PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AT NORTHWEST COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

CURRENT STATUS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

By

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Abstract

This study assessed the nature and potential of Prior Learning Assessment

(PLA) at Northwest Community College (NWCC). The researcher, Karen Chrysler, worked with

the college PLA committee and the University of Northern British Columbia to complete the

study. The focus of the study was to determine the current level of support within the college

community for PLA and to develop some recommendations.

The participants were NWCC faculty, administrators and student advisors. Program

Cluster Committee members and Student Success team members were asked to complete and

return questionnaires. The Cluster Committee members returned a total of 58 surveys, making

for an overall response rate of 65%. A total of 17 surveys were sent out and 10 were returned by

the Student Success team members, making for a response rate of 59%. All twelve key

informants, who were asked, agreed to participate and were interviewed.

The concept of PLA itself was well supported by the program cluster members. The

majority of faculty members would agree to an individual student request for PLA. Key

informants definitely recognized the benefits for students, faculty and the college. The identified

problems around PLA stem from the implementation and fall within three areas. First, there is a

need to have operational language regarding PLA activity within the college's collective

agreements. Second, there is a need to continue to provide training and professional

development opportunities regarding the concept of PLA in general, and at NWCC specifically.

Finally, it is important to continue the development of PLA policies and procedures in

consultation with the appropriate stakeholders in the college community. Addressing these three

areas will assist in addressing the expressed concerns of those individuals who are currently not

supportive of PLA.

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisor Peter MacMillan for his clear direction and useful support throughout the duration of this project. I also wish to thank Paul Madek taking on the role as second reader and providing useful editing advice.

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Finally, I would like to thank my dear friend Jayeson Shaffer who has given me support and encouragement every step of the way.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The topic of Prior Learning Assessment has become of great interest to those involved in

the post secondary education system. The British Columbia Council on Admissions and

Transfer (1999) defines Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) as "assessment by some valid and

reliable means, by a qualified specialist of what has been learned through non formal

education/training or experience that is worthy of credit in a course or program offered by the

institution providing the credit." (p. 29).

In British Columbia, the provincial strategic plan, "Charting a New Course" for colleges,

institutes and systems has endorsed PLA as a viable strategy for enhancing learner efficiency

(1996, p. 36). Post secondary institutions have been eligible to receive money to support PLA

initiatives since 1996. One such institution, Northwest Community College (NWCC) received an

initial $40,000 in 1996 and in 1997. In 1998 and again in 1999, the amount of funding was

decreased to $20,000. Throughout this study, terms such as " collegewide" or the "college"

refer to NWCC, the college at which this study was carried out. As well, all committees and

organizational structures are bodies within NWCC unless otherwise stated.

A college wide PLA committee, of which the researcher is a member, was initiated at the

time the funding was first received. The college PLA committee was originally an ad hoc

committee reporting to the Education Council for the first three years (1996-1998). The

committee was made a task force of NWCC's Education Council as of the fall of 1999. This

action implies that PLA is an initiative of continuing importance to NWCC.

The committee's major role is to advocate for PLA at NWCC. The committee has been

active in the past three years. In the first year, a PLA coordinator was hired to do general

promotion of PLA and facilitate development of PLA policy and procedures, in conjunction with

the PLA committee. Several programs were then funded for development of PLA assessment

tools.

The PLA activity report records the following program areas have offered PLA in some capacity at NWCC: Office Administration, Natural Resources, Early Childhood Education, Business Administration, Adult Basic Education, Computer Science and Adult Special Education (McAloney, 1999). McAloney (1999) states that a total of 3.73 FTE students are recorded as having earned PLA credit between April 1, 1998 and March 31, 1999. This number reflects a total of twenty-three students who earned PLA credit. This figure seems extremely low and it is not certain that this number reflects the amount of PLA activity actually occurring at NWCC.

Study Purpose and Rationale

The use of PLA is congruent with Northwest Community College's mission statement that emphasizes that adults in the northwest region have equitable access to quality learning opportunities (NWCC college calendar, 1999, p. 4). The increased use of PLA at NWCC, through the support of a study such as this will benefit students by increasing access to formal college credit. Course credit obtained through PLA either lightens students' current course load or accelerates their completion time.

In June of 1999, the PLA committee informally reviewed the implementation of PLA to date. The committee felt while there were accomplishments, there was work that remained to be done, to more fully embed PLA in the NWCC college system. PLA needed to become more fully established in order to be a viable alternative that was accessible to all eligible students. There was general agreement that there was a need to review the current status of PLA at NWCC, and to develop some direction as how to proceed with PLA in the future. This study's focus is to document the current status of PLA at NWCC and make recommendations for the future.

PLA continues to be an initiative of interest to the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology (MAETT). A letter dated April 19, 1999 sent to Michael Hill, President of NWCC, from Robin Ciceri, Assistant Deputy Minister from MAETT, presented Ministry-recommended PLA implementation guidelines (Appendix A). This study includes an assessment of both the level of awareness of the guidelines and comments on them in relation to NWCC. The PLA committee and administration at NWCC endorsed the researcher's proposal for a study on PLA at NWCC (Appendix B, C, and D). This study was designed to provide useful knowledge to support increased PLA activity at NWCC. The research questions were generated from PLA committee discussions and formed the basis of the questionnaires and interview questions. It is anticipated the committee will use the findings of this study as a focus for action. The study also received approval from the UNBC Ethics Committee. This UNBC research project will also be reformatted and circulated as an internal NWCC report.

Research Questions

1. What is the current status of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) at Northwest Community College?

    A. What programs use PLA?

    B. How many students are being assessed through prior learning?

    C. What types of prior learning assessment methods are being used?

2. What is the current level of support in the various college sectors regarding PLA?

    A. What are their current beliefs/opinions/knowledge regarding PLA?

    B. What do they see as the benefits of PLA?

    C. What are their issues regarding PLA?

    D. What solutions or directions do they recommend to address these issues?

    E. What is their level of awareness of regarding the Ministry's PLA guidelines?

    F. What are their comments regarding the Ministry's PLA guidelines?

3. What are the perspectives on PLA from the student success team?

    A. What is the current level of demand for PLA from students?

    B. What are the current referral practices for student who inquire about PLA?

    C. What questions do advisors have about PLA at NWCC?

CHAPTER TWO METHODS

NWCC Structure

The study included participants from the four college regions. The college regions are the Central region (Terrace, Stewart, and Nass Valley), Southern region (Kitimat), Eastern region (Smithers, Hazelton, Houston) and Western region (Prince Rupert, Masset and Queen Charlotte City). There are nine Program Cluster Committees that oversee all college programs: Natural Resources, Office Administration, Business Administration, Integrated Health and Human Services, Trades and Technology, University Transfer, Continuing Education, Tourism, College and Career Preparation. These clusters exist to allow faculty in similar curriculum areas to discuss matters of common concern. Each cluster has an elected Chair, and has an assigned administrative liaison person. The Continuing Education and Tourism clusters were excluded from this study. There were no Tourism programs operating during the time of this study and Continuing Education is responsible for non-credit courses which is not of interest to this study.

Researcher

The researcher had an approved leave of absence from NWCC to complete her research requirement for the Master's of Education. She has been a college employee since 1991, and a member of the college PLA committee since the beginning. She has implemented PLA in the Early Childhood and Special Education Assistant Program. She had ready access to the college system and had relationships with the individuals who were involved with this study. As an employee, she also had access to the PLA coordinator's yearly activity reports.

Student Success Survey Distribution

The Student Success team at NWCC is comprised of Student advisors, First Nations advisors, Institutional Support Specialists, and Student Success coordinators at the ten NWCC campuses. They received a short introductory letter explaining the purpose of the project and a

questionnaire (Appendix G). They were asked to sign and return a participation consent form (Appendix G) along with the questionnaire. A total of 17 packages were sent out and 10 were returned making for a response rate of 59%. The data were then analyzed and are contained in the results section of this study.

Program Cluster Survey Distribution

Each Cluster Chair received an introductory letter explaining the purpose of the project. Included along with the letter, was a sample questionnaire and participation consent form (Appendix E). The researcher made a follow-up phone call to each Chair and in consultation with the Chair, determined the best approach for the cluster members to receive the survey. One Cluster Chair, who is also a member of the PLA committee, offered to distribute the questionnaire at the Program Cluster meeting. Members of the other six clusters received their questionnaires individually via internal mail with an introduction letter and consent form.

A total of 86 packages were sent out to full time, regular NWCC college faculty (Table 1). Part-time, sessional faculty, full time permanent faculty who were on leave, faculty who were on a year's term appointment, and faculty who had been at NWCC for less than a year were excluded from this study. Ten instructors in the Natural Resources Program received the survey. Six other instructors who have instructed University Credit in the Natural Resources Program received surveys through their other cluster, the University Credit Cluster and thus were not interviewed as part of the Natural Resources Cluster. Other faculty who instructed in more than one program area were asked to indicate on their survey form, the cluster area they were referring to when responding to the questionnaire. If faculty listed more than one cluster area on the questionnaire, as happened in two responses, the responses were put in the cluster area that the responses primarily referred to.

A college wide voice mail was made a short time later by the researcher, reminding faculty, to return their surveys. Individual follow-up phone calls were then made to a number of

Cluster members who had college voice mail, who had not yet returned their surveys. A total of

61 surveys were eventually returned. Three surveys were discarded at the outset, as the

participants had not filled them out. A total of 58 surveys made for an overall response rate of

65%. The response rate has been broken down by program cluster in Table 1. The collected

data were then analyzed and are contained in the Results Chapter of this study.

Table 1

PLA Survey Response Rate by Program Cluster

Number of Surveys	Number Sent Out	Number Responses Received	Percentage of Responses
College and Career Preparation	24	15	63%
Business Administration	5	4	80%
Integrated Human Service	6	6	100%
Natural Resources	10	6	60%
Office Administration	6	4	66%
Trades and Technology	11	5	45%
University Credit	24	18	75%
Total		58	65%

Key Informant Interviews

A package was sent to eleven key informants requesting an interview. These individuals

were the acting College President, the Program Support Manager, the Center Directors from each

of the three college regions (the position for the Southern region was vacant), the Chair of

Education Council, the Registrar, the President of the Academic Workers Union, the Chair of the

BC Government Employees Union (instructional), the Academic Head in Terrace and the

Associate Academic Head in Prince Rupert. The incumbents in these positions were considered

by the researcher to be key informants at NWCC.

The package included a letter that explained the purpose of the interview, the interview questions, along with a participation consent form to be signed and returned prior to the interview taking place (Appendix F). The letter from Robin Ciceri, Assistant Deputy Minister from the Ministry of Advanced Training and Technology, along with the proposed implementation guidelines were included (Appendix A).They were asked to read and reflect on the interview questions and guidelines prior to the interview. All eleven individuals readily agreed to participate when contacted by telephone, to set up an appointment. Eight of the interviews took place in person and three were conducted over the telephone. The length of the interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes to well over an hour and all were audiotaped. The researcher then recorded the main points of each interview using the interview tape. The researcher then organized the data from each key informant's interview in relation to the interview questions. These points were then placed into categories reflecting the themes that emerged from the data. This section of the study was then given back to the key informant for review. The research made some minor wording changes that were requested by the informants. This thematic analysis is contained in the Results section.

The twelfth key informant was the incumbent PLA coordinator. She was asked the same interview questions as the other key informants and also had an opportunity to review the data prior to inclusion in this report. Due to her unique knowledge and perspective of PLA, her interview has been documented separately in the Results section.

<center>Ethical Considerations</center>

Participation in this study was voluntary. Participants signed a participation consent form (Appendix E, F, and G). The forms included information regarding the purpose of the survey, how the participant was selected to participate, what would occur to the information the participant provided, the circulation of the report, and actions that may be taken based on the report findings. Each form informed the participants as to how their anonymity and

confidentiality of their responses would be handled. Four surveys were returned without the signed consent form. However, because the participant returned the survey, it is felt that they had agreed to participate in the research and therefore the questionnaires were included in this study.

In the case of the Student Success team survey, because they signed and returned the participation consent form along with the completed questionnaire, the researcher knew who provided the information. The form was immediately separated from the questionnaire. As an additional safeguard, the information that used in this report has only identified them as a Student Success team member.

