests.
2. Change must not be perceived as threatening their status or autonomy.
3. Change must be approved of at Course or Departmental level.
4. Impetus for change should be seen to be coming from within organisation.
5. Individuals in positions of leadership need to set a positive climate for change.
6. Needs to be acknowledgement of the nature and degree of paradigm shift necessary to accomplish that change.

The critical factors for the institutionalisation of APL were defined as follows:[1]

1. Staff need to be aware that students can and do learn outside of the classroom.
2. Staff need to know the methods of assessing prior knowledge.
3. There is a need to acknowledge the role changes that APL entails.
4. Staff need to clearly specify course and programme outcomes.
5. APL should be fully integrated within the quality assurance system.

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[1] (Wolfson, 1997)

- Given the institutional growth and change at the University, how do the factors identified by Wolfson relate to the opportunities and constraints that have shaped the development of APL at the University in the last five years?
- What are the factors that have been critical and how have these informed the policy and practice on APL?

PHASES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF APL: ORGANISING CHANGE

The following outline provides a summary of the phases in the development of APL at the University. Given the factors cited by Wolfson each phase of the development of the framework has focused on preparing colleagues for the implementation of APL as an integral part of their programmes and been shaped by the need to promote their ownership of the innovation.

In Phase 1 (Pre 1994)

➢ APL had been used on single courses or within single programmes:
➢ Access to Higher Education Programme with pathways in Health, Art and Design and Hotel and Catering and Consumer Studies
➢ ENB Higher Awards Framework: A Post Qualifying award for nurses and midwives

In Phase 2 (1994– 95)

The use of APL within single courses was extended and the examples of good practice were incorporated within the development of an overall APL strategy. An APL Development Group and APL Steering Group were established to co-ordinate collaboration and partnerships within the University. The APL Development Group was established in 1994 and is chaired by the APL Co-ordinator. It has included representatives from the Faculty of Business and Management, (Departments of Business Studies, Professional Studies), Faculty of the Environment (Departments of Environmental Management, Housing) Faculty of Health (Departments of Health Science, Midwifery, Nursing, Radiography,

Rehabilitation, Social Work), and the Faculty of Science (Information Technology Institute). The Group provides a mechanism for promoting good practice and identifying staff needs and marketing APL within the institution so that the outcomes of work are widely disseminated. The structure facilitates collaboration and partnership and promotes the "active openness" that Lindquist identified as critical (1978). Specific outcomes of the Development Group have included the production of policy and curriculum documents and the organisation of staff development within Departments and Faculties and the opportunities for colleagues from across the University to meet and work together.

The APL Steering Group, was originally chaired by the then Head of Centre for Health Studies, and is now chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning. Members of the Steering Group include the APL Co-ordinator, the Head of the Education Development Unit, the Heads of Access Development and Staff and Curriculum Development, the Director of Continuing Education, the Heads of two Academic Departments and an Admissions Tutor for a postgraduate programme. It reports to the Teaching and Learning Sub Committee of the University Senate and was established to provide a formal communication route for APL developments as well as a mechanism for planning change.

In Phase 3 (1995-96)

From January to July 1995, priority was given to curriculum development, the delivery of a range of staff development and work alongside three external consultants who, as experienced APL Co-ordinators, supported the University's overall strategy and specific work on:

- Curriculum
- Resourcing
- Marketing

Whilst they did not advocate a standard method for the introduction of APL they did recognise that innovation had to relate to the

- needs of particular groups of learners
- nature of the curriculum and existing methods of delivery

- recognition of other issues that impact on course teams; including modularization, semesterisation, CATS, and working with new groups of learners.

These specific recommendations reinforced the findings of Berg and Ostergen (1977; 1979) and their emphasis on the need to understand the unique organisational context and the inter relationships that shape innovation and change.

Having summarised the initial phases of APL, the following analysis considers specific aspects of APL development between 1996 and 1998 and their inter- relationship with other curriculum and institutional changes at the University.

APL INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTATION: EXPECTATION AND REACTION: 1997

"The ideas battle has been won. Now starts the hard work - we are long passed the 1% of inspiration stage; we are at the 99% perspiration stage... early innovatory work has sown the seeds." (Sunderland, 1995). In 1996-97 priority was given to the development of an APL Manual incorporating a series of documents; "APL: An Institutional Policy", and "APL: A Staff Guide", and two documents for learners; "Introducing the Accreditation of Prior Learning" and "APL : A Learner's Guide". The Institutional Policy was accompanied by a series of documents that related to each stage of the APL process. The Policy gained the approval of the University Senate in March 1997. What is interesting, in retrospect, is the contrasting reactions to the document. Whilst individuals in positions of leadership did create a positive climate for change, a number of other colleagues argued that the amount of documentation inferred by the process was unnecessary. Such a reaction is significant for a number of reasons.

Firstly, whilst the APL process does require documenting it could be argued that because it offers an alternative form of admission or accreditation there is a tendency to over compensate in the amount of information that is recorded. So any lightness of touch is overcome by what is perceived as an excess of bureaucracy. Whilst there is an implicit dilemma of how to balance institutional quality

assurance with a responsiveness to Departmental needs this may, in itself, mask another issue. Wolfson (1997)argued that change must not be perceived as threatening status or autonomy. The APL process does not undermine the status of the Admissions Tutor or Course Leader but it does impinge on their autonomy. Consequently whereas some may *present* their objections to APL on the grounds that it generates what they regard as excessive bureaucracy, the *implicit* objection is that it challenges their autonomy and, in particular, their discretion to make a judgement without, for example, making the entry criteria for a course explicit . The question of the admission of what are termed "non standard mature student entrants" is particularly problematic. Whereas the process was designed to replace what had previously relied on the "discretion" of the Dean of the Faculty, in practice this has proved to be far more difficult to achieve. Individual Admissions Tutors who are supportive of the APL process and want to work within it will refer individuals or groups of learners. However, there are also others who are admitted at the discretion of individual Admissions Tutors and not through the APL process.

APL INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DEPARTMENTAL NEEDS: 1998

The questions over the process of admission are still being considered. However, the flexibility of the APL Policy Framework is also being emphasised. The University recognises the need for an institutional policy framework for the Accreditation of Prior Learning as part of its mission to widen participation. The framework also acknowledges that the uses of APL will vary between Faculties and within Departments and that the needs of the Department, programme and student group may differ accordingly. However, the framework for APL provision within the University does identify the benefits of the process, the responsibilities of those implementing it, the key elements and individual roles in any application of the process and the quality assurance of the process. Although it is *desirable* that there should be flexibility within the framework, it is also *essential* that procedures are documented.

The introduction to the Framework emphasises that APL should be used flexibly across the institution given the differences in who is using it, their purpose and the level at which it is being used. As such, this reflects Wolfson's argument that changes must be approved of at Course or Departmental level. However, each Course Team are referred to the core documentation in the APL Manual that includes information for learners and staff contained in the "APL: An Institutional Policy Framework ,"Introducing the Accreditation of Prior Learning", "APL: A Learner's Guide", and "APL: A Staff Guide". Although it may be *desirable* that a course or programme produces its own documentation for the learner, to complement the documentation produced by the APL Co-ordinator, from a quality assurance perspective it is *essential* that each individual learner receives

➢ Initial information and advice on the process including the fee structure and the limits on the amount of credit that can be awarded.
➢ Guidance on either the knowledge, skills and understanding that have to be demonstrated for access to a programme or the outcomes that have to be met if a claim for specific credit is to be made.
➢ Guidance on the process of making a claim and details of how it will be assessed.

Although the process will vary for each individual, depending on whether they want to use prior experiential learning for entry onto a course or programme, or prior certificated or experiential learning for credit towards an award, it is *essential* that any application of APL meets certain minimum standards.

These are that the

▪ Criteria for entry onto a course, or the learning outcomes that have to be met if credit is to be awarded against specific modules within a course, are specified at the beginning of the process.
▪ Appropriate levels of guidance for each individual are negotiated and agreed at each stage.

- Individual emphasises the learning that they have gained from either prior certificated or experiential learning and not the experience itself.
- Assessment of any claim must be documented and should evaluate whether the evidence submitted is
- Valid and matches the level of learning required.
- Sufficient proof for entry or credit against the specific modules.
- Authentic and the work of the learner.
- Current and that the relevant knowledge and skills that the learner is claiming can be demonstrated.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN APL AND GUIDANCE: INNOVATION AND CHANGE

Work on APL has also been enhanced by the University's work with Vivienne Rivis, then Assistant Director of the HEQC . Between June 1994 and 1996, a comprehensive set of guidelines on guidance and learner support were piloted with a selected number of HEIs (Rivis, 1995). University College Salford was part of the original pilot and the University subsequently became involved. The intention was that the internal mechanism for developing an APL framework would be strengthened by defining the implicit relationship between it and other strategies for developing policy and practice on guidance and learner support.

Planning activity at the University extended to a merger group on Guidance and Learner Support. The work with the HEQC was seen by some practitioners as vital in developing a comprehensive strategy for the merged University based on traditions of working with industry, communities and other partners in developing lifelong learning. The work with Vivienne Rivis considered the application of the guidance and learner support framework in practice and, in particular, how it related to translating previous experiences into a shared set of principles and practices (Oakey and Jones, 1997.) The work recognised that APL was not only concerned with individual learners entering programmes, or claiming specific credit, but that the guidance process that begins either before entry, or at the entry /induction stage could and should be extended throughout the programme. Recent work on study skills support for mature

students, including those who have used APL, reinforces the value of such an integrated approach.

The work on quality assurance and guidance and learner support can inform institutional responsibilities and learners' entitlements. It emphasises, in particular, the active role of the learner in negotiating their needs as well as the responsibilities of the institution to provide services.

WORKING WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR THROUGH COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

As well as emphasising the flexibility of an APL Framework and the value of integrating APL within other elements of academic guidance and learner support, the University is also developing APL through external partnerships with the voluntary sector. The University is represented on the Salford Collaborative Training Group. The Group is convened by the Council For Voluntary Service in the City and other partners include the City of Salford, the Manchester Training and Enterprise Council, and representatives of local Churches. It has worked to respond to a need to provide progression for volunteers who want to extend their learning beyond initial basic training. Our awareness of needs and target audience is based on this pilot work and our knowledge of other training provided for volunteers in Salford. A pilot programme, January-April 1998, incorporated individual and group guidance at the University with work in outreach centres in the City of Salford.

The University now wants to expand the guidance and accreditation available to individuals and groups engaged in voluntary work by developing partnerships that widen access to existing provision. The pilot has confirmed the potential for using APL for individuals who want to enter programmes and /or review whether their experiential learning provides the basis for specific credit claims. APL is also a catalyst for curriculum development. Examples of need that have been identified include short/ part time courses on Tenant Participation and Community Development (Social Work and Housing) and Community Arts Skills (Visual Arts and Culture). A project in 1998-99 will

- Identify, assess and accredit the knowledge, skills and understanding of individuals and groups developed through either Citizens Advice Bureaux, other Advice Centres, or other voluntary and community activity within Salford.
- Recognise the outcomes of work based learning that can be used for either entry or the accreditation of individuals within existing programmes.
- Map their educational and training needs and evaluate the potential for collaboration between the sector and the University and investigate the feasibility of designing new curricula in conjunction with voluntary and community organisations.

A subsequent paper will evaluate this project and its relationship with learning for community development, social inclusion, and the contribution that the University is making to the processes of education for citizenship.

EVALUATING CHANGE

What has this paper illustrated about the process of APL development? By analysing the phases in the development of APL at the University I have indicated how we have responded to the institutional structures that we work within. Practice is sensitive to the beliefs of others and recognises the need to be aware of the factors that have been identified in the literature on the management of innovation and change. The process of implementation is facilitated by a number of specific factors; the commitment of senior management, the development of a flexible curriculum and a critical mass of supportive practitioners. However, any change also needs to acknowledge that "Embedding is a long haul, but doing it properly is the secret to success" (Sunderland, 1995). It should also be emphasised that APL is one of a series of innovations in curriculum and staff development that are designed to widen participation.

Scott (1995) identified a series of "procedural and structural" changes that Universities have had to respond to including Access Courses, FE/HE partnerships, the introduction of CATS, modular degree schemes and the transformation of Continuing Education.

"The cumulative effect of these innovations explains their radical impact". Whilst individually they " ....may pose only limited challenges to traditional academic values and institutional cultures. Together they appear to herald the arrival of mass higher education systems, a disturbing phenomenon to many and uncongenial to a significant minority" (Scott, 1995p.156).

If an institution is committed to lifelong learning for employability and citizenship and widening participation, the implementation strategy for innovations, including APL, needs to consider the factors that have been analysed within this paper. In order to meet the challenge it is also essential that the management of change is developed through collaboration within the University and local and regional partnerships and that planning considers the unique context of each institution.

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ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS ONE END OF UNIT ASSIGNMENT: "AP(E)L IN ACTION"

Leonard Rhys Evans, Harrow Business School / University of Westminster (UK)

INTRODUCTION

This assignment is a conceptual overview of the use of AP(E)L as an entry gate for students pursuing a part-time undergraduate programme in health care management. It is not a systematic review of the scope and context of AP(E)L systems, although, the issues identified in this assessment process are applicable and transferable to other assessment systems in both subject base and international settings. The scope is restricted to the higher education sector and ignores the use of AP(E)L in further education and the impact of different driving influences on the FE agenda. As major differences in development and use mark this example of AP(E)L out from many UK and internationally examples, it is particularly worthy of examination.

  Whilst it was initially difficult to make explicit links and connections between AP(E)L and general assessment theory, it has become increasingly apparent that while there is no single AP(E)L assessment theory there is large scale "borrowing" of assessment principles. In establishing clarity of understanding of the foundations of AP(E)L assessment, there needs to be a careful and analytical examination of the issues surrounding the concepts such as validity, reliability and other quality assurance issues. Thus conceptualisation of an AP(E)L assessment theory arising from more general principles can be developed.

ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR (EXPERIENTIAL) LEARNING AP(E)L

The use of previously acquired learning for entry, and exemption from modules, is a relatively new phenomenon in education. Much of the initial work and subsequent UK development has occurred in the last two decades, building on the 1970's USA work. This is ongoing, with those involved keen to make a major impact on main

stream assessment practices. While the Open University pioneered the concept of advanced standing, it was Norman Evans as principal architect of the UK AP(E)L developments who provided conceptual stimulus. Evans (1992) provides a reasoned account of the aims, purposes, developments and issues involved in experiential learning in reviewing his personal assessment systems journey.

The term AP(E)L for the purposes of this assignment covers the use of all prior learning experiences used by students towards award of a degree and includes both certificated and experiential learning.

BACKGROUND TO THE USE OF AP(E)L IN THE BA (HONS) IN HEALTH CARE MANAGEMENT

In 1992 I was employed by the University of Westminster to conduct a study on the feasibility for a proposal to mount a part-time undergraduate course in management studies for health care managers. The main target audience were ward sisters faced with newly qualified students holding degree/diploma qualifications whilst they had often limited academically rated qualifications. The conclusion of the study was the development of an eighteen month part-time programme for validation.

The proposals' major feature was that entry would be at level three only, requiring all participants to provide evidence of their prior achievement at levels one and two within the CATS system. This reflected the belief that the students had already studied many courses with management components which could contribute towards future learning. The course team recognised that many of the skills previously developed in training and work experience were equally transferable to the formal study of health care management. The validation panel expressed considerable concern over the amount of credit exemption suggested, although this was in line with the university AP(E)L regulations produced in 1991. It was agreed that, to support the students and provide evidence that the course team would not be devaluing the academic worth of the degree, a pre-entry semester module would be added to the programme. During this module students would receive guidance and support in making their AP(E)L claim, undertake a study skills package and

receive a brief introduction to sociology with an emphasis on the sociological aspects of health. Subsequently revised in the light of the student experience the module now contains an introduction to the three major core themes of the programme: ethics, change and quality management.

THE ISSUES

Since September 1993, 10 cohorts have enrolled on the programme with 150 students graduating with the BA(Hons) in Health Care Management. During this period a number of issues arose (Table One). While many are similar to those which are to be found in the general assessment literature, others relate generally to the concept of AP(E)L and some only to this adopted model of AP(E)L. What has become apparent, is that while there is no single assessment theory that can be applied to AP(E)L, the system borrows heavily on a range of assessment theories. It might therefore be useful to see links between the fundamental concepts, underpinning values and beliefs as being part of a continuum (Figure One), subject to change depending on the influence of forces exerted by other factors. Not all of the issues can be discussed in depth and many concepts such as validity and reliability exert influence over a range of areas. Notions of validity are important concepts in establishing the values and beliefs of the process and major factors in determining what is assessed, while reliability is a primary concern of both quality assurance and inter-assessor judgements.

Table one: Major issues surrounding the AP(E)L system

Acceptability Issues	Of the concept Of extent of AP(E)L proposed
Values and beliefs:	Purpose of assessment Formative or summative assessment Reliability Validity
Developmental Issues:	Support, Staff development Preparation, Gaining experience Monitoring and moderation
Implementation concerns:	Identifying what is being assessed, Time frame Student support
Academic Issues:	Individuals concerns Devaluing of standards Lack of understanding of AP(E)L Concept Programme credibility Issues surrounding reliability and Validity
Recording systems	What should be recorded How Who should be responsible
Quality assurance procedures	Advisors/Assessor roles External examiner functions Issues of reliability
Evaluation	Purposes Extent Issues of efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equity

Fig. one: A continuum model of AP(E)L influences

INTERNAL PRESSURE FACTORS

Numbers game　　**Academic staff values**　　**NVQ Acceptance
v.Academic Beliefs**

Power and Control

acceptance　　　concerns over　　　devaluing　　　　total
of ideology　　　standards　　　　　experience　　　rejection
✛_____✛_____✛_____✛_____✛_____✛_____✛

education　　　　level of　　　　　　ownership of　　　　élitist
for all　　　　　understanding　　　education experience　views

⇑　　　　　　⇑　　　　　　⇑　　　　　　⇑

Power and Control

**Increased　　employer　　　　　governmental　quality
participation　interests　　　　　agendas　　　monitoring**

EXTERNAL PRESSURE FACTORS

ACCEPTABILITY

One of the important battles which had to be fought and won was the acceptability of AP(E)L in the **content and extent** of what we were proposing. On reflection, the issues that addressed the minds of the validation panels and the more recent review panel before full approval was given to the programme were about acceptability rather than validity. Rumpus (1996) clearly identified a number of those influences concerned with ensuring authentic AP(E)L assessment.

