

## Chapter 2

# Key Concepts, Definitions and Assumptions

This chapter provides an overview of the main components that comprise the conceptual framework of this study. Beginning with a discussion of the key dimensions of lifelong learning, it then clarifies the terms formal, non-formal and informal learning; and system-wide or top-down and individual or bottom-up approaches. The chapter continues with a reflection on the growing awareness of the contingency of lifelong learning upon the establishment of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and the use of learning outcomes.

Following this discussion, the study defines the different terms applied in reference to RVA within various countries as well as the different interests, agendas and directions of RVA studies among diverse international organisations, in particular the EU and OECD, before discussing convergent and divergent models of RVA and the notions of formative and summative recognition.

The final section includes a critical reflection on the conceptual variations that may present challenges when comparing policy and practice across developed and developing educational and economic contexts. In particular there are significant divergences in:

1. the nature of non-formal learning across the two;
2. the nature of workplace learning;
3. the positioning of the individual in the recognition debate;
4. the importance of levels of learning below upper secondary schooling;
5. the distinctions between types of non-formal learning;
6. the potential for enhanced informal learning in the South through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

## 2.1 Lifelong Learning – The Holistic Approach

The notion of lifelong learning, which has risen prominently in recent years to the top of policy agenda in many countries has wide ranging implications for our understanding of the growing importance of RVA. The famous Faure Report *Learning to Be* (Faure et al. 1972) while advocating lifelong education, specified core elements of a learning society embodying fundamental alternatives to the prevailing concepts and structures of education. By the mid-1990s, a clear shift emerged from the term “lifelong education” to “lifelong learning”, putting the emphasis on learner needs and individual choice. This trend was reflected in the UNESCO’s *Delors Report Learning: The treasure within* (Delors 1996), acknowledging lifelong learning as one of the guiding and organising principles of educational action and reform that underlines the essential role learning plays for both society and individuals.

Despite the fact that the notion of “lifelong learning” has replaced the notion of “lifelong education” proposed in the Faure Report and promoted by UNESCO during the 1970s, many of the objectives and strategies of “lifelong education” are now evident in many countries (McKenzie 1998). The lifelong education proposal tended to place a greater emphasis on programmes for adults. Distance education and open learning, and various combinations of work and learning and now evident, are all consistent with ideas that were first given a high profile under the lifelong education banner. By contrast lifelong learning pays considerable emphasis to strengthening the foundation for effective learning throughout the life span. In practice this entails developing the skills, knowledge and motivation among young people and adults to enable them to be self-directed learners. Lifelong education implies a greater emphasis on learning within formal educational institutions than lifelong learning, which potentially encompasses all forms of learning.

However, just as the concepts of lifelong learning and lifelong education were being introduced in countries’ reform processes, there were growing concerns that lifelong learning is driven by demands in the labour market and linked to opportunities for employability. There are also issues around what counts as knowledge in a knowledge society and the growing individualisation. Despite its strong humanistic origins, the concept of lifelong education was trivialised to mean adult and continuing education (Duke 2001, p. 502). The division between countries with a narrow definition of lifelong education as merely adult and continuing education and those that embrace a broader perspective of adult learning has been highlighted in the recent UNESCO *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)* (2013). Some authors like Hager and Halliday (2009) expressed concerns about the lack of importance given to humanitarian values and the ideals of democracy and citizenship education on an individual level in lifelong learning policies. They argue that these latter richer meanings of the learning society as expressed in Faure’s report are outside the ken of most policy makers.

Despite these criticisms, we consider lifelong learning as implying a broader concept of education and training. It is used in the present study as a standard and an

organising principle to promote learning on a holistic basis, to counter inequalities in educational opportunity, and to raise the quality of learning (see also Germany. Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development 2012). Lifelong learning implicitly references the links between various learning settings and serves social, economic and personal development goals. Together with Aspin and Chapman (2000), we see lifelong learning as having a multifaceted character with relationships to a broader and more diverse set of economic, social and personal goals. This is a more pragmatic and problem-solving approach than one which accepts the relativism of a maximalist position i.e. a position which sees lifelong education as involving a fundamental transformation of society, so that the whole society becomes a learning resource for each individual (Cropley 1979, p. 105). All three elements – economic, social and personal – interact and cross-fertilise each other.

Lifelong learning is often understood in terms of three principles: the principles of “lifelong”; “life-wide”; and “learning vis-à-vis education” (Schuetze and Casey 2006). “Lifelong” learning implies that people should continue learning throughout their lives, not just through organised learning in formal and non-formal settings but also in informal ways. The notion of lifelong learning entails the question about the transitions and pathways not only between different sectors of the educational system, but between school and work, and conversely between work, and education and training.

The “life-wide” approach emphasises the integration of learning and living – in contexts across family and community settings, in study, work and leisure, and throughout the life of the individual. The life-wide component also recognises the fact that organised learning occurs in a variety of forms and in many different settings, such as in workplaces or in communities.

Schuetze and Casey (2006) highlight the importance of mechanisms of assessment and recognition in a system of “life-wide” learning. They argue that the assessment and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences learned outside the formal educational system is necessary because the mechanisms need to assess and recognise individual knowledge and know-how (i.e. the applied form of knowledge), understandings, values and attitudes, instead of simply formal qualifications, or the reputation and quality of accredited or otherwise recognised formal educational institutions and programmes. Several studies and surveys such as the Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), Schuetze and Casey argue, have highlighted the discrepancies of certified knowledge and actual know-how. The IALS has shown that holders of high school had only minimal levels of literacy. On the other hand those with few formal qualifications demonstrated literacy competences at advanced levels. “Therefore, assessing and recognising knowledge that has not been learned in and certified by the formal education system is a major conceptual as well as a practical problem.” (Schuetze and Casey 2006, p. 281). This we argue is because learning in life-wide contexts measures aspects such as the potential of learning rather than a tick-box accreditation against a formal syllabus.

The change from ‘education’ to ‘learning’ implies a greater recognition that there is room for flexibility rather than rigidly structured curricula. The change also entails a more learner-centred system in which individuals have to make meaningful

choices among the various options open to them (Schuetze and Casey 2006). More importantly learner-centredness means addressing the fundamental issue of learner motivation rather than only being concerned about the level and availability of provision (Atkin 2000, p. 263).

The concepts of formal, non-formal and informal learning have become key terms within the lifelong learning approach. The following definitions of these terms are used in the *UNESCO Guidelines on the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning* (UIL 2012).

- Formal learning takes place in education and training institutions, leading to diplomas and other qualifications recognised by relevant national authorities. Formal learning is structured according to educational arrangements such as curricula qualifications and teaching-learning requirements.
- Non-formal learning is learning that is in addition or alternative to formal learning. In some cases, it is also structured according to educational and training arrangements, but in a more flexible manner. It usually takes place in community-based settings, the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations.
- Informal learning is learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities and through the interests and activities of individuals. In some cases, the term experiential learning is used to refer to informal learning that focuses on learning from experience.

Many authors have argued that formal, non-formal and informal learning must not be seen as dichotomous and discrete categories, but rather as continuous elements within the “learning continuum”. As Eraut et al. (2000), Eraut (2004) and Livingstone (2005) point out, informal learning and work take place in all settings. All informal learning and work, whether in formal or informal learning contexts, has to do with “engagement in the world than with internal thought alone”; informal learning is “flexible and inclusive of diverse knowledge”; learning is political, emancipatory and empowering; and there is a need to develop more clearly articulated assessments of learning in all settings (Sawchuk 2009, p. 324).

The clarification made by Colley et al. (2003) in their seminal effort of comparative integration is particularly relevant. There, the authors noted that: “Learning is often thought of as ‘formal’, ‘informal’ and ‘non-formal’. [To think they are discrete categories] . . . is to misunderstand the nature of learning. It is more accurate to conceive ‘formality’ and ‘informality’ as attributes present in all circumstances of learning” (2003, *ibid.*). Furthermore, the two notions are inextricably linked.