In the case of the cluster questionnaire, cluster members returned the survey along with the signed consent form. The surveys were then collated according to cluster. The researcher then separated the participation consent form from the questionnaire. Thus, the researcher was not necessarily able to determine the nature of a particular individual's response to the questionnaire. However, as an additional safeguard to the participant, they were informed that the researcher would refer to the information used in the study, as being provided by a member of a specific cluster such as from the Integrated Health and Social Service cluster. This would occur even if the researcher was able to detect whose response it was from the nature of the responses or more commonly from the handwriting of the individual.

In the case of the key informants, they were referred to by position and not by name in the report. They also had an opportunity to review and approve the thematic analysis section contained in the report. The interviews were audiotaped and the informants told they would receive the tapes back at the end of the study.

CHAPTER THREE RESULTS

Three different college sectors participated in this study (1) the Student Success team, (2) Program Clusters, and (3) key informants. The data have been organized accordingly into their respective sections.

Student Success Team

A total of 17 surveys were sent out to the Student Success Team members (SSTM) and 10 were returned making for a response rate of 59%. A survey form is contained in Appendix G. The members were asked how many students they each had advised relating to PLA. Responses are given in Table 2.

Table 2

Grouped Frequency Distribution for Numbers of Students Receiving PLA Advising

Number of Students	Number of Student Advisors
None	2
1–10	4
11- 20	2
21- 30	1
31- 40	0
41- 50	0
50+	1

The modal response category for the SSTM advising students of PLA was the category of between 1-10 students in the previous two years at NWCC. One team member indicated they had advised over 50 students, and two team members had had no students inquire about PLA.

The SSTM were then asked why they felt students had not inquired about PLA. Their responses are given in Table 3.

Table 3
Reason(s) SSTM Gave As To Why Students Did Not Ask about PLA

Reason	Number of Times
Student did not know about PLA	7
Program didn't offer PLA	1
Student would not have been eligible	2
Student didn't think they would succeed	1
PLA concept too "new and untried"	1

The majority of SSTM (7) stated the reason students did not ask about PLA is because the students didn't know about PLA. Note, as SSTM were allowed to give more than one reason, the total responses might be more than the number of SSTM. SSTM were then asked as to the outcome of those students who did inquire about PLA. Responses are given in Table 4.

Table 4
Grouped Frequency Distribution for Outcome(s) of Students Who Did Inquire about PLA

Outcome	Number of Times
Referred to Program Coordinator	6
Referred to PLA Coordinator	1
Received the PLA brochure	1
Student chose not to proceed due to work involved and cost	1
Referred to Educational Advisor	1
Student received credit	1

The majority of students who inquired about PLA were referred to the Program Coordinator (6). The other 5 students had 5 other separate outcomes.

In the final survey question, the SSTM were asked what questions they had about PLA, in regard to their role as an advisor. Three advisors had very specific questions. One asked how staff would find the time to assess PLA when the demand increases. Another wanted to know what the status was regarding the PLA portfolio course. The third advisor wanted to know if he, or she should be actively marketing PLA to students. The other questions the advisors had have been organized into the following three categories: (1) screening, (2) program information, and (3) general PLA policies and procedures. Three advisors wanted to know how they could screen a student to assess if their PLA request is potentially valid. The second category was regarding

specific program information and PLA. Two advisors wished to know which programs at NWCC offer PLA and what their assessment methods were. The final category related to general PLA policies and procedures. Six questions were raised relating to general PLA policies and procedures. These included what PLA costs were, when it was best for students to apply for PLA (before/after program admittance), and requests for information on the PLA process.

Program Cluster

Cluster Member Use of PLA

Cluster members were asked a series of eight questions regarding their PLA activity in the previous two years. They were asked if they had used a particular PLA method. If they replied yes, they were asked how often they had used it and to comment on their experiences. If they replied no, they were asked to provide comments on why they had not done so. Figure 1 indicates the total number of times each PLA method had been used by the faculty. The three primary methods used were challenge exams (136),oral interviews (111), demonstrations (102). Much less used were the portfolios, projects, standardized testing and role-plays. It was evident from the written comments that some instructors had been involved in the assessing the same student so it is not possible to determine PLA activity based on individual students. Figure 2 reflects the total number of faculty who had used PLA in the previous two years and which method they employed. The highest number of faculty members used projects for assessment (18) with a relatively even split of use of portfolios, oral interviews, demonstrations and challenge exams. Note, faculty members were able to list more than one method, Figure 2 does not reflect the actual number of faculty. Figures 1 and 2 show that project assessment was used by the greatest number of instructors, followed by use of challenge exams and oral interviews. However, the instructors that used challenge examinations reported using them much more frequently. As a consequence, more students were exposed to challenge examinations for PLA than to project assessment for PLA.
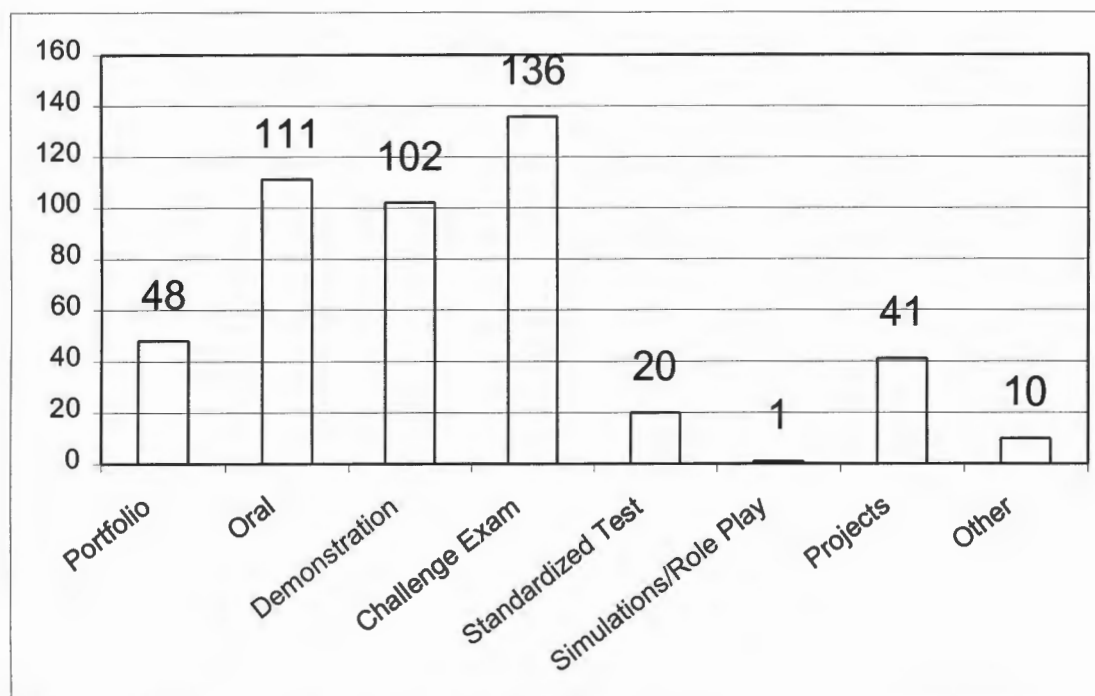
Figure 1 Number of times each PLA method was used
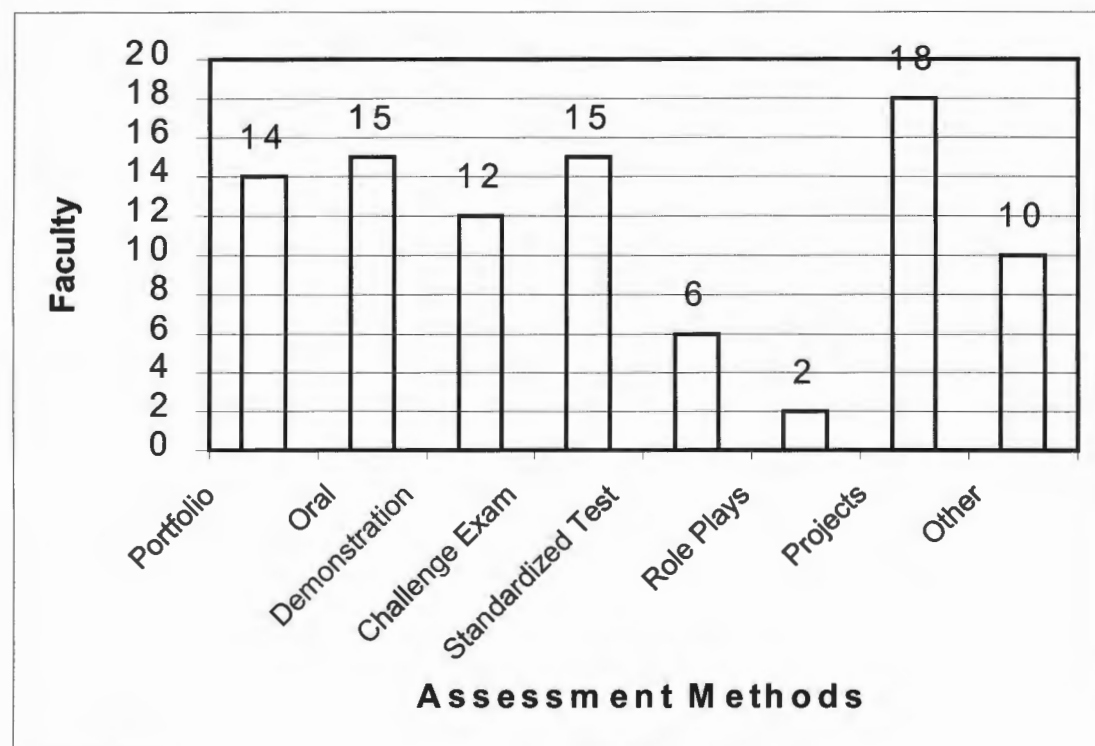
Figure 2 Number of Faculty who have utilized PLA

Tables 5 to 12 contain the eight sets of comments for each of the PLA methods. These comments were separated into yes and no responses and then placed into categories. There were a few comments that were considered not applicable by the researcher and thus not included in this section. This included comments which fell outside of the time lines of the study (previous two years), one comment made regarding another program's PLA practices, and comments made by an instructor who did not assess for credit in his course. The total number of yes and no comments for each PLA method varied as not all instructors made a comment for each method. The number of comments that the percentages are based on are contained as a note under each table.

Based on the data collected, there appears to be some general disagreement/and or confusion regarding the definition of PLA. A number of faculty members reported use of PLA to assess whether students met course prerequisites. In this situation, it appeared primarily that faculty based these assessments on previous formal coursework. However, the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) definition clearly states PLA is for non-formal education/training and or experience, and also that PLA is used for course credit and not to meet course prerequisites.

A number of faculty members also reported use of PLA to assess for where a student should be placed in College and Career Preparation Program. Again, these assessments seemed to be primarily based on previously completed formal coursework. However, the BCAT definition clearly states PLA is used for course credit, not for placement. A smaller number of instructors were clear on the difference and responded in the negative, explaining they used this method for placement not for credit.

However, because of the prevalence of these situations and because of the impossibility of separating the data at this stage, a category titled "Meet course prerequisites" appears in the table for yes, and a category titled "Placement" appears in the tables for both the yes and no

comments. A category for "Used in combination" with other methods also appears in the tables for both the yes and no comments as some instructors gave this as a comment for yes and no responses.

Regarding the use of portfolios (Table 5) 50% of respondents described their experience assessing with portfolio method as positive and or useful. Lesser numbers either described the course they assessed for (17%) or indicated the reason they were doing PLA was because of the student's extensive experiences (17%). The main reason faculty gave as why they did not use this method was because they had had no requests (65%). Oral interviews (Table 6) were used to assess whether students met course prerequisites (38%), were eligible for PLA (15%) or in combination with other methods (23%). The primary reasons why faculty had not used this method were because faculty said they had had no requests (42%) and either the PLA method or PLA itself was not applicable, not relevant or not appropriate (39%). Eighty percent reported they used demonstrations (Table 7) for skill based courses. Again, 41% percent of faculty said they had had no requests, which is why they had not used this method and 36% percent said this PLA method and or PLA itself was either not applicable, not relevant, or not appropriate. Forty two percent described the experience of using a challenge exam (Table 8) as positive and another 42% percent described the type of courses they used this assessment method for which were for vocational courses. A lesser number of faculty members described the challenge exam as inappropriate (15%), while the majority again stated they had had no requests (50%).

