



Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) – The case for Recognition of Prior Learning sites and knowledges in South Africa's transforming education system

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ABSTRACT

By definition and purpose, education is the development of human capital towards meeting the individual and social needs of learners and their societies. This transdisciplinary collaboration parallels the underpinning principle of Lave and Wenger's Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Lave & Wenger, 1990) to South Africa's post-colonial legitimisation of alternative sites and enskilmant canons. Central to both is legitimisation of knowledge acquisition from communities of practice or sites and 'knowers' (Mphahlele, 1992) 'outside formal institutions' of teaching/learning. Considered and termed 'informal' and by deduction, less legitimate for meritorious enskilment, the South African Qualifications Authority (1995, 2002) decrees a transformative paradigm and method of validating these sites and their skills production. SAQA highlights the fact that the pedagogical approach of such sites is context- and learner-centred with demonstrable socially valuable skills. This post-colonial mandate thus centres the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as an acknowledgement of multiple foci of skills production, decreeing their overdue certification, as in our case study of the Van Wyk situation. The approach confronts and deconstructs the colonial marginalisation of human capital from outside 'formal'/official institutions. It is part of the ideological framework of redressing the race and class exclusion mechanisms of artisans and others from the landscape of skills possession. It subscribes therefore to the canon of different 'ways of knowing' (Mosala, 1998). Van Wyk's narrative exemplify the merits of 'outside-institutions' learning and enskilment to various levels of complexity. The objective of such legitimisation is that certification provides credibility and legitimacy, thereby widening the marketability of apprentices' skills. The social recognition and accorded certification thereof carries uncontested confirmation of expertise.

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1. Introduction

Lave and Wenger's (1990) model of Legitimate Peripheral Participation advocates a reconceptualisation of the recognition accorded to learning and training which occurs in what are termed 'communities of practice' (Smith, 2003). This kind of learning process has similar elements to formal institution-based learning, namely practitioners called 'oldtimers', learners as apprentices, pedagogical

approaches that are practice- or observation-based, with outcomes which address those communities' social needs. As an outcomes-based approach, the social engagement presupposed by the teaching/learning purpose is fulfilled.

The historicity of South Africa's education system centred on the devaluation of knowledge or skills produced outside Eurocentric prescriptives which excluded curriculum content, referentials and the realities of African learners (Kgaphola & Mthembu in Seepe, 1998), forcing them to rely on memorisation of alienating and alienated content (Henry, 1993; Mathonsi, 1988; Molteno in Kallaway 1990; Sobukwe, 1960). Learners' cognitive faculties were thus not engaged, resulting in what was termed 'rote drilling, memorisation or cramming' (Mahlomaholo & Bereng, 2005; Ntantala, 1960; Tiro, 1972). In a post-colonial context, the education system requires the critical recognition of diverse backgrounds, learning

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styles and knowledge production, thereby reflecting what is termed the 'learner-centred' approach.

The new approach, termed Curriculum 2005 or Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), subsequently revised as the New Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 1997, 2007) requires context relevant content, pedagogies which engage learners' cognitive abilities, the stimulation of inquiry or 'natural curiosity' (Mphahlele, 1992), collaborative learning and applied practice of what has been learnt. These elements of effective learning are cited by Smith (2003) in Lave and Wenger's (1990) LPP model where demonstrable outcomes are reflected as skills acquired. Our paper thus seeks to establish the parallel relevance of the LPP's demarginalisation of non-institutional enskilment, to the South African Qualifications Authority's (SAQA, 1998, 2001) validation of similarly derived knowledges and skills. SAQA uses a rigorous process to measure, quantify and assure the quality of those skills and duly credit them towards certification.

1.1. The social theory of learning as applicable in contested contexts

Learning is a process that is not confined to formal schooling or instruction but includes incidental or other forms of learning that are part of everyday life (Merriam & Brockett, 1997) as facilitated by observation and practice. Rogers (2003) contends that experience is a cumulative learning process constructed through 'everyday learning'. Value-loaded terminology such as 'non-formal' is part of the construction of de-legitimation where 'formal' is accorded superior value or status, regardless of the demonstrable effectiveness of vocational training, internships and apprenticeships. The demonstrable competence of such trainees is linked to their cognitive development (Vrey, 1992) as their knowledge gain migrates from the periphery or zero level to the centre as their training programme is advanced by practitioners using practice and theory. The outcomes of such training constitute what are termed 'best practices' as they are tried and tested through repeated application in communities of learning with visible outcomes (Reed & Loughran (1984), Reed & Loughran in Merriam & Brockett, 1997), as demonstrated in Van Wyk's example.

