

The Legitimation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as Redress Mechanism for Work Spaces in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Narrative of a Black Master Builder

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ABSTRACT Prior to the first democratic elections in 1994, historically disadvantaged populations (blacks) in South Africa were subjected to Eurocentric learning content that discriminated against any validation of examples relevant to their lives. Invariably, the site and practitioners in prior learning processes are located in work spaces which are often outside formal institutions. RPL as endorsed by post-Apartheid legislation and structures, such as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the National Qualifications Framework (NRF) recognise knowledge and skills learnt from experiences through informal settings. In this paper, the narrative of a black master builder is presented as a case for RPL. Our contention is that learning experiences acquired from work spaces such as the building industry, are equally legitimate, so too are their 'knowers'. Transformative redress mechanisms should recognise diverse 'ways of knowing' and the assessment of quality and enskilment. Our case, reflected in narrative form, will indicate the quality and social benefit of workspaces, historically undervalued and unaccredited due to what SAQA (1995) terms lack of 'certification' rather than merit.

INTRODUCTION

In South Africa's apartheid education period, similarities existed with 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 knowledge gained from institutions outside those recognised by the dominant colonial group. This led to inequitable valuing and validation of differently generated knowledges and 'knowers' (Mphahlele 1981, 1992). The historicity of the South African education system thus centred on the devaluation of knowledge or skills produced outside Eurocentric prescriptives and excluded curriculum content, referentials and the realities of African learners (Kgaphola and 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). Their cognitive faculties were thus not engaged resulting in what was termed 'rote drilling, memorisation or cramming' (Ntantala 1960; Tiro 1972; Mahlomaholo and Bereng 2005), whereas South Africa's constitution-based mandate in education is captured under Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), subsequently revised as the New Curriculum Statement (Department of Education 2007b). The *critical* outcomes expected from the OBE approach are the engagement of learners' cognitive abilities, stimulation of inquiry or 'natural curiosity' (Mphahlele 1992), critical thinking, practice, application of what has been learnt and working with other learners or participants. Post-colonially, the education system requires critical recognition of difference from the diverse backgrounds, learning styles and knowledge production of learners.

Furthermore, the first democratic elections in 1994 ushered in an enabling legal framework for a paradigm shift towards equitable legitimation of African representative content, sites of learning, skills gained and knowledges transmitted, all achieved through the de-racialisation of access. According to Pitman (2009), there is global consensus amongst labour agencies to recognise learning acquired outside of formal working

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environments, for reasons of social equity, improved access to education for traditionally under-represented groups and the development of a 'life-long' learning culture within the broader community. Part of that enabling legal framework refers to the establishment of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in 1998, the central mandate of which was recognition of learning acquired prior to, or outside of, institutions regarded as 'formal'. Subsequent to this development, the newly instituted National Qualifications Framework (NQF), further endorsed the legitimisation of historically non-privileged knowledges, spaces and canons. This portion of the mandate is termed Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Within the Australian context, the National Board of Employment, Education and Training gave impetus to the unfolding of processes that demand of institutions of higher learning recognition of non-formal learning, such as work or life experiences for the purpose of admission, into or credit towards tertiary qualifications (Pitman 2009).

UNPACKING OF RPL AND THE DISCRIMINATORY POLITICAL BASIS FOR ITS FORMER DE-LEGITIMISATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

RPL recognises learners' knowledge and skills learnt from experiences through social settings as the foundation on which other knowledges can be constructed. By legitimating 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. Conrad (2008) views RPL as the formal acknowledgement of skills, knowledges and competencies that are gained through work experiences, informal training and life experiences. The latter he states as follows: 'The recognition of prior learning is practised globally as a means of honouring and building on mature learners past experiential learning.' It debunks the notion that there is 'only one way of knowing' (Mosala 1988) 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 *Portu-guese* 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 which filtered into 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). Sobukwe's position is concurrent with that of Andersson and Osman (2008) who claim that RPL in South Africa is comparable to both the United Kingdom and France. RPL is construed as a practice that could contribute to the social inclusion of historically marginalised groups within society and where the situatedness and the collective dimension of learning and knowledge are taken seriously and valued.

In South Africa this phenomenon was accompanied by denotative terms such as 'non-white, non-European, native' 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 was unverifiable and therefore ambiguously subjective in spite of proof such as the Mathematics and Architectural expertise demonstrated by the Zimbabwe Stone Complex or the Geology, Physics and Chemistry expertise used in extracting gold from gold ore and the construction of the Mapungubwe golden rhinoceros by the people of the Mapungubwe kingdom in South Africa's Limpopo province (Molefe 2004; Mntuyedwa 2003).