Straka (2005) argues that informal and non-formal learning are basically metaphors that have acquired importance in adult education. Using the distinction between “external” and “internal” conditions of learning developed by Gagné (1973), Straka maintains that “formality” can be differentiated according to the “external conditions” of learning, i.e. the degree of educational arrangement, pre-defined learning objectives, and certification approved by public regulation. However, the “internal conditions” of learning are still missing. The “internal conditions” of learning are the conditions that enable a person to act on the basis of

her/his qualities like abilities, skills, knowledge, motives, or emotional dispositions. Information, action, motivation and emotion are dimensions of a learning episode. Thus learning is connected with a person acting at the micro level (socio-culturally shaped external environment) leading to durable change of his internal condition.

In contrast to the position taken by Colley, Hodgkinson and Malcolm, for Hager and Halliday (2009), “the distinction between formal and informal, is both useful, and in most contexts, easily made” (p. 1). The fact that there are borderline cases does not make a distinction less useful (Wittgenstein 1953). Moreover, these distinctions are important in policy and practical terms in order to strike a balance between formal and informal learning, the incidental and the intentional modes of education. Similarly, according to Straka, since most learning takes place below the surface, there is still much work to be done in order to obtain empirically grounded valid evidence on the learning outcomes in informal and non-formal settings. This needs to be done by investigating the learning potentialities of workplaces and youth organisations by according greater visibility and wider recognition to the learning outcomes.

Rather than simply describing the attributes of formality and informality in all learning situations, Rogers (2014) attempts to see the interfaces between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

With regard to the relationship between formal and non-formal learning, Rogers argues, both share a similar profile, in that both are intentional learning by the learner. Both forms of learning can be treated as learning with a ‘*participant orientation*’, i.e. participation in some programme or course, with non-formal learning being more adaptable to the participants than is formal learning. An important factor causing the change in the balance between formal and non-formal learning is the use of self-directed learning. This change is to be seen not only in terms of the logistics of self-directed programmes but also in terms of the content and materials. New technologies such as mobile phones, digital tools and digital gaming are also changing the balance between formal and non-formal learning and now within the mainstream of formal programmes (IADIS 2012).

As regards the relationship between informal learning and formal learning, the relationship is widely recognised. According to Hager and Halliday (2009) “what is learnt formally is affected by what is learnt informally and vice versa” (p. 87). Informal learning, because it is largely unconscious, is more difficult for the learner to recognise it for what it is and to perceive its relevance to a new learning programme. Whereas formal (and non-formal) learning tend to be more generalised, informal learning is always applied to specific situations and can be applied to real life immediately since the learning comes from application.

Formal learning is not without values of its own. It provides knowledge by which the existing pre-understandings, frames of references, funds of knowledge and social imaginaries can be recognised and changed and developed through critical reflection. It enables the participant to recognise and validate the informal learning and to build it to new learning. Informal learning can never see itself for what it is; it takes formal learning to develop such a perspective (Thompson 2002). According to Rogers, “this unconscious non-agentic learning which equips

the learner with their individualised tacit funds of knowledge, pre-understandings, frames of reference and perceptions and attitudes needs to be taken into account, when constructing learning programmes for young people and adults” (2014, p. 49).

Harris (2006) and Michelson (2006) also argue that caution must be exercised in suggesting that there is similarity and continuity between skills, knowledge and competences acquired in different settings as this ignores the *differences* in the “cultures of knowledge” within formal, non-formal, and informal learning settings; there is mounting evidence that they are not the same. Michelson (1998), arguing from a feminist, situated knowledge and postmodernist perspective, positions RPL as a vehicle for recognising and therefore equalising epistemologically unequal cultures of authority based on difference. According to her, all knowledge needs to be seen as a social product and as partial. This, she argues, extends an invitation to RPL to recognise divergent yet complementary knowledge. Spencer et al. (2003, p. 45) writing from labour educator perspectives, note that “(E)xperiential learning is not inferior to formal learning, it is different, there are times when it closely resembles academic learning but there are many occasions when it does not”. Harris (2000) draws attention to relationships between different forms of knowledge, arguing that in some educational sites academic knowledge and experiential knowledge may be closer than in others. She argues that those who argue for recognition of prior learning (RPL) based on knowledge transfers from informal into the formal need to question what and whose knowledge is likely to transfer in the most efficacious ways.

It is therefore more accurate to say that given a certain definition of a set of skills, knowledge and competences, the type of setting where they acquired does not matter. This being the case, ideally, a more practical approach is to consider RVA as capturing outcomes from all forms of learning, including formal as well as non-formal and informal learning. As will be shown in later chapters (Chaps. 4 and 6), many forms of non-formal learning can be integrated into the formal education system, depending on the definitions applied. In Germany, non-formal and informal learning are an integral part of the education and training system, particularly within the dual vocational education and training system. Similarly, workplace learning in Australia and New Zealand includes formal, non-formal or informal learning (Arthur 2009). The comparisons show how knowledge transfer occurs between distinctive and different forms of learning from formal, non-formal and informal learning settings. It is quite possible that some non-formal programmes might be recognised as formal learning, depending on the definition applied. In that sense, our understanding of various existing education programmes will always depend on the definitions in play.

### ***2.1.1 Understanding Lifelong Learning from a Multi-level Perspective***

The implementation of lifelong learning from a systemic multi-level perspective entails several challenges. The responsibility for tackling inequality in educational

opportunities and raising the quality of learning outcomes lies both at the (macro) policy level and at the (meso and micro) institutional and individual level. At the macro-level, a lifelong learning approach calls for a more flexible and integrated educational and training system. In a number of countries national qualification frameworks have been developed to respond to the growing need to recognise learning and knowledge that have been achieved outside the formal education sectors. A national qualifications framework (NQF) classifies and registers learning/skills according to a set of nationally agreed standards/criteria. Qualifications are provided once competences or learning outcomes have been demonstrated based on these set standards. This means that learning can take place anywhere and that the process of gaining a qualification is not bound to a traditional educational setting. The interplay between formal education and training and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is regarded as a particularly important element of the NQF in several countries, and as a means of redressing past inequalities in the provision of access to formal education, training and employment opportunities.

At the micro-level, recognition practices serve as bottom-up strategies that support individuals by providing the basis for goal-directed development and career planning, tailor-made learning, and the on-going documentation of professional and personal development. This entails attaching special importance to learner participation and developing the capacities of assessors, social partners (employers and employees) and national authorities to utilise portfolios for recognition purposes.

We argue that simultaneously developing and implementing bottom-up and top-down strategies can improve the holistic purposes of education – personal development, community participation, active citizenship, social inclusion, and economic integration and well-being – thus contributing to two important development goals: social equity and sustainable development.

## **2.2 NQFs and the Different Uses of Learning Outcomes**

In spite of their financial constraints, many developing countries have successfully taken an incremental and thus more manageable approach to the growing need to recognise learning and knowledge achieved outside the formal education sector by developing learning outcomes-based or competence-based NQFs. In addition to NQFs, other regional approaches and frameworks are being put in place, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and other collective initiatives, including the Transnational Qualifications Framework, which operates across Commonwealth of Learning Small States (Commonwealth of Learning 2010).

Since the shift in many countries towards qualifications based on learning outcomes and competences has important implications for RVA it might be useful to examine the subtle variations in the use of the notion of learning outcomes and the manner in which they manifest themselves at different levels (Brockmann et al. 2011a). Learning outcomes in a national qualifications framework include a combination of knowledge, skills and competences an individual

has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a given learning programme. Competence is the ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context.

Depending on the discursive context, learning outcomes need to be understood in three possible ways:

- as an overarching aim or vision underpinning curricula or qualifications;
- to describe “intended learning outcomes” in qualifications or curricular frameworks (Depover 2006, p. 23; see also Winch 1996.); or
- in relation to the learning objectives of specific programmes.

Germany and Scotland offer good examples of the application of learning outcomes as overarching objectives which inform curricula and qualifications within NQFs (see Frommberger and Krichewsky 2012). The German concept of *Handlungskompetenz* and the “Outcomes and Experiences” defined in the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence describe the overarching objectives of vocational education in accordance with the different values and specific understanding of competence in those societies. The German *Handlungskompetenz* includes a national understanding of competence which is integrative in that it includes a social, moral and civic dimension. Brockmann et al. (2011b, p. 9) contrast this integrative understanding of competence with the more task-focused notion evident for example in England, which may, but need not, involve the application of underpinning knowledge. In France and the Netherlands, where competence is also held to be task-focused, a multi-dimensional understanding of competences as knowledge, skills and attitude is assumed in practice (Frommberger and Krichewsky 2012).