Knowledge that is not socially beneficial cannot be defined as knowledge, but rather as a collection of information that is inert and useless. Mphahlele's submission (2002) and Alexander (2004) capture this purpose aptly in the following words: "Education should equip people to break down imposed barriers to self-fulfilment and self-realisation. Self-realisation can only be valid, however, if the needs of one's community are served by it" (p. 23). Critical pedagogists such as Cummins (1996), Freire (1985), and Giroux (1991) advocate context-relevant pedagogics as essential in responding to Dewey's (1926) views on 'teaching apprentices or learners from their own realities'. Lave and Wenger's (1990) method of teaching through practice thus propels the initiates or apprentices from the periphery of *not knowing*, towards the centre of the community's skilled practice.

In engaging apprentices the experienced practitioners' approach resonates with the social realities of their contexts and social needs. The "social process ... [is thus]...driven by common interests, understood and continually renegotiated by its members as a social entity, leading to [established]... routines... vocabulary and styles" (Smith, 2003, Nisbet, 2004) as desired outcomes. Social interaction that is 'renegotiated' by these communities necessarily reflects 'their way of doing' (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the approach of 'renegotiated' ways of 'doing', Lave and Wenger (1991) highlight identity matters as the culturally specific socialisation of 'newcomers'. The learning apprentice or individual is involved as a whole person in the social processes within the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Our position concurs with Lave and Wenger's

(1991) advocacy for legitimisation of different approaches in diverse locales or settings, as reflected in the South African context.

1.1.1. Migrating unskilled initiates from 'the periphery to the centre' of demonstrable skills – hands-on learning through community practice

As newcomers, apprentices or learners are socialised or trained in the first environment or the environment outside of, or preceding the schools as institutions of learning. That first environment includes the home, community and society as a whole; thus, as learners first enter school, they are not '*tabula rasa*', in that they do have knowledges derived from that first learning environment. For Lave and Wenger (1991) at the commencement of their training or learning in this situation, they are on the periphery of the body of knowledge located within the *community of practice*. As their training advances from the periphery of the community's body of knowledge through the attainment of various skills levels, they advance towards the central position occupied by their practitioners, assessed through competency evaluation of what they accomplish as they perform assigned tasks.

Colonial education in South Africa and elsewhere excluded the realities and knowledges of the first environment, substituting these with content and methodologies which were alien to the colonised. Their context-based content was not referenced, neither were needs identified in their communities. The curriculum, examples used and the objectives of their school programmes often referenced a world of which they were not part. In South Africa for example, one contends that the need for a scientific exploration of affordable housing material would have benefited poor African communities so that shacks and squatter camps would be erased from the landscape of their lives. Many elders in African communities of this country still remember how one type of laundry soap was made from animal fat and caustic soda in many homes. It is those knowledges that could have been passed down to the younger generation, refined into more effective products in institutions thereby building on and referencing community practices and epistemologies.

We therefore contend that the exclusion of those realities de-linked the younger generation learners from an education which dialogues both with their communities' social needs and the knowledges possessed by those communities. SAQA's mandate refers to the 'legitimation' of marginalised epistemologies through processes which subject such knowledges to quantification and quality assurance. Through a formal set of principles and guidelines, apprentice achievements are determined, valued, certified and registered, leading to the certification of knowledge attained (NQF Act 27, 1996) from *communities of practice*. From a critical pedagogical perspective, there is for us as Africans in post-colonial education, a double relevance for unpacking 'peripheral' and 'legitimation' – where peripheral applies to the beginners' starting point in embarking on enskilment training, as well as seeking space for legitimisation of excluded realities, needs and epistemologies specifically applicable to African people.

Our trajectory seeks to link aspects of Lave and Wenger's LPP to the deconstruction of the de-legitimation of knowledges compiled outside formal institutions. We contend that insofar as the merit of such knowledges was demonstrated by their utility value, they deserve refinement (where needed) and most importantly, parity in value and certification. In this way diverse knowledge production will not be hierarchically disadvantageous to 'native' knowledges, but rather be representative of the multi-focalism of a multicultural society (Mzamane, 1999). Furthermore, the repositioning of RPL as legitimate and acceptable knowledge, when acknowledged as such, speaks to the recognition of an identity as an apprentice or journeyman who values the person for her/his professional knowledge.