These are just two examples of the urgent need for the application of the SAQA edict on RPL and the NQF as a legal qualifications' body facilitating the certification of historically non-privileged knowledges. 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" (1998). 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 specifically designed to assist them in displaying their competence. At the end of the assessment process each candidate is issued with credits for the learning 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* (1998).

In the absence of certificated skills' certificated qualifications, 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 a lack of access to institutions of learning, whilst possessing demonstrable skills within their respective work spaces.

RECOGNITION OF RPL AS A REDRESS MECHANISM FOR LEGITIMATING WORK SPACES HISTORICALLY DE-LEGITIMISED BY APARTHEID'S RACIALISED HIERARCHY

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 1998).

A framework for evaluating such skills and knowledge was structured for pegging value to various levels of knowledge or skills, leading to the certification of knowledge attained. SAQA's tool for that recognition and accreditation is called the National Qualifications Framework (National Education Policy Act 1996). It is 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 acquired 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 knowledge.

For various political, social and economic reasons, for the majority of Africans, Mformal

schooling was not accessible such that knowledge acquired and used for self-sustenance was gained outside those formal sites. Given the work spaces referred to earlier, those skills were as applicable as they were beneficial in the lives of those artisans who had no record of formal certification. This case is not entirely confined to South Africa. Polish migrant workers in the construction sector in Britain are certified by the government to work on small-time residential refurbishment and projects involving building, maintenance, refitting, skills repair and redecoration. These skills and knowledges gained in house building Polish migrants acquired in their country of birth via informal learning, personal histories and social identities (Datta 2008).

Our narrative of a qualifiable master builder in the construction sector will demonstrate, that the skills that Mr. Klaas Van Wyk acquired were both *quantifiable* and *certifiable* in terms of the *quality of the knowledge* they encompass and their social benefit (Nyerere 1968). We seek to demonstrate how work spaces as enskilment sites converge with South Africa's redress mandate which requires legitimisation of RPL and its accompanying tool of 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 2001).

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.

UNCERTIFIED SKILLS OF THOSE MARGINALISED BY RACIALISED PARADIGMS - NARRATIVE OF A MASTER BUILDER (KLAAS VAN WYK)

Our respondent's name is Mr Klaas Van Wyk. 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, after 58 years of work, I am still involved in mentoring young 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 had done. I learned my 'trade' from a very young age through a process called a *hand-langer*."

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 the 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 experiences through these processes."

He emphasised that the 'hands-on' learning process was very stringent but quite effective 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 the building construction industry. He was very strict and did quality checks on all workmanship 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 Mr. Van Wyk outlined the mentorship-apprentice interaction, it became clear that his father 'professionally' quality-assured his work in accordance with the familiar Mcriteria of quality craftsmanship. Mr. 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 building inspectors of municipalities, mortgage banks' quality-assured officials and civil construction contractors with their tertiary qualifications."

Having been trained according to professional standards through practice, Van Wyk 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 do not have our experience to back up 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 " as facilitated by observation and practice. Illich (1971: 130) strongly believes 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". Mr. Van Wyk's case substantiates this view as he identifies 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 theory-minus-practice graduates as "inexperienced boys" (sic) who nevertheless "want (sic) to make quick money using your experience to help them 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 a mountain-side you cannot use a *dummy level* or *water level* (builders use 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 his knowledge 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 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, Mr Van Wyk has accessed certification opportunities, which utilise both RPL (SAQA 1998) 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 as a profession for the last forty-five years. [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). The SACPCMP acts as regulatory body that governs the registration of professional and candidate construction mentors. “

In this period of South Africa’s transformative period, Mr Van Wyk’s managerial and mentoring skills have finally been sufficiently recognised for him to belong to the SACPCMP. The responsibility of the SACPCMP 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. The SACPCMP has the responsibility of promoting the professional image of construction mentors and ensuring equal professional recognition amongst building/construction workers. SACPCMP members review the 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.

In relation to the SACPMP, the Master Builder Association of South Africa (MBASA) subscribe to criteria based on the following critical elements:

Skill - A member is required to possess the necessary technical qualifications, knowledge and practical experience or to employ, in a position of responsibility, a person or persons there with to ensure that all building projects are carried out in a workmanlike and economical manner.

Integrity - A member is expected to satisfy the building requirements of his/her client and/or fellow members by complying with the spirit as

well as the letter of his contractual obligations and to handle all business transactions with fairness and honour.