### **2.2.1 Use of ‘Intended’ Learning Outcomes in Qualifications Frameworks**

The second use of “learning outcomes” is in qualification frameworks (QFs). In the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) learning outcomes are defined as “statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined as knowledge, skills and competences” (European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2008, Annex 1). However, since they are prescribed a priori, before the beginning of the learning process, they need to be understood as “intended learning outcomes” when speaking of consequences for curriculum (Frommberger and Krichewsky 2012).

In the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) 2011), learning outcome statements also detail the education or employment pathways available to the learner after completing the qualification. This raises a number of relevant issues with regard to how curricula could promote the interplay between formal, non-formal and informal learning. For instance, do different branches of the curriculum differentiate between different pathways? Is there sufficient choice? Does the outcome statement in the curriculum structure



reflect the result of a negotiation process between stakeholders? Does the curriculum envisage learning outcomes from non-institutionalised learning through community activities, use of media or working? Curriculum structure can thus be assessed on its responsiveness to the interplay between formal curricula and outcomes from non-formal and informal learning.

The NQFs developed after 2005 differ in important ways from the first generation of frameworks developed in England, New Zealand and South Africa (in the meantime these have been revised). The early frameworks were based on what may be described as an “outcomes-led” rather than “outcomes-based” approach. The former approaches tended to make a distinction between learning processes and learning outcomes. A number of countries refer to competences within qualification frameworks, particularly in areas where concrete tasks and skills can be identified. Young (2010) argues that such behavioural output measures employed in NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) in England, in the South African NQF, in the New Zealand Qualifications Framework and, until recently, in the EQF represent an attempt by industry and the labour market to take control of educational outcomes from educational institutions. Within the NVQ, individuals are able to fulfil the requirements of a set of descriptors without necessarily following a prescribed curricular and pedagogic path. There is thus no internal or conceptual link between the assessment of a learning outcome and a particular path of study.

Recent developments in learning outcomes-based NQFs have precipitated change in an increasing number of countries in the developing world (Singh and Duvekot 2013). India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Namibia, Burkina Faso and Ghana have either developed or are in the process of developing an NQF in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. This shift towards learning outcomes reflects the growing perception of the recognition of skills and knowledge as an achievable goal. Learning outcomes expressed in terms of competence-based approaches hold the potential for the immediate recognition, utilisation and further development of existing skills. However, the possibility that curricular and pedagogic processes might be disregarded, with serious repercussions for the quality of the learning, cannot be discounted within this context. As Young and Allais (2011) alert us with respect to the development of qualifications frameworks in developing countries, competence-based approaches must be complemented by inputs, i.e. the knowledge that a learner needs to acquire if he or she is to be enabled to move beyond existing performance levels.

The EQF originally represented an attempt to adopt a transformational approach to qualifications by regimenting national systems in broadly behavioural terms (Raffe 2011). Brockmann et al. (2011b) criticise the manner in which the term “competence” is used in the EQF as a separate category from knowledge and skills, therefore making it potentially non-integrative (p. 9). The EQF concept of broader competences, they argue, is reduced to responsibility and autonomy and excludes the moral and civic dimensions. However, this ambiguity in the concept of competences has been addressed by several countries as reported in the recent European Inventory on NQFs (CEDEFOP 2012), in which it has been shown that

several countries have changed and re-phrased the third “competence” column of the EQF, incorporating additional dimensions such as learning competences, and communicative, social and professional competences. In Finland aspects such as entrepreneurship and languages have been added. Germany and the Netherlands use the term “competences” as an overarching concept, reflecting existing national traditions.

### ***2.2.2 Learning Outcomes as Objectives of More Restricted Programmes of Learning***

Outcomes do not stop with the frameworks or qualifications – they are also applied to learning objectives for specific learning programmes. These can be related to learning inputs and have a more pedagogical purpose like the English National Curriculum, which has programmes of study (prescribed content) and attainment targets (assessment waypoints which serve as points of reference in the design of targeted assessment instruments). Some countries, such as Scotland and Ireland, make a distinction between learning outcomes – defined and assessed at a national or regional level – and inputs, as defined by education providers. Assessment instruments are devised to ascertain whether and how well a standard has been reached, as is undertaken in the case of learning outcomes. There is thus an internal or conceptual relationship between the prescribed content (which aims to satisfy the learning outcome descriptor) and the assessment of whether the learning outcome has been achieved (Brockmann et al. 2011b, p. 11).

Criticism has been made of the negative impact of learning outcomes approaches in NQFs on programme design. Govers (2010) argues that the NQFs in New Zealand are detrimental to programme design as they separate learning outcomes from pedagogy, programme design from programme delivery, and assessment from teaching and learning (Govers 2010). This is not the case, she argues, when generic outcomes are applied, as these still leave a lot of flexibility in programme design and delivery, and allow a broader range of people with different interests to be involved in the programme approval process and its implementation. Another notable aspect of some NQF programme design processes is the specification of its individual parts prior to the description of the programme as a whole – as seen in modular approaches. Such approaches heighten the risk of insufficient integration, depth of learning and coherence within educational programmes.

Similarly, authors like Hall (1995) and Zepke (1997) point out that the definitions of learner-centred learning employed by NQFs are restricted in their scope and primarily oriented to promoting “access” rather than empowering learners to negotiate their own learning objectives. Learner-centredness, as advocated by adult learning theorists (Brookfield 1986; Knowles 1975), is associated with critical reflection, empowerment, pro-activeness, and self-direction and control over learning. These aspects are a central concern in RVA. Other criticisms relate to the

mechanistic approach advocated through qualifications systems, which does not allow a developmental approach to learning, with a focus on post-formal thinking and open-ended learning (Watson, 1996), or the tackling of culturally sensitive issues (Kurtz 2007). Bohlinger (2007–2008) cautions that learning outcome-based approaches in NQFs should not conflict with the wider character-forming processes implied under the concept of lifelong and life-wide learning.

In the case of South Africa, Allais (2011) has examined learning outcomes in terms of their capacity to promote quality in education and training programmes and to enhance transparency between stakeholders. She argues that neither of these goals championed by propagators of the learning outcomes approach has proven attainable in the South African context. One problem specific to this context is the tendency towards over-specification and fragmentation into standard units. An epistemological issue is the tendency in South Africa to map knowledge onto learning outcomes. Knowledge, Allais states, should be considered in its own right.

Nevertheless, more and more countries are exploring approaches based on learning outcomes, and while countries such as the USA and Canada do not yet have learning outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, some institutions have begun to design degree programmes and curricula around learning outcomes or competences rather than college credits. These institutions grant degrees based on student's demonstrated knowledge and abilities. At this time, however, only a small number of US institutions offer competence-based programmes (Ganzglass et al. 2011).

In Portugal, key innovations in learning outcomes-based adult education and training have resulted in flexible but structured curricula that allow for the acquisition of qualifications and awards through the assessment of formally or non-formally acquired competences. The adoption of dual certification (vocational and academic) based on competences together with modular curricular frameworks affords adults opportunities to further their learning while facilitating labour market integration. While modular organisation has been subject to criticism, in the case of Portugal it has allowed for the development of adult education and training curricula that reflect local demands. In France, learning outcomes, while input-related, are used to link adult learning provision to the labour market by referencing occupational profiles describing typical tasks and resources. Some countries, particularly the German-speaking countries, are careful to ensure that, at a conceptual level, outcome orientations are not reduced to narrow task-related skills and basic knowledge, and instead include broad descriptors of knowledge, skills and competences, learning objectives, standards and quality of input (Bohlinger 2007–2008).