Standardized tests (Table 9) were primarily used for placement in the College and Career Preparation Program and the majority of faculty (57%) said this PLA method and or PLA itself was not applicable, not relevant or not appropriate. All faculty members who used simulations and role-plays (Table 10) used them to assess computer skills and writing skills. The majority of those who did not stated this method and or PLA itself was not applicable, not relevant or not appropriate (58%). Sixty one percent of faculty used projects to assess for credit (Table 11) and

another 43% percent said they had had no requests. Faculty members were also asked if they had used other assessment method than those listed (Table 12). Twenty percent had used previous coursework and or workshops and another 20% had used a portfolio with assignments to complete the gaps.

Table 5

Comments Regarding Portfolio

Yes Comments	Percent	No Comments	Percent
Described their experiences and or regarded experiences as positive and or useful	50%	No requests	62%
Gave reason for doing PLA was student had lots of background	17%	Faculty said this PLA method/and or PLA itself was not either not applicable, not relevant or not appropriate	28%
Assessed for credit courses; computer skills and skills based courses	17%	Faculty stated no need/reason	15%
Used in combination with other methods	8%	No PLA process/tool in place	8%
Placement	8%	Faculty stated student preferred to take the course	4%
		Faculty stated student preferred to take course	4%

Note. 12 faculty comments.   Note. 26 faculty comments. Numbers do not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Table 6

Comments Regarding Oral Interview

Yes Comments	Percent	No Comments	Percent
Meet course prerequisites	38%	No requests	42%
In combination with other methods	23%	Faculty said this PLA method/and or PLA itself was not either not applicable, not relevant or not appropriate	39%
Screening	15%	Faculty stated no need	15%
Described experience as positive	8%	No PLA process/tool in place	4%
Placement	8%		
Assessed for full or partial credit from other course (student may or may not have received credit)	8%		

Note. 13 faculty comments.   Note. 26 faculty comments.

Table 7

Comments Regarding Demonstration

Yes Comments	Percent	No Comments	Percent
Assessed for credit in courses; computer skills, grammar, spelling, practice skills in early childhood, course learning objectives, and English in Office Administration Program	80%	No requests	41%
Described experience as time consuming	10%	Faculty said this PLA method/and or PLA itself was not either not applicable, not relevant or not appropriate	36%
Placement	10%	Faculty stated no need/reason	9%
		Done by other faculty	5%
		No PLA process/tool in place	5%
		Placement	5%

Note. 12 faculty comments.   Note. 22 faculty comments. Numbers do not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Table 8

Comments Regarding Challenge Exam

Yes Comments	Percent	No Comments	Percent
Assessed for credit in computer skills, spelling, courses in Office Administration Program and Business Administration Program	42%	No requests	50%
Described experience as positive	42%	Faculty said this PLA method/and or PLA itself was either not applicable, not relevant or not appropriate	15%
Placement	10%	No PLA process/tool in place	15%
Meet course prerequisites	7%	Faculty stated no need/reason	10%
Faculty expressed concern regarding validity of results	7%	Placement	5%
		Done by other faculty	5%

Note. 14 faculty comments. Numbers are more than 100% because of rounding.

Note. 20 faculty comments.

Table 9

Comments Regarding Standardized Tests

Yes Comments	Percent	*No Comments*	Percent
Placement	80%	Faculty said this PLA method/and or PLA itself was either not applicable, not relevant or not appropriate	57%
Described experience as time efficient	20%	No requests	24%
		Faculty stated no need/reason	14%
		Placement	5%
		Meet course prerequisites	5%

Note. 5 faculty comments

Note. 21 faculty comments. Numbers to more add up than 100 because of rounding.

Table 10

Comments Regarding Simulations/Role Plays

Yes Comments	Percent	No Comments	Percent
Used for course credit in Word processing, Excel Program and English essays	100%	Faculty said this PLA method/and or PLA itself was either not applicable, not relevant or not appropriate	58%
		No requests	18%
		Described experience as time consuming or said it would be	8%
		Faculty stated no need	8%
		Faculty stated they didn't know how to use this method	4%
		Screening	4%

Note. 2 faculty comments.   Note. 24 faculty comments.

Table 11

Comments Regarding Projects

Yes Comments	Percent	No Comments	Percent
Used coursework for full/partial credit (student may or may not have received credit)	61%	No requests	43%
Used workplace project (student may or may not have received credit)	22%	Faculty said this PLA method/and or PLA itself was either not applicable, not relevant or not appropriate	36%
Used in combination with other methods	6%	Used in combination with other methods	7%
Described the tool as valid	6%	Faculty stated no need/reason	7%
Described experience as time consuming	6%	Previous course work (faculty was not aware this was not PLA)	7%

Note. 18 faculty comments.   Note. 14 faculty comments.

Table 12

Yes Comments Regarding Other Methods

Yes Comments	Percent
Used previous coursework/workshops to get full or partial credit (student may or may not have received credit)	20%
Used portfolio with projects to complete gaps	20%
Work place assessment	20%
Combination of methods listed in survey	20%
Used manual of PLA tools	10%
Articulation agreement	10%

Note. 10 faculty comments.

Cluster Member Support of PLA

Cluster members were asked what their reaction would be if a registered student in their class asked if they might receive credit through PLA. Three individuals did not respond to this question and five individual's responses were not applicable. Requests for PLA would not apply in College and Career Preparation as the students would have already been screened and placed prior to the course. This made for a total of 50 responses. Five responses of the 50 were categorized as conditional; meaning the faculty had expressed some conditions and or hesitations in allowing the student to pursue PLA. Another five responses were classed as negative, meaning the faculty indicated they would refuse such a student request. This left a total of 40 positive responses where faculty indicated they would agree to a student request for PLA.

Faculty members were then asked their opinion regarding five statements relating to PLA. Their responses are in Table 13. Eighty five percent agreed that life experience could be equivalent to what is learned in a college course and 87% agreed that PLA could be an appropriate method of assessment. This number dropped to 62% percent when asked if more courses could be made available through PLA at NWCC. The two statements that described PLA as having undesirable characteristics received high " "Disagree "responses; 83% and 73% respectively.

Table 13

Faculty Support

Statement	Agree	Disagree	No Response	No Opinion
Sometimes what is learned through life experience can be equivalent to what is learned in a college course	85%	5%	5%	5%
I think that PLA can be an appropriate method of assessment	87%	5%	5%	3%
When you give credit for PLA you defeat the purpose of why students come to college	7%	83%	3%	7%
More NWCC courses could be made available for PLA	62%	14%	2%	22%
Giving credit for PLA compromises good education	14%	73%	3%	10%

Cluster Member Opinion of PLA

The final portion of the survey contained five further questions about their opinion regarding

PLA. Participants were asked questions about benefits, problems and recommendations. They

were also asked about their knowledge of the recommended PLA Ministry guidelines. They

were also encouraged to make any other comments regarding PLA. The results have been

divided into five sections: (1) benefits, (2) issues, (3) solutions/directions, (4) guidelines, and (5)

other.

Benefits of PLA

A total of 54 respondents (four had no response) listed several real or potential benefits

from use of PLA at NWCC. Five percent of the respondents stated there were no benefits to

PLA. "None [benefits of PLA], really." One respondent stated, "I think we already have some

form of past course/experience recognition." The benefits have been grouped into two

categories: (1) students, and (2) college and faculty.

Benefits for students.

Respondents listed a number of benefits for students. Thirty nine percent stated that PLA would be more efficient, reduce the time a student needs to spend in school and possibly speed up their completion time, "[PLA] helps some students avoid wasting time on course work they already understand." "Student may finish the program earlier." "More efficient use of student time and energy." Thirteen percent said that PLA would be of benefit for specific college programs at NWCC. "It [PLA] may assist people in applied programs such as certain trades." Twenty four percent stated PLA had benefit for those students with prior knowledge and skills and mature adult students in particular. "It allows us to recognize that some students, particularly mature students have acquired knowledge and skills independently and should be given credit for that." Eleven percent said that having PLA would produce more satisfied and empowered students. "[Having PLA would bring] a reduction of frustration for some students." "It [PLA] encourages the student." Thirteen percent stated that PLA would increase accessibility to courses. "Having it [PLA] would allow more access to programs with specific requirements."

Benefits for college and faculty.

Respondents identified two benefits for the college. Seventeen percent indicated that having PLA would attract new students. "We would likely get more students to NWCC [by having PLA]." Nine percent felt that having PLA would benefit the college by better meeting the needs of the community. "It [PLA] makes us more relevant and open to the community."

Seven percent of respondents listed benefits to faculty. "Encourage instructors to examine the way they structure and deliver their courses, in a thoughtful and rational way."

Issues Regarding PLA

A total of 52 respondents (6 had no response) listed numerous issues regarding PLA. These have been grouped into the following five categories: (1) lack of resources, (2) faculty workload, (3) beliefs, values and attitudes, (4) concerns over quality and (5) transfer credit.

Lack of resources.

Respondents cited lack of student numbers, lack of faculty knowledge, and lack of PLA policies, procedures, lack of time, money, PLA tools and training as issues related to PLA. Six percent mentioned that there would be low numbers of students who would use PLA, versus the cost of implementing it. "May have very few students who would ever request it." Fifteen percent of respondents made comments that indicated a need for more knowledge around PLA policies and practices. "People would want credit for courses for which no fees could be charged." "Not finding holes in a student's prior learning and sending them out unequipped." The lack of PLA policies, procedures, time, money, PLA tools and training were also mentioned as issues by 35% of respondents. "No standard procedures to follow." "The college has to determine what fees to charge." "Not enough funding to develop a PLA tool." "Problem is developing an assessment tool for each course." "You must have properly qualified faculty to do the assessment."

Faculty workload.

Thirty six percent of respondents mentioned the lack of recognition of PLA activity within faculty workload. "No determination of workload around PLA." "The UC [University Credit] cluster does not seem to have a clear approach to determine how PLA can fit into the workload."

Beliefs, values and attitudes.

Eighteen percent of respondents made comments that fit into this category. These comments would be considered as not supportive of PLA such as "I would be concerned that management envisions PLA as a cost savings initiative." "This may prove to be another fad, it sounds good on paper but how significant are the benefits?" "Is PLA a substitute for a sound formal education? How does PLA fit in with professional on the job training with formal education (e.g. the professional accounting bodies). A likely bias of PLA supporters is to

underestimate the importance of formal training and to identify minimum standards for equivalency." "No institutional commitment."

Concerns over quality.

Twenty seven percent of respondents expressed concern relating to the quality of PLA activity. This included comments regarding subjectivity, appropriate assessment techniques, consistency and validity, concern over general standards, and the expertise of faculty in the content area being assessed. "The subjectivity of the assessment could and will vary." "Inappropriate assessment techniques." "[PLA assessors] need to be certain the assessment properly covers course material", " maintenance of standards in education", " inconsistent PLA methods by instructors." "Some faculty are teaching in courses that they are not experts in, will their PLA be as valid as an expert's PLA?"

Transfer credit.

Eight percent of respondents expressed a concern that other colleges, universities and professional organizations would not accept PLA credit. "PLA is not well received by both the universities and professional bodies."

Solutions

A total of 46 (12 had no response) respondents provided some suggestions as to address some of the issues they had previously identified as problems with PLA. These have been grouped into the following four categories: (1) workload, (2) resources, (3), college and (4) provincial.

Workload.

Thirty one percent of the respondents stated that PLA needs to be operationalized into faculty workload. "These items need to be negotiated in college agreements and work contracts." "Union and institution must agree on how much PLA is worth re workload."

Resources.

Forty four percent stated that PLA tools, methods, policies, procedures and guidelines needed to be developed. "Policies and procedures to follow a streamlined assessment, training in PLA, and methods to be used." Another 8% mentioned that a full time PLA coordinator was needed. "We need a full time PLA coordinator by someone with the training experience and resources." Two respondents stated that college courses could be modularized to accommodate PLA students. " Have our course in many modules so student can complete just one or two modules that they need." Eight percent stated that professional development for faculty was needed. "Have motivational PLA workshops that provide valid PLA information, examples that benefit everyone and allows instructors to see outside the traditional educational box."

College.

Seventeen percent cited better college communication, collaboration with other departments, standardization of assessment criteria across campus, development of internal transfer credit, continued commitment of the PLA committee, Education Council, college management and board were directions to proceed with implementing PLA. "Collaboration with other departments," "standardize criteria across campus", and "continue with PLA committee work."

Provincial.

Thirteen percent of respondents recommended that more provincial research of successful PLA needs to occur, development of provincial assessment tools for each college course, provincial clarification of workload, increased funding for PLA activity and development of provincial transfer credit. "Research to study what is done in jurisdictions with successful implementation of PLA", "province wide assessment tools developed for each subject in each type of course", "a system wide approach may work [for transfer credit]."

