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A REVIEW OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) LITERATURE IN QUEBEC

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Abstract

The field of recognition of prior learning (RPL) in Quebec continues to develop with the incorporation of distinct terminology and policies based on the reality of contemporary Quebec society. In an analysis of the thematic nature of the RPL literature, it became evident that certain recommendations and conclusions from past research continued to repeat and remain unresolved challenges in the field of practice. At the same time, a new stream of research related to RPL and immigrant settlement and integration is beginning to be more prominent. This article is written with the aspiration that the conclusions from the consolidated RPL research will be of benefit to the emerging field of RPL research. As well, this review identifies gaps in the current research and suggests areas for further study. The inherent link between the practice and research of RPL and the field of adult education is that both areas focus on the adult learner. In this respect, this article contributes to the field of scholarly endeavours of RPL, which is based on the philosophical tenets of andragogy.

Résumé

Au Québec, le domaine de la reconnaissance des acquis (RA) continue d'avancer en y intégrant une terminologie distincte et des politiques fondées sur les réalités de la société québécoise contemporaine. Lors d'une analyse de la nature thématique des recherches sur la RA, il est devenu évident que certaines recommandations et conclusions présentées dans les recherches antérieures reviennent et demeurent irrésolues dans le champ de la pratique. Simultanément, une nouvelle avenue de recherche liée à la RA dans le contexte de l'établissement et de l'intégration des personnes immigrantes commence à gagner en importance. L'espoir motivant l'écriture du présent article est que le domaine émergeant des recherches en RA bénéficiera de cette synthèse des résultats des recherches antérieures en RA. De plus, la présente revue relève des lacunes dans les recherches actuelles et propose des pistes pour des recherches futures. Il y a une relation intrinsèque qui lie la pratique et la recherche en RA au domaine de l'éducation des adultes : chacun des domaines est axé sur les apprenantes et apprenants adultes. Ainsi, le présent article contribue au domaine

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des recherches en RA, ce domaine étant fondé sur les principes philosophiques de l'andragogie.

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review of recognition of prior learning (RPL) research in Quebec is to provide historical context to a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) project. The primary question of the SSHRC project is to investigate the balance between protection of the public and the right of an individual as it relates to policies and procedures of recognizing professional qualifications in professional orders in Quebec. RPL is being used to some degree within the professional orders of Quebec; however, the majority of RPL practice is in the field of post-secondary education. RPL has been a field of study and practice in Quebec since the early 1980s and there is a substantial amount of published and unpublished work to review. In an analysis of the thematic nature of the RPL literature, it became evident that certain recommendations and conclusions from past research continued to repeat and remain unresolved challenges in the field of practice. At the same time, a new stream of research related to RPL and immigrant settlement and integration is beginning to be more prominent. This article is written with the aspiration that the conclusions from the consolidated RPL research will be of benefit to the emerging field of RPL research. As well, this review identifies gaps in the current research and suggests areas for further study. The inherent link between the practice and research of RPL and the field of adult education is that both areas focus on the adult learner. In this respect, this article contributes to the field of scholarly endeavours of RPL, which is based on the philosophical tenets of andragogy.

The following definition from the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment clarifies the term *recognition of prior learning*:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a set of processes that allows individuals to identify, document, be assessed, and gain recognition for their prior learning. The focus is on the learning, rather than on where or how the learning occurred. Knowledge, skills, and abilities gained from life experiences may be formal, informal, or non-formal. RPL processes may serve several purposes, including licensure, credit or advanced standing at an academic institution, employment, career planning, recruitment or self-knowledge. (Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment, 2015, p. 1)

Two distinct themes emerge from the RPL literature in Quebec. The first is a significant amount of literature that summarizes the current situation of RPL in the province either as a chronological accounting of projects or a summary of the research in the field. The second theme relates to the unique experience of immigrants to Quebec, specifically the consequences of non-recognition of their competencies. The issue of non-recognition of Canadian immigrant skills and access to professional orders is gaining ground in scholarly articles (Andersson & Guo, 2009; George & Chaze, 2012; Girard & Smith, 2013). The Conference Board of Canada's study *Brain Gain 2015: The State of Canada's Learning Recognition System* (Grant, 2015) suggests that "unrecognized learning and skills

translates to seventeen billion dollars of lost earnings in Canada” (p. 25). However, unlike the work of the Conference Board of Canada, which takes a fiscal approach to the analysis of non-recognition of skills and competencies, the studies from Quebec tend to be more qualitative and focus on the narrative of the individual and their challenge to integrate into the greater Quebec society.