Two skirmishes took place early in the development. The first related to the use of professional qualifications, however old, as equivalent of level one learning and identification of the management learning aspects of subsequent certificated learning. This reflected linked concerns expressed by others over the age/shelf life and status of the qualifications. As the author had been involved in the provision of health care professional programmes in a previous role, counter arguments produced overcame most objections. However, as Skinner and Nganasurian 1996 demonstrate this has important implications for AP(E)L developments, as the degree of successful acceptance is linked to the requirement for an informed product champion. The second, more serious skirmish, concerned the academic snobbery surrounding management as a postgraduate study area and that an undergraduate degree using extensive prior learning would rapidly lead to a devaluing of the field of study.

A further concern lay with the extent of requested credit. Previously only individual modules attracted AP(E)L credits, this was the first time that such a large scale use of AP(E)L was proposed. Much planning and development work was required to convince academic colleagues that this would not lead to diminution of standards and that the assessment would be valid and reliable. Providing clarification of fitness for purpose as described by Gipps(1994) of the AP(E)L system was an important stage of the development process and reflects the need for AP(E)L supporters to borrow from a range of assessment theories.

VALUES AND BELIEFS

Fundamental to the whole programme was the need for the course team to share a common view of the purpose of AP(E)L and adherence to the use of reflective practice, described by Schon (1983), as the heart of professional care management practice. What proved a difficult issue to reconcile, was defining what is assessed for credit: the extent of previous learning or the students current demonstrated ability to benefit from future third level study. This issue is at the forefront of discussion, as students claim more experiential learning rather than assessed and certified learning.

This prompts questioning over whether the role of AP(E)L is about assessment or the recognition of projected/potential ability and this dilemma is reflected in further area of debate: the purpose of the AP(E)L module in the formative or summative argument, a debate is the subject of considerable discussion in AP(E)L circles. Some of the course team see the process as developmental and deplore the summative portfolio assessment considering it restrictive, constraining the creativity that students new to higher education can bring to the course. Students, however are keen to receive constructive feedback and grades for work achieved, a view reflected by Black and Wiliam's (1998) review of assessment purposes.

AP(E)L can be considered a high stakes assessment process because future progression is dependent on satisfactory completion (Madaus 1988). The high stakes nature produced a major conceptual problem in the identification of a suitable framework by which students could identify their assessment requirements. Partially, because management is generally regarded as postgraduate study, no corresponding undergraduate modules with matching learning outcomes existed to serve as assessment criteria. A second more serious problem was the decision to use the Management NVQ Level Four competencies as the basis of the AP(E)L claim. This enabled students to identify areas to develop and expand their claim for prior experiential learning.

The NVQ linkage and transition of competence into academic knowledge raised concerns among colleagues prompting questions over issues of reliability. An issue which still has a high profile for those working with AP(E)L, more so given the views expressed by

Prais (1991) and Smithers (1993) when coupled with Jessup's (1991) claim that use of explicit assessment criteria enhanced validity and rendered reliability a secondary concept. Simosko (199I) and recognises the difficulties of finding assessable outcomes within an AP(E)L system warning of the dangers of gut feelings and the need to establish explicit assessment criteria, a view reinforced by Sadler (1987).

DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES

Whilst many issues were addressed during the development stage, this section focuses mainly on staff support and development and the administration systems.

Staff development and support

There was a perceived need to prepare members of the course team for both advisor and assessor roles (Table Two). Initially it was decided to use only course team members experienced in competence assessment, gained via the accreditation centre for Management NVQ's levels as they had previous training in both the assessor/advisor roles, roles fundamental to the AP(E)L process. In addition, two guides were produced to assist both students and academics. The importance of getting support structures right and in place before commencement of the system cannot be over-emphasised. Bloor and Butterworth (1993) reflect on this in describing their experiences. On reflection some of the problems encountered could have been prevented if this had been 100% effective.

Table two: Definition of terms

TERMINOLOGY	DEFINITION
ADVISOR	A person who provides advice acts as a mentor and guide to a student preparing a AP(E)L submission
ASSESSOR	An independent person who reviews and decided upon relative worth of an AP(E)L claim
VERIFIER	A second independent person who may review assessors judgements as part of a quality check process. Normally internal to the organisation
EXTERNAL EXAMINER	An independent reviewer external to organisation responsible for maintenance of academic standards

Induction of additional team members into the process was achieved by a phased approach with limited advising roles, supervised assessed activities and what might be described as full internal verification of the individuals work until they felt confident of their abilities, Thomson et.al. (1996) describe one way of dealing with this as part of continued professional development of teachers. Only one persons involvement has been discontinued, due to over reliance on addressing all performance criteria of the NVQ rather than using them as a guide for students to base their AP(E)L claim.

Implementation concerns:

Identifying **what is being assessed and why**, has been briefly discussed, but became a major issue as more students offered experiential learning as the means of entry. It is important to provide clear guidance to the student who may wish to use the process of collecting and presenting information for both formative and summative assessment purposes. It has also been necessary to

remind staff to ensure that students actually **identify the experiential learning** rather than the experience they have undergone, a issue raised by recent comments from the external examiner over transparency of the process and actual assessment.

Pelling (1996) is among many who discuss the need for the **time and cost** involved in advising and assessing work to be identified and recognised. In reality these issues are no different from those affecting other assessment systems. If anything, because there is so much scepticism over the system, they have been identified and addressed in ways which many other systems have not. This has worked to the advantage of those involved as time allocations for timetable purposes have been made for both assessment and advising, as Oxlade (1996) notes, something often neglected when introducing new systems.

Reflecting on the implementation phase, it is clear that some of the issues faced might have been reduced had the course team been more familiar with the growing literature on the AP(E)L process (Evans 1988, 1989, 1992, BTEC 1990, Simosko 1991, Storen 1993, McHale and Selway 1994, SEEC 1995). The need to ensure good communications and recognise the contributions of others working in the assessment system has been a hard lesson.

Academic issues

Issues of reliability, validity and more importantly credibility (Simosko 1991, Chaney & Hill 1996) of the AP(E)L process are concerns of all stakeholders with interests to protect, including the academic community, the student and, in this case, employers. For the academic such concerns relate to ensuring maintenance of standards, for the student and employer it is concerns over cost effectiveness and the value placed upon the eventual degree. Different though the starting points may be, the concerns are similar and demand attention. Specific concerns focusing on the process and credibility of the AP(E)L assessment, particularly, over validity and reliability, mirror those anxieties expressed by Sadler (1987) who makes a case for the need for a strong framework as the basis for solid and sound qualitative judgements. Shackleton (1995) an economist, reflects on the employers requirements for rigorous assessment procedures.

The question of reliability in AP(E)L assessment is interesting, as each student presents totally different sets of personal reflection on their experiences. Therefore producing difficulties in identifying the reliability of such a process measured against traditional test/retest terms. But reliability may be enhanced by reducing the extent of bias suggested by Van Der Vleutin et.al. (1991). Simosko (1991) suggests that the extent of what is being assessed or marked is so wide as to make traditional measures of reliability useless. The student's ability to reflect and the depth of this reflection within an infinite range of experiences concerns the course team.

The need to separate the roles of the AP(E)L advisor and assessor is well documented and one which we ascribe to. In seeking to prove the system's reliability there is implied need to ensure that sampling of the work is undertaken along with moderation, hence the role of internal and external moderation assumes more importance. In considering aspects of validity there has been concern to ensure that the assessment process addresses areas closely linked with the issue of authenticity such as predictive, construct and content validity (Torrance 1995). Credit is given for any APL (certificated learning) by the course leader based on experience, knowledge of curriculum content and assessment processes. Where this is not known the student is then required to submit such proof. In the case of experiential learning the external examiner is empowered to review any such claims as they wish. To date, this has usually meant sampling of around 50% of claims, with a percentage submitted to internal verification procedures to ensure consistence. In addition any claim not agreed by the assessor is subject to further assessment by an experienced assessor. Where doubt has been raised over the acceptability, students are required to attend for interview before final decisions are made. It has been a major concern of the team and external examiner that the work produced by students should not just be a form of mini assignments marked for pure credit. Otherwise production of 16 essays or approximately 50000 words could suffice as demonstration of meeting the equivalent module assessment requirements of 240 credits. The use of a range of "evidence" is required from the student in the form of projects, papers, proposals along with the narrative explaining what they have learnt from the process. As a

guide it has been suggested that a piece of work of 2500 words will suffice as underpinning a claim for 30 credits. Of course this has to be quality work, it is reinforced that this is guidance and not a requirement!

Recording systems

The AP(E)L process is heavily dependant upon good administrative backup support systems. Tracing the process of advising and crediting prior learning and ensuring that this is recorded within the student record system has been fraught. A system has evolved and a Business School APEL Board considers and formally approves all APL and APEL claims. The Board is monitored by the Campus Academic Standards Group accountable to Academic Council, this quality assurance system is considered to help prove the validity and reliability of the process. Recording of the AP(E)L award is the responsibility of the course administrator and students receive formal notification of their claim in the same manner as students who have completed standard modules. AP(E)L credits are currently not graded with only the students' final year grades being considered for the honours classification. This could be seen as unfair and inequitable as normally the best of both second and third level credits can be used. However the team and students have not considered this as an issue to date.

Quality assurance procedures

Inherent in the introduction and maintenance of any assessment system is the quality assurance mechanism by which quality of the process is ensured (Booth 1996, Peters and Pokorny 1996). This system is no different and complies with university regulations. Although, the team are aware that operating what is deemed a suspect process produces continual demands to be seen as "squeaky clean". Despite having produced successful students graduating with good classifications, the process is still monitored and the course leader encourages this, as it provides an openness and transparency often missing in other assessment systems. The separation of the advisor/assessor roles coupled with the independent external examiner function, provides a system in which accountability is clearly demonstrated.

Evaluation

In-built evaluation opportunities exist for both students and the team with the aim that information gained will contribute to development of both the process and the validity of the outcomes. Issues which have arisen include:

- Ethical issues over the use of disciplinary and grievance procedures used to demonstrate the students learning from the situations
- Confidentiality of business plans, etc.
- The level of support and guidance required by students
- The need for formative feedback during the development stage of a students claim
- Lessons over the management of the process
- Interpretation of standards
- The identification of learning experienced
- The level of reflection required

With regards to the use of certificated learning, recognition has developed that the curriculum, assessment outcomes and evaluative criteria, as Sadler (1985) suggests, hold vital clues in determining acceptability of claims. Yet there is still more to learn, questions include searching for answers on valuable is non-certificated learning from in-house management programmes, does true AP(E)L need reflective statements or can it be credited without further narrative. For us then the journey in developing and using an alternative assessment system is not over but only just beginning.

A COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF AP(E)L ISSUES

The scope for comparing AP(E)L within the national and international arena, different subject areas, the HE or FE experiences and use for competence or academic assessment is immense. Therefore this comparative review will be restricted to AP(E)L in higher education and will cover such topics as common language, the research base, economic factors, purposes, uses and quality assurance issues (Table Four). These issues will be examined within the USA-UK-Australian perspectives mainly using the

experiences of the care professions. Not all the contributing factors listed can be explored within the context of this paper but have been identified to demonstrate the scope for future comparative analysis. This restriction is purely an attempt to reflect my own experiences within in a broader context using currently available literature and does not imply rejection of the work in other countries and academic subjects.

Comparative study as Broadfoot (1994) suggests, can help to illuminate the complex relationships of cause and effect and are inherent tools in stimulating debate within a systematic and analytical manner. Too much of the present literature is devoted to sharing of practice rather than examination of the fundamental theoretical underpinning assessment principles. Such sharing is important but there is a need for closer examination of, and research into, the issues that surround the concept of AP(E)L.

Table four: The comparative issues for AP(E)L

MAJOR AREA	FOCUS
Common international issues	Determining fitness for purpose Gaining acceptability Issues of validity and reliability Practical implementation concerns Economic concerns Issues of quality assurance
Commonality of language	Defining the terms Agreeing definitions Ownership issues AP(E)L/ RPL/PLA
The educational value base	Recognition of learning styles Acceptance of problem solving Recognise the needs of adult Learners Reflective learning and practice Competence v academic knowledge
Economic issues	Public accountability Identifying actual costs The effective, efficient, economy Debate Resource allocation v increased Demand
The uses of AP(E)L	For entry or exemption purposes Overcoming discrimination Raising professional status For education, job, employment FE or HE Stakeholder requirements
Developing a research base	Establishing a theory Shifting from good practice guides Borrowing and applying
Aspects of quality assurance	Issues of validity, reliability, sufficiency, transparency, fairness, currency, recency and relevance. Monitoring the process

A COMMONALITY OF CONCERNS

A review of the literature suggests that AP(E)L systems should be firmly contextualised within a national context. However, there is remarkable similarity faced by individual countries. These are mainly connected with issues of purpose, fitness for purpose, concerns over acceptability, validity and reliability. Equally, the more practical issues of practice, implementation and quality regimes required to support the system and assist in gaining acceptance demand attention. Economic issues related to time and cost of education are an underpinning feature across all countries. A major international concern lies in the gaining of acceptability within academic, student and employer communities.

COMMON LANGUAGE

An important issue is the commonality of language used to describe the process of accreditation of prior learning. This is of considerable importance as the emphasis given to terminology indicates the different perspectives and uses of the system in different countries. Such wide interpretation affects practitioners and indeed the variety of terms currently used in the UK suggests that there is still much developmental work to be undertaken before consistent application of the system is possible. In the USA, the term Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) remains the preferred option. In Australia, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is more commonly used. In the UK we have four terms, two generic and two more explicit to chose from: AP(E)L or Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning being used to describe both types of accreditation processes (APL and APEL); while APA or Accreditation of Prior Achievement is used to describe the complete process. The nature of the language used reflects the philosophical basis of the purpose of the assessment, e.g. prior qualifications for entry or experiential learning for entry and exemption. Common throughout all countries is a consensus that the central process is about the learning that occurs and not just crediting life experiences. (Simosko 1991, Evans 1992). Cohen et. al. (1993) discuss the issue that it is the learning from and not the experience that counts towards either entry or credit exemption. Recognition of the potential language barrier is

important in all contexts and needs to be understood by all key players and stakeholders.

THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE BASE

It is impossible to discuss comparative issues relating to the development and use of AP(E)L systems without some consideration of the beliefs, principles and educational values held by different groups, society and nations. The need to understand how people learn, reason and solve problems is fundamental in recognising the need for AP(E)L systems. Glaser (1984) provides a helpful insight into the educational theories which contribute to understanding how and why the process works. Evans (1992,1994) discusses the impact that AP(E)L can have on the curriculum opportunity and change within institutions, particularly, in the post experience field. Broadfoot (1995) considers that promotion of skills and competence learning requires the use of non-traditional assessment methods and a change in the culture of assessment practice. Cohen et.al (1993) provide a useful review of the theorists whose thoughts and ideas are perhaps at the heart of the reflective nature of the educational experience that AP(E)L systems are endeavouring to capture. Understanding the work of Lewin (1952), Schon (1983) and Kolb (1984) and others assists educationists to develop and use AP(E)L systems with confidence that the system can be as valid and reliable as any other assessment system.

ECONOMIC INFLUENCES

Provision of education costs and increasingly higher education is coming under closer examination in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and economy of its provision. Greater public accountability is a feature of the past decade (Audit Commission 1985, Evans 1987, Cave et.al. 1988). All countries identify that AP(E)L attracts costs in both academic time for advising and assessment and in administration time for record keeping, often more than the charges applied, discussion is ongoing as to how institutions can best recoup the investment required (Brooks 1993 and Pelling 1996). Debling (1992) identifies the need for cost

effective quality assurance procedures while Levin (1995) provides a model of cost-benefit analysis that are applicable to those proposing to develop and implement AP(E)L systems world-wide. Broadfoot and Gipps (1996) using recent assessment developments, indicate that quality assessment is time-consuming and costly requiring resources and training, reflecting previous points. With increasing demand for access to higher education and decreasing funding resources there is, without doubt, scope for more AP(E)L assessment in professional education. The use of AP(E)L whilst not openly supported by government, is partly encouraged by this need to provide value for money (VFM). Although, much of the VFM drive comes from students and employers, conscious of the need to reduce both time out and financial expenditure involved in obtaining additional educational qualifications.

Cohen et.al. (1993) reports that 79% of Australian universities identify AP(E)L initiatives, however no accurate figures have been found for evidence of AP(E)L provision in the UK. The majority of provision being found in the new universities and Institutes of Higher Education, it has proved difficult to identify provision in the traditional HE institutions including those of the post- Robbins era.