1.1.2. Constructivist recognition of knowledge gained from communities of practice

Social constructivism emphasises how reality-based meaning and the understanding thereof grow out of social encounters (Anthon, 2005) in the social interaction of community members' management of their environments. Such management leads to skills development as a response to the satisfaction of their needs. Lave and Wenger's LPP theory captures this skills transmission process as the migration of the apprentice from the periphery of that knowledge to the centre through practical training by practitioners or knowers in the community. The apprentice acquires skills through practice and observational learning, where s/he observes what the master does, and imitates the model or master even when the model is no longer present.

Constructivists such as Jacobs, Vakalisa and Gawe (2004) point out that "the social nature of the work will produce a classroom in which cooperative learning strategies use" (p.209) practice or observation in social settings (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Ormond, 1995). As the apprentice learns more complex aspects of the practice, his/her participative engagement is at the cognitive and social levels (Vygotsky, 1978) as in institutions themselves. Patsula (1999) and Bandura's (1977) social learning theories endorse Vygotsky's social cognitive development theory, which concur with Lave and Wenger's (1991) position on demonstrable outcomes. Their different approaches contribute to human capital development as Van Wyk's example will illustrate.

Non-institution trainers and trainees utilise the 'known to the unknown' teaching approach advocated by the social constructivism school as the step-by-step or level-by-level progression of knowledge acquisition, as an apprentice or learner's cognition tackles the increasing complexity of phenomena or principles (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1998).

Vygotsky (1998) states that "because cognition is socially organized... the structures of higher mental functions represent a cast of collective social relations between people" (p. 291). Amongst other merits, the reality-related approach affords apprentices practical realisation of the cost of a mistake in a manner that 'wrongly memorised' formulas often may not. Whether such knowledge is gained before, during or after institutional enrolments, it serves as the foundation reference in subsequent or parallel learning from 'formal' schools. Unequal access to formal institutions dictates that "we shall forever need institutions of non-formal learning designed for young and older adults... the two major interest groups that a community-based education is intended to mobilise" (Mphahlele, 2002, pp.45–51).

2. Possibilities for the realisation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in a post-colonial South African scenario

In South Africa's apartheid education period, similarities existed to other colonial contexts where social constructs such as race, culture, expression form (text or orate information), gender, origin, or language were used to disadvantage skilled people or knowledges gained from institutions outside these recognised by the dominant colonial group. This led to the inequitable valuing and validation of differently generated knowledges and 'knowers' (Mphahlele, 1981, 1992).

The South African post-1994 democratic period ushered in an enabling legal framework for a paradigm shift towards equitable legitimisation of African representative content, sites of learning, skills gained and knowledges transmitted which were achieved through the deracialisation of access. Part of that enabling legal framework refers to the establishment of the South African Qualifications Authority (1995) whose central mandate was the recognition of learning acquired prior to, or outside of, institutions regarded as 'formal'. This portion of the mandate is termed Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL.

2.1. Recognition and legalisation of RPL as a redress mechanism for legitimating 'communities of practice' in South Africa

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA, Act 58 of 1995) Act was promulgated for the recognition of skills and knowledge acquired from "non-formal and informal learning", as well as the "promotion of lifelong learning" (SAQA, 1995).

A framework for evaluating such skills and knowledge was structured for attributing value to various levels of knowledge or skills, leading to the certification of knowledge attained. SAQA's tool for this recognition and accreditation is called the National Qualifications Framework (NQF Act 27, 1996). It comprises a formalised set of principles and guidelines by which records of learner achievements are determined and duly certified and registered to enable national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge gained from social settings or *communities of practice*. The SAQA edict therefore affirms Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) with a clear accreditation process applied by the NQF for such knowledges.

For various political, social and economic reasons for the majority of Africans, formal schooling (pre-1994) was not accessible, such that knowledge acquired and used for self-sustenance was gained outside formal institutions. Given the *communities of practice* referred to earlier, those skills were as applicable as they were beneficial to the lives of apprentices or trainees, their families and their communities. As our case study of a qualified master builder in the construction sector will demonstrate, the skills that Mr Klaas Van Wyk acquired were both *quantifiable* and *certifiable* in terms of the *quality of the knowledge* they encompassed and their social benefits (Nyerere, 1968). We seek to demonstrate how the LPP's communities of practice as enskilled sites converge with South Africa's redress mandate which requires legitimisation of the RPL, and its accompanying tool, the NQF. Both the RPL and the NQF were developed for the following redress outcomes:

- to structure and redress historically disadvantaged groups from exclusion;
- to develop individuals' capacity through skills;
- to facilitate access to jobs and progression in career paths; and
- to promote employment equity (SAQA, 1995; Van Wyk, 2007).

Redress is therefore central to our subscribing to deconstructing the apartheid legacy of differential access to 'formal' institutional learning, and the sole validation pertinent to such sites.