The literature can be subdivided into three historical sections (1980s, 1990s, and 2000s), which mirror economic cycles of activity and resources allocated to the field of RPL either by government or public industry. My observation of the works studied is that much of the published literature in the field of RPL in Quebec is reactive to the current political or economic situation of the day. There are few examples of research or published studies that anticipate or provide a roadmap to what RPL in Quebec could be in the future.

For this literature review, it is not only necessary to detail the terminology used in the research, but also instructive to trace the origins of the terms, as these often result from the political and historical context in which RPL policies were adopted in Quebec. The history of the field of RPL in Quebec is intertwined with the creation of a formal Ministry of Education in 1964 and subsequent watershed study commissions related to adult education, most notably in 1980 with the *Adult Education Study Commission on Professional Education and Socio-Cultural Education in Quebec*, often referred to informally as the *Jean Commission Report* (Commission d'étude sur la formation des adultes, 1982). Much of the published literature related to RPL in Quebec reflects the evolution of the field within the province as it relates to both the target audience and the political and economic environment in which policies were instituted. The field of RPL in Quebec continues to develop with the incorporation of distinct terminology and policies based on the reality of contemporary Quebec society.

RPL is in practice across the globe; however, there is little consensus on common terminology. To illustrate, in a footnote to the introductory chapter of *Researching the Recognition of Prior Learning: International Perspectives*, co-editors Judy Harris and Christine Wihak (2011) provided the following explanation:

RPL is also known as the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), the Assessment of Prior Learning (APL), the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL), and by many other acronyms in languages other than English. (p. 1)

The Trajectory of RPL in Quebec

Quebec's trajectory with the concept of RPL could be summarized with the expression “one step forward, two steps back.” As an example of taking one step forward, Quebec is one of the first provinces to attach government funding to the dossier and was the first to establish a provincially funded research and consulting group dedicated entirely to the support of the dossier within the public collegial system and adult vocational sector. This refers to the establishment of CERAC (Centre d'expertise en reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences/Centre of Expertise in Recognition of Acquired Competencies). The Quebec Government has defined CERAC as an institution (school board, college/CEGEP) recognized within the community as having achieved a level of mastery in the area of

recognition of acquired competencies (RAC), which will allow it to assume a leadership role in this area and with other institutions to improve and increase RAC services and contribute to the harmonization of practices in the network (Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, n.d.). However, when the budgetary cycles have impacted funding for RPL, it has meant the dossier and the entire field of practices take a step back, and this has prevented RPL from being fully established outside the Ministry of Education. Many who work with RPL every day still consider it vulnerable to cyclical budget cuts. Further, professional orders within industry have not embraced the concept or widely put it into practice, nor has it achieved widespread awareness in the general public. The published research and general musings about RPL in Quebec often highlight and bemoan this situation of one step forward, two steps back. This is also reflected in the establishment and subsequent disbanding of regional organizations or think tanks dedicated to the field of RPL in Quebec. The literature from this field of practice is primarily from the education sector and to a lesser degree from the immigration sector (government and resettlement groups) and unions. This literature review did not find any published literature related to RPL and industry.

In a study on the relaunch of RPL in Quebec, researcher Rachel Bélisle (2006), from the Université de Sherbrooke, could be summarizing the overall situation of RPL in Quebec when she noted "that the problem...is the near invisibility of vocational guidance in the Quebec collective discourse on prior learning recognition" (p. 1).¹ Although there may continue to be a lack of "collective discourse" on the recognition of prior learning in Quebec, the literature does not point to any marked confrontations between sectors or between government policy and people in the field in the implementation of the concept of RPL. This is confirmed in an unpublished report authored by Alex G. Potter (1988), former academic dean at Vanier College, entitled *Prior Learning Assessment in Quebec 1980–1988*, in which he stated:

At the request of the college presidents, the Federation of CEGEPs was asked to provide services, coordination and control of the colleges' efforts in recognizing of [sic] prior learning. To understand the development of the Québec project it is essential to recognize that basically the political battles with administrations and governments which occur elsewhere were not necessary in Québec. (p. 1)

The collegial system continues to be the most robust within the province in the practice and research of RPL. This is evidenced in the number of research projects funded by the Federation of CEGEPs as well as the funding of the CERAC endeavour at the college level.