Guidelines

A total of 21 respondents stated that that they were aware of the recommended PLA implementation guidelines from Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. Of the 21 responses, 18 of them went on to make one or more comments regarding these guidelines. Twenty two percent (of the 18 individuals) stated that they had no opinion regarding the guidelines. Eleven percent expressed a positive opinion regarding the guidelines. Seventeen percent expressed concern for the guidelines and or the concept of PLA as a whole. Twenty eight percent expressed concern relating to a specific issue outlined in the guidelines.

Other

Respondents were asked if they had any other comments to make regarding PLA. A total of 22 respondents wrote comments. Nine percent replied that PLA was not applicable to the College and Career Preparation Program. Fifteen percent of the comments were supportive of PLA. "PLA is a good idea." "PLA seems easy enough if the student can already perform the expected outcomes of a course." Thirty two percent of them were not supportive of PLA. "The Ministry should put money to finance it's [sic] great ideas, instead of relying on volunteer work and good will." "In UC [University Credit] the majority of courses would be difficult to assess for PLA." Thirty six percent made general comments, and made recommendations such as "Go slow. Respect the academic freedom of instructors." "Trying to sort out PLA is a huge task." "I would like to know how the ministry reconciles life experience with earned university credit."

<div align="center">Key Informants</div>

ThIS section has been divided into two sections. The first part contains the interview of the PLA coordinator. Her interview has been included separately because of her unique position and knowledge of PLA. Key informants were asked their opinion regarding benefits, problems and recommendations relating to PLA. They were also asked about their knowledge of the recommended PLA Ministry guidelines. The results have been divided into five sections: (1)

benefits, (2) issues, (3) solutions/directions, and (4) guidelines. When the comment made seemed particularly pertinent to the role of the informant, their role has been identified as such e.g. administrator or union representative. Otherwise, quotes are not specifically identified. Some of the quotes include phrases or words in parentheses. These are the researcher's words and are intended to help the reader better understand the quotes.

PLA Coordinator

Benefits

The coordinator listed the benefits of PLA for student, faculty, and the college. She identified less time in school for students as the main benefit. "Students don't have to take the time to sit in a classroom to redo learning that they already know. No repeating [courses]." She also mentioned "they can save on daycare." The coordinator pointed out that while the actual assessment can take as long as a classroom course would, PLA can be done at the student's own pace and time. "Yes, I have to say that in many cases the assessment process can be very onerous and many times it will take just as long as a classroom would but at least they can do that at their own choice of time. [They have] flexibility, they can still work, they don't have to quit work to do this. The big benefit is for those who are in the workplace and who have no credentials and need credentials. They can go through an assessment process that is adaptable to their work schedules to give credit."

The coordinator stated the faculty would see their teaching become more satisfying and student learning improve as a result of engaging in PLA. "I [as faculty] have actually just worked with a few students where the students felt very, very motivated. Even though they had to produce a project in the case I was just working on, and they produced projects that were very time consuming. They did them in the evening on their own time. But they felt so good that they could do this on their own time without sitting in a classroom. From an instructional point of view that meant you felt good because it meant that you didn't have the student sitting in your

classroom bored saying this is all going too slow. As an instructor that is who we are there for, the students. I actually learn from students and I am talking as a faculty member. Many times these students with PLA have knowledge and experience that I don't have and by them sharing through the PLA process and while I work with them through the process I am learning things that I didn't know. It improves my learning as an instructor."

The coordinator also felt that faculty had an obligation to meet their individual students' needs and that PLA is an appropriate method to use for this purpose. "Within the classroom even with top up learning, lots of times we will get into a class and we will find students who know more than you do. Many times when that happens in the teaching and learning process immediately you should recognize it and take that student aside and work with that student even if you just give them separate projects of making that learning enriching for them."

The coordinator gave an example of how the college benefits when PLA is used. "I am working on another proposal for the Resident Care Program. For the college it's additional revenue. We are going to take a group of people and put them through the process. We do not have to supply the facility and we don't have to supply the materials, it is all on site. It is work place based assessment, the student may have to do top up learning, or many of them will get the credential. From the college's point of view we have offered a service to the community within their facilities and I think that is a really big benefit. There are so many marketing opportunities to get people within industry. For example, you want to look at business technology sector. There are many people who have learned this on their own. There was no course then to take; they had to teach themselves. It [doing more PLA] would attract new groups of learners and you could put new programs together. I look at other programs, not specifically at NWCC. But other colleges and they are doing very innovative work. They are saying you have worked in the field for five years so we are going to assume you have all these entry level skills so we are going to

start you at entry level four. You are recognizing they have five years of learning in the field, we are going to put a six month program and so at the end we are going to give you a diploma."

The coordinator then mentioned her view of assessment. "I try to stay away from the word prior learning assessment because all learning is prior so I would like to call it assessment, that is just assessment, no matter when you do it. It [assessment] has been the edge of change, it will be the driver of change for the whole organization."

Issues

The coordinator first defined her view of issues. "There are issues but I don't like to call them issues, because I don't see them as issues. I think that anything is solvable and they are just things to be done.

She mentioned her lack of time. "I have to say because of limited time and resources for PLA, I think many of them [issues] haven't had the time to be solvable. In the current position I have, it is 10% release time, that is all taken up by meetings." However, in her view, establishing more use of PLA at NWCC will happen slowly anyway. "There is a lot of work to be done to solve the problems so I prefer to just say we will move along through time. In my study of change, any change that happens all at once is not change. Because change happens only, because people have come against a roadblock. We don't change until we have had some adversity to it. Because that means we have just followed along like little sheep. We need to have had the confrontation, the dialogue, and all of that to happen to make change and all of that takes time. So I prefer to think that these really aren't issues."

Solutions

The coordinator feels "that as we are given more time and more resources it [resistance to PLA] will change. I know in University Credit, many of the issues were around they thought other universities would not accept PLA. I know that UBC senate has passed a motion that they

will accept PLA from any other institution. UBC isn't advertising it wide and clearly but they have publicly announced that they will accept PLA. I think people were looking to UBC."

The coordinator raised the issue of the lack of release time identified as a concern from faculty. "The other issue that I hear from faculty is "I don't have release time to do this." My response is Yes there is [money to purchase release time]. PLA has offered money to anyone who wants it. There is money for anyone who wants to do a project or wants to do PLA in the program. We have never turned it down. In some cases it has been reduced and in some programs that have had a lot [of funding], haven't been given it. But, there hasn't been a program who has never done it [PLA] been turned down. So I don't take that argument. I say here, write me two lines and we take it to the committee and we will fund it. We have had extra resources at the end of every fiscal year that we have carried over." The coordinator then mentioned the perception that universities will not accept college PLA credit. "North Island College did English PLA for UC for students. UVIC accepted the student's PLA credit. That is written up and it is a fact."

The coordinator reviewed the status of PLA at NWCC, to date. "We are doing well at NWCC, given the limited resources we have. Is there any other program that is run here at NWCC with only 10% resources? We have done a lot, we have had $20,000 total a year. With that, we have done projects with specific faculty and curriculum, held meetings on a regular basis, done workshops and developed policies and procedures. I think if you look at it, given what we have and the large geographic area we are doing well. We can't compare ourselves with Douglas."

She then provided some comments regarding how to meet the needs of adult students in the future. "But I have to say is what we have to do is to start thinking differently. Everything is 9 to 5, Monday to Friday. Who are our learners? They are out there working. Some of our most successful courses are running on weekends. PLA needs to be looked at in the continuum of

meeting adult learner's needs." She then offered an example of how PLA could be used in this way. "We can develop new programs at the college that build PLA right in, such as the Resident Care Program. We keep thinking in the old 1920's model. We are still thinking in that model. That society is no longer there. We need to change." She suggested that PLA needs to be marketed in conjunction with other innovations such as Summer Institutes and Field Schools.

Guidelines

The coordinator had several comments to make regarding the suggested PLA implementation guidelines from Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. She said, "remember they are guidelines, it doesn't say that we must do, in some cases we have chosen to make our own decisions as many other colleges have. Of how we are going to handle things. The guidelines are not something we have to live by; it will help people who have not written their policies. We need to work these decisions out on our own."

The coordinator mentioned it was time to revisit the college PLA's policy. "We have learned through experience. Our own policy [and procedures] are two years old and it has never gone to the board. We need to go back and revisit them with our current knowledge and experiences. There are some of them that we need to change. It evolves, through time through knowledge and through change." She also mentioned her views regarding recording of PLA credit on a student's transcript. "Whether PLA should be recorded on a student's transcripts has been an issue for awhile and many colleges chose not to record it because of the concern of hurting a student. Now many colleges have said, 'we will accept PLA' and they are revisiting that decision."

The coordinator then raised the issues of fees. "One issue we have not dealt with is fees. We have to deal with it. I do not believe there should be no fee. For instance, a student who comes and completes the whole program through PLA, there should be a fee. We have to be clear on what the fee is. Once we are clear we will get more support from University Credit."

The coordinator offered several thoughts regarding professional development. She felt that "professional development in PLA should be professional development in assessment. How you assess for PLA should not be any different than you would assess in the classroom." She explained further that "we need to look at the application of the skills [in the classroom]. We need to be giving projects and real life experiences. We need to do a lot more reflection with students to give them the critical thinking skills, we don't need to memorize info anymore, we need to work with the information such as critical analysis, problem solving and application of the information. "

The coordinator felt that faculty would learn about and use PLA more when they were introduced to it in sessions where they could come away with a PLA tool. "The major change [increased use of PLA] is when people have been worked with one on one, in an active working session where course outlines are transformed." She preferred this method to group workshops. "[I have] done lots of workshops, had only a little bit of change."

The coordinator felt that PLA should become incorporated into typical classroom assessment. "I actually have to say I personally hope PLA will change, it is becoming more integrated, I would hope in a year or two it is gone [as a separate entity] that it is just people's way of doing business."

She suggested taking a longer-term view of establishing PLA at NWCC. "We have to look at our faculty who will retire in 5-10 years and don't want to change.
The new ones are the ones who will have come through the system of the high schools and college that are doing authentic assessment from the start. That is where we are going to see the change. Keep introducing it [PLA] and see where it will be in 5-10 years. Work with our newer faculty, with the ones coming on aboard. I think every new faculty should have a session on authentic assessment. Why don't we have every new faculty instructor have an instructional skills session, we have trained faculty for it."

Other Key Informants

Benefits of PLA

The other eleven informants listed several real or potential benefits from use of PLA at NWCC. The benefits have been grouped into three categories: (1) student, (2) faculty and (3) college. It is acknowledged that it can be argued that some of the benefits listed affect both faculty and college such as a potential increase in student numbers. However, the attempt has been to place them into the category that reflects the best fit.

Benefits for students.

The key informants identified several benefits to be realized by the learner through use of PLA. These include less time in school, less student costs, improved accessibility through use of PLA to meet course prerequisites, student empowerment and the particular applicability to NWCC learners. Six of eleven informants identified that PLA reduces the time a student needs to spend in school, "We are able to recognize people's knowledge and skills without them wasting their time and duplicate what they already know" and "they don't have to repeat years of study." Two informants directly stated there would be less student cost, "less books to buy, less daycare for single parents" and "not as much tuition." Five informants mentioned increased accessibility to courses. "Potentially, PLA could help with course prerequisites." One administrator mentioned the Education Council policy that requires prerequisites now be listed course by course rather than general program prerequisites. He felt that PLA could be a potential help to meet these course prerequisites. Another of these informants felt that PLA could help to "allow people who have some sort of prior knowledge to gain credit or entrance to a program, that otherwise might not have bothered to go back at all."

Another administrator spoke about how students can be empowered through use of PLA, " PLA is a way especially for those who are historically undereducated, those people have learnt

ways to learn and those ways of learning have made them more effectual in their jobs and they could possibly have skills that they themselves would not recognize easily. PLA is a way of empowering them too and a way of giving them recognition for the work they do."

Three informants mentioned the particular applicability of PLA to the NWCC population. One administrator commented on the potential for First Nations students in social service positions to access PLA credit, "Lots have taken workshops, courses and there have been people in human services who have been doing the job." Another administrator commented that PLA was particularly applicable "because we have a population that is older than the average in the province and they have a lot of life experiences, and those life experiences should be recognized in their studies where appropriate." The third informant mentioned the difficulty in accessing courses if you live outside Terrace. " PLA allows us to better meet their needs [the student's] and minimize the time their life is disrupted to get training."