In sum, we argue that the understanding of learning outcomes requires attention to the distinction between learning outcomes defined at a national or regional level, and inputs as defined by education and training providers. In addition, learning outcomes approaches should not be used in a narrowly technical manner to refer to just skills, precisely because of the implications this has for education and training (Sultana 2009). It is important to have a holistic understanding of “competences” (See Weinert 2001). They contain cognitive, emotional, motivational and social components, as well as behavioural features, general attitudes, and

elements of self-awareness. As competences are focused on goals, intentions and tasks, they manifest themselves in individual actions. Competences therefore can be formulated in educational standards and in learning goals as “outcomes” and their acquisition can be evaluated. If it is clear what is supposed to be learned, content or formal knowledge can be chosen accordingly. Thus the aim of learning outcomes approaches is not to empty education of content or formal knowledge, rather content needs to be chosen on the basis of people’s prior knowledge, their motivation, and their local and individual daily experience

## 2.3 Recognition, Validation and Accreditation

### 2.3.1 *Different Terms Used in Different Countries*

The concept of RVA is not new. Its practice spans several decades in some countries, most notably in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA. Different terms are used for RVA in different countries. In some countries such as South Africa, the term *Recognition of Prior Learning* (RPL) is used. This is a process undertaken by learners, for example adults considering a return to “learning”, that involves describing their experiences, reflecting on those experiences, identifying the learning associated with those experiences, defining the learning in terms of given statements of skills, knowledge and understanding, and providing evidence of that learning. Within this context learning providers are required to support learners and to manage the recognition process in a clear and consistent manner (Andersson and Harris 2006; Harris et al. 2011).

In the USA, RVA is referred to as *Prior Learning Assessment* (PLA). In the UK, the terms *Accreditation of Prior Learning* (APL), *Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning* (APEL) and *Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning* (APCL) are used. On the one hand, APL tends to have a higher education focus and is established as a method of recognising non-formal (experiential) learning for individuals with relevant knowledge and experience who have not gained a qualification through the formal education system. On the other hand, the main characteristics of APEL are that it always and necessarily assesses the individual’s competences and skills, and its relation to the economic skills agenda (Pokorny 2011). APCL can be described as a process, through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered as appropriate and is recognised for academic purposes.

In Scotland, the definition of APEL has been redefined since its introduction in colleges and universities in the late 1980s. The change from the term *accreditation* to *recognition* of prior informal learning has enabled a clear distinction between the separate, but linked, processes of formative and summative recognition (Whittaker 2011). Since 2005 there has been a shift in the way the terms are used, with a growing focus on the extent to which an individual’s competences are equivalent to

the required learning outcomes, competence outcomes or standards in qualifications of a specific course or study programme.

In Canada, *Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition* (PLAR) emerged through government initiatives to increase and improve the quality of Canadian labour supply through further and accelerated education (Van Kleef 2011) and has been practiced for over two decades. In New Zealand, there are various terms used in reference to RVA, such as RPL and *Recognition of Current Competency* (RCC) as well as APL and *credit transfer* (Keller 2013). In Australia, RPL is subsumed under the overarching term of *credit* and is defined as one of the credit processes (Cameron 2011).

In the Republic of Korea, RVA is an essential element of the Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS). In the Philippines, RVA is exercised through the Equivalency and Accreditation Program of non-formal and informal learning. In most developing countries it is common to use the term RPL.

### ***2.3.2 Different Interests, Agendas and Directions***

To date, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) has been the most prominent proponent of PLA worldwide. In the case of Sweden, Andersson and Fejes (2011) note the influence of PLA on Swedish initiatives in the 1970s to broaden access to higher education through the recognition of general work-life experience and aptitude. The Swedish system of RVA at that time differed however from that of the United States, which focused on specific competences (Abrahamsson 1989).

Among the various international organisations, the OECD and CEDEFOP are the most prominent within the European and OECD contexts in promoting RVA in the field of skills and competence recognition in non-formal and informal settings. Within the OECD the term *Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning* (RNFIL) is applied (OECD 2010). The recognition of learning outcomes refers to “the formal part of the [learning] process and the way to communicate to the rest of the world about the knowledge, skills and competences one has acquired” (Werquin 2008, p. 144).

Within the EU, the report *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* comprises a key political landmark with its finding that learning should be valued as a prerequisite for the area of lifelong learning (European Commission 2001). In the EU, RVA is referred to as *Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning* (VNFIL). Validation is defined as the process of identifying, assessing and recognising the wide range of skills and competences that individuals develop throughout their lives in different contexts. Designed by the Council of the European Union and developed further by CEDEFOP, VNFIL has a strong vocational training focus. Identification and validation are seen as key instruments in the transfer and acceptance of learning outcomes across different settings. The identification of non-formal and informal learning records makes visible the individual’s learning

outcomes (Bjørnåvold 2000). This visibility does not automatically result in the awarding of certificates and diplomas, but may provide the basis for such formal recognition and accreditation. In 2004, the Council of the European Union adopted the conclusions on common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union 2004), and in 2009 published the *European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning* (CEDEFOP 2009).

Developments in the context of the European Qualifications Framework are proving to be a stimulus for European countries to consider how non-formal and informal learning outcomes might be directly embedded within their national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). Within the European Commission, the Cluster on the Recognition of Learning Outcomes – the largest of the eight education and training clusters – supports countries in developing NQFs and systems for VNFIL. The cluster uses peer-learning methods to exchange good practice and channel collective efforts (CEDEFOP 2008). However, there are several challenges to the learning outcomes approach as reflected in the EQF (see Brockmann et al. 2011b; Bohlinger 2011), and while the EQF levels provide a benchmark for any learning recognised in a qualification, the EQF does not directly recognise learning (Bohlinger 2011, p. 134). The development of systems to support this validation varies across the participating countries – some have already established systems, while others are only beginning to develop appropriate instruments. A number of steps have been taken at a European level. An inventory of the validation of non-formal and informal learning is produced and updated regularly on behalf of the Commission and CEDEFOP, with a detailed survey of developments in Member States.

The responses to a recent consultation on the European Guidelines clearly indicate the important role of VNFIL in making visible the skills and competences gained through life and work experience, and underscore the strong support it enjoys from a diverse group of individuals and stakeholders. At the same time, the responses show that existing validation schemes and arrangements are considered to be too limited in coverage and impact. In some countries and sectors – the knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside schools, universities and vocational training establishments remain in many cases invisible and are not appropriately valued. (Council of the European Union 2012). Member States therefore agreed that they:

[S]hould (...) have in place no later than 2018, in accordance with national circumstances and specificities, and as they demand appropriate, arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to (a) have knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated (...); (b) obtain a full (...) or partial qualification on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning (...). (p. 3)

A seminar organised in April 2013, used the above Council Recommendations as an opportunity for actors from all relevant areas to discuss how the European Guidelines can be reviewed, so as to form a common basis for practical European cooperation on validation. At the heart of this seminar were four questions dealing with: how to increase availability and access of validation, how to strengthen

professionalism of validation practitioners and clarify the procedures they follow; how to improve the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning; and finally, how to ensure trust in validation through quality assurance of validation (Council of the European Union 2012).

Within the International Labour Organization (ILO), RVA is considered primarily as a skill development pathway and a crucial means of helping individuals maintain their ability to compete in the labour market. The ILO Recommendation R-195 on the framework for recognition and certification of skills (ILO 2004) is an important point of reference. According to this document: “Measures should be adopted in consultation with the social partners and using a national qualification framework, to promote the development, implementation and financing of a transparent mechanism for the assessment, certification and recognition of skills including prior learning and previous experience, irrespective of the countries where they were acquired and whether acquired formally or informally” (p. 6). In order to provide policy advice on the adaptation and application of these recommendations, the ILO’s Skills and Employability Department launched its Qualifications Framework Research Project in 2009 to help improve understanding of qualification and the recognition of experiential-based learning in terms of the information conveyed to employers about the expertise of prospective workers. The study (Allais 2010) showed that the frameworks for the recognition of existing skills, knowledge and abilities of workers and potential workers are insufficient in most of the countries considered, and did not provide clear evidence of improvements in international recognition or mobility due to the existence of a qualifications framework (Allais 2010).