Terminology and Context

According to Bélisle (2006), "Quebec's first publication pertaining to the recognition of prior learning assessment would be the review of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation published in 1975" (p. 13). However, the application of the concept into practice can be traced to 1980. Quebec's first iteration of the concept of RPL in the early 1980s was heavily influenced by the research and work being conducted in the United States, specifically by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. At this time in both the United States and Quebec, the

1 All translations from French are by the author.

vast majority of the work in RPL was limited to the formal education system. The term used in the United States from that time to the present is *prior learning assessment* (PLA), and initially, Canadian practitioners used PLA as the common term too. According to Wong (2001), in 1995–1996, the Canadian Labour Force Development Board, a national advisory body composed of labour market partners, initiated a national consultation that resulted in the development of national standards for prior learning assessment and recognition, or PLAR. The “R” was added to ensure the *recognition* of prior learning and emphasize the potential of using prior learning assessment tools to address issues of social justice, labour force development, and reforms in education and training (Wong, 2001, p. 161).

In the early 1980s, the adult education sector in Quebec was redefining itself with public consultations and implementing the resulting recommendations in the *Adult Education Study Commission on Professional Education and Socio-Cultural Education in Quebec*. According to Potter (1988), “There was a strong recommendation that the recognition of prior learning be made a cornerstone of the reform and indicated that Quebec could learn from the experience of the United States in this area” (p. 2). Research and foundational tools in the field were produced in 1981. Marthe Sansregret can be credited with writing the first materials to be used by RPL advisors in Quebec.

As a pioneer in the field of prior learning assessment recognition in Quebec, Sansregret refers to prior learning assessment as a process by which a person identifies the training they have completed according to various methods prior to having them assessed by experts and finally obtaining an official accreditation by a recognized learning institution. (St-Pierre, Martel, Ruel, & Lauzon, 2010, p. 123)

In 1983, Sansregret was mandated by the Ministry of Education to write three guidebooks: *Prior Learning Assessment: The Portfolio*; *Recognition of Prior Learning: The Portfolio, Student's Guide*; and *Recognition of Prior Learning: Administrator's Guide* (Potter, 1988, p. 2). In 1984, the Ministry of Education released its adult education policy statement and action plan. This continuing education project was designed to ensure integrated services developed jointly by players in the fields of education, labour, and social and community development and based on regional cooperation (Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2006a, p. 6). The government's policy made two significant steps forward for the field of RPL. The first was a mandate to implement a system of RPL in the formal education system. The second was financial in nature involving a change in the academic regulations governing all colleges in Quebec. In this new policy, colleges were given “the power to grant credit for extra-institutional learning” (Potter, 1988, p. 3). This is noteworthy, since prior to this change in policy, colleges were able to grant credit only for learning done in an academic institution. This policy opened the door of financial support to RPL in Quebec, especially as it relates to the evaluation of learning that takes place outside the classroom. However, scholarly reviews are quick to point to areas in the education sector where RPL has not reached its full potential. According to St. Pierre et al. (2010), “On the subject of learning that happens outside the classroom, progress has been slow since the Jean Commission Report, particularly in the university setting” (p. 120).

This literature review used *Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)*, *Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)*, *Recognition of Prior Learning*, and *reconnaissance des acquis* as search terms to explore the literature from 1980 to 1999. During this time, the Quebec