Benefits for faculty.

The informants mentioned that faculty would see their teaching and student learning improve as a result of engaging in PLA. Other benefits for faculty are potential employee recognition, potentially increased employee security, and potentially increased employee satisfaction. Five informants mentioned improved teaching and learning benefits. "Making us taking a look at how we are delivering our course plans makes those a little more logical and consider what it is we are providing." "PLA makes us define our learning outcomes, people have sat down and asked themselves what is the outcome we are hoping to get from this stuff?" " PLA has made me think about how people learn, why people learn and how I as an educator see education happening for me, these are all really powerful issues. PLA has given me a lot of solace because as an educator I tend to try and look at the big picture of the student developing [and PLA helps to do this]." "PLA is a way of documenting and ensuring the curriculum is both reflective of the needs of the community and also giving us some assurances that the things we

do are educationally sound." One informant saw PLA's benefit as having "another academic tool to use." One union representative foresaw that college employees could potentially be recognized for their skills and knowledge. "For employees themselves who have done other jobs outside of the college, something may come up in the college that could be recognized [for the employee]."The two union representatives both mentioned the potential for PLA to increase employment security. "One benefit of PLA would be if there was a great deal of PLA work which would allow more work for our members." One union representative also mentioned the potential to increase employee satisfaction. "[PLA] provides employees an opportunity do something different, to assess a student from another point of view, it increases job satisfaction, doing something different, happy employee, better college."

Benefits for college.

The informants mentioned several benefits to the college regarding use of PLA. These included increased numbers of students, keeping current with the provincial trends, the appropriate fit with the mission statement, improved community and stakeholder relations, PLA's potential for changing the instructional role, and improved provincial relations. Two informants felt that PLA could potentially increase the number of students. "It [PLA] opens the door to more students." Two informants mentioned the need to keep current with provincial and global trends. "We will be left behind if we don't climb on board and we [would] deserve to be."

Two informants specifically identified that PLA was congruent with NWCC's mission statement, "It [PLA] fits with our mission statement." Improved community and stakeholder relations with use of PLA was mentioned by three informants. "[PLA] helps our name." "We must remember that we are a community college and we need to look at it [PLA] from the perspective of meeting the needs of the community."

One administrator mentioned that PLA recognizes that instructors may not need to teach everything in the program and therefore program resources could potentially be diverted to other worthy educational pursuits. "It [PLA] recognizes that we [the college] don't have to do everything. Then we could use some of the time and energy that we spend on education and do it in different ways because we may not have to use all of our dollars in the same pot. Maybe we could have more programs, if we are more accepting that learning happens elsewhere. As an administrator, there are a whole lot of needs out there that we can never fill. If the world was wonderful, to take some money from different things and do other creative things."

One informant who had earlier suggested the provincial learning outcomes be developed for PLA stated that PLA would result in improved provincial collaboration, "It [doing PLA this way] would lead us to be thinking big picture and lead up to work efficiently and collaboratively, looking externally to figure out what we really should be doing."

Issues Regarding PLA

The eleven informants described numerous issues regarding PLA. These have been grouped into the following six categories: (1) lack of resources, (2) operational policies and procedures, (3) faculty, (4) beliefs, values and attitudes, (5) distinct individual issues and (6) provincial issues.

Lack of resources.

Informants identified the lack of general resources, tools, time and knowledge and the need for professional development as issues regarding PLA. One administrator commented that "We don't have the resources to put to this, [we have] only given it lip service." One union representative stated the assessment tools need to be developed and "the employer needs to set aside money to develop the tools necessary for PLA." Another administrator stated, "there needs to be the time given to faculty to develop the learning outcomes [that form the assessment tool] with other people."

Several informants asked a variety of questions and made comments that reflected a need for more knowledge about PLA practices and procedures. These were questions such as "Where does PLA fit into a competency based program?" "People don't understand how much credit is normally determined by PLA", "PLA is a vaguer kind of assessment, it could be difficult to assign a grade, be easier to assign a credit or no credit", "What kind of PLA assessments would be appropriate for a variety of courses?" "What happens when a student has partial credit for a course and needs to top up their learning?" and " PLA has huge validity and reliability issues." One informant stated that students doing PLA should do the same test and assignment as the students doing the course. Another informant commented that "They [faculty] have difficulty understanding the difference between PLA and a mail order degree. More often you find people who don't understand PLA than you find people who violently disagree with it." Another informant stated that he was not sure "if people really know what PLA is?"

Three informants specifically identified the lack of faculty knowledge of how to develop PLA assessment tools and how to conduct PLA assessments. Four informants identified the need for professional development for faculty. One administrator also commented that the entire college staff would need training. Both union representatives were quite clear that it is the employer's responsibility to provide professional development opportunities, "everyone who is asked to do PLA also has the right to be trained. The college needs to know that if they are asking faculty to do PLA, they had better provide the training", and "Administration needs to make a commitment [to provide professional development]."

At the same time, concern was also raised by two of these same informants as to whether the potential benefits outweighed the large cost for every faculty member to be trained to develop assessment tools and to conduct assessments, "trying to develop specialists in this skill is difficult to do. You are asking people not only to accept the concept of PLA but also to do it fairly and adequately."

Operational policies and procedures.

Issues relating to operational policies and procedures were identified. These included a number of specific policies as well as comments about the existing PLA policy were made. Three informants identified the lack of policy that would determine how PLA would be carried out in each program. Questions such as whom would assess, what assessment methods would be used, and assessment standards were raised.

One administrator identified the need for specific policy that would ensure fairness and equity for each student regardless of whether they used PLA credit or traditional formal qualifications to be admitted to a program. This included the need for determining how legal challenges would be handled regarding PLA should a traditionally qualified student not be admitted into a fully subscribed program while a PLA student was. He mentioned the need to ensure conflict of interest guidelines were developed. He also foresaw some potential difficulty with the timing of PLA and admittance to programs. He wondered how the priority of student applications would be handled in popular programs should one student apply to use PLA to meet a program prerequisite. In July and August, faculty members are generally not available. A student who wishes to use PLA may be required to wait until September when the program may already be full.

The existing PLA policy also was identified as problematic by five informants. Two of these informants mentioned that certain college programs did not agree with it and therefore were not following it. One administrator commented that "you can't legislate behaviour, it doesn't work." Two other informants mentioned that there was a lack of general awareness in the college community of the existence of the college policy. One of these same informants also suggested the "PLA committee needs to be higher profile, because it is not really well known."

Faculty.

The two faculty issues that were identified related to the lack of recognition of PLA activity in faculty workload and the need for faculty to have more of an educational background. Six informants, including the two union representatives, mentioned various issues relating to workload. It was generally identified that PLA work was not operationalized and therefore the informants believed that faculty were not participating in PLA as a result. One informant stated that "certainly all of the questions around faculty release time have not been addressed and that may be holding up some of the work." The common provincial collective agreement acknowledges PLA is to be part of the workload. However, at the same time there is no calculation of determining what PLA is worth in terms of workload. Therefore, there is no operational definition of how to recognize PLA activity within a faculty member's workload and so PLA work is not occurring." The college needs to make sure that people are not doing more than 100%, because in the long run it won't work. If an employee were to do PLA, something else would have to go"

Another related issue is that of timing of PLA activity. One union representative mentioned that faculty on occasion have been approached after their workload had been set, to do PLA. PLA work, according to 13.2.1.11 in the common agreement, is to be determined as part of the workload, not after it has been set. One informant suggested there was an "inherent problem" with the collective agreement when PLA must be determined as part of the workload prior to work commencing. Most PLA work is ad hoc and comes up without planning.

The second faculty issue mentioned is the background of faculty. One administrator stated that NWCC has a "lack of educators on faculty. In this college, they [faculty] think that knowledge in their discipline is more important than learning to teach their discipline." This comment suggests that this informant believes, that for faculty members, learning to use PLA is less of a priority than to keep current in their field.

Beliefs ,values and attitudes.

Nine informants made one or more comments to the interviewer during the course of the interview that fit into this category. Each informant has been quoted, some more than once because this imparts a flavor of what individuals are thinking and feeling about PLA at this present time. The first section lists comments that are not supportive of PLA and in the second section are comments that are considered supportive of PLA.

Not supportive of PLA. "People [faculty] don't have good feelings about PLA, they don't want it foisted on the them." "Where is PLA coming from? Why are we doing PLA? Right now, I just see it as another administrative fashion, the equivalent of 1970's bell bottoms." "How you measure one's experience in life long learning [PLA] is through the quality of one's peers and the community of scholars? People who have developed a life long systematic interest in a field are few and far between." "The concern about PLA at the community college level is there are very few jobs that people have where they can earn credit for the first and second year level because for the most part the type of jobs that people have where they are thinking, learning and analyzing and researching, those people already have a degree before doing that kind of work." "I have potential concerns about PLA's differing agendas between business, industry and education. What business or industry wants might not be what educators can provide." "Trying to get it going [PLA] it is really only the converted that are working on it. PLA needs to get believed in to get operationalized." "[There is a] lack of credibility of PLA." "I would have loved PLA. I would have loved to do fewer courses and get my degree quicker. But in hindsight, it is the number of courses that I took combined with my work experience that allowed me to graduate. My work experience augmented my learning but it did not replace it."

One informant mentioned to the interviewer that while he personally believed it wouldn't happen, that he had heard faculty members state "that everyone [students] will demand PLA if it is available and this will entail way more work because faculty members will be flooded with

PLA requests." He had also heard mentioned "that doing PLA will lead everyone [students] to assume every course is a stay at home distance education course and all they need to do is to come in and write a final exam." This same informant identified a "general grumpiness around PLA. There is a general unease or dislike of PLA."

Another informant identified the lack of trust that PLA will continue on as an initiative. "These things tend to come and go with the ministry and sometimes something else will be the big push. People tend to hold back until they see something is going to stick. They put a lot of time and effort into things and then it disappears, so there is a reluctance to get involved."

The Registrar mentioned that there is a possible mistaken perception about the FTE count being adversely affected in those programs that offer PLA. Instructors may believe that encouraging students to do PLA, instead of taking the course may lower the FTE count in programs with already low numbers. Given this, instructors may not be as supportive of PLA, In actual fact, the Registrar pointed out it would take a lot of PLA activity to count for much FTE. Ten university credit courses accounts for 1 FTE.

FTE numbers are used to determine the college's budget from the Ministry of Advanced Training and Technology. This method of accounting is a problem in and of itself though. NWCC does record PLA FTEs. However, how PLA activity is presently counted provides little monetary incentive from the ministry to engage in PLA.

Supportive of PLA. "Some folks will see PLA as a threat to their work [faculty]. They think if we start giving credit without having to take the stuff, then we won't be important anymore. (But) All we are is an administrative body for recognizing what people know. Virtually everything we offer people could get in a variety of other ways. "Fear of change is the real reason [why people are not supportive of PLA]. There is lack of time, need for professional development, all kinds of reasons that you can put up, but those are reasons not to do it. People

just refuse to step out of the box. It takes some time and trouble to figure out that something else

can work"

One administrator commented that "Faculty quickly loses track of the real world."

This comment appears to imply that if faculty kept their instruction relevant to what the learner's

needs are in the real world, PLA would seem a logical educational approach. This same

informant went on to say that "We did too good a job in educating educators to think that

education still belongs in the box, in the box of the college ... that it doesn't belong in people's

hands. That the teachers give knowledge rather than the classroom creates a learning

environment where everyone can learn from each other."

Distinct individual issues.

Four informants mentioned the low number of students that would potentially benefit

from access to PLA versus the cost to make it available in every program college wide. Two

informants mentioned the need to ensure that PLA practices and tools are appropriate for First

Nations students, "We need to made sure our assessments are culturally appropriate." Two

informants mentioned the need for research. One stated "these PLA students needed to be

tracked through the system to determine whether outcomes for these students are successful."

The other informant asked if "anybody has ever done more of an academic understanding of the

relationship between what one gains in the workplace and how it translates to the formal learning

environment?"

Two informants mentioned the competition for attention to PLA amidst other pressing

issues", A lot of things going on at the college and most people are spending their time teaching

and reserve a small portion of their brain for PLA." One informant felt there was "a lack of

clarity around PLA, nobody is really sure just what it is, where it is going and what it is all about,

I think this helps to cause some of the problems." Two informants raised the issue of the lack of

authority to implement PLA. "How do you force them? Education Council has no authority."