THE USES OF AP(E)L

The system of AP(E)L described in the section one is used totally as a means of gaining entry into higher education and of shortening the length of study for professionally qualified students wishing to top up or gain degrees. This is a common use in the systems reviewed. Simosko (1991) and Evans (1992) both allude to this use as a prime aim in gaining qualifications more expediently, to re-enter job markets, to gain promotion or change careers. The use of AP(E)L for meeting entry criteria affects a range of educational sectors and professional associations. In Accountancy and Personal Management evidence of learning is required for both entry and upgrading of membership. (IPD 1998). Further Education colleges are encouraged to make explicit AP(E)L procedures particularly for mature students and in the context of GNVQ programmes for the 16-19 age group. (BTEC 1990, Oxlade 1996). Within Higher Education the use of the Higher National Diploma/ Certificate

programmes have been a feature of progression from sub-degree to final or second year degree studies, a fact recognised by Dearing (1997) in his recent review. Thomson et. al. (1996) provide guidelines for Scottish teachers in the use and implementation of AP(E)L, bringing to the forefront the notion of measurement against notional student effort in determining the value of the credits sought within the context of staff development another area identified in the literature as important for the eventual success of any AP(E)L system.

In the UK, health care professionals appear to be the largest user of AP(E)L within the university sector. Skinner and Nganasurian (1996) explain the mechanisms necessary to ensure a satisfactory student experience a need supported by Booth (1996) who demonstrates the use of AP(E)L in Business Studies and Hotel and Catering. Whilst true also for Australia, RPL and competency testing are used in overcoming educational disadvantage in indigenous groups and immigrants. Gonczi, Hager and Athanasou (1993) provide a useful description of the common features that affect a number of professional groups in development of competency based assessment. An area I would argue is a fundamental feature where AP(E)L systems are used to fulfil higher education entry requirements. Girot (1993) makes a useful contribution for the use of reflective practice as the basis for AP(E)L.

Differentiating the purpose and use of AP(E)L for conveying credit exemption from modules, part of courses or indeed whole courses leads to the need to specify the type of credit given. My use which reflects generally accepted practice within the UK is to provide general credit which cannot be used for honours classification. Although, there is debate about the desirability of grading such credit, overall the impression is that this would be considered inappropriate. Cohen et al (1993), discuss the notion of what type of credit might exist a topic that Evans and Turner (1994) address while Rumpas (1996) amongst many address the issue of the maximum award that AP(E)L should attract. One point worth of consideration, based on my experience suggests, that unless a student is professionally competent, they find it almost impossible to demonstrate learning from experience, finding difficulties in demonstrating the extent of their previously acquired learning.

DEVELOPING AN AP(E)L RESEARCH BASE

The concept of AP(E)L is still relatively new having entered the world of education theory and practice as late as the 1970's. This means that much of the literature, both nationally and internationally, is still in the form of good practice guides rather than reasoned academic research on the pros and cons of the system itself. The search for educational theory expressly related to AP(E)L is still in its infancy and much has yet to be achieved. Furthermore there appears to be little comparative work outside of the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand. An initial search of the literature on the concept of AP(E)L, using terms specific to each country, produced a limited response. This dearth of research material has also been reported by McDonald (1992) who considers a perceived shortcoming of vocational assessment is lack of fundamental research and ineffective use of what exists. Gonczi et. al. (1993), recognising the enormous amount of literature assessment, felt that only a small proportion concentrated on performance assessment and less on the performance of professional work. Simosko (1991), in conclusion to her useful contribution, acknowledges the lack of research but suggests that what research has been conducted has had significant impact on the values underpinning AP(E)L. Perhaps it is significant that less than 150 references could be identified using current educational data bases. Cohen et.al. (1993) consider that extensive research has been undertaken by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in the USA but offers no firm evidence to support this claim. This apparent lack of identified research could well be the result of communication problems and the need to use the right key words in searching for information. In support of the case for research into AP(E)L, Evans (1992), in his descriptive account of the journey so far, recognises that his account is only a snapshot in time and it is for others to take up the challenge of providing systematic research. That this is going on is not in doubt. In my role as external examiner, I am aware of at least two masters dissertation and one other doctoral study in progress examining the influences of AP(E)L in two professional groups.

Little (1996) suggests that study of the international context of assessment systems helps develop understanding of the extent and variety of influences and pressures and that there is an inherent value

in comparative analysis in helping to provide understanding for ones own system. The small amount of comparative analysis undertaken for this assignment has opened up a new vision and expanded horizons for future research. Yet, fundamentally, AP(E)L as an assessment system faces similar challenges and debates affecting other assessment systems. The theories and principles described by Gipps(1994) and Rowntree (1987) can be adopted and applied to AP(E)L. They have to be contextualised, purposes clearly articulated but adopted they can be and prove useful. The dynamics, dimensions and nature of assessment, the maintenance of standards, the process and content, the decision and judgement making process are common to all assessment systems. What is different and exciting is the use of experiential learning to support the assessment decision, the responsibility of the student prior in the process and shift away from teacher domination. Cohen et.al. (1993) suggest an epistemological dimension to the use of AP(E)L, that forces assessors to rethink the worth of knowledge. Surely a question that all involved in assessment should frequently be asking.

ASPECTS OF QUALITY (ISSUES OF VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, SUFFICIENCY, CURRENCY, RECENCY AND RELEVANCE)

No review of AP(E)L systems can be complete without consideration of the issues surrounding validity and reliability. Objectivity is a purpose common to all assessment systems but there are pitfalls especially when applied to assessment within clinical situations. Reducing the amount of bias can lead to increased reliability of the assessment method as Van Der Vleutin, Norman and De Graaf (1991) explain. Their discussion over the reliability of clinical assessment echoes concerns expressed by AP(E)L assessor in the health care field.

The increased prominence of performance orientated assessment, of which much AP(E)L is only one example, Moss (1992) considers, places great demands on measures of validity, especially when considering issues of authenticity which cannot be meet by traditional approaches. A lesson that has been the experience of the system under discussion. It would appear that defining how to best

to measure aspects of validity and reliability of AP(E)L is a common problem. Possible solutions may be met by reviewing the advice offered by Cronbach (1989) and Messick (1989). Wiliam (1992) reinforces the importance of recognising the social context of assessment in seeking out measures of validity, his practical advice is particularly welcome when looking at the international implications on reliability and validity of AP(E)L systems. Torrance (1995) expands on issues of authenticity within both educational and political settings. The degree of complexity surrounding the measurement of validity and reliability of AP(E)L assessments, a result of the use of portfolios and other assessment tools, was recognised by Linn et.al. (1991) who suggested that there was a need to rethink the criteria by which the quality of educational assessments are judged.

Concepts of transparency and fairness are a consistent feature of discussions on AP(E)L systems. Linn et.al.(1991) Cohen et.al.(1993) and McHale and Selway (1994), all discuss various aspects of equity and equality within the system suggesting that these are issues which cross the international boundaries. In Australia there appears to have been an emphasis on the use of AP(E)L in correcting inequality of the indigenous population. While in the UK, there are numerous examples of the use of AP(E)L to overcome ethnic disadvantages. However, there has been greater use in overcoming educational disadvantage in the vocational professionals to meet demand for upgrading of qualifications and status.

Taking Nuttall's (1987) view that validity is the extent to which results can be generalised, validity of AP(E)L assessment can only be achieved longitudinal when students have completed their programme of study and have matched or exceeded the endeavours of other students. In programmes were there is no other course comparison, matching or generalising with other comparable qualifications may be the only means of demonstrating validity. But this is fraught with dangers as the literature on performance indicators shows indicates (Evans 1987).

AP(E)L systems are challenging assumptions over measurement of learning and can lead to enhanced standards in assessment because of the need to establish public criteria and set explicit standards. Cohen et.al.(1993) and Simosko (1991) clearly debate the

issues relating to validity, reliability along with the concept of sufficiency, relevance, currency and recency, areas which are not often addressed within other assessment systems. The close continual examination of process and content has an effect in ensuring maintenance of standards. Just as, determining the use of AP(E)L and avoiding the notion of double counting continually exercises the minds of those involved in policing the use of AP(E)L (Evans 1992).

CONCLUSION: LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE.

Having attempted a brief review of a few the issues impacting on AP(E)L systems in the national, international and subject arenas, my contention is that notwithstanding differences in, culture, society and educational theories there are remarkable similarities in the application, use and challenges facing all AP(E)L systems. As Simosko (1991) concludes, much can be learnt from the experience of others who have successfully implemented APL. Surely, this is the ultimate challenge for those of us who strive to develop, use and ensure quality of the system. Certainly my experience confirms that the more we learn about the process of assessment of AP(E)L, the more we need to review and evaluate current practice. Having utilised certificated prior learning successfully we are now faced by the need to assess and credit work-based learning within a competency framework. The need to clearly articulate the nature and meaning of experiential learning grows with each new cohort of students, leading to the need for further research and enlightenment. Perhaps the day is dawning as Evans (1992) hoped for: that AP(E)L will be integrated as a mainstream assessment activity within the higher education sector.

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THE GREAT UNCASHED: AP(E)L, CREDIT SYSTEMS AND SOCIAL INCLUSION WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION.[1]

A.P. Wailey / R. J. Simpson, University of East London[2]

By taking the assessment focus of Experiential Learning and linking it to Learning Development, we make a case for the broader interpretation of educational guidance; one that accommodates wider notions of academic coherence and assessment and that not only fits within a credit based system but also articulates wider personal and academic objectives that are consonant with credit as both form and content behind the concept of life long learning. This paper concerns itself with mature students, primarily in Britain but the ideas that inform the paper are currently part of initiatives being developed in Spain, with the University of Deusto, Bilbao, the University of Padua, Italy and the University of Lille, France.

In Britain, the implementation of the structural changes resulting from the introduction of modularisation and credit based systems can draw attention away from the quality of learning and teaching. The impact of recent organisational change has highlighted key questions about how we meet students' needs and how students maintain a sense of coherence of their learning experience in Higher Education. These questions are particularly significant with increased accessibility and student numbers rising to 1.3 million. Kennedy[3] and Dearing[4] and the Fryer Report[5] set out the challenge of turning the vision of a life long learning society into reality. This paper proposes a framework for academic guidance within a credit

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1 The following paper refers to the abstract of the conference

2 Robert Simpson is the English language Adviser at the University of East London where he works in the Learning Development Unit which promotes learning development entitlement across the university. Previously he has worked abroad and in secondary, adult, further and higher education in the U.K.. Tony Wailey is an AP(E)L and Mature Student Adviser at the Centre for Access, Advice and Continuing Education at the University of East London. Previously he has worked in guidance centres and adult, further and higher education. He has published in many fields particularly in relation to mature students and their learning demands.

3 Kennedy H.; The Kennedy Committee Report, *Learning Works*, May 1997.

4 Dearing R.; *H.E. in a Learning Society,* July1997.

5 Fryer R.; the Fryer Report, *Learning for the 21st Century,* November 1997.

based system of credit transfer and which recognises the widening range of different student experience by attaching increased importance to the assessment of prior certificated and experiential learning, AP(E)L, for the greater numbers of mature students entering Higher Education.

More flexible systems of curriculum delivery, which are designed to rationalise resources in the context of widening participation and mass expansion, have often been bolted on and are not without their critics.[6] Given the decline in resource in what is still a transitional phase of student expansion, it is essential that participants within the education process are encouraged to understand the processes involved in their own learning and are equipped to satisfy their own learning development needs. These needs are defined from the situation of the student i.e. the demands of the learning programme, the different levels of study, the demands of the assessment and the teaching methods used. [7] Students need guidance in information retrieval, the setting of learning objectives and more importantly in dealing with assessment.

In Knowledge and Human Interest, Habermas draws attention to the different stages of learning between its Technical, Hermeneutic and Emancipatory form[8]. The model we propose enables a framework for guidance in which individual learners can develop high level academic qualities and skills and chart their own personal development and achievement[9]. It is based on a three-fold model of assessment which involves a diagnosis of students' learning needs and achievements, an analysis of the demands of the academic disciplines they are to study and the inter-relationship of student-determined outcomes of learning and the outcomes of the academic programme. This mirrors communicative action achieved by critical reflection and assisted by critical dialogue[10].

6 Edwards R.; The Inevitable Future ; Post Fordism and Open Learning *Open Learning* Vol 6,2., 1992.

7 Hurley J.; *Supporting Learning* The Staff College, 1994.

8 Habermas J.; *Knowledge and Human Interest*, Heinemann,1971.

9 Simpson R. & Wailey A.; in Rivis[ed] *Managing Guidance in HE using Quality Assurance Guidelines: Selected Case Studies*, HEQC,1997.

10 Habermas op. cit

This model aims to encourage students to critically reflect on the learning processes they experience. In this way, a wider interpretation of assessment is put into practice which goes beyond an often instrumental end-of-module/collection of modules-assessment so prevalent with the introduction of credit bearing systems. Such an approach is consonant with many of the current questions being raised by the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) and which, for its part, the CVCP (Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals) also recognised, *strong and supportive educational guidance systems are vital to the provision of effective credit-based H.E.*[11].

The model recognises the importance of life long learning and the need for individuals to take responsibility for their own learning beyond formal education and requires H.E. to recognise that Learning Development is not a peripheral concern but key to student progression and achievement. As the mass expansion becomes the mass reality, guidance is vital in the management of academic studies and must be accommodated within the curriculum. Although this involves perspective transformations on the part of the university, a paradigm shift in the way that learning is acknowledged, how many credit based systems relate to the student's total learning experience? It is three years since this interview appeared in the British national press: *What appeared to offer choice and flexibility began to seem like a recipe for less variety and a lot of fragmentation.* [12]

This shift of perspective moves the discussion from the purely functional credit framework back to the learning needs of the learner. It is not a bi-polar argument between coherence without choice, signified by the "strong programme" of the single honours degree, and choice without coherence, in some form of cafeteria style pick'n mix system. The argument is more complex. In categorising the need for (pre-)entry, on-programme and exit guidance, the Robertson Report advocates the use of negotiated learning agreements and a programme of study *finally negotiated with and authenticated by an appropriate academic authority* [13].

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11 Trow M.; On Over Assessment, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 28 April, 1995.

12 Symonds K.; Personal View, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 21 April, 1995

13 Robertson D.; *Choosing to Change*, HEQC p.276 1995.

The core of higher education learning requires its participants to be able to construct their own critical frameworks with a greater conceptual mapping associated with critical reflection irrespective of specific cognate discipline. Any initiative which attempts to respond to the changing needs and characteristics of the labour market, and CATS represents a very significant response, must value and assimilate this core activity. Credit frameworks have to be more than a functional quick fix operation. Recent case studies illustrate this point(14).

Guidance for assessment places the learner at the centre of the learning activity. The following feedback from a level one perspective illustrates how a Position Paper, used iteratively throughout a professional award within the university credit framework, can help to,

… "reflect effectively and why reflect"

… "integrate knowledge and skills"

… "evaluate my experience in terms of professional expertise"

… "effectively use theories taught on the course"

… "develop better understanding which has informed my knowledge in theory and practice"

More importantly, for those for whom this exercise was not particularly helpful, it produced responses such as, "the importance of theory is overemphasised" and "the relationship between theory and practice in the workplace is not obvious". The contrasting comments echo the complexity of student feelings and the diversity of student prior experience and learning at this level. In terms of transition to different levels of study this has important lessons for credit accumulation and not least for life long learning. It emphasises the point that without guidance in bringing together an increasingly complex set of assessments, Higher Education credit based systems will remain little more than simple algorithms in the determining of an awards framework.

The writing of a Position Paper, an initial stage within our framework, attempts to make sense of the often non linear and

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14 Yorke M.; *Systemic Transfer of Skills*, Centre For Higher Education Development, Liverpool, 1995.

messy life and learning experiences on the one hand together with conventions of academic work on the other. The result is a conceptual mapping associated with credit which brings together the two areas of activity and the three fold method of assessment detailed earlier. The opening paragraphs of a Position Paper could be such as those outlined below,

"The three effects of every learning experience are the communication of knowledge, the development of skills and the shaping of attitudes. These are accomplished by such conditions as motivation of the student, distribution of practice and feedback of results. Learning is accomplished more effectively if the material is meaningful to the student. Our learning overall is a process of association. These associations will lead us to transfer our responses to new situations. We learn to think and solve problems by both convergent and divergent thinking." [15]

Life so far for me has been a continuous learning process and the following extract from *Psychology for Everyman*, reflects in some way my professional development. My main aim is to enhance my knowledge and expertise and demonstrate my ability to perform in a professional and academic capacity at level three. I was born in Mauritius from a family of teachers and nurses. I have two brothers and two sisters. Our upbringing was strict and very disciplined and this sense of discipline has been my major direction throughout my life and career. I had a great deal of respect and almost fear for my father and as children we could not allow ourselves to get too close to him. This situation however was reversed when I nursed him through a serious illness."

The juxtaposition of and reference to academic texts and personal experience are encouraged as a source of analysis and validation; learning takes place, whatever its source, and is therefore worthy of assessment and credit.

Recent reports situate lifelong learning as a quest for an individual's continual pursuit of learning, and so focus attention on a learner's needs and guidance entitlement. Both Kennedy and Fryer articulate progression by means of a qualification framework but one which places people before structures and attaches labels to learning

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15 Skurnik L.& George F.; *Psychology for Everyman*, Macmillan, 1974

programmes not to the learners themselves. In this attempt to place the learner at the heart of his/her programme, there has to be the connecting thread of making sense of past experiences and turning them into learning. Just as the distinction between traditional and non traditional students has become obsolete in the new universities, it is worth remembering that over 79% of the three million students in FEFC colleges are over the age of twenty. To make sense of this experience requires systematic guidance into the processes of systemic critical reflection and assessment.

SKILLS	*REALISATIONS*	*AP(E)L PRODUCT*	*PHASE*
THRESHOLD	*ROAs Skills Audit/diagnosis Action Planning Learning Agreement*	*1. Position Paper*	*PRE - ENTRY*
		2. Needs Analysis	*ENTRY*
KEY	*Profiling Learning Outcomes Careers/Education Units Monitoring & Tracking*	*3. Work-based Learning Out comes*	*ON- COURSE*
TRANSFER- ABLE	*Additional Support ... ROAs Progression Counselling Transcripts*	*4. Critical Review* *PORTFOLIO*	*EXIT*

Table 1: Higher education learning development

The figure above sets out the possible components of the delivery of Learning Development, second column, and the AP(E)L process, third column. The AP(E)L column represents the four separate products a student produces which go towards a final portfolio.