Government allocated funds to a research consortium of the colleges. The French acronym for this funding initiative was FIRAC, which can be translated to "Funds for the Implementation and Development of Prior Learning Assessment in Collegiate Institutions." In the FIRAC-funded literature reviewed, the terms in the education sector were *prior learning assessment*, *recognition of prior learning*, or *reconnaissance des acquis*. There was a significant amount of action research and development of tools in the era of 1980 to 1989 by FIRAC. By the mid-1980s, the focus of FIRAC had shifted from creation of evaluation tools, training, and implementation to reflective study and to "more cautious experimentation" in the hope that this action plan would yield positive results (Potter, 1988, p. 4). In this noteworthy period of action research, FIRAC funded and published studies by Robert Isabelle (1984a, 1984b, 1985a, 1985b) on the results of a study mission to the United States and a position paper on the implementation of RPL policy within the college system (see Appendix A for a list of FIRAC work referenced in this article). The funding also extended to domain-specific research of particular case studies of implementation of RPL within the college system. Cantin, Lavergne, Martin, and Vallée (1985) published the *Evaluation Committee Report: The Experience of CEGEP de Saint-Félicien Related to Recognition of Prior Learning and the Nursing Assistant Program*. Another prolific researcher from this period is Francine Landry (1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b), whose work on behalf of FIRAC included a substantial number of publications ranging from an analysis of the implementation of RPL within a specific college program to broader questions of recommendations for filling learner gaps within the RPL process.

The 1980s ended in Quebec as the decade began; in economic terms, this was a technical recession (Kabore, Dupuis, Joanis, Savard, & Bégin, 2014, p. 10). With the Quebec economy intrinsically tied to both the Canadian and US economies, the 1990s started in recession due to a widespread slowdown in consumer spending and investment that led to layoffs and increased unemployment. According to Bélisle (2006), the robust activity in the 1980s was not to last, as the "confrontation between education and labour sectors slowed this craze and the 1990s saw some stagnation in the development of the recognition of prior learning" (p. 14). However, one of the innovations in this decade was further evolution of the terminology used in the field.

In the late 1980s and the 1990s, the term *prior learning recognition* was used in educational establishments in Quebec, while *recognition of skills* or *recognition of competencies* were used in public employment agencies and community-based organizations concerned with occupational integration. The term *recognition of prior learning assessment* (*reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences*) was adopted by organizations such as the ICÉA² because of a concern with policies and practices across all sectors (Bélisle, 2011, p. 87).

In comparison to the previous decade, there is a dearth of published research and reports in the 1990s in the field of RPL in Quebec. An example of one of the few publications from this decade is by Gilles Tremblay (1995), entitled *Summary of an Experimentation of Recognition of Prior Learning in the Colleges, January 1992–June 1993: Quantitative Analysis of Findings, Critical Analysis of Results*. This publication is representative of one main theme within the literature in Quebec, that of a summary of RPL activities.

2 The Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes (ICÉA) is a democratic organization established in 1946 that brings together various networks and organizations of civil society that are active in education and adult education.

The Influence of UNESCO

The 1990s could be characterized as an incubator decade when new ideas and policies took shape. A major influencing factor in the field of adult education and RPL in Quebec in the 1990s was the Declaration of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education organized by UNESCO in Hamburg in 1997, also known as CONFINTEA 5. It was at this conference that the term *lifelong learning* and a definition were implemented and adopted by all participants, including Quebec, which was represented by the then education minister Pauline Marois (Bélisle, 2006, p. 14). Subsequent to this global event, the Government of Quebec published a new policy on adult and continuing education entitled *Projet de politique de l'éducation des adultes dans une perspective de formation continue—Pour partager la passion du savoir* (Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 2001). This set into motion the next major phase of activity in the field of RPL in Quebec.

A Relaunch: Resurgence of Research and Exchange in the New Millennium

Often referred to within Quebec as *the relaunch*, the start of the new millennium benefitted from a resurgence of research and publication activity. The literature reflects a theme of researchers applying themselves to document the current state of affairs concerning RPL (Bélanger & Robitaille, 2008; Bellemare & Dupré, 1994; Houle, 2015; Moss, 2011; Solar & Bélisle, 2009; Talbot, 2005; Tondreau, 1999). This trend was initiated in 2000 when the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation published a notice entitled *Recognition of Prior Learning, A Political and Social Responsibility (La reconnaissance des acquis, une responsabilité politique et sociale)*. There was also renewed activity in the area of study missions and exchanges. In May 2003, a delegation of post-secondary administrators, professors, and community leaders in the English community of Quebec participated in a study mission to Europe. The result was a report published by the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports entitled *Lifelong Learning and Québec's English-Speaking Community: May 2003 Study Mission to Europe: Report and Recommendations* (Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2003). The recommendations from this document, combined with the recent publications by the government, would guide the implementation and current practice of RPL within the English school boards throughout the province.