Provincial issues.

The informants raised four issues that have provincial implications. These are the professional bodies' lack of formal PLA policy, PLA fees, the method of recording of PLA on student transcript and transferability of PLA credit between institutions. One informant mentioned that it is difficult to get accurate information from the professional accrediting bodies such as the Certified Management Accountants (CMA), and Certified General Accountants (CGA) about their organization's formal policies on PLA.

Three informants mentioned the subject of student PLA fees. One informant felt "all students should pay the same." Another informant mentioned that fees were a problem because "some people are charging for it [PLA] and others are not. I have a real problem with the inequity. There is a provincial range from nothing up to the full cost of the course." There is no NWCC fee policy in place at this point in time.

Three informants mentioned the current issue around how PLA credit will be recorded on a student's transcript. If PLA credit is shown on the transcript, there is a concern that if a student transfers to another institution, that the institution will not accept the PLA credit. Therefore some institutions are recording PLA credit in different ways. NWCC is recording "EX" for exemption. "Education council is grappling with about how we record this on a student's transcript." This issue has been raised because the Ministry Guidelines are recommending that PLA credit be shown as such on the student's transcript.

Another issue related to PLA credit transcription is the present system's ability. The Registrar stated the Student Record System (SRS) has a limited capacity to record PLA credit on student's transcripts. While the present recording of PLA can be accommodated, she cautioned it would be important to remember that it would cost money to make any significant changes to the present system.

Several informants raised issues around transferability of PLA between institutions. One informant stated that it had to be discussed and decided upon. One administrator noted the lack of agreement on this issue from the clusters, "Education council sent out a memo to find out what the clusters' position was [on accepting PLA credit], several voted no and others haven't been heard back from." Two other informants clearly stated that NWCC college programs should not accept PLA credit from another institution "We should not accept PLA credit from other institutions until the research proves the question of transferability of knowledge from the informal to the formal, what we do accept is our articulation agreement." One other informant felt differently, We accept their courses, why wouldn't we accept PLA credit given by the same person [who taught the course]?" One informant stated there is a need for NWCC to determine whether internal transferability of PLA credit [between NWCC programs such as College and Career Preparation to Natural Resources, for example] will be accepted at NWCC. Three informants mentioned that the universities do not accept PLA credit,

"Lots of issues with PLA in terms of universities, until they accept PLA, it will be hard to move ahead with it."

Solutions

Informants were asked to provide some suggestions as to address some of the issues they had previously identified as problems with PLA. These have been grouped in the following seven categories: (1) workload, (2) policy development, (3) educational planning, (4) professional development, (5) marketing, (6) general strategies, and (7) provincial.

Workload.

The informants suggested the need to develop a PLA formula and made one suggestion to address the timing of PLA. Three informants recommended that a calculation be developed to use for determining how much PLA is worth in terms of workload. "We need a beginning

definition of a PLA formula, how much PLA is worth." "The PLA formula could be worked out based on class size."

One informant made two separate suggestions regarding how to address the ad hoc timing of PLA. "If they are really serious about it, [PLA], build it in right from the start. [into the workload]. Reduce workload to nine sections. Say a 25 member class, 1 PLA is worth 1/25." The other suggestion was to give faculty a retroactive workload reduction for PLA activity done in the previous year. "Once you figure out how much PLA is worth, faculty keep track of how much PLA they did and you give them release time the next year. The collective agreement allows this. If you do 11 sections, you can carry this section for the next year and do nine. You could keep track of this as a cluster or as a union and give it to the academic head to figure out."

Policy development.

The informants made a number of suggestions in the area of policy development and how this development could happen. These included development of policies regarding internal PLA transferability, the strengthening of the PLA calendar policy, and development of fee and transcription and scholarship funding policies. There were also suggestions made as to the role of the PLA committee and that a college PLA office be established.

Three informants recommended that NWCC begin by developing internal PLA transferability between NWCC programs. "PLA credit should be transferable in the college between programs. Spend the time and money now to ensure that there is a college wide system in place." One informant suggested the place to do this work would be a joint initiative between the articulation and curriculum, and PLA committees.

One informant had read the PLA policy in the calendar and stated," [we] need to strengthen the PLA policy in the calendar." Another informant felt that a way to increase participation in PLA activity might be to direct fees into a scholarship fund. "I wonder if people saw that PLA

revenues were going other than into the general revenue, might be more motivating to do PLA if the money were going into a scholarship fund."

Another informant suggested the PLA committee needed to put together some recommendations on fees and send it to senior management. The same informant went on to say that the committee should also prepare some recommendations on transcripting to forward it to education council. The role of the PLA committee in the view of one informant was to be "the cheerleader and provide workshops, but it is really the administration of the college that will have to put PLA in place."

One informant suggested the direction of the PLA committee be reviewed. "I wonder if we are due for a review of the PLA activity to date. We have had a coordinator, a committee and funded proposals to develop some tools. How do we get committed to PLA as an institution? If we were to allow the committee to finish the tasks in determining fees, transcription and advertising, then take the grant and move to focus this activity on an individual who can then be like a lightening rod for PLA." The informant was suggesting that there be a PLA office established at the college for faculty and students with use of the provincial monies and some money from the college budget.

Educational planning.

Many informants felt that in order to establish PLA as an ongoing initiative it needs to be both planned for and seen in conjunction with other educational strategies. Six informants either agreed with or stated independently that PLA should be confined to two or three college programs. One informant felt it was important to "start small, do it well, develop standards, provide training and then branch out to other college programs." Informants cited cost benefit analysis, natural applicability, best use of resources and quality control as reasons why this approach was recommended. "Is it worth the institution's time, energy, and resources to train everyone?" "My view is if this [PLA] were to go [ahead], we need to quickly identify what

areas where it has greater application, narrow the field and work on securing successes in these fields." Three informants recommended that PLA needs to be seen as part of the broader educational context. One informant said, "We have an advantage. We can combine PLA, distance education with the human face. We can have courses like summer institutes and face to face and mix it with practicums." One informant saw PLA as part of the bigger educational needs of faculty, "I think it is a terrible thing that we don't require college teachers to be educators. I think knowledge of your field is very good and very important, but if you can't educate, if you can't teach them, how can you ever take the thinking it takes to say this is the curriculum I want to use, how am I going to be able to intellectually climb the ladder that they [the student] do know this stuff?" This comment seems to imply, if faculty have an educational background they would be able to employ PLA much more readily. The third informant suggested that NWCC should have a centre in instructional design and assessment, which would include PLA.

Two informants commented on the educational plan and PLA. One suggested "We recognize PLA and access through other distance opportunities is a key to our survival and so we are going to support those initiatives over the next five years (through inclusion in the plan) and then people will get motivated (to engage in PLA)." The other informant said, "The question of where PLA sits in order of importance should be addressed in the educational plan. The questions need to get asked about where it sits as a priority."

Professional development.

The informants made several suggestions regarding professional development. These included suggestions on who required the training, what kind of professional development was needed, who was responsible for providing it and how the training could occur. Several of the informants indicated the entire college community needs professional development in order to implement PLA. "Educate student advisors, registration people etc., A lot of people would

have to be very knowledgeable about PLA." One informant mentioned that it was important to provide adequate training. "Don't just rely on the policy to make it happen. If you don't provide the training and resources, it becomes a joke and it works against you." One informant also suggested to "make a point of including everyone, including one or two that have more to learn."

There were a number of suggestions as to what kind of professional development would be needed. One administrator suggested that "every 5 years people have to go back in the field one way or the other. I don't think it has to be a paid job but there have to be ways that people do it." The implication here seems to be if faculty are involved in the community, that PLA will be encouraged to happen when they are back in the classroom because they will see the need for PLA to happen. Three informants stated there was a need for general knowledge about the PLA concept and the existence of the present PLA policy and procedures among the entire college community. Two informants suggested that college faculty needed professional development in developing assessment tools, learning outcomes and how to conduct assessments. "Faculty need to know how to develop the tools and then how to assess because it is important to maintain professional integrity." One informant felt that it was important to look at PLA in the broader educational context when providing professional development. "What is assessment? They need to look at this basic educational concept, but a lot of faculty have never been asked to think about things this way before."

One administrator stated the professional development should be an "institutional responsibility" with some help from the province. "It is a problem with our colleges that we don't get enough monies and support with PD and especially with the northern and rural colleges. There are supposed to be people at the Ministry who will come out and do workshops but we haven't seen them yet. That is an area that is going to take time."

One informant suggested that "everyone [faculty] take some kind of course on PLA and come out with a PLA tool, or with ideas on how to do it and how to do PLA."

Marketing.

The informants made a few suggestions around the marketing of the PLA to the community. These included the effect of marketing on student demand for PLA, the role of the college advisor and the need for general education of the community on PLA. Two informants felt that by marketing NWCC's PLA practices, this will create a growing demand for PLA. "What would be most likely to push me to do PLA is the student demand for it. Create a student demand without setting them up [this means to ensure the student would get PLA if they indeed ask for it]." This same informant went on to suggest the growing need will act as a catalyst for faculty to take some professional development on PLA. The other informant suggested that a workplace/college partnership PLA initiative be done and then marketed to the community." Take something like office administration. Go to a workplace, recruit people, complete them through PLA and market the successes. Go to the press and get publicity." Two informants stressed the importance of the role of the educational advisor. "Advising has to play a component in PLA so the person is directed to target their PLA efforts wisely." One informant commented that it was important to ensure "the education of general population so there is an understandable route of how PLA will work."

General strategies.

Four informants felt it was important to do some research and present to faculty at cluster meetings. "Look at other colleges who are ahead of us and see how they are doing it, share it with the faculty." "Whether it be in the ministry or within the institution, they should make a case as to how credit is in fact learned through life experiences and the question of formal versus non formal learning. Until that is dealt with, I am going to be very suspicious. I am going to leave it up to those people who are doing the advocating to do the convincing." One informant stated it was important to "keep pushing it [PLA], keep it on the agenda " but also to remember to be realistic. And at that, there will be some people who never will come on board and then

there will be some people who are forced to come on board." Another informant recommended trying to move away from seeing PLA as the flavor of the day. This informant suggested it was important to "avoid giving people the opportunity to say, why all this jargon? We have been doing PLA for years." In terms of how to keep going with PLA, one informant suggested that we "support the champions, but find the hold outs and use the opportunities to make some shifts there." One informant suggested that "maybe we are getting too caught up in that end of it [fees and transcripting]. Maybe we should just let it go for now and start doing PLA."

Provincial.

The following suggestions made by these informants are more within the control of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology rather than NWCC itself. These include the need for provincially developed learning outcomes, development of a monetary incentive, the need for keeping in touch with the provincial picture, need for more provincial resources, contacts with the articulation committees, and a suggestion that the BC Council on Admission and Transfer play a more active role in determining PLA credit transferability.

Three informants recommended development of provincial learning outcomes. "Getting involved as an institution where learning outcomes are being identified provincially." One of these informants at the same time expressed a concern that the outcomes "might be carved in cement, when provincially articulated programs cannot be changed." One informant suggested there is a need to develop an incentive to encourage people/ institutions to get more involved with PLA. "People will have to see some benefit [for themselves] the real benefit is to the student." This informant suggested the province address how PLA activity could be counted in a way that would provide monetary incentives for institutions to increase their PLA activity. One informant stated that it was important to keep in touch with provincial events, "the province will eventually settle PLA negotiations [in terms of workload], it is not going to be NWCC making the decision, it is going to be a provincial decision." Another informant suggested the

province needs to put more provincial resources to PLA if it were to go further. "We need more provincial resource to help it go." Another informant felt it was important to also keep accessing the present monies available. Two informants suggested the provincial articulation committees were an appropriate place to develop more support for PLA. "Work through places such as the articulation committee to get faculty to talk about it with their peers. Develop some trust about PLA with that group." Another informant suggested that the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCAT) was a logical organization to play a role in the discussion regarding PLA credit and transferability. "The BCAT would be a place to start some of this work [PLA credit and transferability]. They could start being more active and start getting some provincial agreement on what we are going to do provincially."

Guidelines

All eleven informants made one or more comments regarding the suggested PLA implementation guidelines from the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. They mentioned the implications behind the guidelines, the lack of authority, the role of the guidelines as a catalyst, the vague language, the lack of agreement regarding all of the guidelines and the role of NWCC in providing professional development for PLA.