Responsibility - A member is expected to organise his business administration effectively, to maintain adequate financial resources for the proper discharge of all contractual obligations, to assist wherever possible in the training of the future skilled manpower needs of the building industry and, where applicable, to comply with all wage regulating measures for the building industry (Master Builder Association of South Africa 2010).

Emanating from the above criteria, the table below indicates a summary of registered master builders in South Africa. This data according to us demonstrate the legitimisation of master builder skills required by the association.

Table 1: Summary of Registered Master Builders in South Africa (MBASA)

Province	1994	2009	% increase/ decrease in registration
Kwazulu-Natal	748	606	-18.9
Eastern Cape	1049	820	-21.8
Western Cape	380	552	+45.2
Free State	98	96	-2.04
Northern Cape	47	58	+23.4
Gauteng	1250	708	-43.3
Total	3562	2840	-20.2

Source: MBASA 2010

Based on the data in Table 1, there was a decrease of -20.2% in the registration of master builders from 1994-2009. This pattern could be possibly attributed to the stringent requirements and the more specific requirements laid down by the SACPMP and MBASA. In contrast to the overall decline in registration, the Western Cape has registered the highest increase (+45.2%) in the registration of master builders. Our case of Mr Klaas van Wyk, is resident in this province.

To illustrate our point regarding the compliance to BMASA and SACPMP pertaining to the quality workmanship of master builders in South Africa, especially in the Western Cape, we provide two photographic images of the case. Photographic image 1 (Fig. 1) represents a completed office block of the Old Mutual Insurance company (one of the biggest insurance companies in South Africa), the building of which was supervised by Mr Klaas Van Wyk.

Photographic image 2 (Fig. 2) presents a mentoring relationship between Mr Klaas Van



Fig. 1. Old mutual insurance company building



Fig. 2. Master Builder – Graduate building contractor mentorship relationship

Wyk and his son, Ashley Van Wyk, who has an academic qualification of a Bachelor of Technology degree in Construction Building, at the Peninsula University of Technology. The SACMP compels graduate building contractors to undergo a coaching programme under the guidance of a registered master builder.

TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RPL

The indisputable enskilment of Mr Klaas Van Wyk exemplifies the discriminatory subjectivity of the Eurocentric devaluing of processes from alternative sites. Mr Van Wyk's competencies

withstand 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 Mr. 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 (Vygotsky 1998; Lave and Wenger 1991). 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).

Antherton (2005a) concurs by contending that social constructivism emphasises how meanings and understandings grow out of social encounters, related to social interaction in the learning process in which community members participate in activities. Other scholars align themselves with the cooperative learning characteristics of RPL work spaces. They view the approach as reflecting important elements in South Africa's Outcomes-Based curriculum, such as participatory learning and cognitive engagement. Jacobs et al. (2004: 209) point out that "the social nature of the work will produce a classroom in which cooperative learning strategies are used differently". "Different" therefore speaks to diversity modalities rather than the inherently superior or inferior value of any modality. Mphahlele (2002) admonishes us that if South Africa and the developing world seek to competently address human capital development as "managers, entrepreneurs and technocrats... needed to run the huge and ever-expanding industrial machine... [thereby mediating] ... the human condition" there has to be a recognition of multiple sites of learning. He explains that "we shall forever need institutions of non-formal learning designed for young and older adults... two major interest groups that a community-based education is intended to mobilise" (pp.45-51), rather than be "trapped by the walls of ... the hidden curriculum" (p. 51). Earlier, we stated in our analysis of the devaluing of human capital from RPL sites, that this devaluation is not so much a result from a lack of merit, as from what Mphahlele terms 'the hidden curriculum' of racialising access to certificated or legitimated recognition of value for skills or knowledges gained from such sites.

In a constructivist manner, the apprentice as

a learner in the building industry, acquires skills through practice and observational learning, where s/he observes what the master builder does and emulates the model or master even when the model is no longer present. Even where the observer does not exhibit visible change in behaviour immediately, the benefit of observation cannot be discounted, given the impact of learning from observing other people in social settings (Merriam and Caffarella 1991; Ormond 1995). 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.

TRANSFORMATION NEEDS FOR THE EFFECTIVE MAINSTREAMING OF RPL

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 RPL specifically in the building or construction industry, the South African government established the *Construction Education and Training Authority* (CETA) in April 2000 under the Skills Development Act (Act 31 of 2003). This was 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 were established for this skills development mandate, one of which is SETAM-CETA. CSETA 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 evidently follow the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) legitimisation view.