Emergence of Policy Statements and Guidebooks

During this period, the Government of Quebec bolstered the reinvigoration of the RPL in the college system with publications that were both policy statements and government-sanctioned guidebooks for those working in the field. The term used in this era in the education sector was *reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences*, although according to some official documents there was an allowance to use *reconnaissance des acquis* as interchangeable. In the English education sector, *reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences* was initially adapted to *recognition of prior learning and competencies*. This was soon changed to *recognition of acquired competencies* so that the French and English acronyms would both be "RAC."

Significant publications of this period include government policies such as *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training: Learning throughout Life* (Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 2002b). In this document, an entire chapter is dedicated to increased access to RPL assessment. This policy document was swiftly followed in the

same year with *Action Plan for Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training: Learning throughout Life* (Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 2002a). In the field of practice, a guidebook was published entitled *Recognition of Prior Learning and Competencies in Vocational and Technical Training: General and Technical Frameworks* (Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2005). This document is the foundational piece explaining the government's orientation to RPL, the core principles and philosophy, and how it is envisioned to actually take place. The third significant publication from the government in the education sector was a reference document entitled *Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Advisor: Employment Situation Review Report* (Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2006a). This document was intended to be used in the training of new professionals in RPL assessment. It lists in detail the many facets of the role and the expectations of an advisor.

The Labour Sector and Professional Orders

In the labour sector, Emplois-Québec began offering their own version of RPL, known as *competency recognition (reconnaissance des compétences)*. Although sometimes confused with the vocational-sector term *recognition of acquired competencies (reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences)*, the purpose of the Ministry of Employment's attestation is clearly different as it is not linked to the competencies within programs of the education sector and is concentrated in the norms of the labour market. The program is defined as "skills or competency recognition awarded after assessing the mastery of skills associated with the professional standard attached to a trade or profession. Taking into account the norms of the labour market, sectorial workforce committees of each industry establish the evaluation criteria" (Québec, 2016)

Professional orders in Quebec are organized under l'Office des professions du Québec (Office of Professional Orders of Quebec). A search of the website with the terminology *recognition of acquired competencies (reconnaissance des acquis)* prompted the website to offer the following alternative search words in its algorithm (although the documents found were mostly press releases or annual reports): *assessment and evaluation; equivalence; course exemption; certificate of equivalence; and experiential learning* (Office des professions du Québec, 2016b). In terms of publications, both the Office des professions du Québec and the Conseil interprofessionnel du Québec publish annual reports. It was beyond the scope of the literature review to read through each annual report to find mentions of RPL. However, as an example of terminology, the 2014–2015 annual report from the Office des professions du Québec used "assessment and recognition of professional qualifications (*évaluation et reconnaissance des qualifications professionnelles*)" (2016b, p. 5).

The Office des professions du Québec is responsible for the office of the Commissioner for Complaints Concerning the Recognition of Professional Competence. Established in December 2009, the mandate of this office is to "receive and investigate complaints against professional orders concerning the recognition of professional skills, and to submit recommendations to the order when it deems appropriate" (Office des professions du Québec, 2016a).

The Commissioner for Complaints Concerning the Recognition of Professional Competence has produced a number of documents that act as benchmarks for the professional orders regarding their respective engagement with RPL. As recently as

March 2016, the Commissioner published a report entitled *Portrait of the Mechanisms in Recognition of Professional Competencies (Portrait des mécanismes de reconnaissance des compétences professionnelles)* (Commission des plaintes en matière de reconnaissance des compétences professionnelles, 2016). The terminology employed here is *recognition of professional qualifications (reconnaissance des compétences professionnelles)*. The office has also published work related to the unique Québec-France Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (Commission des plaintes en matière de reconnaissance des compétences professionnelles, 2015). These works are significant to the field of practice and add to the repertoire of research in the field of RPL beyond the education sector.

