

Assessment of Prior Learning- the recognition and endorsement of experiential learning

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This presentation considers APL with special reference to the National Certificate in Carpentry.

Builders now need to be Licensed Building Practitioners to carry out a large range of building work whereas in the past this was not required. This is one of the reasons students seek a formal qualification.

The Goal

To establish existing student knowledge and fill any gaps in knowledge and understanding with the minimum input from the student and the tutor.

APL is the assessment of knowledge and skills acquired through experiential learning that is formalised and accredited in a nationally recognised qualification framework. In other words we recognise “on the job” learning and match it to a formal qualification such as carpenter or chef.

Kolb first recognised and theorised the value of “ experiential learning” in 1984. APL today is increasingly acceptable and gaining credibility.

The APL process strikes a balance between:

The Body of Knowledge vs the Mastery of a Process

Academic rigour vs Capabilities through Workplace Application

The assessor assigns a formal value to the students competency based on one or more assessment processes.

Teachers sometimes find APL assessment intimidating because it requires a new type of structure around the assessment process.

We may need to
operate outside the
classroom



The Established Model

We teach and then we assess competence

The APL Method

We assess competence and then we teach

APL ASSESSMENT

APL evidence may come from several sources. Traditionally student journals and portfolios were the main assessment tools.

For many students poor English literacy contributes to their lack of formal qualifications so we may need to look at other assessment methods that do not require a high level of English literacy.



What should these tools and processes be ?

The assessor can

- 1.Examine the CV of the student**
- 2. Interview the student.**
- 3.Formally test the student**
- 4.Design assignments to identify gaps in the students knowledge.**
- 5.Observe the student performing a task.**
- 6.Watch recorded evidence of the student performing a task.**
- 7.Interview credible people who know of the students work.**
- 8.Examine evidence collected by quality assessors in industry that indicate the student is competent within this framework.**
- 9.Examine student compilation their own evidence of competency eg. a portfolio.**



How do we ensure that these processes are rigorous and consistent?

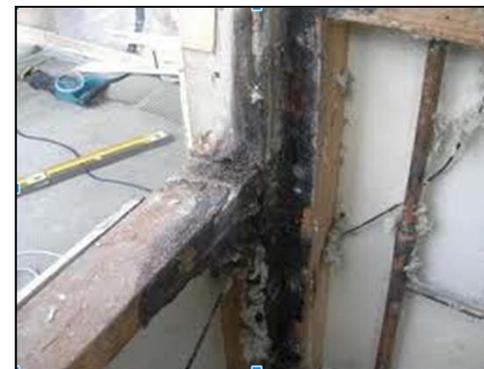
- monitor our assessors and moderate their work.**
- create detailed guidelines for assessors.**
- ensure that the students entering the course have the appropriate industry experience and are capable of passing the course.**
- When we do teach, ensure that the course content accessible and transparent.**



The danger in awarding a qualification to someone who appears competent in industry is that the competent worker that **understands** what he or she is doing but **not why they are doing it** may, in the long term prove a liability in industry.

It can be argued that some of the leaky building issues in New Zealand are a result of workers failing to have a contextual understanding around the job they performed.

For instance if you do not understand the principle that underpins a task you can not be sure that when the situation changes the adaption that you make is correct.



Unitec Carpentry APL process

National Certificate in Carpentry entry criteria

7 Years Practical Experience as a carpenter

Practical assessment

Negotiated format

APL assessment

- Portfolios
- Professional dialogue
- Testimonials

Theory Assessment

Online cloud based assignments with linked resources.

Assignment questions designed to assess prior learning and provide resources to upskill as required with backup tutor support provided.

History of the course

In the **theory** component students received a hand out and a lesson based around the hand out and were tested the following week on that material.

The course had no online content.

Drawbacks of the above format.