2.1.1. RPL and the discriminatory political basis for its former de-legitimisation in South Africa

RPL as a transformative tool recognises learners' knowledge and skills gained from experiences through social settings as the foundation on which other knowledges can be constructed. By legitimising and acknowledging the validity of such knowledges, it creates space for legitimisation of those sites and the practice-based knowledge gained from either society-based training or occupation-based practice. The RPL debunks the notion that there is 'only one way of knowing' (Mosala, 1998) which, in colonial situations of hegemonic hierarchisation, involves the privileging of Eurocentric schema of referentials. Understanding the system means unpacking the not-so-subtle machinations which subordinated even the names of countries under those of the colonising country's or nation's identity, such as *Portuguese East Africa* for post-colonial Mozambique, *Spanish Sahara*, the *Belgian Congo*, *French Equatorial Africa* and so on. The socio-political and economic relations in colonised countries flowed from the superstructural relations, discourse and practice, the ramifications of which affected all aspects of life, including education. The referentials used in the education system thus reflected the dominance and subjugation of the identity of the colonised group/s

and thus, any referentials which accorded them equal status or recognition as human beings with intellect (Sobukwe, 1960).

In South Africa this phenomenon was accompanied by denotational terms such as 'non-white, non-European, native, kaffir' where 'white and European' were accorded the *standard* referential position whilst subordinating the rest outside that nationality, citizenry or 'race' (Sobukwe, 1960). Curriculum content and skills gained from the dominated populations were thus invalidated and excluded from credit, value and certification. The banal rationale often used was that where knowledge or skills are not textualised, documented or otherwise recorded, their value is unverifiable and therefore ambiguously subjective in spite of proof such as the mathematical and architectural expertise demonstrated by the Zimbabwe Stone Complex or the geology, physics and chemistry expertise used in extracting gold from gold ore in constructing the Mapungubwe golden rhinoceros by the people of the Mapungubwe kingdom in South Africa's Limpopo province (Mntuyedwa, 2003; Molefe, 2004).

These are just two examples that underpin our contention for the urgent need for the application of the SAQA edict on RPL and the NQF as instrumental towards legitimisation of historically non-privileged knowledges, spaces and canons. SAQA's concise definition of its mandate of equity in legitimisation of diversity specifically applicable to indigenous African contexts is "a process whereby, through assessment, credit is given to learning which has already been acquired in different ways" (1995). Given the importance of assessment for certification and legitimisation, RPL allows candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through a series of assessments (outcomes – what they can do, demonstrate) specifically designed to assist them in displaying their competence rather than through theoretical training. At the end of the assessment process each candidate is issued with credits for the knowledge that they have been able to display. These credits are linked to SAQA-registered qualifications of skills acquired from *formal training, workplace experience, or general life experience* (1995).

In the absence of certificated skills' qualifications, the RPL serves as a measure of an individual's readiness for further or alternative formal training that would support his or her career progress and personal development. It is therefore a tool of redress, introduced to demarginalise the skills of those who were disadvantaged by lack of access to institutions of learning, whilst possessing demonstrable skills from *communities of practice*. In so doing, the RPL is an empowering tool that fosters transformation in acknowledging the skills of citizens in an equitable manner, and operates within a democratic society.

2.1.2. Empowering citizens through the RPL lodged within a social constructivist paradigm

Lave and Wenger (1991) acknowledged the interrelatedness of the master trainer as an effective credible teaching agent in much the same way as formal education teachers. The sites differ, the methods of training may also be different, but in both sites, training and learning take place. Both agencies and the pedagogics use practice to demonstrably engage apprentices' or learners' cognition, albeit the differing emphasis on practice. Both sites require trainees to be personally and collectively involved in making meaning of what is taught, together with demonstrable outcomes and skills. Both sites thus contribute to human capital development as our respondent's narrative will illustrate. Human capital is here not utilised as a social engineering tool as Apartheid was by the Nationalist government; rather the emphasis is on utilising the human potential of the individual as something that can transform his/her identity as one of value within a democratic society.

Thus, in *communities of practice*, skills are transmitted from the socially and culturally structured lived-in world of these individuals and their trainers. It is that lived-in practice which tailors special

expertise gained from such sites. Mistakes readily indicate consequences in a manner that 'wrongly memorised' formulas may not often indicate. Devaluing the human capital from such sites as was practised in the past, can only be concluded to spring from reasons other than the quality of knowledge gained there from.