They correspond with the four phases (column four) of a student's HE career, Pre-Entry, Entry, On-course and Exit.

Students have noted some of the following issues about constructing a portfolio based upon the above methodology i.e. on guidance associated to assessment for learning development and credit,

> "On the whole, AP(E)L has been an enjoyable experience. It has enhanced my self awareness and given me the opportunity to personally reflect on my past, and extract significant aspects relevant to my future development. It has awakened inert qualities such as the appreciation of time and my ability to plan and organise study around work and family life[...] This insight into Higher Education has also helped dispel the awesome assumptions I previously held of studying at University. In the short period of time I have learnt a tremendous amount, but I feel that there is room for further development in analysis, reflection and self assessment. It has increased my motivation and assertiveness in reading and analysing recent research materials[...] In undertaking the AP(E)L programme it has allowed me to progress through several stages of educational development and prepared me to have the potential to study at level three [...]"

Such a model has advantages not only for the student but also the institution, and can help achieve a higher quality of a student's total experience. In short, where would this methodology interact with "the totality of the student's learning experience" and importantly, how would it demonstrate the way in which guidance and Learning Development is managed within the whole institution? AP(E)L and Learning Development models could usefully serve their different but mutual ends to implement such key aspects as, diagnosis, action planning, the recording of progress and tracking of students. More significantly, it would assist academic performance in establishing a method of guidance which would incorporate the wider role of assessment in the learning process within the application of credit accumulation and transfer schemes.

There should be no reification of the organisational framework. From the FEDA (Further Education Development Agency) perspective, Unitisation is not the same as CATs or ECTs, the British and European credit transfer schemes, but with a completely different methodology of how learning is arrived at; yet the same problems as listed above could equally apply; namely how does the holistic coherence of placing the learner at the centre of his/her study enable students to assess themselves in the light of that learning. How, through their life and experiences, can they link this assessment to the requirements of a professional (vocational) or academic programme.

Research conducted on a group of nurses about to enter a higher education programme with the equivalent of 240 credit points, equivalent to two thirds of a British Honours degree, illustrated that those that had accrued these points through experiential knowledge did as well, if not better, than those who entered with accumulated certificated learning, in the final part of their studies. All, however, noted the benefits of a pre-entry learning development programme based upon the above methodology although this was initially resisted by those who had accumulated certificated learning.

The AP(E)L process, within this context of pre(entry), on-programme and exit assessment, involves four exercises and can operate at any level. The exercises are a Position Paper, a personal profile with Needs Analysis based upon a specific taxonomy of learning achievement, documented past and present learning outcomes. The overall analysis of this process of the student's learning would be finalised in the form of a 1,500 word narrative, the Critical Review, a reflective learning exercise based upon the concept of the "Reflective Practitioner". The Critical Review calls on students to reflect on and assess the process of the component parts of their programme of study at different levels.

The model characterises the different attributes of the programme and how the student engages with them to produce a final, summative evaluation. Such an evaluation can also serve as a synoptic planner for further development and more importantly bring the processes of coherence together. Ironically, what modularity and credit based systems have exposed in Britain is the relationship between learning and the learner and more importantly,

a shift in focus of that learning relationship beyond that of the tutor-disciple relationship.

Credit based systems require systematic guidance structures so that students can reconfigure the learning process and make it more integrative ([16]). This would combat the critics who argue that modularity restricts intellectual growth and that it promotes skills over knowledge, and that bite sized credit fragments and limits broader educational experience and is more suited to vocationally-based degrees than value-based degrees ([17]). These arguments ignore the flexibility that credit has brought to modes of delivery together with the social inclusivity of different forms of learning that have supported students in the assessment of their prior learning.

In Britain the three common themes of the Dearing, Kennedy and Fryer Reports are the importance of maintaining and extending a Learning Culture, schematising a suitably flexible Qualifications Framework and providing a focus for Advice and Guidance in the capacity to understand outcomes of learning, assessment criteria and the processes generally associated with critical reflection. In this conceptualisation of learning, the distinctions raised earlier between the technical, the hermeneutic and the emancipatory have an added resonance in that they give critical dialogue to guidance and assessment issues rather than as a pre-ordained client relationship in the management of learning.

Unless frameworks of educational guidance, undisturbed by hidden assumptions and vastly unequal power relationships ([18])are actively developed by institutions at local and a regional levels, the issues raised by modularisation and credit based systems will continue to deflect meaningful discussion about how the learning needs of students are met. If students are to maintain a sense of coherence and so fully benefit from the introduction of a credit based system, they need to be able to construct their own critical frameworks. Systems must allow for conceptual mapping and critical reflection irrespective of specific cognate discipline.

These are ideas that are not new within Britain but still require careful thought in their implementation. Within this context our

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16 Yorke op. cit
17 New Times, 1990-1992 as quoted in Edwards R. op. cit
18 Mezirow J.,et al, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood,* Jossey-Bass, 1990.

European partners are seeking to develop their own approximate initiatives from a very different set of power relationships but ones which share common assumptions to the above in the redressing of social exclusion.

THE ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: A COMPARISON OF CURRENT PRACTICE WITHIN THE UK AND FRANCE

Pat Davies, City University, Jim Gallacher and Fiona Reeve, Glasgow Caledonian University

INTRODUCTION

This paper arises from our work on a comparative project "Validation des acquis professionnels" funded under the European Community's LEONARDO Programme. Working with colleagues from the University of Lille 1 and the University of Valladolid we have begun to explore how the different partner institutions approach the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). It also draws on the research which Pat Davies is undertaking in France on the impact of credit based systems of learning funded by the ERSC. These projects have enabled us to examine in some detail a comparison between the APEL systems in the countries represented in the projects. However, since in Spain APEL is still at the debate and negotiation stage, this paper focuses on France and the UK where procedures and practice are in place. Although in both countries APEL exits outside higher education - in further education in the UK and in secondary level vocational training in France - this paper concentrates on higher education and seeks to locate developments in the context of that sector.

APEL is just one aspect of a much larger move towards greater flexibility within the higher education sector. It reflects the belief that individuals can learn in a variety of contexts outwith the institution, such as paid or unpaid work, and that this learning may be broadly equivalent to that gained more formally within an institution. The accreditation of prior experiential learning provides a mechanism for individuals to receive recognition within formal higher education programmes for their prior learning from experience. This recognition may be granted in the form of access to a programme - where the individual lacks the usual pre-requisite

qualifications or entry requirements - or as credit within a programme - where the individual is awarded part(s) of a qualification. Thus, APEL is one element of the more general process of the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) which also includes the possibility of credit or access on the basis of prior formal (certificated) learning. In some institutions, however, the general term APL has become closely identified with the accreditation of formal certificated learning only. Whatever the nomenclature it is clear that APEL and APL are intended to provide useful routes into and through higher education for adult learners, enabling them to build on relevant learning and avoid repetition. In this sense it can make an important contribution to the process of lifelong learning as individuals seek to create their own learning pathways from of a variety of learning opportunities.

The paper will begin by tracing the origins of APEL development within France and the UK and by describing the formal frameworks for APEL which have been established. It is suggested that these frameworks have been influenced to a large degree by the general context of higher education in each country; key similarities and differences in these contexts will be explored. The ways in which different conceptions of learning and knowledge have influenced approaches in the two countries will also be raised. At an institutional level the methods by which APEL has been implemented in practice will be contrasted. Finally an attempt will be made to identify the level of activity in the two countries.

ORIGINS

In general in both countries, APEL can be seen as a response to two kinds of social and economic pressures for change. One relates to the democratic imperative, concerned with maximising and widening participation in education and training in general and in HE in particular. This has been associated with giving greater value and recognition to experiential learning which can occur in a variety of contexts, including the vocational or professional. The second relates to an economic imperative which is concerned with the measurement and management of the skills and competencies of the workforce (in both public and private sector organisations) and with

the need to improve the skills base of the labour force in general in the interest of quality and competitiveness in global markets. These are both part of a wider debate about the need for lifelong learning and in the European context have been given added impetus by the European White Paper on Lifelong Learning (1995) and by funding programmes such as LEONARDO (including the project referred to here).

In both countries two kinds of APEL have developed over the last 10-15 years. APEL for access and APEL for credit. To some extent these distinctions correspond with the two imperatives identified above - APEL for access has been associated with the democratic imperative and APEL for credit with the economic. However, they also cross cut these themes, and do so increasingly, since access can be about improving the qualifications of the labour force and credit can be about providing new opportunities to learners. At a more detailed level of policy history there are differences in the origins of APEL in the two countries.

France

Interest in APEL developed in France in the early 1980s primarily among practitioners in continuing education, influenced by developments in Canada, especially Quebec, during the 1970s. This was taken up by two departments of central government: the Vocational Training Division of the Ministry of Employment *(la Delegation à la Formation Professionnelle du Ministère de Travail)* concerned with young people without qualifications, and the Higher Education Directorate of the Ministry of Education (*la Direction des Enseignements Supérieurs du Ministère de l'Education Nationale)* concerned with adults wishing to enter university after a break from formal education. For the universities, the policy became formalised as part of a more general reform of higher education in 1984 and was specifically set out in a decree in 1985 authorising universities to validate personal and vocational/professional skills (*validation des acquis personnels et professionnels)* for the purpose of entry to higher level study - i.e. APEL for access.

Alongside this development, were shifts in the socio-economic context which were creating changes in training provision and in the way both individuals and companies viewed and valued education and training. Feutrie (1997) has identified three strands in particular

which are relevant. First, the idea that the workplace is a location not just for the utilisation of learning imported from outside, mostly provided by the formal institutions of education and training, but also for the actual production of knowledge and skills (Barbier, Berton et Boru 1996). This has major implications both for the way in which work is, could be, or should be organised and for the relationship between companies and providers of training. Second, the idea that a career might in future be discontinuous, interspersed with periods of unemployment, training, and retraining for a different kind of work several times in a lifetime, with again significant implications for individual education and training needs and the way in which providers might meet them. Third, the individualisation of teaching and learning seen, for example, in the creation of resource centres for individual use, modularization and credit accumulation in the universities and the development of job specifications (*référentiels-métiers*) by the occupational organisations (*branches professionnelles*).

Official policy took a further step forward in the early 1990s: an Act in 1992 implemented through a decree in 1993 which introduced the possibility of awarding part of a diploma (to a maximum of all but one of the units/modules in the course) through a process of accreditation of other studies, work experience, or skills and knowledge acquired at work (*les études, les expériences professionnelles où les acquis professionnels*) i.e. APEL for credit. Since the universities are the guardians of the national diplomas at higher education level this constituted an important shift away from a development led by individual members of staff committed to change and towards an institutionalisation of policy and practice. This shift was mirrored in thinking about the way in which APEL may be used in companies: away from the idea of a method for individual, personal development (although that remained an option) and towards a growing recognition of the potential of APEL as a tool in developing HRD policies.

UK

The emergence of APEL took place in, and was conditioned by, the changing context of higher education (HE) in the UK. These changes included the move from an "elite" system serving 14% of the 18-19 year old age group in the early 1980s to a "mass" system

serving 30% in the early 1990s. In addition the reform of higher education in 1992 ended the binary system of universities and polytechnics. Thus the university sector now included highly vocational programmes which valued different kinds of knowledge and skills to those emphasised within many traditional courses, particularly at the undergraduate level. These changes were accompanied by a re-examination of the role of HE in the process of economic development. As indicated above within this overall context two main types of socio-economic factors can be helpful in explaining the development of APEL. Firstly a practitioner led democratic imperative to widen and increase access to new student groups and to encourage greater heterogeneity in the HE population. Secondly the economic imperative to combat skills shortages in the labour market and to emphasise vocationalism in the curriculum.

The extent to which these two imperatives have led to the implementation of APEL within institutions has varied considerably across the sector. Formal APEL mechanisms are more commonly found within the "new" universities (ex-polytechnics) than in the pre-1992 universities. This partly reflects their different traditions, for example the greater emphasis on widening access and vocational learning in the new universities, and the different identities which they are now establishing with the emerging system of mass higher education in Britain. But it also reflects the predominance of centralised systems of management within the new universities which make it easier to establish institution-wide APEL procedures. This centralised approach can be traced back to the legacy of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA)[1] which, in a number of important areas, encouraged a common approach across the polytechnic sector. In contrast the older universities tend to have decentralised or devolved management structures where initiatives such as APEL (where they exist) remain localised and largely obscured from the rest of the institution.

The roots of many current APEL systems in the new universities can be traced back to earlier work of the CNAA. In this respect two developments are worthy of note. Firstly their decision in 1985 to commission the Learning from Experience Trust[2] to undertake one of the first major UK projects on APEL (see Evans, 1988).This

project provided a focus for initial development amongst 10 polytechnics and by the end of the decade more than 20 polytechnics were involved in APEL (Evans and Turner, 1993). In these developments the American experience, and particularly that associated with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)[3], was a major source of information and guidance to UK institutions. Secondly the CNAA was also involved in establishing a "credit framework" which encouraged a number of institutions in the polytechnic sector to establish credit accumulation and transfer schemes (CATS). Since credit frameworks facilitate the award of credit through a variety of modes, including APEL, the establishment of these schemes in the polytechnics, which were later to become the new universities, is another factor which has facilitated the growth of APEL in that sector. Some of the pre-1992 universities have also begun to adopt similar structures and we are now seeing the emergence of common frameworks, such as the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT)[4] scheme, which span entire countries or regions.

Given the traditional autonomy of HE in the UK, government and its agencies rely on techniques of persuasion rather than legislation to steer institutional policy and practice, in contrast to the situation in France with its greater emphasis on a national system. For example, the White Papers of 1987 and 1991 (DES 1987; DES 1991) emphasised the need to widen access and provide more explicitly vocational programmes of study, giving encouragement to alternative entry arrangements including APEL. Subsequently, the Funding Councils, first the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC) and later the Higher Education Funding Council for England and Scotland (HEFCE and SHEFC), and the DfEE funded a series of projects for widening participation and developing APEL. Since small amounts of such funding tend to have a significant impact on institutional innovation, it is likely that these projects have made an important contribution to developments. However, as will be discussed later, at present there seems to be no clear data to measure the extent of APEL arrangements.

FORMAL FRAMEWORKS

France

As indicated above within France rights to *validation des acquis professionnels* are enshrined in law. Thus, in keeping with traditional practice in higher education, the framework for APEL has been formally established on a national basis. Four texts relating to APEL have been passed: the decree of 1985, enabling APEL for access; the law and decree of 1993, each relating to APEL for credit; and the *arrêté* of 1993 which sets out the content of the documentation required under the 1993 decree. The legislation gives the right to certain individuals to make a claim for APEL, indicates the number of submissions which can be made, and sets out the structure for the committee which will decide on the claim. Universities must respond to a request for *validation des acquis* but they are not obliged to give a reason if they reject the request. Applicants have the right to appeal to the President of the university and, if following a further rejection, they believe the law has not been adhered to they have the right of appeal to the *Tribunal administratif* which rules on the proper conduct of procedure, not on the content of the application.

The 1985 decree enables individuals who are over 20 years old and who have had a break from their initial education of at least two years, or three years if the break followed examine failure, to apply for admission to a university course at any appropriate level (post-baccalaureate) without the usual entry qualifications (e.g. baccalaureate or equivalent for the first diploma, licence for maitrise). Considerable prominence is given within the text of the decree to the structure of the *commission pédagogique* which is charged with making the decision regarding the claim. This committee must include at least two subject-based lecturers and one from continuing education. It can also include professionals from outside the HE sector, and where applications relate to courses to which they contribute more than 30% of the teaching, their presence is obligatory.

The 1993 decree applies to individuals who have 5 years of work experience, not necessarily continuous, in a field corresponding to the diploma within which they are making the application. The decree restricts candidates to one claim per year which must be

made against a given diploma in a particular institution. The claim must specify the exemptions which are requested by the candidate, which can in theory amount to all but one of the units required for the award. The content of the documentation (following the *arrêté* below) and the date for submission are to be specified annually by the institution for each course. In the case of the 1993 decree the decision on the claim is allocated to a *jury* which must contain relevant university staff and professionals (although the latter can not be in the majority). The *jury* is charged with examining the documents which have been presented and verifying if the candidate has the *acquis professionnels* which correspond to the level of understanding and aptitude required. To help them in this judgement they may request an interview with the candidate.

The *arrêté* which was issued at the same time specified that the *dossier* submitted by the candidate should comprise:

- a C.V. which includes an indication of the motivation of the candidate and the objectives which have been pursued;
- the qualifications which they hold or training programmes followed;
- a declaration that they have made no other claims under the 1993 decree in that year;
- a description of the functions they carry out in their workplace (which considers the candidate's role in relation to the organisation); and
- information relating to the organisation of the workplace.

This strong national framework for APEL enshrined in law confers on individuals the right to progress their education and training. However, in order to exercise these rights individuals must firstly be made aware of the possibility of *validation des acquis professionnels* and secondly receive support for undertaking the process. Therefore structures need to be put in place by the institutions in order to implement the legislation. Again the government has taken a lead by establishing a working group drawn from different institutions to develop a common approach. Thus *the Ministre de l' Education Nationale (MEN)*, has exercised considerable influence over the policy and practice in APEL.

UK

In contrast to the French situation there is no overall framework for APEL within the UK. Practice has developed on an institution by institution basis and differences can be observed in the terminology used and the emphasis given to access and credit. These differences are particularly evident between the old and the new universities. While one must be cautious about commenting on APEL provision in the absence of systematic data, it does appear that the older universities are less likely to have an explicit institutional framework for APEL. Although opportunities for APEL may exist they are rarely articulated in an institution wide form, and since they mostly relate to access, practice tends to draws on the existing expertise of admission tutors rather than policy formulated at an institutional level.