Two informants mentioned the implications, of the guidelines being implemented at NWCC. "It is difficult to imagine how we can provide professional development for 125 faculty." [the institution is cited as responsible for providing the professional development]. One informant termed the guidelines as "Political statement with implications. It is a noble step but they tend to pontificate about things they know nothing about at a local level. Philosophically sound, but I am not sure they realized the implications of implementing these. It is more of a position politically." Two informants stated that the guidelines had no authority, "While the province may be committed to it, it can't impose PLA on institutions any more than the college can on it's program or clusters." A union representative stated that "the collective agreement

would supercede these guidelines." Four informants felt the guidelines would act as a catalyst for

NWCC. "It is helpful to have these guidelines to push institutions to declare what they would

accept." "The guidelines are pushing because the walls need to be pushed. The province is not

trying to say ye must do, because it doesn't work. But they are putting it out there." "It was a

good idea to ask the clusters about number 1 [of the guidelines], because it will identify the

holdouts." [One of the guidelines regarding acceptance of PLA from other institutions was

circulated to the clusters for feedback to the education council]. Two informants mentioned the

"vague language." " The guidelines leave you saying kind of now what?" Several informants did

not agree with all of the guidelines. "I don't want the student penalized by putting PLA credit on

the transcript [as the guidelines recommend]." "I don't see the guidelines in terms of the

university credit area." One informant stated that "a thing that I liked is the suggestion about the

institutions need to take some responsibility for supporting staff to acquire and maintain

expertise in PLA."

CHAPTER FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Three distinct groups participated in this study: Student Success Team members, Program

Cluster members, and key informants. The Student Success Team members were asked about the

current level of demand for PLA from students, current referral practices for students who had

inquired about PLA and questions the advisors had relating to PLA at NWCC. The Program

Cluster members were asked about their use of PLA methods. They were also asked their

opinion regarding benefits, problems and recommendations regarding PLA. A question was also

included for both the cluster members and key informants regarding their awareness of the

Ministry's recommended PLA guidelines. The key informants were asked similar questions

about their opinions regarding the benefits, problems and recommendations regarding PLA. The

PLA coordinator was also interviewed, using the same questions as the key informants.

There were some themes common to all groups, themes common to the Program Cluster

and key informant groups, and finally, themes raised by a significant number of individuals

within each group. These are contained in the next five sections. The limitations of the study are

then outlined in the section following. These sections form the basis for the recommendations

that follow.

Discussion

Common Themes

It is apparent that PLA is still in the beginning stages of development at NWCC. PLA

presently occurs on an ad-hoc basis within a limited number of college programs. Opportunities

for students to pursue PLA are not well defined at this time. No one in any of the three groups

currently has much knowledge about PLA at this point in time. During the course of this study,

several participants from all three sectors asked the researcher questions and or made comments

that reflected a need for more knowledge about the concept of PLA. As well, the definition of

PLA, knowledge of the existing NWCC PLA policy, the role and activities of the PLA committee and the PLA coordinator were not well known or recognized by the college community. There was also a lack of current knowledge of provincial developments regarding PLA such as information regarding university acceptance of PLA credit and professional accrediting bodies' PLA policies.

A large number of individuals in all three groups identified a definite need to continue to provide professional development and training opportunities for the college community to build knowledge of PLA. This includes the concept of PLA in general and PLA at NWCC specifically. Many respondents also identified the need to continue development of operational policies and procedures with which to implement PLA. Specific polices and procedures varied with each group and will be mentioned in their individual sections below. However, individuals from all three groups identified the need for a fee policy.

Program Cluster and Key Informants

Individuals within the Program Clusters and key informants expressed similar concerns regarding PLA. The major issue among most respondents in both groups is the current lack of recognition of PLA activity within faculty workload in the collective agreements. Until this is addressed, it can be surmised that little increased PLA activity will occur. Other concerns included ensuring the quality of PLA, the need to develop PLA tools and the faculty members' need for professional development to be qualified to engage in PLA activities. Also mentioned was the need for release time to develop the tools. It was seen as the institution's responsibility to provide the professional development. Respondents from both groups mentioned the need for NWCC to develop a policy regarding internal transferability of PLA credit between NWCC programs.

Less than 30% of individuals in the program cluster were aware of the Ministry's recommended PLA guidelines and those that were, did not endorse them in their entirety. The

key informants also did not endorse the guidelines. Of those that were aware, several individuals in both groups recommended that they be used as a catalyst and resource for the continued work on implementing PLA at NWCC. Several key informants and members of the Program Cluster raised issues and made some suggestions that had provincial implications. The issues are the professional bodies' lack of formal PLA policy, the need to determine a consistent method of recording PLA on students' transcripts and ensuring transferability of PLA credit between institutions. The suggestions made were that more provincial research of successful PLA activities needs to occur, the need for increased funding for PLA activity, development of provincial assessment tools, and development of a provincial transfer credit system.

Key Informants

Key informants definitely see the benefits for students, faculty and the college. However, the majority of them continue to view PLA conditionally. That is to say, they could see the real and potential benefits but they were also quite aware of the problems.

As a way of proceeding with implementing PLA effectively, a significant number of key informants suggested that it would be useful to identify specific clusters that are either currently engaged in PLA or who wish to be and to target the limited resources to these identified groups. This would include providing professional development regarding development of PLA tools as well as assistance in developing PLA policies and procedures, specific to the cluster's program area. The plan would to be to then gradually increase the number of the programs providing PLA over a period of time.

There was support for looking at PLA within the broader educational context. Several key informants recommended that PLA be included in NWCC's Educational Plan that is presently being developed. This would ensure institutional commitment to PLA.

Program Cluster

The Program Cluster members provided some useful information regarding PLA activity at NWCC. The highest number of instructors used projects for assessment. The second highest number of instructors used challenge exams and oral interviews. However, the most number of times a particular method was used was challenge exams. In other words, although fewer instructors actually used challenge exams, those that did used them more often. As a result, more students were exposed to challenge exams for PLA than to projects. It is also important to note that although the numbers appear quite high in Figure 1 (e.g. 136 for challenge exams and 111 times for oral interviews) it does not reflect the total number of individual faculty members who used PLA, as individual instructors could report use of more than one method. However, it can be easily surmised from the data that not all PLA activity that is occurring is currently being captured in the yearly PLA activity report to the Ministry. The 1999 report stated that a total of 3.73 FTEs were recorded as having earned PLA credit. The figure represents only 23 students in terms of actual numbers, dramatically lower than the numbers contained in Figure 1.

As mentioned previously in the Results chapter, there appears to be some general disagreement and or confusion regarding the definition of PLA. Some faculty members reported use of PLA to assess whether students met course prerequisites. They appeared to base these assessments on previous formal coursework. A number of instructors also reported use of PLA to assess for where a student should be placed in the College and Career Preparation Program. These assessments also seemed to be based on formal coursework. While both of these are assessment practices, they do not fall under the formal definition of PLA. Thus, a number of faculty members do not distinguish PLA from other assessment practices. It is logical to then acknowledge this lack of distinction by continuing to view PLA from within the context of assessment itself, rather than attempting to separate it out as a distinct form of assessment.

In regards to 5 out of the 7 PLA methods listed in the survey, the majority of faculty members stated the reason they did not use a particular method was they had had no student requests. In the case of the use of standardized testing and simulations, the majority of instructors said these PLA methods and or PLA itself was not applicable, not relevant or not appropriate. These particular methods do have a limited application and so these comments would be appropriate. The majority of faculty members stated they would agree to an individual student request for PLA. Given these two findings, it might be considered a worthwhile initiative to build student demand for PLA through marketing initiatives.

A minority of instructors expressed beliefs, values and attitudes that were not supportive of PLA. A number of Program Cluster members identified many of the student benefits relating to PLA but demonstrated little knowledge about the benefits of PLA for themselves as faculty or for the institution. The general opinion of the majority of faculty was overwhelmingly positive when asked about the concept of PLA (87% agreed that PLA could be an appropriate method of assessment). This support decreased (62%) when asked whether NWCC should have more courses available for PLA. This may be because of the current lack of infrastructure supporting PLA at NWCC. Cluster members identified the need for PLA policies and procedures that outlined how assessments would be carried out and by whom. They also identified the need for more opportunities to develop PLA tools and methods. Some individuals suggested that the workload of the present PLA coordinator be increased in order to assist in accomplishing this work. The PLA coordinator, in a separate interview, also confirmed this need. In view of the amount of positive support for the concept of PLA among the cluster members, this might be a worthwhile action to assist in carrying out the recommendations of this study.

Student Success Team Members

Very few students at NWCC have asked Student Success Team members about PLA. At the most, approximately 50 students would have inquired. The primary reason given by advisors

was that it was because students didn't know about PLA. When students did inquire about PLA, the advisors generally referred them to a program coordinator. Student Success Team members had a number of requests relating to PLA, relating to their student-advising role. They asked for information with which to provide students regarding the PLA process at NWCC. This included the appropriate individual for advisors to refer students to and the programs currently offering PLA and their assessment methods. They wished to be able to quickly screen students as a first step to determine if they may be eligible for PLA. These individuals make the first contact with potential students, thus advisors would be able to readily market PLA to students so more students are aware of the opportunities available for PLA at NWCC.

Limitations

One thing this study did not do is to capture the number of current NWCC students that would be eligible for PLA, if it were available to them. While many speculated that having PLA would benefit present students and also attract more students, there were others in the college community who believe that there would be very few students who would benefit from this opportunity, given the large amount of time, energy and resources given to offer PLA. This matter is of interest, because if it could be determined that PLA can definitely be used to attract more students, then it would be evidently of benefit to pursue increased PLA activity.

The definition of PLA was included in all of the surveys sent out. However, there still appears to be considerable confusion and or disagreement about what PLA is and what it is not. This clouded the survey results, in that it is not possible to accurately determine the amount of PLA activity that occurred within the past two years at NWCC.

In retrospect, it would have been useful to determine the actual number of individual faculty who had employed PLA in the previous two years at NWCC. Because the survey allowed faculty member to note use of one or more methods, the total does not represent individual instructor use of PLA.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are directed to the PLA committee at NWCC for their consideration. They are divided into five sections: (1) establishing commitment, (2) resource development, (3) increase knowledge of PLA (4) increase knowledge of NWCC's PLA activities, and (5) increasing involvement of those involved in PLA. The recommendations have been placed in order of suggested priority.

Establishing Commitment

- Develop PLA workload language in both the BCGEU Instructor and AWU's collective agreements.

- Include PLA in NWCC's Educational Plan.

- Identify to Educational Council the need to develop a policy regarding the acceptance of internal PLA credit between NWCC programs.

- Ensure the provincial issues are brought to the provincial level.

- Increase the workload of the present incumbent.

Increase Knowledge of PLA

- Develop a one page clear, simple backgrounder on PLA.that include the benefits for faculty and the college as well as the student.

- Ensure current information regarding the university and professional accrediting bodies' PLA policies are accessible.

- Provide assessment workshops that include both the development of PLA tools and methods within the broader context of assessment itself

Develop Resources

- Adopt PLA standards for NWCC.

- Adopt a PLA model that outlines the PLA process from the student's perspective at NWCC.

- Revisit the current PLA policy.

- Develop a simple screening tool for advisors that will assist them to determine if students would be potentially eligible for PLA. Include with the tool the names of the appropriate individuals to whom the advisors should refer students.

Increase Knowledge of NWCC's PLA Activities

- Capture all PLA activity at NWCC.

- Develop a more effective communication link with the college community regarding the activities of the PLA committee.

- Ensure the knowledge of current resources is widely disseminated at NWCC.

- Provide training on PLA marketing for Student Success Team members.

Increasing the number of those involved in PLA

- Identify the clusters that are currently engaged in PLA activity or who wish to be and target training to them. Plan professional development events around the availability of these cluster groups.

- Provide resources such as release time and resource people to these clusters to develop the PLA tools.

- Assist the identified clusters to develop PLA procedures such as who would be conducting assessments, and what assessment methods would be used. Assist the clusters to develop proposed fee structures, and a policy regarding recording of PLA credit to their program. Bring these recommendations to the PLA committee in order to forward on to the appropriate committee.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER AND RECOMMENDED PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES
FROM ASSISTANT DEPUTY MINISTER, MINISTRY OF ADVANCED,
EDUCATION, TRAINING AND TECHNOLOGY

Rwd 99-04-19
PSE

BRITISH COLUMBIA

MAR 3 0 1999

Michael Hill, President
Northwest Community College
5331 McConnell Avenue
Terrace BC V8G 4X2

Michael
Dear Michael Hill:

This letter is to inform you of a recent development in the field of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) in British Columbia.

