

Developing a model of the various types of recognition of prior learning and their use in youth work in the european union

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Abstract:

In European policy, the recognition of prior learning (RPL) is seen as a step towards lifelong learning. This is especially related towards informal and non-formal learning (European Commission, 2000; 2001b). In the context of this study RPL refers to the provision of some kind of recognition of the learning that has taken place in these activities as described by Taylor and Clemans (2000). Due to rapid economical and technological changes individuals are pushed to acquire higher and more generic skills (Pool & Sewell, 2007). In order to keep up with this increasing pace, the full spectrum of learning (ranging from formal to informal learning) has to be used (Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003). To access this whole range, RPL practices need to be integrated into traditional educational systems. Doing so enables students to obtain partial or full qualifications based on previous experiences (European Commission, 2012a). Within the European Union (EU) two main problems were identified as part of an impact assessment into the state of the validation of non-formal and informal learning: (1) the limited opportunities and underuse of RPL practices and (2) the lack of compatibility and coherence between RPL approaches in the member states of the EU (European Commission, 2012b). In this thesis the first problem will be addressed and a solution will be generated in the form of a model which characterizes the different types of learning outcomes. The above translates into the following research questions for this study: 1. What causes RPL to be used so infrequently in youth work in the EU? 2. What would the characteristics be of a model describing various types of RPL? In order to address these questions a literature based Root Conflict Analysis was carried out to identify problems with regard to the underuse of RPL in Europe. This technique is used to identify causes that underlie the given problem. The analysis found four main categories of problems: the lack of a common language, the limited resources available and limited quality of RPL. Ranking these problems resulted in the language problem being selected to generate a solution for. By applying idea generating methodologies (inventive principles and –standards) solutions were developed to solve this problem. Ideas were divided in groups which were ranked using a multi-criteria decision matrix to determine the most appropriate one. The solution that was further developed is a model identifying the different aims why people seek RPL. Such a model can lead to a more targeted approach when it comes to helping individuals in getting their previous learning recognised. The created model follows a user-based approach and is based on the key players in the RPL process regarding portfolio use as described by Johnson (2002): the person seeking RPL, the process advisor and the assessor. To these, a fourth actor was added: the evaluator (as described by Paddison (2012)). From these four actors the assessor and evaluator were identified as having the greatest impact when it comes to the aim of the recognition. Variations in the way these actors can be represented make up the foundation of the model. These variations are self-assessment and assessment by others in case of the assessor and a limited and broad extent of recognition in case of the evaluator. By placing these in a 2x2 matrix the model was generated. It distinguishes four types of recognition (I to IV): type I recognition is related to the valuing of achievements by the individual (e.g. to foster self-confidence or empowerment of the individual), type II relates to proving one's achievements to a limited number of people (e.g. internal certification), type III to explaining the achievement of the individual to others (e.g. CV translation tools) and type IV to proving one's achievement on a large scale (e.g. credit exemption schemes). These types relate to the aims of recognition as

described by Hart, Howieson and Semple (2009). Variations in the role of assessor can be linked to different types of assessment. Assessment by others has often a more summative nature whereas self-assessment is often more formative. Variations in the extent of the recognition can be linked to different types of motivation of individuals. Recognition with a limited reach is more of intrinsic nature (related to the act itself and the value it brings to the individual) whereas more extensive reach of the recognition is related to more extrinsic motives (related to factors outside the individual e.g. status). To increase the practical value of the model an instrument was developed which allows organizations to identify the different types of recognition that are taking place. In this instrument a three-step process is used which organizations can use to identify and classify current strategies and develop new ones related to the development of new tools which enable the recognition of learning outcomes. This process can be aided by a database, which provides examples of recognition of learning outcomes in other organizations. For this purpose a prototype of this database was developed in this project. The main outcomes of this study include the overview of the problems that limit the adoption of RPL practices in European youth work. A second outcome is the model which gives an overview of the different ways learning outcomes can be recognized. This is valuable as this allows for a targeted development of tools which address one type of recognition. Further steps in the implementation of the outcomes of this study include the further testing of the instrument in a broad youth work context (testing of the instrument only took place in a Scouting context) and dissemination of the result in both the youth sector in Europe as well as the academic community. Areas for continuing research include the usability of the model in other (non youth work) contexts and preferences in the type of recognition in the various EU countries based on the national situation.

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