The new universities are far more likely to have developed an institutional framework for APEL or at the least policies set out at the faculty or department level. Many of these frameworks place considerable emphasis on establishing structures for awarding university credit through APEL and not just providing access. Where frameworks do exist they often appear to draw on the approach taken by the CNAA and many of these universities were also influenced by the American experience and the principles promoted by CAEL. Thus similarities can be observed in the frameworks which are now in place. For example many stipulate that assessment should not be carried out by staff who have been involved in supporting the APEL process with students. The proportion of APEL credit which can be claimed and the use of external assessors are other points of commonality. Given this level of agreement it has been possible for institutions to work together to develop joint approaches to APEL. In recent years both the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT) scheme and the South East England Consortium (SEEC) have developed joint approaches to quality assurance in their areas, (see SCOTCAT, 1995 and SEEC, 1995). These initiatives have encompassed institutions with a variety of traditions including the older universities. Thus, despite the absence a national framework for APEL considerable commonality can be found in practice and this is

becoming increasingly recognised, and perhaps strengthened, by developments within the sector.

IMPLEMENTATION

France

The 1985 decree received a lukewarm response from the universities: a survey in 1992 showed that only one third of universities had effectively implemented the decree, one third had some arrangements in some departments organised by some staff, and one third had done nothing at all (Feutrie 1997). However, a later survey in 1996 (Feutrie, 1996) showed that the 1992 Act had to some extent unblocked or re-launched the intentions of the 1985 decree but that there was still a wide variation in the extent to which either or both of the 'possibilities' had been exploited, in the interpretation of the regulations and in the number of candidates considered across the university sector. Among the 60 universities which responded (70% of 86 universities) 5 had done nothing, 12 had applied only the 1985 procedures and 43 had applied both the 1985 and 1993 decrees. Despite, therefore, the legislation which confers a universal right to individuals and a universal obligation on universities to respond, it is clear that there is considerable variation across the country in the extent to which APEL is actually taking place. It is clear that implementation depends significantly on the extent to which the universities are proactive in developing their structures and procedures and promoting these arrangements among prospective clients - both individuals and companies.

Across the country there appeared to be three organisational models developed by the universities for the implementation of the policy set out in the two decrees. The first involved a centralised organisation, often led by the Vice President of the university and usually giving a central role to the Continuing Education Service. The second involved a decentralised model either somewhat 'anomic' - led by individual, isolated members of the teaching staff, with course leaders developing arrangements for their specific courses and with some departments refusing to engage at all, or a rather more managed, but nevertheless differentiated, departmental approach. The third involved a centralised approach but one

managed by administrative staff (*le service de scolarité*) rather than by academic or teaching staff.

The first of these is the one which seems to be most frequently held up as the model of good practice and which is being encouraged by the Ministry of Education.

Feutrie (1997) has identified three approaches underlying the development of APEL processes. The first puts a great deal of emphasis on the idea of proof; it assumes that the decrees do not exempt candidates from submitting concrete evidence or submitting themselves to some form of test or verification (Aubret et Meyer, 1994). It usually requires some form of professional dissertation which warrants the 'higher' element of a higher education award; and the onus of proof is entirely on the candidate. The second approach is based on the idea of a portfolio; it involves a process of analysis of personal, social and professional experience in order to identify the skills and competencies required. The portfolio itself is a way of making the learning accessible to others and, accompanied by evidence, of convincing them that the award is warranted. While the prime responsibility rests with the candidate, the production of the portfolio is usually supported by a tutor or counsellor. The main problem with this approach is that it is a heavy workload and requires a major investment of time and energy on the part of the candidate. The third approach has some similarities with the second but is a simplified, 'lighter' version - a *dossier* rather than a portfolio. Two types are used: the first, for access, includes a summary of necessary information - initial and continuing education and training courses taken, work experience with particular reference to key learning 'moments', personal and social experience, individual achievements; the second, for credit, invites the candidate additionally to analyse in detail the work experience which forms the basis of the application and which provides the evidence of ability and potential. No further explicit evidence of learning is required. Both types presuppose a dynamic relationship between the candidate and an advisor, and subsequently also a member of the teaching staff.

The third of these approaches is favoured by the Ministry of Education and emanates from a Working Group set up under the

auspices of the Ministry to examine the implementation of the two decrees. The Group has produced a set of proformas: the application forms which form the basis of the dossier to be completed by candidates and a grid for analysing courses of study. Various seminars and conferences have been organised, most recently in December 1996, to disseminate information, share experience and involve all the partners - universities, unions and employers - in the debate as a way of encouraging them to develop systems and procedures. The Ministry has recently approved an Action Plan which includes support for a Resource Centre and Help Desk, the development and dissemination of materials and good practice, and systematic monitoring and evaluation. The Working Group has been granted approximately £45,000 for 2 years to carry out the Plan.

There is generally no charge to the applicants for *validation des acquis* for access, under the 1985 arrangements: the cost is integrated into the fee for the course (where there is one) and from the institutional perspective is part of the general government funding for enrolment, guidance and induction of students. For *validation des acquis* under the 1993 arrangements, the present charge is around £300 (although it varies between universities). However, most candidates are funded by their company, by one of the training funds, or by the State if they are unemployed. Universities can also include an application for finance to support implementation of the legislation in their 4 yearly funding contract with the State.

UK

Any consideration of the ways in which APEL policies have been implemented in the UK is hampered by the absence of systematic data. This problem will to some extent be addressed by the work of a SOCRATES project currently being undertaken by the University of Louvain, Belgium, the University of Warwick, UK and the University of Barcelona, Spain. The project aims to develop a database of the institutions across the England and Wales which are using APEL for access, advanced standing or credit. It is hoped that the data-base will be available by the end of 1997. One small scale study, which focused on APEL for credit, was recently undertaken as part of the SHEFC funded "APEL in the West of Scotland" Project (Reeve, 1997 forthcoming). This confirmed that APEL was

mainly being used for credit by the new universities or by a particular faculty (Education) of an older university (Strathclyde).

In the latter case, prior to its merger in 1993 with the existing university, this faculty had been a separate college of education with degrees validated by the CNAA. This small study therefore tends to support the conjecture that APEL is being used in different ways by the old and new universities.

This paper will illustrate the ways in which APEL is being implemented differently within the new and old universities by examining practice in the two UK institutions which are currently participating in the LEONARDO Project.

GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY - A NEW UNIVERSITY

Within the 'new universities' APEL for access is often devolved to individual departments and in particular to admission tutors. However, where the award of credit is concerned more structured approaches emerge, and many institutions have developed centralised models of implementation. Often a APEL co-ordinator or unit has been appointed to take forward policy and practice. These central units may also be responsible for processing the actual claims which can relate to any area of the university's provision. Clearly this would involve liaison with staff from the particular subject area for the purposes of assessment and perhaps student guidance. Glasgow Caledonian University is an example of an institution which originally began to implement APEL using a centralised model but which has in recent years attempted to encourage greater diversity and greater ownership by departmental staff of the process.

As part of the recent review of APEL at Glasgow Caledonian existing documentation has been revised and a new "General University Framework for APEL" will shortly be published. This attempts to set out clearly for departments and programme organisers the elements which must be in place if APEL is to be offered within their courses. The emphasis within the framework is on establishing a structure which will ensure the quality of APEL provision whilst providing some scope for diversity in the way that

the structure is actually implemented. The central unit will also be producing a revised manual for staff and a handbook for students which can be used as templates. Within certain boundaries, departments are encouraged to tailor the APEL process to the needs of their students or subject area.

As in the rest of the UK, the APEL model used within GCU places considerable emphasis on the presentation of tangible evidence of learning. A variety of assessment tools are available to gather this evidence including the portfolio, a project format, observation, simulation, written assignments and oral exams (although in the past the portfolio format has tended to predominate). It is the students' responsibility to provide the evidence and to ensure that it demonstrates the achievement of the learning claimed. This evidence is assessed by university subject experts and made available to an external examiner. The recommendation regarding the claim is then made to the appropriate assessment board which ties the assessment process into the overall quality assurance procedures of the institution.

In the past the charging policy for APEL has varied across the institution depending on the degree to which it was perceived as a means of attracting new target groups or, alternatively, as a mechanism for awarding credit like any other. Thus in some situations only nominal fees were charged whilst in others the costs of the individual tuition provided for the APEL process was passed on to the students (up to the usual module fee). Attempts are now being made to move towards a university wide policy on this issue which will include the setting of a fee. At the same time, group support mechanisms are being promoted to provide a more cost efficient means of supporting candidates.

Although a centralised approach of the type described above is fairly common within the new university sector alternative models which operate on a faculty by faculty basis can also be found. This is particularly likely in institutions where APEL first developed within a particular faculty, such as health, and where it may be directed towards particular ends, such as the completion of programmes which build on the professional certificated and experiential learning of a specific target group. In such cases the administration of the APEL system is likely to occur on a faculty basis with only loose

links existing between faculties. A completely devolved approach, of the type described below, where APEL is managed at a department level, is less likely to occur in the new universities.

CITY UNIVERSITY - AN OLDER UNIVERSITY

The older universities tend not to have an institution wide framework managed or led centrally. This reflects both a general difference in the approach to institutional management where much more faculty or departmental autonomy has been the norm and the regulations of most universities which leave considerable discretion over admissions with the faculty or department. Often this is in turn devolved to admissions tutors and course teams and APEL therefore tends to be initiated and developed at that level. City University as an example of a pre 1992 university is a relatively small institution, and sees itself as "professional", more than 50% of the students are postgraduate; nevertheless it is an interesting example of such an institution in the field of APEL. In general, there is less flexibility at undergraduate than at post graduate level since much of the postgraduate provision, particularly Masters programmes, is "professional" in the sense that it is closely related to a professional body qualification or to the workplace, especially programmes offered in the Business School. However, a number of specific arrangements exist in degree programmes. For example, the degree in Optometry admits students into the programme with advanced standing on the basis of experience and participation in certain professional courses; and the university participated in a "flexible learning" project funded by HEFCE which established arrangements for APEL for credit for the whole of year one of the degree in Systems Science.

More common are arrangements for Masters courses where the university regulations state that 75% of entrants should have a first degree or equivalent and that the remaining 25% may be admitted on the basis of experience and/or other qualifications. In addition it is possible to make course specific arrangements which exceed the 25% quota. How this will be done is part of the course document which is scrutinised by both the department/faculty Board of Studies and by the Courses Committee of the University (a sub-

committee of Senate) although in practice these give considerable discretion to course directors and admissions tutors. APEL for credit is in principle dealt with in a similar way and subject to approval by external examiners as are all submissions for assessment. In addition, the Board of Studies has a responsibility to monitor retention and progression and to make an annual report to the Courses Committee and within this framework APEL arrangements are likely to require particular attention. Also, at Masters level, programmes are both more likely to be modular which facilitates APEL and to be part-time and/or work-based or to have a work-based or professional project as a major element of the programme. Various Masters courses, for example Health Management and some of the MBAs, have links with the public sector and private sector companies to allow work-based learning to be taken into account in a number of ways, often through negotiated employer-specific arrangements. Since the market in London for Masters students, particularly in courses leading to business and professional qualifications, is very competitive, such an approach enables more responsiveness, flexibility and creativity on the part of the departments in relation to their particular client or target group, particularly the major companies. It also reflects the cultural ethos of many of the older universities in which the departments or course teams jealously guard their authority in relation to admissions and in relation to their particular professional networks and contacts. It does not, however, favour an institution-wide approach to the development of APEL. There are of course channels of communication between departments, and the Courses Committee constitutes a collection point for information and experience, but dissemination tends to be reactive rather than proactive. This onus is on the member of staff wishing to develop APEL arrangements to find out what precedents and experience exist in the institution and to seek them out as appropriate. It is not easy therefore to give an account of how APEL works in the University, except in this very general sense, or indeed to say how much of it there is in numerical terms.

KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING AND THE APEL PROCESS

In both countries there is considerable academic interest in different forms of knowledge and learning, in particular the differences between that which is developed in and through experience or professional practice and that developed in and through formal academic study.

There is no space here to explore the full complexity of these issues and this is not the purpose of this paper. However, it is important to identify the key strands in the debate in order to relate them to the APEL arrangements which have been put in place and which are continuing to develop. In France the key distinction is between *saviors d'action* and *savoirs theoriques*, see for example Barbier (1996), Barbier et al (1996) and Decomps and Malglaive (1996). These echo the distinctions made in the UK between professional knowledge and disciplinary knowledge, see for example Eraut (1992), Barnett (1996) and Becher (1996). Associated with these distinctions are a number of key questions. What are the processes through which different kinds of knowledge are produced, and what is the role of the universities and other types of organisations in these processes? What is the relationship between them? What is the relative status of these different kinds of knowledge? What are the processes through which these different kinds of knowledge are learned or acquired?

What is interesting for the purpose of this paper is that these debates seem to be more tightly coupled to the practice of APEL in France than they are in the UK, and there seem to be two reasons for this. In the course of the projects on which this paper draws, it has been apparent in discussions about policy and practice of APEL in various seminars and public events that the distinctions are connected to important political considerations. If the *savoirs d'action* are located outside the university and *savoirs theoriques* are located within it, then *validation des acquis professionnels* (*savoirs d'action*) by the university for credit within a national or university diploma (rather than a professional diploma) is highly significant in terms of the role and influence not just of the universities but of all the social actors, including the unions, companies, and the *branches professionnelles*. In terms of the practice of APEL, the distinction is also important

since university staff are accustomed to measuring *savoirs theoriques* but not to measuring *savoirs d'action*. The relationship between the two and the extent to which the former can be inferred from the latter, or to which evidence of the latter can be taken as evidence of the present existence or future potential for the former is highly problematic. This has helped create considerable interest in the development of tools - *outils* - including those which are designed to enable staff to identify the theoretical component in the students learning. There is also considerable interest in exploring the 'private' or hidden theory embedded in the students' experiential learning.

In the UK the academic debates about different types of knowledge, the relationship between knowledge and skills, and the respective roles of formal education institutions (FE and HE) and companies in what one might call the politics of assessment, has most prominently been played out with respect to the development of NVQs and SVQs[5]. In higher education the impact of these debates on APEL practice has been much more oblique. Greater prominence has been given to the *process* of learning from experience and to the role of reflection. In this context the work of Kolb (1984) and Boud (1985) has been particularly influential. From this perspective it has been argued that the process of making an APEL claim can help the learner to transform their knowledge from that which is particularistic and rooted in the context from which it emerged, to a more general form of knowledge and understanding which can be transferred to other contexts. In this way the process encourages the development of more universalistic learning, which has parallels with that acquired in more traditional HE settings.

RESULTS

In both countries the data is not readily available at national level. In France, despite an obligation in the decrees to report on the number of applications and admissions through *validation des acquis,* it was necessary to undertake a specific survey to obtain the information and even though conducted by the MEN, did not achieve full coverage. However, on the basis of the 70% response rate (which undoubtedly included the most active universities), 5571 students applied for access under *validation des acquis* in 1995-96 and 763 for

credit. Of those applying for access, 68% or approximately 3788 students were admitted, the majority to second cycle courses in humanities, languages and social sciences. About 71% of claims for credit, 542 students, were successful. A slim majority of these claims were made within premier cycle courses, although second cycle courses also featured strongly. Half the claims were made in the humanities, languages and social sciences. Most candidates for *validation des acquis professionnel* were in employment, and all (reflecting the regulations) had work experience: 85% had 4 years or more, 92% were aged 25 or more and two thirds had some kind of financial support for their studies.

In the UK, despite the policy attention which APEL has received in recent years, as indicated above, it was only in 1995-96 that it became possible to enter APEL as part of the national student statistical record system. It is also clear from the data obtained that it is not accurate: it is not possible to believe that only 291 out of a total intake of 383,465 (UK domiciled) in 1995-96 were admitted on the basis of formal APEL. There is clearly something going on here, or rather not going on, in the institutions in the coding process. Nevertheless, it is clear that even if we treat the data with caution (see Davies 1997 for some explanations of the difficulties), there is a lot of informal APEL going on at least for access (and we have not yet been able to establish a way of differentiating between access and credit in the data). Almost 28,000 students were admitted with less than what might be regarded as the usual entry qualification and in a large proportion of these cases, considerably less or none at all, but it would take more research at institutional level to locate the APEL students in these figures. Nevertheless, it is clear something is happening in the admissions process which includes some form of recognition of prior learning for a large number of students in addition to formal APEL arrangements. In the absence of a clear statutory definition such as exists in France, we are unlikely ever to have totally accurate figures but it may be that as the new coding frame becomes established the accuracy will improve. In the meantime, we can say that these students are mature - the overwhelming majority are over 25 - and they are studying part-time on "other graduate" courses, although 9,000 are studying for degrees and about 3,000 for postgraduate qualifications. While a large

proportion are studying humanities, languages and social sciences the proportion seems to be rather less in France. However, "combined studies" is an important category of programme for these students and there is no direct equivalent in France. Overall around 55% are women.

CONCLUSIONS

The work of this project has begun to show that there are both a number of common themes and national differences associated with the development of APEL within European higher education.

Firstly APEL/VAP emerged in both the UK and France at approximately the same time, the mid 80s - 90s, and was associated with similar changes in the relationship between higher education and the wider society and economy. In both countries these changes gave rise to democratic and economic imperatives which helped to create the context for the emergence of APEL/VAP. These developments have also increasingly been located within the wider debate about the need for lifelong learning across the European Community.