### ***2.3.3 Carrying Forward the UNESCO Project***

While each of these different agencies aims to focus on a specific aspect of the recognition of non-formal and informal education – be it within the labour market, the TVET and the higher education sectors, its economic imperatives, its relationship to formal qualifications and practice within the European Member States (CEDEFOP) or OECD countries – *Global Perspectives on Non-formal and Informal Learning* is committed to a holistic analysis of RVA in its fullest sense and the promotion of RVA as a means to empower individuals to make meaningful and constructive choices about their lives and to engage in the societies in which they live. As the Faure Report demonstrates, this has been the motivation behind UNESCO’s work since the early 1970s.

Since the publication of the Faure Report, UNESCO has formulated its *Guidelines on the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning*, and while these are not legally binding, the promotion of lifelong learning for all remains a major commitment. Member States’ authorities are expected to make efforts to apply the UNESCO Guidelines and to develop guidelines appropriate to their specific national contexts. The UNESCO

Guidelines were developed in consultation with Member States and with the professional advice of an Experts Group composed of representatives from each of the regions as well as leading international agencies (UIL 2012).

### **2.3.4 *Convergent and Divergent or Parallel Models***

Analyses of approaches to RVA commonly reveal a combination of different models of RVA at work within countries. Andersson et al. (2004) have identified two main types of recognition models: recognition which is adapted to the education and training system (convergent), and recognition that is oriented towards changing the system (divergent). Harris (1999) explores RPL practices in the South African higher education context in terms of its application as a mechanism to change the system.

In line with Harris' definition, in the convergent approach, recognition is awarded depending on an individual's capacity to meet goals or criteria that have an equivalency in the existing programme of study. In this sense, validation converges with the standards of the existing programme (Harris 1999). Parallel or divergent models stress the unique quality of informally acquired competences and are based on special procedures of identification and validation which are independent of the institutions of the formal educational system. In order to guarantee the validity of such a system, there has to be consensus in the community between the significant sectors, regional and occupational stakeholders of what constitutes an appropriate set of standards (Harris 1999).

In divergent models, RVA practice seeks to challenge and broaden existing fields of recognised knowledge by building bridges between traditional academia and the kinds of knowledge that are at risk of being excluded from the curriculum and/or standards development processes. RVA has a role to play in making this kind of knowledge visible and available to the curriculum design process. In doing so, RVA bolsters inclusion rather than acting as another device for exclusion (Harris 1999, p. 135).

Although we consider the above two approaches applied by Andersson et al. (2004) and Harris (1999) as relevant for understanding RVA, we argue, however, that convergent and divergent models are not static categories; rather they are evolving. For example, while RPL in South Africa, on the one hand, is highly standardised and centralised through being closely associated with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), on the other hand it recognises the different strategies in implementing RVA for different target groups – “access”, “redress” and “credit/qualification attainers” (SAQA 2012b). In Iceland too, RPL displays both convergent and divergent tendencies. On the one hand, it has a highly standardised approach through the issuing of a National Curriculum Guide for upper secondary schools. This guide sets out the principles for the evaluation of prior studies – whether formal or informal – with the objective of establishing whether prior learning is *equivalent* to the standards defined in the curriculum guide and



provide the student with the qualification to complete a programme of study. On the other hand, work experience gained by a student prior to the commencement of an apprenticeship may be recognised. In case of doubt, adults may be offered the opportunity to take a test of competence, allowing applicants to demonstrate their knowledge in a specified subject or field (Iceland. Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2008). In this context, the process centres on recognising the complementary rather than identical nature of the knowledge and skills gained in non-formal and informal learning. Furthermore, in many countries such as Mexico and the Philippines, accreditation processes are expected to stimulate supplementary programmes, with non-formal education routes to formal learning impacting positively on the certified learning standards.

At an individual level, the distinctions between convergent and divergent can be equated with those between summative and formative approaches to recognition. The *summative* mode offers a direct and formal procedure for accrediting the learning experiences of an individual to a qualification and a specific standard within an NQF. Its focus is on certification or qualification where individuals seek this goal. The *formative* mode aims at personal and career development, and formative assessment is a more informal procedure for accrediting learning experiences in relation to a specific active goal in professional and voluntary work, and further learning (Duvekot and Konrad 2007).

While the awarding of specific credit within the context of formal programmes is an important function of summative assessment and recognition, the formative role of RVA in terms of personal growth and development remains equally important. Acknowledging and making explicit key outcomes of formative recognition is important (Whittaker 2011). Thus, while there is a clear distinction between formative and summative assessment (Whittaker 2011), countries must be aware of the linkages and be clear about how assessment in recognition is to be employed for their specific educational and broader policy goals.

At the systems level the distinction between convergent and parallel models may be related to the manner in which countries relate recognition to national reference points. Singh and Duvekot (2013) identify a fundamental division between RVA based on standards defined within NQFs (divergent), and RVA based on education and training curricula (convergent). Examples of the latter case, are equivalency frameworks, which are frameworks that compare non-formal education to standards in formal basic education (convergent), and are to be found in many developing countries with a large non-formal basic education sector.

National Qualification Frameworks vary widely according to whether they are grounded in the TVET system – and more generally the education system – or in the labour market. This distinction impacts too on how learning outcomes are understood and recognised; on the one hand as standards and on the other as workplace performance descriptors. In many developing countries, NQFs are perceived to provide a means to recognise learning that takes place outside the formal education sector, helping those who have dropped out of the academic systemic to receive a more vocationally oriented-training. Recognition of non-

formal and informal learning thus becomes a key issue and can be subsumed under the divergent model.

However, depending on the sector concerned (vocational, academic or adult); most countries tend to combine both convergent and parallel systems. Generally, the recognition of labour competences is more easily facilitated in parallel systems as equivalents frequently do not (yet) exist within the formal system of education and training for that learning. In some countries recognition takes place through the educational system (convergent) or against specially designed competence-based vocational qualifications frameworks for adults (Finland).

When referencing qualifications to the EQF, countries in Europe are making great efforts to identify and assess learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning that do not yet have an equivalent in the formal system. Norway is now debating the merits of accommodating non-formal and informal learning within a distinct NQF (parallel approach), rather than integrating the recognition process within the formal education system (convergent approach).

By orienting practice towards acknowledged qualification standards, processes at a country level can strive to attain parity and equivalence, shifting from a parallel to a convergent model. Convergent and divergent models are therefore not static categories; rather they are evolving.

### ***2.3.5 What Counts as Knowledge, Skills and Competences in RVA***

RVA is a process that provides individuals with an opportunity to validate knowledge, skills and competences not recognised to date. The implementation of RVA practices presents numerous challenges however. As suggested by Harris (1999), if only the site of knowledge production is challenged through RVA, and what counts as knowledge is not, then we must question the assumption that RVA is a democratic and inclusive practice. There is need therefore to understand the conditions under which RVA is to be developed. The question of what is it that should be validated, what skills should be recognised is critical to the development of RVA. Is knowledge production only within traditional academia? Or will workplace relevant skills play an increasing role in this phenomenon?

According to one line of thought, the skills and knowledge that need to be recognised depend on the socio-economic change and technological advances that have resulted in different labour market requirements and job profiles (Brockmann 2011). Brockmann points out, for example, internationally recognised individual competences (divergent tendencies) in the field of software engineering are increasingly taking priority over formal VET programmes (convergent models) in determining employability. A common trend towards greater workplace orientation is apparent in many countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, France and England. Brockmann (2011) highlights the following as factors in this trend:

competence-based qualifications, oriented towards situations in the workplace and social competences; work-based learning, as part of both initial VET (for example through apprenticeships) and continuing VET and lifelong learning; a shift away from knowledge-based initial VET to work-based continuing VET. Within the context of fast-changing industries such as software engineering, the ability to perform tasks is increasingly valued over formal qualifications. In such situations, Brockmann argues, it will therefore be critical to recognise outcomes from non-formal and informal learning. Brockmann draws attention to the so-called “specialist” qualification of “Software Developer” in Germany, which constitutes a radical departure from traditional occupational models, relying on the assessment of competences developed through involvement in the professional environment. This assessment process is not tied to a specific curriculum and requires students instead to self-direct their learning according to what they perceive as necessary to solve the tasks at hand.