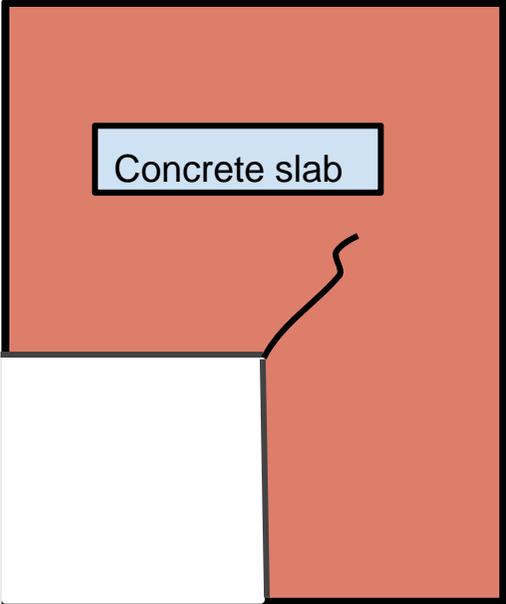
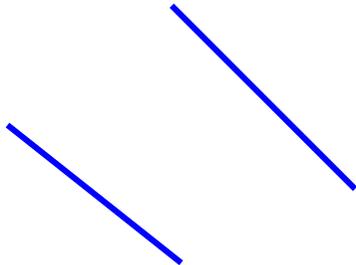
- 1. Prior learning did not accelerate the progress of the student through the course.**
- 2. The course needed to be regularly updated and then reprinted in order to remain current.**
- 3. Students did not develop any skills in finding and using online resources.**
- 4. Unitec had directed staff to move all courses online so the course was out of step with department policy.**

Changes that were made:

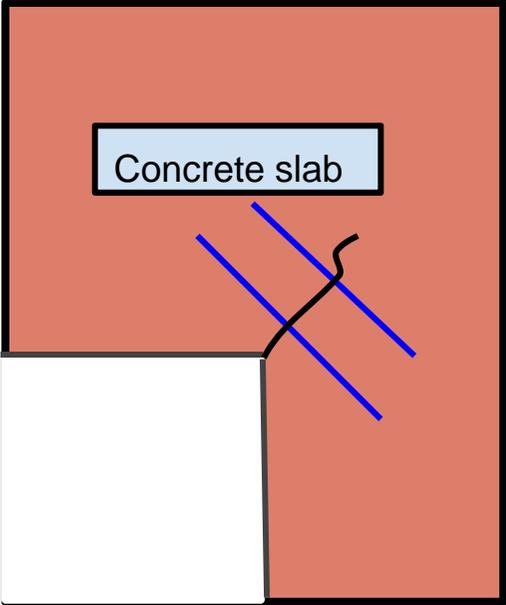
- 1. The course was moved totally online.**
- 2. The Google Drive platform was adopted supported by Teacher Blackboard a New Zealand developed teaching platform designed to be used with Google Drive which is a cloud based equivalent of the Microsoft suite.**
- 3. Assignments appear as power points to the student and the student complete the assignment by modifying the power point slides.**
- 4. Resources are accessed by a link located within the question.**
- 5. The course became self paced and accessible from any online computer.**



You are placing reinforcing steel in the floor below . Where will you place reinforcing to limit the cracking shown. Place the two blue reinforcing rods where you feel they should go to limit the cracking



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Advantages

1. Students complete assignments from anywhere that has internet access.
2. Questions can be modified, rearranged, added or deleted quickly with no printing costs.
3. Resources such as YouTube clips and manufacturers websites can be added as links.
4. Students can work on collaborative documents.
5. Students can work through the assignments at their own pace.
6. The tutor can access and give feedback at any time.
7. The tutor is freed from formal teaching and can circulate in the room giving one to one tuition.



More Advantages

8. There is much more flexibility in the format of a question.
9. Students are exposed to the complexity of the resource material available but can still navigate using support provided in the question.
10. Online material is updated by the site owner rather than the course manager.
11. One of the limitations of APL is that when you have identified the gaps you do not have a means of teaching smaller packets of information. Using this format the student has the resources available to gain the required skill or knowledge without tutor input.
12. Students learn to locate information using digital tools.



Disadvantages

- 1. Some students needed to upskill in IT to use the platform.**
- 2. Students were required to login twice if they use the Unitec computers.**
- 3. The speed at which students navigate the course varies resulting in students moving at different speeds through the course. This means that the tutor needs to be able to mark any part of any assignment at any time.**



Questions are specific and are accompanied by verbal and written resources.