Secondly the frameworks which have been established for APEL, both nationally and institutionally, reflect differences both in the national traditions and in the educational traditions within the two countries. Thus in France the centralised nature of educational policy has resulted in a national statutory framework for VAP, and support from the MEN for the development of a favoured national model for implementation. By contrast in the UK, given the traditional autonomy of HE, the government's influence has been more indirect. However, to classify France as a top-down model and UK as a bottom-up model is too crude, although, as with all good stereotypes, there is an element of truth in it. Clearly initiatives emanating from the centre - civil servants and politicians in the MEN - have been particularly important in France, since without them the universities would have been unable to act. However in the UK the national initiatives of the CNAA, various government agencies and departments, and the more recent financial incentives offered by the funding councils have also been of crucial importance, albeit in a different way. While in the UK, initiatives led

by individuals, departments and institutions with a particular commitment or mission have been particularly important, in France it is no coincidence that arrangements are best developed and activity is greatest in those universities where the Director of Continuing Education is a Vice President or where the President is a former Director of Continuing Education. Thus in both countries there are differences at institutional level and at departmental level within institutions.

Thirdly, although the process of APEL varies across each country, certain general differences can be observed, particularly where claims are for credit. The main model within France, promoted by the MEN, places considerable emphasis on analysing the experience of the individual in order to identify their potential to successfully engage in the full learning process once within the university. In the UK, however, explicit evidence of learning is usually required in order to demonstrate that the learning from experience is already broadly equivalent to that achieved within the institution. In this respect practice in the UK more closely resembles that of the second French model described above, where evidence is indeed required.

Fourthly, in France there has been more explicit debate about the different types of knowledge and the respective roles of the universities and enterprises in the processes through which learning takes place. In Britain the debate has been less about different kinds of knowledge, and more about the processes through which experiential learning can be recognised and accredited within higher education.

Fifthly, there is at present relatively little good quality data regarding the impact of APEL in either country. In France this is due to the lack of systematic data collection, despite the existence of agreed definitions which have been set out in the legislation and could be used as the basis for such an exercise. In the UK systematic data collection does take place, through the a system established by an agency known as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), but there are no agreed definitions of the categories used. Thus the data which is available in the UK remains unreliable.

Finally, despite the lack of systematic data it is possible to conclude that APEL/VAP are becoming well established in both countries. With the increasing emphasis on lifelong learning

employers in both the private and public sectors are recognising the potential of APEL to contribute to organisational policies on education and training. At the same time a growing number of universities are recognising the need for appropriate, robust and workable systems of APEL if they are to meet the needs of their increasingly heterogeneous student groups. Finally at a national and European level governments and the European Commission have signalled their support through a number of APEL/VAP initiatives. It must be recognised that the role of APEL remains limited within the higher education systems within both France and the UK. This will continue to be the case because many students do not have appropriate experiential learning and the accreditation of experiential learning will only be appropriate with respect to certain university subjects and programmes. However in the areas where it is appropriate there is growing evidence that is importance is recognised, and that this will continue as the higher education systems come to have a more central role in the processes of social and economic development.

NOTES

1. The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) was the body responsible for the regulation of the polytechnic sector during its rapid grow in the 1970s and 1980s. Amongst its responsibilities was the validation of all degree programmes offered by the sector. A key role was the quality assurance of provision and within that the development of an appropriate framework for credit transfer and eventually APEL.

2. The Learning from Experience Trust (LET) is an educational charity founded in the UK in 1986. The Trust's aim is to secure greater acknowledgement of "unrecognised" learning from experience by running seminars, reports and advocacy.

3. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) is an American association of colleges, universities, organisations, and educators dedicated to the advancement of experiential learning and its assessment. It also has a considerable overseas membership.

4.   The Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT) Scheme is a national framework relating to higher education in Scotland. It provides a coherent and integrated framework for credit-based learning. The operating principles for the scheme were approved by all Scottish institutions by early 1992, although the extent to which the opportunities it offers have been actively utilised varies across the sector. The scheme is fully described within the SCOTCAT Quality Assurance Handbook (1995).

5.   The National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are a framework of vocational qualifications linked to occupational roles. Central to the framework is the assessment of competence against agreed "standards". Employers take a major role in the process of agreeing the standards through their membership of Lead Bodies for each occupational area.

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APEL FROM THREE PERSPECTIVES: MICRO, MESO AND MACRO

Agnieszka Bron, University of Stockholm (Sweden)

INTRODUCTION

Our conference focuses on the issue of the Assessment of prior experiential learning as a key to facilitating lifelong learning. We have heard different speakers and topics on policies and practices in adult education, in further and higher education; and in vocational training from cross national/cultural comparative basis. We have also learned that APEL is most advanced in two European countries, i.e. Great Britain and France. One might wonder why this is a case. Why other European countries with well-developed practices in education of adults are lacking APEL-methods, at least to such an extent? I am thinking particularly here about Sweden.

As adult educationists and educators, that is both scholars and practitioners, we can agree that one of the most important factors in adults learning is to take advantage of life and work experiences as central to the process. We can trace this perspective back to John Dewey's writings, and after that to many others, within pragmatism and the neo-pragmatic tradition. We are aware of the importance of experience for learning, but unfortunately as practitioners we have not much experience either in using experiences in learning-teaching processes nor in assessing such experiences as part of accrediting learning. There are however some theoretical contributions to this issue, like Donald Schön's the reflexive practitioner, the Kolb's model of learning, Mezirow's instrumental, communicative and transformative learning to name a few.

Post-modernists argue that ideas (and thought) and action are inseparable, reciprocally dependent components of the learning process, breaking the tradition of separating theory and practice, which has been the dominant idea in science and education.
One of the crucial problems here, I think, is the different political and cultural contexts, as well as traditions within European countries.

To have a broad perspective on the issue of APEL in different European countries, we have to take into account different levels of inquiry/examination, for example micro, meso and macro levels. Each of these levels can be important for both researchers and practitioners within the field of adult education. Besides all of them together can give us a whole picture of the question and problematic of the assessment of prior experiential learning.

THE MICRO LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

This level concerns an adult himself/herself. The question appears: what is his/her attitude towards life and work experiences? Could they be treated and recognised as learning? What is his/her way of thinking, of reflecting on his/her own capacity, competencies and experiences as a part of constructing the world, as understanding this world, using his/her own knowledge and experience? What about his/her self-confidence? Is it growing when experiences get the status they deserve in the construction of reality?

Taking into account the micro level is to look at the process of an individual's thinking about his/her own competence, confidence, and knowledge, including their formative effect in constructing a self (image).

There are, however, some disadvantages in such a process when one has to recognise capacities in own life and work experiences for educational careers and associated purposes. In such circumstances it is up to an individual to "sell" his/her own competencies and experiences and get recognition for them. Especially such market orientation might be unfavourable towards women who have difficulties in getting skills and knowledge accepted in educational and most especially academic terms. But there are some advantages, too, as it forces an adult to reflect over own life situation, understand it and to make important educational and learning decisions. Here the life history approach could be of great importance, both in the research and in practice, as it triggers the reflexive process about one's own potential as a person and as a learner. Self-reflection, self-evaluating or assessment as far as competencies, knowledge, experience and motivation are concerned could be crucial in this process.

Depending on the tradition, culture and political situation in a given country, an individual has or has not opportunities to get recognition of his/her experiential learning. Unfortunately the division between formal learning (school) and learning by life and in life (reflection, interaction with others, social competencies, tacit knowledge in solving problems, etc.) is still very big, where the first gets an identification as formal knowledge in the form of certificates and diplomas, while the latter often remains unrecognised by educational institutions. Moving to institutions is a good way of moving to a more meso level frame.

THE MESO LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

On the meso level we have to deal with at least two issues: first, the role of institutions in assessing prior experiential learning of an individual to give her/him a) access to the institution, and b) accredit these experiences in the individual programme of study; and second, using life-and work experiences of adults in learning-teaching process.

Taking the Swedish perspective, I would not be wrong to say that either of these issues are "implemented" or taken seriously on the agenda, except probably the issue of gaining access to the educational institutions on the basis of former work experiences. But what kind of experiences one has doesn't matter, and these experiences are not evaluated in any sense. Thus, it is possible to gain access to higher education, for example, by documenting some years of work experience. Experiences alone, however, do not give the right to apply, or be accepted, for university study.

The big issue in Sweden could be: How to implement an APEL strategy within institutions? As long as there are not enough places at higher education institutions and more than enough candidates for them, universities are not interested to change their access policies and recognise experiences of adults as a part of formal courses.

APEL strategies are difficult to implement, because the circumstances which could trigger them do not exist. Moreover, one can expect a strong reaction against the notion of recognition especially in academic settings. This is the issue of separation

between theory and practice, where the first one is acquired at the university and the second can be achieved by working outside the academia. (Work and life experiences often are regard as practical, and important for solving practical problems. Moreover, the university staff would argue that critical thinking develops while studying theoretical and abstract issues, not practical ones. Ideas and theory are not to be found in daily life or at work, but in the school institution. Solving practical problems is not a part of formal education curricula).

But our work, and our life as a whole, demands more and more knowledge and skills where theoretical thinking and critical reflection are necessary. How can this dichotomy between practice and theory be challenged and changed? Is it really true that practical problems do not demand critical thinking? This is the issue which unites the micro and meso levels of thinking about APEL.

Vocationally oriented institutions in Sweden are much more willing to recognise experience as a challenge for learning. There we can found some APEL methods in the form of interviewing individuals and giving them individual programmes of study, tailored specially for each individual. Thus, vocational institutions recognise informal and non-formal learning acquired through experiences based on documentating them. (Institutions need of course a special category of educational advisers, counsellors who can assess experiences. Such a category of personal is almost missing in Sweden, neither trained nor recognised. "Studievägledare" - study guidance advisers at higher education level work closely with students but their work is limited to recognising formal education from other higher education institutions in Sweden or abroad, and to give an individual advice in choosing a programme of study.)

Even if APEL methods are few, and not used by many institution of adult, higher and vocational education in Sweden, one result from our research might be interesting here. Many of these institutions want to keep confidentiality in regards to their methods. The reason for it is twofold. First, there is a kind of "privatisation" of institutions and by that a rising competition between them, so they feel that they have a copy right on their methods. Second, one should keep the methods confidential, they argue, and preventing

applicants of finding out what is the basis for selection to the institution.

Assessment of prior experiential learning is practically non-existent at the higher education level in Sweden. The lower the educational level, and more practical, there is more interest in prior experiential learning.

THE MACRO LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

The macro level involves mostly educational policy of a given state, but also social attitudes towards education and learning. Is there a difference between different types of education, learning and experiences on this level in Sweden? The answer is neither "yes" nor "no". If we think about policy towards the educational system there is no difference. Since the 1970s there were many attempts to change the educational system in the direction to integrate more with real life experiences and challenges, beginning with primary school and ending up with higher education. However, these attempts were never oriented towards a recognition of work and life experiences in the sense of giving educational credits for them.

We can thus, look at the assessment of prior experiential learning as a social construction of the issue itself. How knowledge is constructed and perceived can be treated differently in different countries, also differently by theoreticians and by practitioners. This can actually contribute to a clash between the two groups, as it is traditionally in Sweden between adult educators working in popular adult education and university staff, the so called academics. There is a distrust towards the kind of knowledge academics are producing, as they are not taking into consideration, according to practitioners, practical knowledge created by ordinary people. Such attitudes can be traced back a long way in the history of popular adult education.

Another question is: Who has a right to education? In Swedish educational policy, since the 1950s, the main goal was equality of opportunity, thus giving access to education to all groups of society regardless of social background, age and gender, basing access on meritocracy. From the 1970s the policy changed towards equality of results, thus to achieve an equal level of education by different means, i.e. different types of institution. As a result Sweden become

a society where access to education became open to all groups, and where adult education got an important ideological place, including state economic support. The result of such policy was that the level of education in Swedish society became higher, but there are still groups who have are missing from more advanced level of education. To compensate for poor education there are adult education institutions where one can fill the gaps in formal education which are needed for advanced study. Besides, there are centrally created educational programmes at higher education for these who lack formal prerequisites, but they are restricted to a certain age and particular work experience connected with the field of study. These are special tailored courses for adults at natural sciences programmes. Moreover, university education is still concerning a very small proportion of society (half a million have completed university education in comparison to 9 millions inhabitants).

As a consequence of such a policy, one could expect political changes towards giving freedom to educational institutions to assess and accredit adults prior experiential learning. Unfortunately this is not a case. Changing attitudes among politicians as well as educators is a long process. Such attitudes concern the place one gives theory and practice within education; to treat them, or not, as equally necessary components of constructing knowledge and competencies.

As long as there are enough candidates for educational places, and as long as there is no institutional problem to survive, there is no pressure from the institutional side to get more students, and to recruit these who do not have formal prerequisites. Thus, there is no formal need yet in Sweden to assess and evaluate adults' experiences.

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THE ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN SWEDEN

Christina Lönnheden, Stockholm University, Department of Education

Sweden has participated in the SOCRATES APEL research project[1], co-ordinated by Belgium, since September 1997. The APEL project aims to investigate methods to assess prior experiential learning in adult education institutions. Institutions which have such methods are gathered in a data base. In a later phase this data base will be available to practitioners in adult education institutions. In the project we have focused on three different areas of adult education; vocational training, adult and community education and further and higher education.

APEL doesn't exist as a concept in Swedish adult education and therefore, in the Swedish survey we asked about the institutions methods for evaluating and assessing adults earlier experiences. We explained experiences by study, worklife and life experiences. 100 adult and higher education institutions were investigated. 57 institutions answered that they have methods to assess adults earlier life and work experiences. From those 57 we studied 10 in depth as case-studies, focused on APEL-methods and on a deeper level than the surveys. It is difficult to distinguish APEL-methods by the institutions. Sometimes there have been institutions who say that they didn't have methods, but we knew they had and sometimes there has been the opposite. Nevertheless in this paper I use the concept APEL-methods, for designating the evaluation of adults experiences.
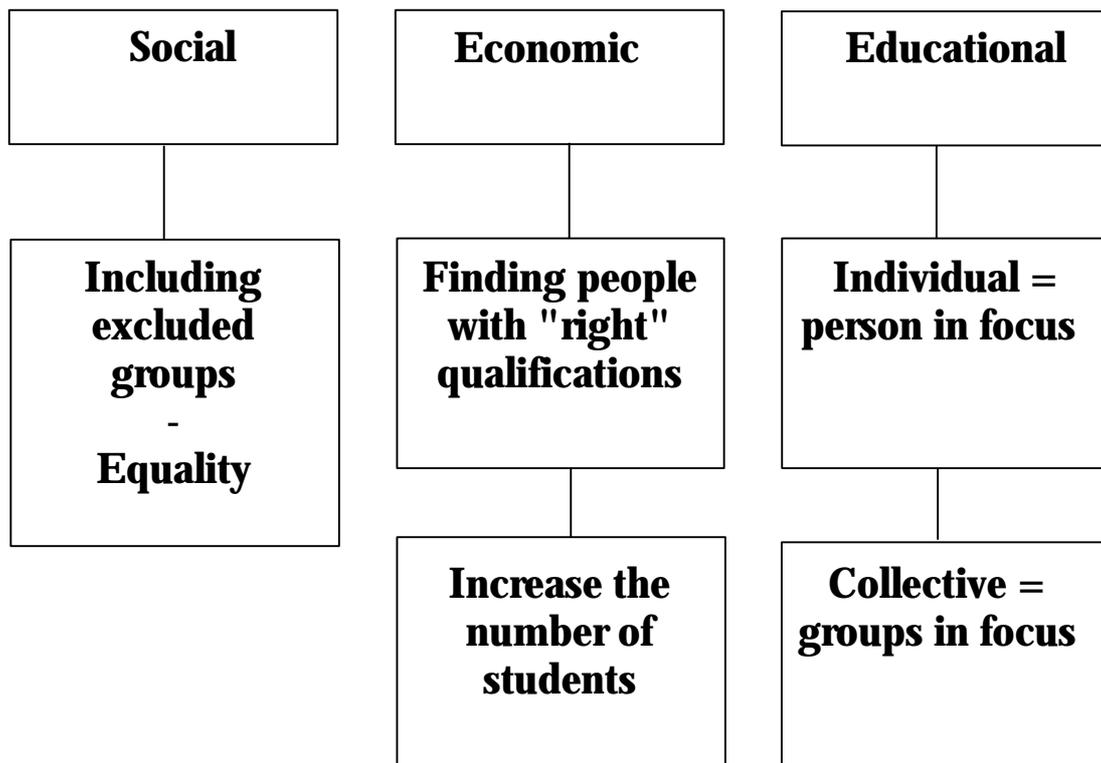
Surveys and particularly the case studies clearly showed that there were different motives as to why institutions chose their methods. To structure these motives I have tried to visualise them in a figure called Underlying Purposes. These are the philosophical purposes in contrast to the more pragmatic ones about which we asked in the survey[2].

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[1] SOCRATES research project 25 019-CP-1-96-BE-ADULT EDUC-ADU
[2] In the main table of our data base these purposes are called: admission, accreditation, advanced standing and contribution to learning

In the paper I first want to describe the underlying purposes and secondly, give examples of them by describing the tradition of the APEL in higher education in Sweden. Thirdly I will present one case study from the research project and finally draw some conclusions and share some reflections.

UNDERLYING PURPOSES

Social	**Economic**	**Educational**
Including excluded groups **-** **Equality**	**Finding people with "right" qualifications**	**Individual = person in focus**
	Increase the number of students	**Collective = groups in focus**

Social, Economic and Educational purposes are the three main categories I have identified and each one of them include one or two parts. The social purposes aim to include excluded groups. The goal might be trying to reach equality in terms of gender or socio-economic factors. Social purposes can be based on or combined with ideological values.

I identified two economic purposes. The first one aims to find people with suitable qualifications and select them from other applicants. I see this is as an economic purpose, because education is regarded as an investment and as an outcome the educated should be as competent as possible. To find people with qualities which will make them socially skilled doctors or social workers, is an example

of such methods. The second economic purpose is to increase the number of students when institutions are lacking applicants. Through creating methods, which can make it possible for new groups to get access, the education system can grow or avoid to decrease.