The indisputable enskilment of Mr Klaas Van Wyk exemplifies the discriminatory subjectivity of the Eurocentric devaluing of processes from alternative sites. Van Wyk's competencies stand up to the assessment scrutiny applied in the construction or building industry in South Africa. We contend that the socially situated learning of seventy-two-year-old Van Wyk amply articulates the value unfairly denied such sites. By contrast, the social constructivism school acknowledges the step-by-step or level-by-level progression of knowledge acquisition as an apprentice or learner's cognition tackles the increasing complexity of phenomena or principles (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1998). Vygotsky (1998) states that "because cognition is socially organized... the structures of higher mental functions represent a cast of collective social relations between people" (p. 291).

Related to the social constructivism-learning theory, is the aspect of collaboration with peers through interaction whereby knowledge is exchanged, refined and further developed (Johnson (2001), Johnson in Nisbet, 2004). This underscores the validity of South Africa's transformative approach through OBE/Curriculum 2005/the National Curriculum Statement which emphasises peer collaboration as a means/mode of social development that would benefit trade or skills 'graduands'.

In a constructivist manner, the apprentice as a learner, acquires skills through practice and observational learning, where s/he observes what the master does, and imitates the model or master even when the model is no longer present. Even where the observer does not exhibit immediate and visible change in behaviour, the benefit of observation cannot be discounted, given the impact of learning from observing other people in social settings (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Ormond, 1999). Other scholars endorse the effectiveness of outcomes from such social interaction, such as Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social cognitive development, complemented by the social-learning theory views of Bandura (1977) and Patsula (1999) regarding the fundamental role played by *social interaction* in the engagement and development of cognition.

The RPL is thus a redress mechanism which de-hegemonises sites and skills gained outside the institution through training developed in various sectors or workplaces of learning and training. In extending the validation of the RPL, specifically in the building or construction industry, the South African government established the *Construction Education and Training Authority* (CETA, 2003a) in April 2000 under the *Skills Development Act* (Act 31 of 1998). CETA's primary objective is to influence the course of training and skills development in the construction sector. Various skills development projects and learnerships are initiated with a view to developing a pool of skilled and motivated construction workers whose abilities are recognised and valued in terms of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). This is a continuation of the mandate to acknowledge people with skills but no certification, and/or generate qualifications in the construction sector to be recognised under the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Special agencies have been established for this skills development mandate, one of which is CETA. CETA (2003a) is accredited by SAQA for Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA), and is authorised to transmit or teach skills, whilst further monitoring and accrediting training through the agency of accredited training providers. Given the experience- or practice-based approach to their training programmes, the training providers follow the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) legitimisation view.

The interrelatedness of the LPP and RPL benefits will illustrate how Van Wyk's knowledge portfolio *qualifies* him to be a master-builder in the construction or building industry, in spite of that expertise not being certified by 'formal' institutions.

2.1.3. Methods for the implementation of the RPL by the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) for the purpose of legitimating skills acquisition in extra- 'formal' institutions, such as the building industry

As indicated above, CETA is accredited by SAQA as an Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) body authorised to accredit skilled people whose expertise is not certified because it was acquired in alternative sites. In accordance with CETA's quality driven philosophy, standards are rigorously adhered to. CETA is accredited as an Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). This ETQA status authorises CETA to accredit and monitor the delivery of training by Accredited Training Providers as CETA does not offer training itself. One of the tasks of CETA (2003b) is to ensure that people who have acquired skills but do not have the required qualifications, participate in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessment process. CETA co-ordinates and manages the activities of the Skills Development Department as per the Skills Development Act and the Skills Development Levies Act. It also monitors the management and implementation of the work skills plans (WSP). CETA further liaises with stakeholders, Skills Development Funders, Provincial Regional Offices and WSP Agents. CETA monitors the implementation of the Sector Skills Plan (SSP), manages and administers learnerships in the sector and skills programmes (Meyer, 1998). In South Africa the challenge facing the Recognition of Prior Learning for the African population is of a different magnitude from that faced by other population groups. Historically, Blacks faced economic and political obstacles to accessing quality or any kind of education, which excluded them from formal institutions of learning. Invariably they were uprooted by the economic 'push and pull' factors to work in mines and on farms, and subjected to the powerlessness of the disenfranchised in being denied recognition for the skills acquired from those sites. Their location in the labour market was a racially regulated exclusion from certificated skills levels through Acts such as the Job Reservation Act of 1911, amended in 1926. This Act decreed that certain occupational levels be the sole monopoly of the 'white' population. Where Blacks (Coloureds, Indians and Africans) had certain skills, the racialised job assignment index devalued these in terms of both authority and remuneration. Job Reservation invariably meant the "white induna (boss)" occupied the supervisory position from 'the shade' whilst Blacks bore the brunt of physical labour. They performed the tasks and demonstrated competency in those tasks but racially, did not qualify for acknowledgement thereof in terms of remuneration, position accorded or in authority. Given the hands-on nature of both practice and delegation, this meant ironically that black workers often acquired greater skills than those reflected in certificates as qualification indicators, with these skills often exceeding those acquired from institutions considered significant. The assessment of these skills is based on reality itself, in terms of the final product or outcome being publicly tested by inspectors and more importantly, by the client whose project in which they were engaged.