Similarly, with regard to the nursing profession, Brockmann highlights the tendency towards the inclusion of more “technical tasks”. In order to enhance the relevance of qualifications in the workplace, many countries have introduced competence-based approaches, identifying specific clinical competences which then serve as the basis for both VET programmes and job profiles (Brockmann 2011, p. 124). Nursing serves as an example of the potential conflict between broad academic education and workplace-relevant skills. In both England and France, nursing education is integrated or converged with higher education to a greater extent than in Germany and the Netherlands. Both these countries, which have a strong tradition of VET, have sought to safeguard the multi-dimensional concept of competence within the nursing profession. Definitions of knowledge must accordingly take into account the various national perceptions of ‘competences’.

Notwithstanding the divergent tendencies resulting from technological change, which give greater importance to work-related competence-based qualifications and to the strengthening of informal learning in enterprises and industrial sectors, it is important that RVA take into account the full range of lifelong learning goals. Striking this balance requires that other domains of informal knowledge be taken into account such as the formal recognition, support and respect for indigenous ways of knowing, traditional knowledge, language, culture and self-determination of indigenous peoples. The work of the International Indigenous RPL Network has shown how recognition of indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing have helped to enhance employability and social mobility both within the mainstream and in indigenous communities (Day and Zakos 2000).

Striking a balance away from a systematisation that is built into an over formalised view of recognition is what Hager and Halliday (2009) regard as valuing internal goods (such as ideals, creativity, the care of animals and environment) vis-à-vis only external goods (such as money, status or power), a distinction they use from the work of Alasdair Macintyre (1981).

The implications of this understanding of recognising internal goods for RVA is that recognition should not over-formalise practice by turning it into something

that lacks vital features of actual practice. Furthermore, workplace practice is but one kind of societal practice. Knowledge, skills and competences from contextually sensitive societal practices such as hobbies, crafts, sports and other recreational activities; activities preparing for work, for continuing vocational development or for coping with survival (Hager and Halliday, 2009, p. 235) should also be taken into account in RVA. All these societal practices involve various internal and external goods which need to be taken into account when recognising outcomes from non-formal and informal learning.

## **2.4 Challenges of Sharing Learning Across Developed and Developing Country Contexts**

Sharing learning across the North-South divide can be challenging. Putting aside the issues of terminology – a hurdle already well documented in previous studies, especially from the OECD (Werquin 2007) – there are conceptual variations that present difficulties when comparing policy and practice across developed and developing educational and economic contexts. There are also differences in the size of the non-formal/informal learning sector, with much larger non-formal education and informal economic sectors in the South than in the North (see Singh 2011, 2012) on traditional non-formal learning in informal economies of the South; and Hoppers (2006) on non-formal education in developing countries). More explicitly, it is worth noting that there are key differences between contexts in developed and developing countries with respect to:

- the line between non-formal and formal
- the nature of non-formal learning
- workplace learning
- the way that the individual is positioned in the recognition debate
- levels of learning below upper secondary schooling
- the distinctions between types of non-formal learning
- the enhanced potential of informal learning in the South through ICTs.

### ***2.4.1 The Line Between Non-formal and Formal Learning***

Non-formal learning in contexts located in the South requires further examination due to its role in delivering basic education and vocational skills and life skills learning to the majority of the population in these countries, and in filling the substantial gap left by weak or inadequate and poor-quality mainstream basic education and training provision. Often, the line between non-formal and formal learning systems is not so sharply drawn. In some countries, such as Bangladesh (Us-Sabur 2008) and Mali (Diarra Keita 2006), non-formal education (NFE)

programmes can be highly organised and national, provide the bulk of education services to the population and can even be based on consistently described and assessed learning outcomes. Similarly, the Kenyan adult and continuing education system – now in its fourth decade – has been operating as a secondary service without a nationally recognised or validated qualifications framework, even though adults must undergo the same the examinations as those directed towards children leaving primary school (Westman 2005). In other countries, such as South Africa, Botswana and Namibia, non-formal basic education is considered a better, more future-oriented option by many participants who feel stigmatised and excluded from formal education (McKay and Romm 2006). In many cases, their non-formal status is more a matter of definition than fact. Often NFE programmes are non-formal only in that there is little or no framework to “accredit” them against rather than because they are “outside” in any sense (Hoppers 2005, 2006).

In contrast to the cases outlined above, in developed nations drawing a line between non-formal and formal education systems is a centrally important notion in discussions of RVA due to the key role that RVA plays in creating visibility for skills and knowledge. In countries of the North with highly developed education and training systems, the line between “outside” – non-accredited learning programmes – is effectively drawn by what is “inside” – accredited courses and programmes. As Werquin (2007, p. 4) succinctly notes, non-formal learning happens only in relation to formal learning – “it happens only if and where there is formal learning”. In the North, formal accreditation processes stimulate supplementary non-formal programmes that are work-oriented and often combined with social and pedagogical remedial support, giving the individual the opportunity of reintegration into the formal system and transition into the workforce (Singh 2008).

### ***2.4.2 The Nature of Non-formal Learning***

In the North, the term “non-formal learning sector” is generally used in reference to non-formal work-related continuing vocational education and training (CVET), while deficits in basic education are largely addressed within the formal sector through remedial initiatives. In Germany and Austria, for example, the demand for non-formal learning at the basic level of the kind described above in the case of developing nations (as a parallel system to the formal basic education system) has so far played a limited role. The comprehensive nature of education and training systems in these countries has resulted in comparatively low levels of demand for the recognition of competences acquired in the non-formal education sector. The fact that the dual system rests upon a combination of school- and work-based learning makes explicit the inclusion of experiential learning within the official models, reducing the need to assess non-formal education acquired outside the formal system (Straka 2005). Within these two countries the formal system is informed by *Berufsprofile* (vocational profiles) representing a clearly defined set of qualifications, competences and profiles, indicating both learning content and

where learning is to occur. *Berufsprofile* are the standards or the benchmarks of this system, and can to a certain degree be seen as “input oriented”. At a conceptual level, the individual *Beruf* (profession) is linked to a specific approach to training and is also tied to specific wage levels and rules defining the rights and responsibilities of practitioners. All of these factors contribute to the high value afforded to the formal system. Alternatives such as non-formal education face significant obstacles in systems in which each step is planned in relation to other social partners, etc. (Straka 2005).

There has been a notable increase in non-formal work-related CVET in countries of the North. Evidence from Germany (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science 2008) indicates that non-formal CVET rose from 52 % in 1994 to 72 % in 1997 – up from 67 % in 2000 – with two out of three employees engaging in non-formal continuing vocational education and training. The level of participation in eastern Germany was somewhat higher than in western Germany. Analysis by gender and age reveals that women value non-formal learning more than their male counterparts and that both the younger and older age groups consider it to be more important than those in the middle age group. More generally, the data suggests that across the board, individuals who change professions or place of employment more frequently tend to make greater use of non-formal learning to expand their range of competences. In order to broaden the available data on the use of recognition programmes, the development of a database to record skills is under consideration (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008).

Self-assessments of continuing learning by adults suggest that learning takes place more often in non-formal “lessons” and informal settings than in formal courses. It is possible that the certification and documentation of informal learning increasingly favoured in many countries such as Germany, could contribute towards encouraging individuals with less access to formal and remedial learning to make (even) better use of the potential of this form of learning in future (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008).

While, non-formal learning, especially of adults and young people, does not necessarily stand in opposition to formal learning, nevertheless, the main characteristics of non-formal learning have developed as alternative and complementary to the formal. These distinctive characteristics render strength to non-formal learning (Chisholm and Hoskin 2005). Further distinctive features of non-formal learning are highlighted by Rogers (2014). Non-formal learning includes active, participatory, democratic, responsible, reflexive, critical and inter-cultural elements. Non-formal skills tend to be similar to everyday life skills, or at least, to be a means by which individuals can cope with their lives in different contexts. Non-formal competences could be specified in terms of acting as a bridge between formal knowledge on the one hand and informal aspirations, wishes and perceptions on the other. They constitute prerequisites for participating in life as a whole – professionally, socially and personally. Employers increasingly demand non-formal competences alongside formal qualifications. They offer an additional way to differentiate between potential employees in a situation where more and more young are well-qualified in formal terms. Non-formal competences are most visible and best recognised when people

take part in some activity or programme. Nevertheless, there is still need to render non-formally acquired social and personal skills more explicit and more visible than has been the case until now and with greater assurance that all young people and adults benefit fairly.