Recognition of Foreign Credentials and Competencies

The millennium brought to Quebec a new reality of demographic shifts and an increased focus on the integration and recognition of foreign credentials and competencies of immigrants. As the only Canadian province with a Ministry of Immigration (which has gone through a number of iterations of its title), the Province of Quebec produced the following working papers related to the RPL and the integration of immigrants to Quebec society:

- *Report from the Working Group on Recognition of Diplomas and Competencies of Internationally Trained Individuals (Rapport de l'Équipe de travail sur la reconnaissance des diplômes et des compétences des personnes formées à l'étranger)* (Québec, Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés Culturelles, Direction des affaires publiques et des communications, 2005), which details the recognition of foreign credentials in Quebec.
- *Projects Intended to Facilitate Access to Regulated Professions and Trades (Projets visant à faciliter l'accès aux professions et métiers réglementés)* (Québec, Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés Culturelles, 2008) is one of the few joint projects between branches of government working in public affairs and immigration. The work centres on an analysis of the situation of professionals to access regulated professions and trades.

These government working papers are related to the second theme predominant within the literature, that of the experience of the immigrant to Quebec. The balance of the literature in this area is focused on the consequences of non-recognition of immigrant skills, competencies, and education (Arcand & Najari, 2014; Beji & Pellerin, 2010; Blain, Fortin, & Alvarez, 2015; Boudarbat & Cousineau, 2009; Cardu & Sanschagrin, 2002; Chanoux, 2003; Drudi, 2003; Girard, Smith, & Renaud, 2008; Lejeune & Bernier, 2014; Pierre, 2005). The majority of the peer review literature in Quebec related to the experience of the immigrant and RPL are investigations into the barriers associated with the socio-economic or simply social access and acceptance within Quebec society. An example of this research is succinctly expressed by Maalaoui-Belhassen and Raymond (2008): "This research comes in response to requests from immigrant women who encountered major difficulties in their attempts to obtain recognition of their experience and skills and fits also in the Government's action plan on recognition of acquired competencies (RAC)" (p. 3).

Author Carol-Ann Gauthier (2013), in her article entitled "The Role of Social Networks in the Process of Socioprofessional Integration of Skilled Immigrant Women in Quebec"

("Le rôle des réseaux sociaux dans le processus d'intégration socioprofessionnelle des femmes immigrants qualifiés au Québec"), goes further and defines the non-recognition of competencies as due to "the lack of experience in Canadian or Quebec labour markets, prejudices, discrimination and the difficulty to access social networks" (p. 98). The issue of social justice and the non-recognition of competencies and educational credentials is a potential subsection in the theme of immigration and RPL for which more research and substantiated opinions are being published (Houle & Roux, 2012; Korotkina, 2013).

Quebec Union Activity and Government Forums: Launchpad for Contemporary Research

The union movement in Quebec is also taking notice and publishing their own work related to RPL as it affects their members. The Centrale des syndicats du Québec (Quebec House of Labour) published in 2003 a paper in response to the government's policy on adult and continuing education (which includes RPL), and then in 2004, the group published an overview of access to training and RPL. The connection between workers and RPL is also explored in Bédard, Bernier, Lejeune, Pulido and Lesemann's (2011) article entitled "La concertation en milieu de travail entre employeurs et employés au Québec, en lien avec le développement et la reconnaissance des compétences" ("Workplace Consultation between Employers and Employees in Quebec, in relation to the Development of Recognition of Competencies").

In 2005 and 2007, the Government of Quebec hosted provincial symposiums on RAC. Participants included representatives from a wide variety of sectors, including education, immigration, unions, professional orders, and industry. These conferences were an opportunity for networking, sharing best practices, and publishing conference presentations, some of which are listed on the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sports-funded InfoRoute/RAC website.³ What is not clear at this point is how these stakeholders are partnering to share experiences and best practices. There are exceptionally few research projects and published works that transcend sectors or are inter-ministerial.