Finally the educational purposes set focus on learning processes and environment at both an individual and a collective level. Individual doesn't actually mean in an individualistic way, but there could be personal individualistic effects. Individual means that education is suitable to the individual's needs and goals. For example it means that the person doesn't have to repeat exercises he or she is already capable of, which can mean giving credit to knowledge and skill received by experiences. There is an individual adaptation of the education. This of course demands resources and can be expensive if it is used as a routine. If methods are offered but it depends on the individual to use them, the effect can turn out to be individualistic. Individualistic because the individual must take all initiatives him/her self and that favours just those who have the power of initiative. Individual also means respecting the personas experiences and using them in the learning process. The collective aspect focuses on the learning environment. The methods aim to find people with different backgrounds/experiences and to create heterogeneous groups where these experiences can be a part of the studies and enrich everyone involved in the group. In the following I want to describe the purposes in depth by giving some examples.

TRADITION OF APEL IN HIGHER EDUCATION

What in other countries is divided into colleges and universities is in Sweden since the 1977-reform gathered in a regulated higher educational system. In 1998 there are 9 universities and 57 university colleges. The 1977-reform also denoted a vocationally oriented higher education system with a strong connection to working life. One of the purposes with the reform was to make higher education more accessible to new groups in society. This was done through new access routes, for example 25:5-scheme and access for those who had a certificate from a Folk High School. The 25:5-scheme was from the beginning meant to give access to people who were 25

years or older and had as least 5 years of work experience. After just a short time it was changed to 25:4, 4 years of work experience instead. Later a university aptitude test was created for those people to test their capability to study at college/university. Even people who were engaged in organisational activities received credit, and work experience was valued much higher than it is now. The credit for work experience was in the 80[ies] added to the exam result from upper secondary school, which made it possible to work some years and in that way make the exam result better and get access to higher education. A system which disappeared about ten years ago.

Since 1993 there have been a lot of changes, among others the focus on nationally regulated programs and vocational orientation has decreased. Instead there is an increasing emphasise on traditional theoretical education. Also several measures have been taken to recruit younger students.

In terms of underlying purposes, the main focus in higher education has been on <u>social and economic purposes</u>. The 1977-reform aimed to make higher education accessible for excluded groups, a social purpose with an equality goal. This was done partly by using methods to evaluate experiences other than former studies. The result which showed up after some years was depressing. The main target group, less educated people, weren't reached. Instead it was already educated people who got access by the 25:4 route. Methods to evaluate earlier experiences were in other words not enough to level the socially biased recruitment (Erikson, R. & Jonsson, J. O. 1993). The economic purpose aimed to involve new students, i.e. older ones, because there were not enough applicants to higher education. This purpose was fulfilled to a too greater extent than wished. The average age increased in a few years and it started to be unusual to apply to university at the age of 19 or 20. A traditional Swedish student under the 80[ies] worked for some years before applying to higher education. This was due to a strong labour market, where almost everyone got a job. The change came with the rise of unemployment. Statistics show that the median age was 24 at the beginning of the 80[ies] and 21 at the beginning of the 90[ies] (Agélii, K. 1997). The reform in 1977 had somehow resulted in excluding[3] younger people, therefore a lot of measures were taken in the 90[ies] to

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3 Which was not its purpose.

include them again. For example the university aptitude test was accessible for new groups, at first for those who were 19, but later even for those who were 17 years of age. The number of applicants who were admitted as 25:4 decreased and those who were admitted on the aptitude test result combined with credit for work experience. Nowadays it is very difficult to get admission as a 25:4. From the autumn -98 applicants require exams in some subjects from upper secondary level. Even other aspects such as financial support has since 1991 dramatically deteriorated for students who have children.

Earlier there were a lot of other methods which could be called APEL-methods. For example there were shorter education alternatives to be nurses and doctors, for those who had experiences as staff nurses an nurses respectively. Other examples are social workers, teachers and nursery school teachers. Despite the increasing emphasise on traditional theoretical education those alternatives have been taken away.

It means that APEL-methods have decreased in higher education in Sweden in the last five years. It is still possible for adults to be admitted of course, but it has been more difficult. There are also some programmes at certain schools which have new APEL-methods not connected to the older ones. For example at least two medical schools in Sweden have started to interview applicants. The purpose with interviewing is to find people with the right qualifications for being a doctor (economic purpose). In Sweden it is very difficult to be admitted to medical education, the best certificates are needed. The interview is used as a tool to find people with important qualifications but who don't have the best certificates4. The same methods are also used for younger applicants that come directly from upper secondary school.

CASE STUDY - FOLK HIGH SCHOOL IN ANGERED - FIA

The FiA is a school with a short history. It was founded in 1990 but it was first in 1997, thanks to governmental financing that education started on a large scale. The owner is a non-profit-making

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4 But those who have the best certificates are not interviewed.

association with 200 members, 100 of which are locally established associations.

The main purposes of the school are to strengthen the national movement and increase the general level of education in the suburbs of Gothenburg. The field of studies focuses on general courses with different themes, such as living, democracy, public health, national movement, international solidarity and consumer knowledge. The teachers at the school are named tutors because that describes their role in a better way and gives some important signals to the students. The student group, in co-operation with the tutor, decide the curriculum. It is based on interests and earlier experiences.

Some of the courses give general access5 to higher education and also give upper secondary competence in the form of a description of the student's capability to continue education on higher level. The school admits new students every six months. The teaching is organised as full- or part-time studies at day time, located in four different suburbs.

The APEL methods used at FiA are aiming to reach people with minimal study tradition, strengthen the students self confidence and also to promote own initiative and motivation. Another aim is to arrange heterogeneous groups where different experiences are used to broaden the students outlook and give new knowledge and insights. In the following I will describe the APEL methods.

When a person wants to study at FiA he/she has to fill in a form. The application form focuses on earlier studies and work as well as motives for studying and personal interests. Every applicant is then interviewed by a tutor. The open-ended interview, which takes about one hour is focused on the person's life experiences and motives to study. After this an admission group with 6-7 tutors decides who will be admitted. When the admission group makes their decision, they pay attention to factors such as gender, experiences from different cultures, participation in associations, life and work experience, community work and leisure activities. The following are the socio-economic factors valued and given priority to.

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5 Specific access one can get from a municipal education.

Social status	those who are treated unfairly, neglected or forgotten socially, economically, culturally or politically
Age	Older goes before younger
Legal domicile	People living in Angered are given priority to
Educational status	People with a shorter education are given priority to
Motive, purpose and goal with education	People who want to increase their self-confidence, knowledge, and with other students deepen in sights and/or prepare for community and popular movement work.
Understanding	Priority is given to those who are interested in the school's phlosophy/aims

When the decision is made and the applicants have started their studies, every student makes an individual study-plan in co-operation with their tutor. In this plan the person writes down earlier experiences in terms of education, work, community and life experience. 25% of the form is set aside for the student to write down these experiences, which illustrates that the former study experiences are only a small part. The next is to formulate short and long range goals which are described in terms of knowledge, skills and personal development. The study plan also puts focuses on the student's study conditions. What barriers exist? What helps him or her to learn? What needs does he or she have? How to follow up the studies is also planned. Evaluation usually takes place twice every term. This individual plan means that the duration of schooling differs from individual to individual.

The philosophical underlying purposes I identified in this institution represented all the categories. The social purposes are

expressed by including groups excluded from the society. They give for example priority to applicants who are treated unfairly. Their local destinations are in segregated suburbs near Gothenburg which also means that one target group are people from other ethnic groups. The educational purposes are expressed both as individual and collective. The person is in focus in his/her individual plan. The education extent and content are constructed from the persons needs. The collective aspect means that the institution is consciously looking for diverse experiences with the aim of combining heterogeneous groups in which students can enrich each other. They are also looking for motivated applicants because this makes the learning environment more active and stimulating for the individual. The economical purpose has in this case both an ideological and economical character. They are looking for applicants who share their ideology, which means that they are looking for people with the "right qualifications". They also search for those who are older and with a shorter earlier education as such target groups are required to get governmental financial support.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

From the Swedish data we can draw the conclusion that there are two areas of adult education in which APEL-methods dominate, they are vocational education and Folk High Schools. The municipal education, running secondary school for adults and equivalent of youth education which is more theoretically oriented and results in upper secondary "exam" has some examples too, where accreditation is in focus. Higher education however has very few examples. Moreover APEL methods in Swedish higher education have decreased the last five years. Thus the next conclusion is that the more practical the education is, the more earlier experiences are valued and assessed.

Is it possible to draw any conclusions from the Swedish experiences? It is difficult to say, but maybe we can learn something.

First, it is very difficult to fulfil the social purpose to include excluded groups in higher education. It is not enough having nationally regulated APEL-methods to do that. The Swedish attempt in higher education wasn't successful as the result from other

investigations shows up (Eriksson & Jonsson, 1993). At the same time case studies in Sweden show that locally formulated APEL-methods makes it possible to include excluded groups at lower levels in the education system, even people with no study tradition.

Second the economical purpose to increase the number of students, opening for new age groups through APEL-methods, can be fulfilled too well. What happened in Sweden was that young people were not interested in higher education. Therefore the higher education system was opened towards mature students. After some years the average age has increased to 24 year. When the youth unemployment was increasing and the younger showed a bigger interest in higher education they were hindered by the APEL-methods. The system to evaluate mature students experiences made it more difficult for younger people to get admission. Thus new routes and regulations were created to help younger people get admission to higher education. Routes and regulations which hinder mature students. The pendulum went in the opposite direction.

Third, the case studies in Sweden make it clear that APEL-methods with educational purposes are strengthening peoples self-confidence. It is also possible that it could lead to people getting more engaged and interested in democracy and civil movements. If the methods are not applied to all students, there is also a risk that the outcome will be individualistic.

The Swedish case study above shows that it is possible to combine different purposes within the same methods. The interview and the individual plan at FiA combined a lot of purposes. To do that, it is necessary to discuss the underlying purposes in an explicit way. Another case study in Sweden supports that, the institution had the methods, but the purposes weren't explicitly formulated and the contents in their methods were weak and unclear. The question is what the real outcome was, it seemed vague. It is also important to emphasise that a method doesn't fulfil different purposes automatically, but fulfilling one purpose can lead to coping with other purposes as well. In Sweden we have a lot of mature students in higher education. Investigations (Brandell, S. & Höög, H. 1998, Lönnheden, C 1998) shows that mature students don't feel that they are treated as the adults they are. It is a frustrating situation for adults to be treated as if they were 19 years old. From the report

"Students in Sweden, StudS " I want to quote: "University and university colleges don't seem to be for people above 26 year. Because, if you are a student over 26 year, you don't have the same rights" and "discrimination of mature students became much more obvious" (Brandell, S. & Höög, H. 1998, 46) These quotations come from two students in the investigation carried out by the National Agency for Higher Education. The tutors write "A lot of the mature students consider that the system is made for youth students, regarding both teaching and the social student life". There is a contradiction: when mature students apply to higher education their experiences are assessed, but when they are studying their experiences haven't any value at all. However the same rules, the same pedagogical methods are applicable to both young and mature students. In Swedish higher education the economic and social purposes haven't resulted in any educational purposes even if there are needs for it. From the mature student's point of view it isn't enough to get access, it is also important to be treated as an adult. If just the economic and/or social purposes are fulfilled this won't be done.

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THE ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN SPAIN

AEPA, Adult Education Association / CREA, Centre of Research on Adult Education, University of Barcelona. Spain.

The idea the APEL project picks up is that adults can learn in a great variety of situations, not only through the traditional channels of education. This disposition which is explicitly supported by the European Union emphasises the recognition of all the competencies and learning that a person has acquired during his/her life time.

The APEL policies are a systematisation of these processes of recognition of the knowledge acquired from different sorts of experiences. These experiences can contain situations of formal learning (for example, a process of academic learning) or informal situations of learning (for example, self education or labour experience). Through evaluating knowledge acquired in a non-formal way people traditionally excluded from training and education can see their access to a course smoothened or may even directly receive a certificate and in this way their chances of entering the labour market are improved.

The changes brought about by the "information society" require new means of eluding the forms of exclusion and marginalisation that are being generated. In this sense, the access to and the processing of information acquire great value. Education and training turn into the processes that can guarantee this processing of information. The processing of symbols and knowledge is being confirmed itself as an indispensable tool of the new processes of production and is turning into a determining factor in the economic, social and political world. Therefore, obtaining awards and certificates is turning into one of the most important filters of selection of the staff in the labour market. This is even so in those occupations that traditionally have not required specific levels of instruction. Access to education is not only important for obtaining titles, it is also important when gaining capacity to process information and the knowledge that it provides, in a context where the constant renewal of technical and professional knowledge on a base of general culture is essential. "*To consider education and formation in relation to the subject of jobs does not mean that education and formation are*

reduced to an offer of qualifications. Its basic function is social integration and personal development, sharing common values, transmitting a cultural heritage and the learning of autonomy" (European Commission 1995:18). The APEL policies, therefore are specifically defined to give adults the opportunity and to encourage them to lifelong learning and to go on adapting their skills to the demands of changes in the labour market.

Being inside the frame of analysis of the mechanisms of recognition of prior learning, we are one of the partners of the SOCRATES programme *"Assessment of prior experiential learning"* (APEL).

The exchange of good experiences between different types of institutions and countries can improve the global development of formulae of validation of the key abilities and of the knowledge that is traditionally not certified, and can improve the routes of access to the processes of education. The project also aims at fomenting co-operation between universities and other educational institutions of adults with the intention of developing educational and formative policies being more co-ordinated and global.

From CREA and AEPA we want to contribute to underlining the importance that these mechanisms of evaluation and accreditation will be strengthened in Europe and can improve all sectors of Spanish education: vocational training, basic adult education and higher education. Nowadays, in the Spanish State, and in the frame of the 2nd National Programme of Vocational Training, the National System of Qualifications is being defined. That means the institutionalisation of a unique system of qualifications which is valid as a reference for both employees of the labour market and for the agents of the world of education and training and for the rest of the population. The formation of the National Institute of Qualifications is the first step that is being carried out to achieve this aim. Among the measures foreseen for the constituting procedure of this National Institute of Qualifications there are the defining instruments for accrediting competencies which provides a contribution to consolidating a co-ordinated European frame.

However, the debate on evaluation and accreditation of competencies in most of the European countries is still in an incipient stage. And owing to the great opportunity that these mechanisms represent as formulae to overcome social exclusion, it is

important to reflect upon the best way of defining and designing these strategies. In this way, it is essential to count with the active participation of all sorts of social and economic agents implied in the debate, to secure the diffusion of information on these mechanisms, mainly their advantages and also their possible inconveniences, with the aim of constituting policies of validation of competencies that really pick up the plurality of realities constituting contemporary societies.

Furthermore, with these policies many of the efforts produced in different areas are concrete, so that other types of abilities and different non-academic skills are recognised. Practical abilities, for example, prove that people with practical experience background can develop activities and knowledge, and that this type of knowledge is now less important than those developed in academic contexts. Therefore it is important that the APEL policies (or similar instruments of recognition/evaluation and /or accreditation of competencies and learning) recognise the value of these abilities, and, at the same time, create structures to make possible the acquisition of academic learning could be broadened. The academic curriculum must profit from practical experience not turning into an obstacle for them. The APEL policies should open access to university and to the rest of the formal channels of education in full conditions of equality to everyone whatever may be their cultural background and social origin.

As far as the different theories and empirical research results is concerned, we can confirm the existence of another sort of abilities that are the base for processes of social transformation. These are communicative abilities, used by people constantly in all areas of life which make possible the acquisition of much of the necessary learning in modern society. With "communicative intelligence", through dialogue with people in equal conditions, we can resolve many operations that we are unable to solve individually with our "practical" and "academic intelligence". An example for the constant use of communicative abilities is learning how to use a washing machine or a video. In most cases we do not use the instructions, we try to find out how the machine works talking to our partner, neighbour, friend. Therefore everyone has "communicative

intelligence", but according to the context, this sort of intelligence can develop under different conditions.

Both competencies, practical qualifications and communicative abilities or other sorts of learning that people acquire during their life time in great variety of situations (labour experience, self education, informal education obtained through social experiences such as volunteering, house work, nets of informal knowledge, basic adult education, occupational and/or professional education...) must serve to link the education systems and the labour world. The policies of accreditation and/or evaluation of adults' previous learning must be transformed in this point, for the aim must be to:

- facilitate the access to the formal educational system to adults that otherwise would not have access to the same, for access to education will be possible through the recognition of non-formal learning. Anyhow, the design of these mechanisms of evaluation and accreditation is a determinant element to really transform the APEL policies into processes of social transformation. If the mechanisms of evaluation and recognition of learning find a concrete form in very academic exams they can become a deterrent rather than an opportunity to certain sectors of the population;

- provide a rigorous process of evaluation to guarantee that people who submit to this accreditation really have knowledge and abilities comparable in quality to those obtained through formal mechanisms of learning;

- provide titles for the learning obtained through experience.

In this way people's evaluation and accreditation of competencies should serve to counteract traditional processes. Mainly cases that are too rigid and that do not fit in the growing requirements of flexibility of the labour market and that do not pick up the richness in diversity of the competencies of all social and cultural groups must be changed. If we want to accredit and recognise certain experiences, we must take into account that there are people or groups of people that carry out some strategies which do not recognised or give value to socially excluded. A clear example of this is the gypsy population, which develops activities in the informal economy which includes a series of non-academic abilities not yet

identified as valid knowledge or still not in a stage of being valued. A person who dedicates himself/herself to hawking, for example, is capable of "calculating" the selling price to a customer and not able to do that same operation on a piece of paper. Through formal channels this group of people will never be put than educated people, and therefore find themselves in a dynamic of exclusion and marginalisation where it is very difficult to escape from.