As they gained skills, the apartheid government pre-empted claims of expertise qualification for apprentices by formally denying them accredited apprentice status under the Apprenticeship Act 1922 as amended 1944. In 1951, three years after the Nationalist Party came to power in the apartheid government the Black Building Workers Act (Act 27 of 1951) was passed. The Act "granted to Blacks the opportunity of qualifying as skilled building workers with a view to rendering service to their own communities, but

which, inter alia, also prohibited Blacks from undertaking skilled building work in White urban areas" (italics for emphasis). From this point onwards, they could only be part of a building programme for housing construction reserved for Black 'townships'. The unintended outcome of their enskilment, was short-circuited by those sectors being categorised as 'un-papered' or 'un-certificated trades' as applicable to Black builders and painters.

For South Africa's new democratic and transformative period, with its orientation towards equity in access and in enskilment, these historical, race-based obstacles created the need for operational programmes for the application of the RPL as a legitimating policy; thus, the establishment of the Construction Education Authority (CETA, 2003b) mentioned earlier. Our respondent in the case study below illustrates the role of agencies such as the CETA.

3. The case of Mr Klaas van Wyk as exemplifying both the LPP and the RPL as enskilment from communities of practice sites

Our respondent's name is Mr Klaas Van Wyk. He was born on 19 May 1931 in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. From 1910 South Africa was a Union and had Dominion status, which allowed the country to rule itself. Under the Population Registration Act (Act of 1929, as amended 1950), Van Wyk was classified as a Cape Coloured. His family was very poor and attending only primary school up to Grade 5 level, his impoverished circumstances forced him to leave school.

In 1948 at the young age of 15 he started working as a 'hand-langer' helping his father on building construction sites where his father supported and showed him the trade of bricklaying. At this time there was no job reservation and discriminatory laws which excluded other races from the labour market.

In 1949, the political arena in South Africa changed when the White Afrikaner Nationalist Party (NP) won the elections and came to power. The NP changed labour policies pertaining to race and set job reservations for various race groups. Discriminatory laws pertaining to jobs which excluded Blacks (Coloureds, Indians and Africans) from entering certain highly skilled jobs (Job Reservation Act) were implemented.

His narrative runs thus:

'I am Klaas van Wyk, 72 years old, a master-builder in the building construction sector for 58 years in my 'trade'. Even now in my 58 years of work experience, I am still involved in mentoring young and upcoming building contractors. I did not have any formal qualification because of circumstances beyond my family's control. I was forced by the previous South African apartheid education system to work under the supervision of my father and learned the 'trade' of master builder as my father did. I learned my 'trade' from a very young age through a process of what they called a *handlanger*.

The term 'handlanger' denotes a building-site labourer or assistant who functions literally as the 'hands' of the 'white' supervisor in getting the manual work done.

Before you qualified for the master-builder title, you learned the trade through quality craftsmanship over a number of years. Let's give an example of this: you first learned how to mix the concrete properly. Then you learned all the bricklaying styles. I gained my experience through these processes.

The above paragraph indicates the stringent quality evaluation of the 'hands-on' training process. Despite such evaluation or tests to be 'passed', the paragraph below indicates the long training period of 'six to eight years' of skills training which were denied certification or qualifications; thus, the relevance of accessing equitable legitimization in South Africa's post 1994 SAQA/NQF Act.

Van Wyk emphasised that the ‘hands-on’ learning process was very stringent but quite effectively enskilling because of its prolonged and thorough approach:

If you are not a graduate with official qualifications you go through a tough process for more than *six to eight years* under the guidance and mentorship of a master builder to pass your ‘trade’; firstly, as a bricklayer. I learned my craftsmanship the hard way. My father, who also worked all his life for more than sixty years without any formal qualifications in the building construction sector, was my mentor. My father delivered quality craftsmanship in building construction. He was very strict and did quality checks on all work that was done. He had vast knowledge of quality workmanship in building construction. He passed on his skills and experiences of more than sixty years in the construction sector to me. I called this the ‘*craftsmanship practice*’ in the building sector (*italics for emphasis*).