The contemporary landscape has new interpretations of the concept of RPL depending on whether it relates to the field of education, immigration, labour markets, the law, or issues of social justice. Since this literature review is limited to the terminology used in Quebec and is not a review of equivalency of educational degrees, I did not investigate terminology such as *validation of acquired experience* (*la validation des acquis et de l'expérience*) or *recognition of studies and diplomas* (*reconnaissance des études et diplômes*). However, a significant number of graduate theses have been produced on the topic of RPL in Quebec, including the following titles:

- E. Bernier (2012), *Travailleurs immigrants qualifiés à Sherbrooke: Réseaux et stratégies d'insertion socioprofessionnelle*
- L. Héon (1985), *La reconnaissance des acquis expérimentiels dans la politique d'admission des adultes à l'Université Laval*
- S. Morin (2015), *Le rôle des ordres professionnels dans l'intégration des immigrants qualifiés à travers le processus de reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences: Les cas de l'Ordre des ingénieurs et du Collège des médecins du Québec*

3 <http://reconnaissancedesacquis.ca/>

- L. Moss (2001), *Prior Learning Assessment: A Working Solution for Changes in Adult Learner Demographic in Quebec: 1980–2000*
- T. Mugwaneza (2011), *Femmes immigrantes et insertion en emploi: Parcours et analyse des trajectoires des rwandaises dans la région d'Ottawa-Gatineau*
- E. A. Nazon (2011), *Le concept de la qualité de vie: Représentation dans les revues infirmières francophones du Québec*
- C. Noel (2010), *Retour aux études universitaires et acquis expérimentiels: Perceptions d'acteurs du communautaire*
- J. Ouellet (2013), *Scolarisation et développement régional au Québec, 1838–1971, une étude critique du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean*
- I. Rioux (2012), *Défis d'écriture de soi rencontrés par des adultes non diplômés en contexte de reconnaissance des acquis au secondaire*
- L. Solar-Pelletier (2007), *La reconnaissance des acquis en France et au Québec, éléments de comparaison*

From the publication dates, it is clear that the majority of graduate work in the area of RPL in Quebec is relatively recent in comparison to the practical work in the field, which began in the early 1980s.

Research into Practice

According to Andersson (2014), the existence of RPL research is not necessarily a prerequisite for the development of RPL practice. Rather, it is the other way around; i.e., it is unlikely that the research will develop without a developing field of practice (p. 408). At conferences hosted by the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment or the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, the vast majority of sessions are dedicated to practical applications of RPL or sharing of best practices based on a post-secondary institution's experience implementing RPL. Most RPL offices reside within continuing education units of post-secondary education. Herein is the cross-reference between RPL and tenets within the theory of adult education where the potential for more research from practice exists. For example, how knowledge is produced, whose knowledge is of value, and how this knowledge is expressed are the wider questions in RPL research. For an individual to have their learning and competencies assessed and validated, these questions of the value of knowledge, potential biases in assessment, and quality assurance of assessment are all central to the field of RPL research and practice.

Areas for Further Study

According to Wihak (2014), the field of prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) relies too heavily on qualitative research. For her recommendation for PLAR research to advance, scholars and practitioner-researchers need at a minimum to embrace mixed-method research design more readily and to collect and integrate both qualitative and quantitative data with regard to their research questions (p. 37). Wihak's recommendations could be the synthesis of the RPL research in Quebec. The majority of published research produced in Quebec is qualitative research. Further, there is a continued lack of interdisciplinary (or at minimum, inter-ministerial) research. The RPL dossier has financial implications and existing research within three ministries (Education, Immigration, and Employment). All

three ministries have documented publications within this literature review; however, all lack any mention of partnership or joint initiatives.

The other area for further research in RPL in Quebec is quality assurance. The Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment launched in 2015 a manual on RPL quality assurance with the intention that the recommendations within the document would become pan-Canadian standards in RPL practice. There have been other studies on quality assurance practice (Amichand, Ireland, Orynik, Potter, & Van Kleef, 2007; Van Kleef, Amichand, & Carkner, 2007); however, none originate within Quebec. Considering the breadth of the RPL offering, an examination of the quality of the RPL service within the province would yield interesting conclusions and perhaps provide the blueprint for future planning.

Conclusion

The Quebec landscape in RPL enjoys an expanding number of players as well as permanent and semi-permanent training and referral services to serve the province or specific urban centres of activity (CERAC and Qualification Montréal). The goal of this literature review is to compile a comprehensive portrait of the published and influential unpublished work related to RPL in Quebec so researchers and practitioners can see the common themes that continue to emerge in the literature. The next phase would be to address areas for further study and to encourage researchers to be familiar with how the dossier is implemented outside of their sector and to create connections that will push RPL in Quebec beyond the current legacy of a dossier that has been one step forward, two steps back.

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Appendix A

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