### **2.4.3 Workplace Learning**

There are significant differences in workplace learning between the North and the South. In the developed North, workplace learning is formal, non-formal and informal (for New Zealand, see Keller 2013). In developing countries such as Bangladesh (Arthur 2009) however, most informal and non-formal workplace learning has not met some quality assurance requirement such as accreditation and is not recognised through any credit transfer arrangement. This situation is in contrast with that in Australia, for example, where credit transfer arrangements exist even for workplace learning. In other words, until such time as formal education and training and qualifications in developing countries includes RVA for all forms of learning, it will focus primarily on recognition in the context of non-formal and informal learning, without being related to the formal system (Arthur 2009).

Workplace learning is a powerful tool to enhance capabilities and competences, and to lower some of the barriers to obtaining qualifications or becoming qualified. In many countries efforts are therefore being made to put systems in place to ensure that informal workplace learning is encouraged, formalised and recognised. Lave and Wenger (1991), put forward the communities of practice approach based on the notion that better learning takes place in groups, which can share and diffuse tacit knowledge within an organisation. Wenger (1998), has extended the concept of workplace learning to encompass learning that involves the whole person rather than learning which occurs in relation to specific economic or productive activities.

According to Taylor and Evans (2009) and Livingstone (2001) workplace informal learning is not simply self-directed learning such as independent mastery of work procedures, but encompasses the relationships among workers and employees, context and opportunities. For example, informal learning can also result from coaching or mentoring as well as participating in focused workplace discussions or committees. This type of work-related learning is a complex process that involves the interplay of employee agency, workplace relationship and interdependencies of the wider environment and the affordances of the wider environment (Taylor and Evans 2009; Livingstone 2001). It takes into account workers' existing skills and competences, and tailors them to the actual demands of the workplace. It provides appropriate encouragement to them to expand their capacities in ways that can benefit their workplaces and themselves and their families (ibid.).

Unfortunately, the notion of "work" continues to be understood as what people do for a wage. Livingstone (e.g. 1998, 2005; Livingstone and Sawchuk 2004), however, has most persistently argued that this approach is inadequate for fully understanding both the creation of value that human beings add to organisations and society.

Livingstone argues that in the same way informal learning has emerged to challenge the hegemony of “formalised education” so too must an expanded notion of work which includes domestic (without pay) and community volunteer work challenge the hegemony of paid employment as constituting work-based learning. It has been shown that family work teaches us work-relevant skills. The action-oriented learning, direct, personal and emotional, and the responsible nature of the family as a learning place has a stronger and sustainable effect on skills development (Gerzer-Sass 2001). Similarly, gaining personal satisfaction or receiving social esteem and approval for investing time and energy on behalf of the community should by no means be excluded from worthwhile and useful “work”.

#### ***2.4.4 The Positioning of the Individual in the RVA Debate***

Another issue relating to the differentiation of non-formal learning is the position of the individual within recognition systems. In the North, RVA systems in highly developed countries often place a significant emphasis on individuals’ motivations to acquire certification and the manner in which information on acquiring certification is accessed. In the Netherlands, for instance, it is usually framed in terms of the lifelong learning of the ‘enterprising individual who is working to develop himself or herself continuously’ (Duvekot et al. 2003, p. 3). Individual responsibility is incorporated into recognition processes.

The motivation theories deployed in the North are grounded in an individualistic perspective, in which access to education and upward mobility is defined as an individual problem amenable to individual solutions, thus marginalising both community and collective values and, frequently enough, female learners. To some extent this emphasis assumes not only the existence of a strong formal sector, but also some individual resistance to engaging in the sector which must be overcome. As Gomes et al. (2007) point out, within this context a lack of motivation might potentially be viewed as an individual deficit rather than as a problem that is relational, leading to the stigmatisation of those, for example, who do not wish to continue their studies.

The context in the South can differ markedly. The barriers there are not only dispositional, but primarily situational and structural (Singh 2009). Where populations are engaging effectively with non-formal and informal learning, for example, it is collective activities such as systemic recognition (e.g. through effective and transparent equivalence or actively embedding the existing programme into an NQF) and policy coordination that are foremost in RVA reform efforts. It is in this sense that the several international humanitarian organisations in the area of internally displaced persons make a strong case for all children, young people and adults to have the right to a record of what they have learned. Another area of focus is the right of access to examination or assessment processes that are validated by relevant authorities or educational institutions, enabling learners to resume, continue and complete schooling and access further learning opportunities and employment (Kirk 2009).



In the North, a focus on individuals is important when tackling persons within target groups such as minorities, migrants, second-chance learners; in the South, however, the sheer number and proportion of the population for whom non-formal learning is the only available pathway has a significant impact on policy. The recognition of non-formal learning in countries of the South is more a societal project than one focused on individual access to lifelong learning. Faced with millions of women and men who lack access to educational learning opportunities, education systems invariably seek to reach numbers rather than addressing the multiple learning needs of individuals.

Thus while developed countries emphasise the exercise of individual choice and preference as central motivations, this perspective is yet to be explored in developing countries – a state of affairs which is due in part to the high levels of functional illiteracy, and the need to continue to focus on access to basic education.

### ***2.4.5 Levels of Learning Below Upper Secondary Schooling***

A further issue that distinguishes discussions about RVA across developed and developing nations is the place of basic and post-primary levels of education and training in overcoming issues of progression to and through formal education and the labour market. In the so-called “Western world” recognition and validation are particularly relevant to higher education and vocational education (Bohlinger and Münchhausen 2011). Overarching national frameworks frequently identify upper secondary schooling or baccalaureate programmes as an initial transition point towards further education and –directly or indirectly –labour market opportunities. In developing countries, on the other hand, areas of education below this are frequently bundled together as “literacy and basic education”. This is perhaps appropriate where well-functioning education at the primary and early secondary level is in place and second-chance education at these basic levels is accessed by a relatively small minority of the population.

In many developing countries where the Millennium Development Goals for universal primary education and the Education for All goals for universal basic education are yet to be reached, greater proportions of the adult and out-of-school youth population need a more fine-grained approach to levels within this sector of education and training in order to create meaningful bridges and pathways to opportunity. In these cases, levels must not only be fine-grained, there is also a need for different conceptual elements. The term “levels” implies a process of progression from one element to the next. In fact, these elements should encompass qualitatively different learning, especially for adults, who require an entirely different pedagogical approach to school pupils.

The identification of levels, exit, and re-entry points within this subsector is critical to providing the variety of programmes required. RVA is an important mechanism for ensuring that individuals are undertaking meaningful programmes that will move them on to further opportunity. For example, Ethiopia (Ethiopia.

Ministry of Education 2006) has identified the eighth grade as an important “qualification” level where a successful transition to development work or health agent training and practice can be made. Recognition of differentiated adult basic and even literacy programmes, as well as the skill levels of the individuals accessing them, is an issue of much greater significance in many countries of the South than is evident in the approaches in the North.

In considering points of reference for recognition and their frameworks together with their correlation to broader mobility systems it is therefore important to consider that levels *within* basic education may be as important to contexts in the South as levels beyond it. Basic education and literacy programmes must ensure that initial diagnosis (a form of RVA) facilitates appropriate placement of individuals to maximise learning.

The growing interest in post-primary education found in learning programmes is mirrored in the need for RVA at this level – again to ensure that individuals are indeed afforded relevant opportunities to learn new skills. When considering the RVA of post-primary education, the reputation and social/employer standing of the formal system by which skills are benchmarked will also play a critical role in determining the value of and progression to work and further education and training which stems from core effective practice in this area.