As Van Wyk outlined the mentorship–apprentice interaction, it became clear that his father ‘professionally’ quality-assured his work in accordance with the family’s criteria of quality craftsmanship. Van Wyk junior’s competencies are demonstrable by the diverse buildings he has worked on:

I constructed many houses, schools, hotels and office blocks that were approved and quality assured by the building inspectors of municipalities, mortgage banks, quality-assured officials and civil construction contractors with tertiary qualifications. I believed through my efforts to help other people with whom I can share my experience in the building sector. As I said, I brought value to myself, to my fellow country men and women. I am very proud what I achieved over the past 58 years as a builder in South Africa. I am proudly South African!!

Having been trained according to professional standards through practice, he also became an effective teacher, even to those accorded *certificated* ‘formal’ institutional training:

The interesting thing here is that most qualified graduates from universities or technical colleges did not have our experiences to back their official qualifications.

This refers to a Bachelor of Science in Construction Management. His statement endorses Merriam and Brockett’s (1997) assertion that “learning is a process that is not confined to formal schooling or instruction but includes incidental and other forms of learning that are part of everyday life” (p. 6) as facilitated by observation and practice. Illich (1971) strongly opines that “the freedom of a universal skill must be guaranteed by laws which permit discrimination only on the basis of tested skills and not on the basis of educational pedigree” (p. 130). Van Wyk’s case substantiates this view as he identified the qualitative difference and limitations between what formal institutions regard as ‘accredited qualification book knowledge’ and his experience-based applied knowledge in the building industry. He regards the theory-minus-practice graduate as an “inexperienced boy” (sic) who nevertheless “wants to make quick money using your experience to help him with huge projects.”

With more amusement than rancour he continued:

For example, I have told some novices that in building a double-storey building against the slope of the mountain-side you cannot use a ‘dumpy level’ or ‘water level’ (builders used it as their levelling instrument in construction). I used a ‘water pipe level’ which has a similar function to the ‘dumping level’ to measure the profile between the vertical and horizontal angle (90°) of a building. I love to share such information with these young builders with certificates.

He mentored technical college/university graduates as well as his own son, a third generation Van Wyk, who gained from the combination of ‘formal’ instruction and his father’s knowledge:

I used my experience and passed on my vast knowledge, skills and experiences to my oldest son, Ashley who in 2000 read for a Bachelor of Technology degree in Construction Building, at the Peninsula University of Technology, in the Western Cape province. My oldest son, the third of the Van Wyk generation in building, was very fortunate to have obtained his official qualifications and even applied my experiences through a mentoring process to further his knowledge and skills in the trade.

With the advent of transformative approaches to the recognition of skills by South Africa’s new government, Van Wyk has accessed certification opportunities, which utilise both the RPL and LPP for giving credit where it is due, *albeit* belatedly for many such Black craftsmen.

Officially, my profession lasted for 45 years – all my life I have been doing my ‘trade’ as a master builder. [Officially retired, but still carrying on with his work, he has spent 58 years in the trade as indicated in the opening statement]. Now I am currently registered as a member of the South African Council for Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP, 2004). The SACPCMP acts as a regulatory body that governs the registration of professional and candidate construction mentors.

In 1983 the political system in South Africa made provision for the registration of Coloureds and Indians as “uncertified” building contractors whilst Africans were excluded from this arrangement. In 1986 Van Wyk registered under the amended Integration of Labour Laws Act, Act no 3341 of 1994, as a building contractor. In 1998, during the post-Apartheid period, Van Wyk’s contributions to the construction sector were officially acknowledged through membership of the Somerset West Building Contractors Association. This association recognises outstanding craftsmanship in the field of the building construction sector. He retired in 2002, but is currently assisting, supporting and mentoring young tradesmen for emerging building construction companies in the Western Cape province. Only through SAQA’s paradigmatic shift have Van Wyk’s managerial and mentoring skills been sufficiently recognised for him to belong to the SACPCMP (2004). This body’s responsibility is to ensure that professional construction mentors are evaluated in an equitable non-prejudicial manner and that they act and operate in accordance with the standards that are set by the Council of Construction Professions. SACPCMP members review mentors’ competencies, skills, experience and expertise in providing the best possible advice and support to emerging building contractors. They also act in the best interests of the supported contractor and the client by assessing the quality of the product delivered, thereby promoting the professional image of construction mentors and ensuring equal professional recognition amongst building/construction workers. The advocacy and accreditation roles assist the legitimation that is central to the appropriate utilisation of skills.