The APEL policies are mechanisms that can include all these particularities in conditions of equality. They are processes that can make the curriculum and the methods of learning flexible. This enlargement of flexibility also permits a constant actualisation of the learning processes. In the same way, the processes of evaluation of learning make it possible for adults to identify their own abilities and learning and to define their specific academic educational needs. Because of this a process of self-reflection is carried out which increments the autonomy of adults, who, after this process, can reap the benefits and advantages of continuing education with their learning during their lifetime. At the same time, new titles are obtained, without taking away value from all the knowledge that is acquired through daily life experiences and thus become the ideal complement to academic education. The APEL policies, therefore, represent processes that guarantee the autonomy of the person in an educational process during his/her whole life. In Europe a great deal of importance is given to people not ever finishing their education just to make sure that they enlarge their knowledge.

In this debate on the defining of the evaluation processes and accreditation of the learning, we consider it necessary to generate methodological proposals which permit the social actors to express their own subjectivity without using dramaturgy actions or feeling threatened or disqualified. Qualitative methodology of a communicative orientation (methodology followed by CREA in its research) wants to grasp, apart from the traditional participation of the subject, the reflection of the actors themselves, their motivations and their own interpretations, supplying through this a greater degree of involvement of the social actors. Following this methodology, the actors, (whatever their social and cultural condition may be and their role in the APEL process) will be considered equal in the processes of definition of the policies of

evaluation and accreditation of the previous learning of adults. The techniques we used in different investigation projects (comunicative gatherings, daily life narration, extensive interviews, and communicative observations) try to adapt to the people and permit the interaction of the participants in the project.

Dialogue spaces are generated where language is not an obstacle but a fundamental instrument. The dialogue situation creates an atmosphere within which asymmetrical relations can be replaced by egalitarian relations.

These relations are transferable to the processes of evaluation of previous learning coming from experience. The APEL policies, therefore, must take into account and value, among other things, communicative abilities.

As we have been arguing throughout this paper, it seems contradictory that we evaluate only the person's experiences that can be expressed at an academic level. Everyone has knowledge, but this knowledge is not valued socially in the same way. The way in which we organise the information that we have at our disposal and the way in which we transmit this information is influenced by our cultural characteristics. Those who do not share the cultural characteristics of the social dominant groups are the ones who have the greatest difficulties in finding their knowledge recognised and have a higher risk of being excluded.

Communicative abilities, if recognised, can contribute greatly to areas such as basic adult education or professional training, working towards introducing communication elements in the classical processes of academic learning, so that adults with initial levels of formation can increase their degree of self esteem and self value when seeing recognised, valued and used in curriculum, their own competencies. Relying on oneself can contribute to these people feeling motivated to continue their education.

But apart from taking into account communicative abilities as a content which can be valued, we must integrate the dialogic process as a defining principle of methodologies of evaluation and accreditation. In all defining processes of the mechanisms of evaluation and accreditation of learning it is necessary to establish a dialogue in equal conditions between the social and economic agents implied. Together these actors must try to define which are the key

abilities and competencies that society demands nowadays, avoiding "corporativism" and fights for control of processes of accreditation that bring the exclusion of key subjects for the processes of definition. In the specific case of the Spanish State, for example, it would be an ideal moment to get most agents and social and economic sectors implied in the discussion over the constitution of these mechanisms in our country. In any case, the main aspect to be taken into account must be the ethical aspect, when implementing the methods of validation of the competencies. This point, on the other hand, could be resolved if the presence of a public organisation that controlled all the process was guaranteed, if this organisation does not present an obstacle to the requirement of flexibility inherent in these policies.

Another element to be taken into account when designing this type of policies is that the evaluation and accreditation of professional experiences must be effective - an option that requires, in many cases, to place oneself in the same place and context in which the evaluated persons develop their professional competencies. In other investigations carried out through CREA it has been proved that the best way to observe the competencies and formative needs of a person is to participate in observations of a communicative nature (with the active participation of the observed), possibly in his/her own working place. In these situations, people do not feel the rigidity that impregnates too academic exams, and they feel more secure to show their abilities. The idea is to be able to create an adequate atmosphere, so that the subjects, whoever they are can express their knowledge under really equal conditions.

Summing up, the processes of evaluation and accreditation of competencies and previous learning need to incorporate communicative processes to actually change conditions. This is the precondition to avoid exclusion for everyone through access to education and training. If people with more initial levels of instruction who are in a socially excluded situation develop skills (that can be valued) the entry into the labour world (even though it may only be in activities in submerged economy) will be much easier and their daily life will gain normality.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF APEL PROJECTS IN SLOVENIA

Nataša Elvira Jelenc, Slovene Adult Education Centre, Ljubljana/Slovenia

In view to promote research, to develop new programmes, especially in the terms of lifelong learning, to serve as a counselling institution to all those who are involved in adult education teaching, administration, programmes development etc., Slovene Adult Education Centre (SAEC), a research and development institution, was founded in autumn 1991 by the Slovenian government decree. It operates at the national level and there is no other institution like this in Slovenia.

Its basic mission is to foster the development of a culture of lifelong adult learning and education in Slovenia. Besides the development and implementation of new projects one of the main concerns, from the very beginning, was the training of adult educators and others, working in adult education in view to develop a network of public institutions for adult education, to introduce new teaching methods and techniques and thus adapt the teaching-learning process to the needs, specific characteristics and capacities of the adults. Steps were taken (in co-operation with Ministry of Education and Sports) in view to put forward a national adult education programme. Adult Education Professional Council was established at the national level and the sufficient funds were assured by the state.

Besides APEL, many other projects have been developed and implemented by SAEC in the last years, study circles, open learning centres, learning exchange, functional literacy programmes, the use of multimedia in adult education to name a few. A strong information centre was established, publishing monthly news in Slovenian and twice a year in English. Once a year a catalogue is published including all the data concerning adult education in Slovenia. A SAEC library opened in 1992.

INTRODUCTION OF APEL:

The APEL project started in Slovenia in 1994. The idea was to develop within a several years time a network of APEL centres all

over the country, comprising all the levels of education, from elementary (primary) school to the university. These centres could be part of formal educational institutions, part of so called folks high schools or similar adult education institutions and of private adult education organisations, depending of the area and level of education. The non-formal educational institutions would all have to be authorised by the National Examination Centre, the institution which has been entitled by law to grant certificates in formal and non-formal education. The project is very ambitious and will take a lot more of time and energy, due to the traditional mode of thinking which has to be changed and unwillingness to make any radical changes in formal education. At the Slovene Adult Education Centre (SAEC), where the idea was born, we decided to start at the micro level, developing a pilot APEL centre at the SAEC itself, serving as an example to other institutions and as a "promoter" of the APEL activity. The project has been so far morally and financially supported by the Slovene government. As the SAEC has no other training activities than training the adult educators, its APEL centre operates only at the university level as we are going to see later on.

Hopefully the centres will spread all over Slovenia forming a network, embracing various levels. Various faculties of the University of Ljubljana, among which the Faculty of Economics are considering the option of opening an APEL centre, simultaneously we have been collaborating with the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce in the field of vocational education.

WHY APEL

As in other countries, there is a lot of "hidden" language in Slovenia, by "hidden" we mean not publicly recognised and certified. Even more so, as we were facing, especially before the independence of Slovenia, an important drop out from schools, at all levels, but in particular from universities. Very often people got educated at their working place, (there was practically no unemployment in former Yugoslavia, so a degree was not always required, at least not in some branches). While spending many years at the same work, one was getting competent with experiences, was promoted and so many managers did not have proper qualification, though they possessed

the skills. Spontaneously some big companies introduced sort of APEL, granting a degree of internal value to their most diligent and competent employees.

On the other hand for those who might have had a qualification (a degree for example) in some branch, but became competent in another (with working experiences), it was difficult to change the job, as they were not up-dating their initial knowledge (in most cases even forgot most of it), while their newly acquired competence was not formally recognised. They often had to follow some further education course, which was a waste of time and money. So it became clear for us that this "hidden" knowledge is a richness not to be neglected.

After having got acquainted with similar projects in USA, UK and New Zealand, we developed our own model. It was decided as I mentioned before that a pilot centre at the SAEC would be established.

At the beginning the centre would operate for three different educational programmes, all awarding a certificate, obligatory for certain target groups, study circle mentors, literacy teachers and adult educators/ programme designers and developers/ administrators/ organisers. The first two projects have been developed and implemented by SAEC. SAEC is the only institution in Slovenia, entitled to award the certificate for SC mentors and literacy teachers, which is obligatory for any one who wants to work as a mentor in study circles or a teacher in literacy programmes.

To be able to enter the programmes the candidates have to have a four years university degree, exceptionally they are accepted with two years university diploma. The third training programme is meant for broader audience, all those who are in any way involved in adult education, like researchers, programme designers, adult educators, administrators, organisers etc. In Slovenia all those who are teaching, but have never got a degree in education (engineers who switched to teaching at schools or universities, doctors etc.), have to attend a special training programme at the Faculty of Arts, department of Education (six month) to get a certificate which is required by law. Now the SAEC organised similar training programme for adult teachers, who have up to now been obliged to attend the training

programme at the Faculty of Arts, where adult education is not entirely part of it.

THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING APEL ACTIVITY

We defined what kind of knowledge or skills would be recognised in our centre. We did not merely take into consideration the experiential learning, but other forms of gaining competence as well (we called it non formally obtained knowledge):

- Experiences at working place
- Experiences in everyday life
- Self-instruction (open learning, multimedia)
- Learning in non-formal meetings (couples, groups like study circles or others)
- Interest and involvement with hobbies

Then we developed standards of achievement for every programme as they are the key element of the APEL process implementation. They were defined in active form, so that they could be easily understood by the candidate as well. The whole programme was split in unites, covering all the necessary contents. The units were further on split into elements and for each element we made a list of competence, fixed the criteria of the performance, included various situations in which the performance could take place and also theoretical knowledge needed to understand the performance.

Developing the standards was a difficult and long lasting task, where we have to overcome our deeply rooted traditional thinking - that by standards we design what an individual has learnt in a particular institution, with work or by himself, and not what he is able to do, perform, plan, elaborate. We had to keep in mind to design by standards the output of knowledge and not the input. Instead of focusing at the learning process, what happens in traditional education, we had to focus to the learning outcome, because people learn in very different ways and in different places. Therefore it was not important to know how an individual had got the knowledge, but how competent he was, how he could prove what he had learnt.

THE APEL PROCESS

We consider the start of the APEL process with the first contact the candidate gets with the institution (usually with the counsellor) and the end when his competence is being certified. There are several phases in between. At the start the counsellor takes over the candidate, trying to identify, together with the candidate, his wishes, in view to find out whether the chosen direction is the right one. Usually already at the first meeting a plan is being dressed for the candidate, again in co-operation with him, in view to identify what kind of knowledge/skills the candidate possesses and what kind of evidence he might provide. A portfolio is "open" for him where the evidence would be collected. This phase can last from several weeks up to a year and a half - in case the evidence does not cover the required skills, so the candidate has to be reassessed, sometimes he has to attend a course, or parts of it, in this instance organised at the SAEC. Various methods are being used to identify the knowledge/skills like the interview, candidate writing his CV (named candidate's profile), making a list of competence, questionnaires, to name a few.

Next phase starts when the candidate is in the process of collecting evidence. There can be many different kind of evidence. We divide them in direct and indirect evidence. Direct evidence comprises all that has been made, produced or achieved by the candidate himself. This can be a product, written material (article, handbook), video recordings etc. The indirect evidence comprises references of the actual and former employers, letter statements of the clients, awards the candidate had received in the past, articles about the candidate etc. During this phase the candidate keeps in touch with the counsellor who keeps him in the right direction, watching that he does not provide too much or irrelevant evidence. Besides the counsellor has the role of motivating the candidate, giving support and trying to build up or at least reinforce his self-confidence, in case the candidate has had difficulties in the past or has been unemployed for some time. In a way his role is also mentoring or teaching (how to get organised, how to learn) the candidate.

When the evidence is collected and the portfolio filled up, it is communicated to the assessment body, usually composed of three

assessors. They carefully study all the evidence, decide whether it is authentic (the work of the candidate), sufficient, reliable, current, covering the necessary criteria. If so, the candidate can get the certificate right away. But in practice an additional assessment of the candidate is often needed. Various modern methods are being used for the assessment. In case the evidence is sufficient and satisfactory, an interview with the candidate is sufficient, to check the authenticity of the evidence and the underpinning knowledge and understanding of what has been done. When the evidence is not sufficient other methods are being used to fill the gap, simulation, project work, role playing, sometimes assessment at work.

The counsellors and assessors have a very important role in the process and are therefore being trained in view to acquire the necessary skills. They are obliged to get a licence if they want to work in this field. We have organised for the first group of counsellors and assessors a specific training, performed by RSA from UK. In the future we will train them at the SAEC by our own experts.

These are the first steps in Slovenian APEL network development. The target groups have so far been limited. There are not many underachievers among them, though there are some university drop-outs and a small number of those who possess a university degree but have been unemployed usually waiting for their first job.

In the future we expect a different target group in particular in the field of vocational education where there is a large number of people with learning difficulties and/or poor working habits.

As for the university level, we have not yet introduced APEL for access purposes, as by law nobody can enter a university without an A level (it was possible to do so a couple of years ago, though). Right now we are planning to develop the APEL in some faculties, mostly for former drop-outs or within the frame of lifelong learning (in view to gain some extra knowledge completing the basic university level – like, for example, an engineer who need certified skills in economics).

In the next phase we plan a possibility to build up a university degree with the APEL and especially to introduce it again for

making access open to those who had once failed and are willing to take a second chance for higher studies.

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THE APEL DISCUSSION IN GERMANY[1]

Peter Alheit, University of Göttingen/Dorothea Piening, University of Bremen; Germany

In the field we recognised that the discussions about APEL schemes in Germany – compared to the British discourse - are quite at the beginning. On the other hand - after periods of obstinate formalisation and processes of institutionalisation - even in the German educational system the trend of "informalisation" is noticeable. In this context also an increase of acceptance of non-formal learning is - more or less - remarkable in all different areas of adult education – last but not least as a common *didactic principle.* In this sense "experience" and "admission" are approaching each other. This trend also matches well the results of the Faure Report (1972) as to the results of the more recent Delors Report (1992), which both lay stress on the increasing importance of non-formal learning.

In the sense of *accreditation* of non-formal learning APEL, however, is still not in existence in the field of higher education. Since the seventies there are some opening tendencies for employees who do not have A-levels at their disposal. However these ways of access have been orientated at the formal A-levels for a long time. Only some years ago discussions and activities became more important in removing the prerequisite of access to university studies from the more general qualification of the A-level to more professional competencies. The discussions focus the idea of putting the same emphasis on general as on vocational education. Simultaneously there are still formalised arrangements which are far removed from the basic idea of accreditation of individual competencies and qualifications.

On the other hand we identify in the area of vocational training the trend of "modularization" of acquiring qualification and knowledge and – apart from this process - also the trend of flexibility and a policy of openness. The process of lifelong learning forces the individual to combine permanently new-work connections, life-relations and spheres of interest. Linear or mono-causal education paths (like the A-level as a guarantee to a well-paid job in the higher management) will no longer exist. In this sense the "patchwork-biography" is a vivid reality.

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[1] This paper refers to the out-comes of the national APEL-Workshop, 3-5 April 1998, University of Bremen

Besides great efforts due to the explicit interests of economy, processes of informal learning are in the risk to be used for formal qualification. Topical discussions, e.g. on the value of the "dual system" show that even traditional systems or institutions of formal accreditation like the vocational system and the universities have to follow this trend of openness and flexibility. If the professions of the future involve qualifications whose synthesis has to take place permanently by the learner, one will tend to be increasingly dubious of the viability of installing education paths which refer to an ideal-typical customer, who probably never has existed, and it will be increasingly necessary to look for those qualifications and competencies, which are assessed in the traditional qualification system, but never imparted.

In this sense APEL would be an important strategy within an education-system which is firmly attached to modern society. For the further development of the APEL-concept in Europe an optimistic prediction can be given as a lot of companies are interested - although mainly for economic reasons - in non-formal learning.

Within this context there are four aspects which serve as the basis for the APEL-discussion in Germany:

- Is it possible to accredit self-directed learning in a reliable way?
- What happens with strictly institutionalised education and qualification opportunities if attitudes become more important than special qualifications?
- Self-evaluation of learning experiences could be accompanied by risks of "de-limiting" personal information. This would be a problem of data-security and could be followed by misuse of personal data.
- The openness of strictly formalised education and qualification paths might be followed by the retreat of the public education tasks. It may turn out that the responsibility for ensuring that qualification of education takes place lies entirely with the individual, i.e. education as an individual risk of reproduction.

The main problem with regard to the acceptance of non-formal education is its valuation. The British example of the "written report" shows very clearly that the essential thing is to depict self-reflexive objectivations of learner's experiences. This "accounting to oneself needs" to be subject to concrete valuation criteria - an evaluation concept

that has just been elaborated but that could have a central role within the advisory function of education institutions.

To protect the privacy of applicants it must not only create a legal system of taking information but it also has to be clear which aspects of informal learning are necessary and how they would be further utilised. So the enterprises and institutions have to clarify their concrete requirements and to give reasons for these requirements. The outcomes of this process of "double reflection" ("discursivation") would be part of a democratic progress, a flexibility and a new kind of legalisation of education and qualification. The integration of informal learning outcomes to the explicit and implicit expectations of the institutions would run probably in the way of "modularization" of learning and qualification.

The idea of self-learning-centres, communicative evaluation-workshops, etc, also opens the system of public responsibility for education and learning. Among state and private initiative there could - besides the permanent discussion of a "welfare–mix" - grow up an open "learning-and-qualification space", financed by user-controlled funding. In this environment APEL procedures would be perfectly conceivable. In this sense the outlook for the discussed trends in Germany too is quite positive.