You are lifting timber wall frames into position.

a/ Name 4 hazards associated with this task followed by a method of eliminating , isolating or minimising the hazard.....

b/ What tool will you use to plumb the frames?.....

c/ How will you ensure that the top plate is straight?.....

d/ How will you make sure the top plate remains straight while you fit the roof framing?.....



[Video](#)

[Link to Unit resource Click Here](#)

Video provides a commentary relating to the question

Written resources

The tutor controls the learning pathway of the student.

Question 7

Pole platform set out

Group discussion exercise.

Read the other students comments and add your own ideas as well as commenting on those of other people.

You are setting out poles for a pole platform. One profile would need to be 4 metres high. How would you establish the location of the poles? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the methods that are suggested. You may insert images as well as text.

[Click Here](#)

Add your name to the end of any submission you make and keep a copy of your answer at the end of this question.

This question asks students to work on a collaborative assignment and share their industry experience

Using video commentary as a teaching resource.

Videos are housed in YouTube and a basic video can be made and uploaded in a few minutes.

Advantages .

You can not cut and paste commentary so you need a greater level of understanding when you present the information as a submission.

Students who have limited written comprehension may have a better understanding of spoken language.

If students are able to navigate the assignment more quickly there is the possibility of increasing the amount of material being learned.

Future Plans

- 1. Provide a verbal commentary for some questions to support students with limited English language or written literacy challenges.**
- 2. Create a library of video clips of activities and images relevant to the specific questions and provide links from the question. The commentary can utilise and discuss the videos.**
- 3. Continue to develop a flexible and robust method of APL assessment for the practical component of the course.**



Practical Assessment

Previously students would compile a portfolio where each element of each practical unit standard needed to be addressed and cross referenced.

Drawbacks

Only well organised and motivated students could pass.

New Format for Practical Assessment.

The BCITO (Building and Construction Industry Training Organisation) who oversees the delivery of the course have reduced the specific detail around assessments allowing a greater use of APL tools.



Questions that arise

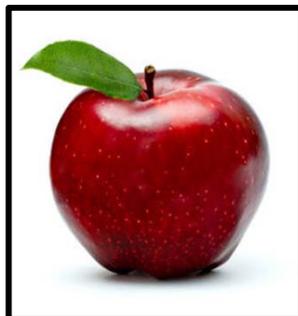
Do the extra skills they have learned in industry have value if other skills are missing.

**Can we have discretion around weighing one skill
or understanding against another?**

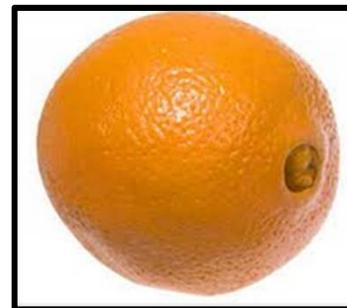
**Does the fact that the person functions effectively in the workforce mean that we can overlook
gaps in their knowledge and skills and award a qualification?**

If we do. What are the implications for the industry?

**If we are assessing different but relevant skillsets , how does our assessment remain
consistent?**



and



Student Data Analysis

Students with poor English struggle to fully understand the question and also to navigate through resources.

Students with a background in industry and good IT and English skills moved swiftly through the course material.

Students requiring the most support had poor English and poor IT skills.

10 of the 11 students had spent one year or more in a university or polytech.

Unitec policy statement 6 states :

*“To the extent APL measures learning experiences from work and life against Formal learning outcomes, judgment is premised on the concept of Equivalence. If the sum of Competences evidenced is equivalent to the **Capabilities articulated in course Learning Outcomes** and/or programme Graduate Profile, then the main criterion of a positive judgment outcome has been met.”*

The implication here is that the more specific criteria become the more difficult it will be to award APL credits.

The trades qualification framework we work under that is at present unit standard based and extremely detailed regarding specific criteria to be matched is in the process of restructure. The Targeted Review of Qualifications (TROQ) now underway appears to be less specific and so may allow greater APL assessment.

Conclusions

APL assessment responds to modern educational demands because it is both efficient and responsive to individual needs.

APL can accelerate the progress of a student through a course.

APL can allow individualised teaching and more personal attention from the tutor.

The range of APL assessment tools allows the student to be assessed without using written English language as the only assessment vehicle.

Using an online platform allows specific learning outcomes and learning pathways to be engineered.