4. Legitimation of Peripheral Participation – relatedness to South Africa’s mainstreaming of the Recognition of Prior Learning

As demonstrated in the discussions above, the SAQA/NQF approach and the LPP both affirm the valuing practice-based skills and knowledge gained. In the South African context, Van Wyk’s situation confirms the discriminatory race-class disqualifier rather than the paucity of quality in such knowledges. The curriculum content, pedagogics used and assessment tools marginalised African

epistemologies, their production sites and their 'knowers'. Race, class and identity were thus intertwined in maintaining colonial supra-infra "notions of racism" (Essed, 1991, p. 49).

Grover (1987) maintains that in race-as-class hegemonic relations "whiteness means being dominant and it stands to reason that if someone's dominant, somebody else is down" (p. 34). McLaren (1989) points out that "Certain types of knowledge legitimate certain... class and racial interests. Whose interests does this knowledge serve? Who gets excluded as a result? Who is marginalised?" (p. 169). Inequitable legitimisation disadvantages qualified apprentices from being managers confining them to the 'menial' status of 'handlangers'. Theoretically, both the LPP and the RPL deconstruct the conceptual paradigm which values only those sites considered 'formal' and 'institutional'.

To transform these relations necessitates re-humanising those whose personhood has been negated on the basis of race. Personhood encompasses 'ways of seeing or reading the world' (Freire, 1981) and 'ways of doing' (Mosala, 1998).

4.1. Afrocentrism as a paradigm which recognises the diverse legitimacy of multifocal, multicultural and multiracial bases of knowledge-production sites

Alcoba (2008) defines the African specific framework as sites where "sources of knowledge and experiences of peoples of African descent are an integral feature of the teaching and learning environment". Mkabela (2005) and Seepe (1998) holds the view that the Afrocentric paradigm provides alternative insights into the democratisation of access to skills and social development, endorsing Renegecas and van Harmelen's (2008) ideas on the validity of local or indigenous knowledges from the World Intellectual Property perspective. African scholars (Asante & Asante in van Sertima, 1994; Mafube in Biko, 1996; Thiongo, 1988), contend that African knowers read and manage their environments from a specific identity-related world-view (Mecoamere, 1999; Nabudere, 2006; Makgoba, 1998), underpinned by the communal perspective. Whereas subjective Eurocentric assessment and accreditation impeded the validation of different knowledge sites (Bereng, in Chilungu & Niang, 1989; Kgaphola & Mthembu, in Seepe, 1998), SAQA promoted legitimisation of 'cross-border' pedagogies, for 'culturally diverse learning styles' (Nkomo & Seepe, 1999).

Afrocentric teaching modalities subscribe to the constructivist approach to learning, in which learning is a formative, cumulative process which builds on previously generated knowledge. Van Wyk's different socio-locational experiences before and after South Africa's New Dispensation, reflect the post-colonial interrogation of traditionalism which privileges institutions over historically devalued sites, termed *communities of practice* (Cullingford, 1990; Van Schalkwyk, 1990) and their knowledges or skills transmission (Mzamane, 1999).

5. Concluding reflective summary

Mr Klaas Van Wyk's experience and situation applies to countless artisans or craftsmen in South Africa's industrial and commercial sectors, including the construction sector. These workers' skills base is demonstrable proof that *communities of practice* do not necessarily lack the professional standards of assessment commonly regarded as existing only in 'formal' institutions. We concur with Lave and Wenger (1991) that the LPP exhibits the same elements of competent mentor, purpose of the training, systematic organisation of levels of transmitting skills, and outcomes assessment, as sites of 'formal learning'.

Examining Lave and Wenger's treatise on the Legitimation of Peripheral Participation, we concur from an anti-essentialist position that differences in approach, learning/teaching styles and varied sites of knowledge production have effective skills empowerment methodologies and outputs. As in Van Wyk's case, the socially constructed de-legitimisation or devaluing of apprenticeship can therefore be redressed only through equitable access to certification.

In South Africa's attempt to reach the *Millennium Development Goals* (2008) it is imperative that scholars participate actively in the provision of sustained development by deconstructing attitudinal, policy-based and procedural barriers to skills production and validation. Only then can the problem of skills shortage and unemployment be addressed effectively.

Van Wyk's knowledge-acquiring process from peripheral participation to being a master builder exemplifies Simon's (1992) theory of education for 'possibilities' for those excluded by essentialist demagogues in the education field. Through a graded process the apprentice progresses to certifiable levels of capacitation. For those Blacks blanketed under the erroneous term of 'unskilled', the Recognition of Prior Learning outside institutional sites deconstructs socially constructed barriers so as to enable the process of their certification.

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