Much as the ambit of this paper excludes the interrogation of South Africa's overall education system's curriculum and pedagogics, it is necessary to highlight the learner-centredness of effective teaching (Dewey 1966) wherein the

complexity levels of teaching are geared to reality, the level of the learner and the application of the knowledge gained. We also assert that holistic transformation of enskilment of the workforce towards developing human capital requires that the paradigm which characterises effective learning as confined to 'formal' institutions be debunked. For the South African situation, debunking the exclusive results of the conservative paradigm necessitates embracing RPL and other forms of context-relevant-, learner-centred-, outcomes-related approaches. To deconstruct the 'race'-class twin-index exclusion, we need to recognise that in post-colonial situations and in South Africa, racial positionality and access to validation opportunities or lack thereof are intertwined, because the asymmetry or inequality is "substructured by substructured by relations of race, ethnicity, class and gender. This introduces, finally, the notion of racism" (Essed 1991: 49). Institutions considered credible are those constructed by or legitimated by the coloniser; those outside these eurocentrically privileged sites are 'otherised' (Cummins 1996) or invalidated because the coloniser has the power to ascribe, canonise or withhold recognition. McLaren's (1989) questions underscore the subjectivity rather than the merit-base of such categorisations: "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 would obviously serve the 'race'-class of those whose socio-political positionality disallows access to being managers or mentors, but confines them to the menial status of *handlangers* as Mr Van Wyk senior mentioned.

**METHODS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF 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 South Africa, the challenge facing 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 which prevented them from accessing quality or any kind of education and which excluded them from formal institutions of learning. Invariably they were uprooted by the economic 'push and pull' factors to work on mines and farms and subjected to the powerlessness of the disenfranchised by being denied recognition for skills acquired from those sites. Their location in the labour market was racially regulated for exclusion from certificated skilled levels through Acts such as the Job Reservation Act of 1922. This Act decreed that certain occupational levels be the sole monopoly of the 'white' population. Where blacks had certain skills, the racialised job assignment index devalued their skills in terms of both authority and remuneration. Job reservation invariably meant that 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 recorded or authority. Given the hands-on nature of both practice and delegation, this meant ironically, that black workers often acquired greater skills than those persons who possessed certificates as qualification indicators. These skills also exceed 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 the inspectors and importantly, the client whose project in which they were engaged.

As these black workers gained skills, the apartheid government pre-empted claims of expertise qualification for apprentices by formally denying them accredited apprentice status under the 1944 Apprenticeship Act. In 1951, three years after the Nationalist Party came to power in the apartheid government the Black Building Workers Act (1982) 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 enskilment, these historical, race-based obstacles created the need for operational programmes for the application of RPL as a legitimating policy; thus, the establishment of the Construction Education Authority (CETA) mentioned earlier. Our respondent in the case study below illustrates the role of agencies such as the CETA. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of master builder skills has been extended to women. The Ezilweleni community in Kwazulu-Natal province in South Africa portrays the involvement of women taking the lead in supervising the construction of high quality dwellings (Ndinda 2007).

CONCLUSION

Mr. Klaas Van Wyk's experience and situation applies to countless artisans or craftsmen in the South African situation's various sectors such as building construction itself. Their skills base is demonstrable proof that *master builders* do not necessarily lack the professional standards of assessment that are commonly regarded as enshrined only in 'formal' institutions. RPL exhibits the same elements of competent mentor, purpose of the training, systematic organisation of levels of transmitting skills and outcomes assessment, as do sites of 'formal learning'.

The socially constructed de-legitimation or devaluing of master builders can only be redressed through recognition of the multi-focalism of sites of learning, agency and diverse types of teaching and learning. Equitable access to certification would contribute to addressing the skills shortage and underemployment problems faced by South Africa. It is imperative that progressive scholars further interrogate the practices of invalidation of 'different ways of knowing' (Mosala 1988) which still persist.

Mr. Van Wyk's knowledge-acquiring process, as he moved from peripheral participation to being a master builder, exemplifies Simon's (1992) theory on education for 'possibilities' for those excluded by essentialist and eurocentric paradigms. Through a graded process the apprentice in the building industry participates in the actual social

practice that is guided by the master builder. This process has the inadequately tapped possibility of contributing towards the sustainability of skills development whilst addressing South Africa's high rate of unemployment, especially amongst those blacks blanketed under the aggregated term of 'unskilled', where this erroneously includes 'skilled but uncertified' people.

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