#### ***2.4.6 Distinctions Between Types of Non-formal Learning***

Clarifying the distinctions between the various types of non-formal learning will enable readers to fully appreciate the implications of RVA for non-formal learning. Three major types of non-formal learning programmes are modelled below, showing that RVA implementation can be complicated both by the absence of frameworks of integrated education and training, and through policy approaches which fail to consider life skills, work skills, and education and training within an integrated and holistic perspective.

*Non-formal education and training (schooling and TVET) that is not defined in an NQF but is standardised through a curriculum with equivalence to formal education.* This includes general education and training programmes that are assessed against the same curriculum as school qualifications and are accordingly recognised as equivalent to formal school qualifications. However, as any recognition is based on the curriculum rather than the learning achievement, equivalence is achieved through the same examinations utilised in schools (which are not necessarily appropriate for adults), making recognition of wider learning in labour market or community contexts less visible than in the case of the previous category. Ecuador gives high priority to the relationship between non-formal and formal education through its high school certificate (*Bachillerato*). In the Maldives, the principle of equivalency applies to primary and secondary education; but it also applies to literacy programmes entailing 3 years of study, leading to a certificate equivalent

to the completion of the sixth grade in basic education which qualifies adult learners to join the seventh grade. Those who cannot continue their education in the formal system can choose to join any of the various adult education courses available. An important mode in which equivalency programmes are offered is through distance learning, e.g. the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programmes of the Institute of Adult Education in the Maldives (Maldives. Centre for Continuing Education 2009). Equivalency programmes also exist at a basic level in various developed nations, but RVA is more frequently an integral component. In Norway, recognition is deployed for the purpose of matching the learning of individuals to the national curriculum and thereby shortening the period required to complete school certification (Norway. Ministry of Education and Research 2007). RVA serves to recognise the complementary rather than the identical nature of learning programmes.

*Non-formal education and training that is defined in an NQF or formal standard and assessed against learning outcomes.* General education or training programmes that are assessed against learning outcomes described within either NQFs or the defined outcomes of other recognised programmes. The outcomes help establish the achievements that are included in the certification, which can be meaningful for both education/training and labour market progression. The relationship established between the programme and the level helps the student to progress to further levels of formal education. Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) in South Africa, for example, has more than one level, enabling this equivalence to be understood across a number of levels of the NQF. It is the existence of the NQF as well as the linkage to it that makes such programmes better able to provide access and progression to formal education and can also enhance their meaning in the labour market, because standards would include work skills and life skills in addition to the formal criteria of general education (McKay and Romm 2006).

*Non-formal learning programmes with a developmental focus rather than overtly educational focus.* Such programmes, although sometimes considered to be part of the non-formal learning sector, are generally uncertified, or if certified have meaning only in terms of the social/work learning (rather than being seen as also educational). However, the wide range of social, interpersonal and life skills imparted in such programmes imply a strong transferability to education or vocational learning and thus these non-formal programmes have a greater potential of recognition within formal systems than is currently being exploited. In post-conflict countries these programmes focus on civic and peace education, environmental improvement, HIV/AIDS and community reconstruction. In Bangladesh, non-formal education programmes include literacy programmes in various development spheres (agriculture, health, universities, and distance learning) as well as vocational skills and income-generation skills that build on the informal learning of disadvantaged people, facilitating lifelong learning and enhancing earning capabilities with the objective of reducing poverty (Bangladesh. Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) 2008). However, there is no standard mechanism or system that has been instituted for the recognition of these skills.

By contrast, in other countries, such as New Zealand, non-formal adult and community education frameworks have been established for literacy and adult community development. The primary areas of focus include: personal development (e.g. parenting skills, computing skills, music, foreign languages, arts and crafts, recreation and fitness activities); community development (e.g. capacity-building for community groups, training community volunteer workers); civil society development (e.g. workshops on the Treaty of Waitangi and participation in governmental submission processes).

The European Youth Forum is soon to have a Quality Assurance Framework for its non-formal education programmes so that they are sufficiently recognised within society and within youth organisations themselves. NFE in youth organisations in the European context fosters active citizenship and the transmission of values, e.g. human rights and freedom; democracy; respect, diversity; peace and prosperity; sustainable development; social justice; solidarity; and gender equality. Youth organisations select needs that they themselves identify, or that are articulated by young people. Quality of the NFE provider takes learning outcomes into account and compares them with the learning quality learning objectives agreed to by all stakeholders. In addition, each learner is expected to evaluate for himself whether the learning objectives have been met. Recognition through reflection and self-assessment makes visible the learning outcomes. Youth organisations need to be aware of how all their individual learners perceive their learning experience. The YFJ sees peer-feedback and the establishment of indicators as a good starting point for building confidence in the quality of NFE and enhancing its recognition and its parity of esteem with formal education (Youth Forum Jeunesse 2008).

#### ***2.4.7 The Potential for Enhanced Informal Learning in the South Through ICTs***

While there is an emphasis on formal and non-formal learning, informal learning and non-institutionalised learning through media was previously neglected in the South. More recently, interest has grown in enhanced informal learning via satellite television, telecommunications, mobile networks, and through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) etc. Some open universities in developing countries, such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in India, have a wide basket of media and technologies including non-formal distance learning programmes (Panda 2011). The work of Mitra (see Mitra et al. 2005) on computer-based informal learning highlights potential even in situations where basic education levels are low. Since 1999, Mitra has convincingly demonstrated that groups of children – irrespective of their location or background – are able to use computers and the Internet on their own using public computers in open spaces such as roads and playgrounds. The transferability of these informal computer skills to education and training needs to be further exploited.

## 2.5 Summary

Lifelong learning has been described as a standard that promotes learning on a *holistic basis*, counters inequalities in educational opportunities and raises the quality of learning. Lifelong learning implies the linkages between various learning settings and serves social, policy and economic purposes. However, the implementation of lifelong learning presents several challenges. The responsibility for tackling the problem of inequality of educational opportunity and raising the quality of learning outcomes is located at both a systemic and an individual level. Several Member States have developed national objectives to move towards a lifelong learning society.

The definition of non-formal and informal learning remains a subject of discussion in the field of RVA. For many it is more helpful to speak of a formal-non-formal-informal continuum, recognising that different combinations of features occupy different positions along the continuum. For many others, drawing a firm line between non-formal and informal on the one hand and formal education and training on the other is seen as both essential and desirable. For these authors non-formal and informal learning are distinctive and positive alternatives to formal learning and need to be valorised. For the latter group, RVA is a way to rectify the distorted balance between formal learning vis-à-vis non-formal and informal learning.

The adoption of the lifelong learning approach gives rise to the need for a more flexible and integrated system of qualifications. In a number of countries learning outcomes-based NQFs have been developed in response to the growing need to recognise learning and knowledge that has been achieved outside the formal education sector. However, the aims, objectives and purposes of establishing NQFs varies, and there seems to be a general agreement among countries adopting NQFs that the formal education system does not cater fully to the learning needs of the population.

RVA is a process that would provide individuals with an opportunity to validate unrecognised skills and competences. There is a need to understand the conditions in the field in which RVA is to be developed. Two models of RVA are presented – the convergent and the parallel model. We argue that both of these models overlap. On the one hand, RVA interacts by necessity with predefined categories (convergence). At the same time, it challenges normative classifications of knowledge. While summative recognition leading to predefined categories in the formal system is important, formative recognition plays an equally important role in personal growth and development. Acknowledging and making explicit key outcomes of formative recognition is important. In other words, while there is a clear distinction between formative and summative assessment, and convergent and parallel models, they are linked and evolving processes.

Finally, sharing learning across North and South has brought to the fore the disparate issues relating to RVA in the North and South. There is a clear difference in the subsector focus on RVA activity between the North and the South. Countries

with well-developed education and training systems focus much of their recognition implementation efforts on non-formal continuing vocational education and training and workplace learning, attempting to make informal learning more visible and facilitating direct access to accredited and non-accredited programmes. In the countries of the South, where basic education is delivered extensively through the non-formal education sector, there is a greater focus on equivalency and improving links between non-formal programmes and their formal counterparts (often school certification) with the aim of facilitating access to further opportunities in education and training. There is clear evidence that enhancing alignment to qualifications through RVA in the literacy and adult basic education sectors can lead to important innovations in linkages and pathways.

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