A set of Standards and Guidelines for PLA was adopted in 1994 by the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT). During 1997 and 1998, in recognition of the advances made by institutions in offering PLA programs and services, the Provincial PLA Steering Committee and the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology managed the process of revising these Standards and Guidelines. After extensive consultation and review by post-secondary education stakeholders, including BCCAT, the Centre has submitted a revised set of Guidelines to the Ministry (see attached). The process used to develop these guidelines is a laudable example of how system partners can work together to achieve an important goal.

These revised PLA implementation guidelines have been endorsed by the Ministry and are being forwarded to you with our recommendations that they be accepted by your institution for implementation. We further recommend that each institution clearly state its PLA policies in its institutional calendar (including the policy on acceptability of courses completed by PLA for transfer credit).

.../2

I appreciate your attention to this initiative which is of significant importance to British Columbia's post-secondary system.

Sincerely,

Robin Ciceri
Robin Ciceri
Assistant Deputy Minister

Attachment

pc: British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union
British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer
Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology
Chairs of Boards
Committee of Registrars
Chairs of Education Councils
Coalition for the Advancement of Applied Education
College Institute Educators' Association of British Columbia
Council of Chief Executive Officers
PLA Administrators at Universities
PLA Administrators at Colleges and Institutes
Provincial Steering Committee on PLA
Senior Educational Services Officers' Committee
Senior Instructional Officers' Committee
The University Presidents' Council of British Columbia
Directors, Post-Secondary Education Division

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA)

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

Most institutions in British Columbia are now implementing prior learning assessment services for learners. The experience of these institutions is reflected in the following guidelines.

EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION

1. All institutions will identify any of their programs or courses which are listed in the BC Transfer Guide (or in other formal transfer arrangements) for which they will not accept credit awarded as a result of the assessment of prior learning.

2. Learners will receive recognition and credit for demonstrated knowledge, skills and attributes and not for experience alone.

3. Credit will be awarded for learning reflecting knowledge, skills, attributes and values which are appropriate to the subject, course or program.

4. In receiving institutions, credit will be awarded for learning which is consistent with the achievement levels required by the particular credential to be awarded.

5. The assessment and recognition of prior learning and the determination of credit awards will be made by content specialists, with external advice as necessary.

6. Learners will have access to prior learning assessment and learning opportunities appropriate to the content area.

7. Credit awarded as a result of the assessment of prior learning will be identified as such on the transcript issued by the institution and transfer credit will be granted on the same basis as is granted for equivalent courses as identified in the BC Transfer Guide or in other formal transfer arrangements.

NOTE: This guideline (#7) will be reviewed after a period of 3 years in the light of follow-up studies conducted by individual institutions and by the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology to assess learner success and to monitor PLA policies and practices.

8. Policies and information about the prior learning assessment process, including provision for appeal, will be readily available.

9. The fees for assessment will be based on the services performed and/or the number of credits requested. The fees will not be determined by the amount of credit awarded.

10. Institutions will regularly monitor, review, evaluate and revise prior learning assessment policies and practices to maintain and improve institutional standards.

CONTEXT

1. Assessment is integral to the learning process and is a vital component of fostering lifelong learning.

2. Prior learning assessment is a critical component of other educational and training reforms occurring in the province.

3. Prior learning assessment services involve a dynamic relationship among educators, business, industry, licensing and accrediting bodies, and professional associations.

4. Every effort will be made to meet the needs of all learners, including those with diverse and non-traditional learning backgrounds.

5. Learners need to be active participants in the assessment process.

ACCESS

1. Prior learning assessment will be considered as a vehicle for enhancing access to education and training or accelerating a learner's progress towards a desired credential or other goal.

2. Prior learning assessment should be developed first for those programs where the labor market demand or learner need has been identified, and institutional readiness and capacity are evident.

ASSESSMENT

1. Learning assessed for post-secondary credit should be:
   - linked to established learning outcomes or other criteria consistent with institutional standards for a given course; it should not be linked to time spent;
   - transferable to contexts other than the one in which it was learned;
   - current and relevant;
   - at a level of achievement equivalent to that of other learners engaged in studies at that level in that program or subject area;
   - assessed using a range of strategies consistent with institutional standards for a given course.

2. The number of credits to be granted is determined by the institution, based on their published learning outcomes or other criteria.

3. Assessment of the learning should be the responsibility of faculty who are content specialists from the accrediting institution, and the names and qualifications of those making an assessment should be recorded.

LEARNER ORIENTATION/PREPARATION

1. Learners should have access to adequate information about and orientation to the process.

2. Learners should be supported to make decisions throughout the learning process.

3. Institutions should offer a variety of opportunities to support learners to progress through the assessment process.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. All personnel involved in PLA (PLA assessors, learner advisors, instructors of portfolio development/career/educational planning courses) should have appropriate skills and knowledge relevant to their roles and responsibilities in the process.

2. All personnel should work systematically towards continuous improvement in their own practice.

3. Institutions should assume the responsibility for supporting staff to acquire and maintain expertise in prior learning assessment services and provide opportunities for sharing information and expertise with other institutions.

TRANSCRIPTS/TRANSFER

1. Grades or credits may be assigned to PLA awards and will be entered accordingly on the learner's transcript.

2. Institutions will document PLA credit awards internally.

3. The percentage of a program's credits which can be obtained through PLA will be determined by the institution awarding the credential.

NOTE: See EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION guideline #7 regarding identification of PLA on transcripts.

APPENDIX B

LETTER FROM THE COLLEGE PRESIDENT

**Northwest
Community
College**

5331 McConnell Ave.,
Terrace, B.C. V8G 4C2
Phone: (604) 635-6511, Fax: (604) 635-3511

September 20, 1999

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Research Project

This letter is in regard to the research project that will be done by Karen Chrysler. The project,
"A Study of Prior Learning Assessment at Northwest Community College: History, Current
Status and Future Direction", has been approved by myself and has the full support of Northwest
Community College's administration.

The project will be carried out under the auspices of Northwest Community College's Prior
Learning Committee. Larisa Tarwick is the management representative of this college
committee.

Should you need any further clarification of NWCC's support or part of this process, please feel
free to call me at this office.

Sincerely

Brian Loptson,
Acting President

BL/rr

APPENDIX C

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR OF THE COLLEGE PLA COMMITTEE

Northwest
Community
College

3966 2nd Avenue,
Box 3606, Smithers, B.C., V0J 2N0
Phone: (250) 847-4461, Fax: (250) 847-4568

Stephen Doyle
Chair, PLA Task Force
Regional Coordinator
Natural Resources Program
P.O. Box 3606
Smithers, B.C. V0J2N0

September 20, 1999

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to take this opportunity to support and endorse the proposed research
topic by Karen Chrysler: Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) at Northwest Community
College: A Study on History, Current Status, and Future Directions.

As Chair of the Prior Learning Assessment Task Force at Northwest Community
College for the past three years, I know that our college has come a long way in both the
development and implementation of prior learning assessment (PLA). Today, several
departments have fully developed assessment tools, some departments have on-going
PLA projects and some departments still resist PLA. After three years of PLA
implementation, I believe our college has completed the "easy" work, ie. implementing
PLA with those departments that believe in the philosophy of PLA. The future work of
PLA at our college must address the challenge of implementing PLA with departments
that do not believe PLA is a viable route college credit. This is where I believe Ms.
Chrysler's research is critical.

In addition to researching future direction of PLA at Northwest Community
College, the archiving of the past PLA activities at our college would be a significant
contribution to our college.

Sincerely,

Stephen Doyle

APPENDIX D

LETTER FROM MANAGEMENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE COLLEGE PLA COMMITTEE

September 20, 1999

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Karen Chrysler Research Project

This letter is a support letter in regard to the research project that will be done by Karen. The project, "A Study of Prior Learning Assessment at Northwest Community College: History, Current Status and Future Direction" is a project that will give us, at the college, a chance to view our endeavours with Prior Learning. As the management representative of the colleges' committee, I will be delighted to support Karen's work.

Please feel free to contact me for further information.

Sincerely

Larisa Tarwick, Manager
Program Support and Development

LT/rr

APPENDIX E

CLUSTER MEMBER
INTRODUCTION LETTER
PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM
QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear

      As you may already know, I am working towards my Masters degree in Education in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Northern British Columbia. I am working with Northwest Community College as a researcher under the supervision of Dr. Peter MacMillan this year while I am on unassisted educational leave.

      The purpose of the study is to determine the nature and potential of Prior Learning Assessment at Northwest Community College. Your participation will provide the college PLA committee with valuable future direction of how to proceed with PLA.

      I am requesting that you complete the enclosed survey and return it to myself, Karen Chrysler, via internal mail to Terrace campus by **December 10.** If you complete the survey, could you also please sign and return the enclosed participation consent form.

      If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please call me at 250-635-6511 Local 5290, or my supervisor Dr. Peter MacMillan at 250-960-5828. If concerns are not adequately dealt with, they may be then directed to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies at the University of British Columbia 250-960-5820.

Thank you,

_____
Karen Chrysler M.Ed. (Candidate) BSW

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may choose not to participate. I understand that the data that I provide will be used when preparing the final report. I understand that if the information I provide is cited that it will be referenced as coming from a particular cluster and not by my actual name. The completed surveys will be destroyed within six months of the final report.

Based on these understandings, I hereby give my consent to participate.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

*Name of Cluster:*_____

Please take some time to respond to the following questions. You would probably find it helpful to read through all of the questions first, prior to responding. Your participation is appreciated.

Definition of PLA

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is assessment by some valid and reliable means by a qualified specialist of what has been learned through non-formal education/training or experience that is worthy of credit in a course or a program offered by the institution providing the credit (British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer)

NWCC's Education Council passed this general PLA policy statement (September 19, 1997)

NWCC recognizes that knowledge and skills are acquired through a variety of learning, life and work experiences. Opportunities for flexible assessment and recognition of the knowledge and skills gained through prior learning will be offered to learners wishing to acquire credit in a course or program at NWCC.

1. a. Have you ever assessed a student for full or partial course credit by

Reviewed a portfolio   Yes ☐   No ☐   If yes, how often in the
containing evidence   previous two years?
of the student's prior   (put number of times in
learning?   the box)
                                                                    ☐

If you answered yes, can you please comment on your experience. If you answered no, could you please provide comments as to why you have not done so.

b. Have you ever assessed a student for full or partial course credit by

Orally interviewing a   Yes ☐   No ☐   If yes, how often in the
student and assessing   previous two years?
prior learning   (put number of times in
                                                                 the box)
                                                                    ☐

If you answered yes, can you please comment on your experience. If you answered no, could you please provide comments as to why you have not done so.

_____

_____

_____

c. Have you ever assessed a student for full or partial course credit by

Giving a performance   Yes ☐   No ☐   If yes, how often in the
test such as a   previous two years?
demonstration in the   (put number of times in
shop or laboratory?   the box)
                                                                    ☐

If you answered yes, can you please comment on your experience. If you answered no, could you please provide comments as to why you have not done so.

_____

_____

_____

d. Have you ever assessed a student for full or partial course credit by

Giving a challenge exam (these are developed by the discipline/ program in which credit is sought)	Yes ☐	No ☐	If yes, how often in the previous two years? (put number of times in the box) ☐

If you answered yes, can you please comment on your experience. If you answered no, could you please provide comments as to why you have not done so.

_____

_____

_____

e. Have you ever assessed a student for full or partial course credit by

Giving a standardized test (external to the course such as from a test bank)	Yes ☐	No ☐	If yes, how often in the previous two years? (put number of times in the box) ☐

If you answered yes, can you please comment on your experience. If you answered no, could you please provide comments as to why you have not done so.

_____

_____

_____

f. Have you ever assessed a student for full or partial course credit by

| Observing simulations/role plays demonstrating prior learning | Yes ☐ | No ☐ | If yes, how often in the previous two years? (put number of times in the box) ☐ |

If you answered yes, can you please comment on your experience. If you answered no, could you please provide comments as to why you have not done so.

_____

_____

_____

g. Have you ever assessed a student for full or partial course credit by

| Reviewing previous projects/assignments | Yes ☐ | No ☐ | If yes, how often in the previous two years? (put number of times in the box) ☐ |

If you answered yes, can you please comment on your experience. If you answered no, could you please provide comments as to why you have not done so.

_____

_____

_____

h. Have you assessed a student for full or partial course credit by another method other than those described above? Please describe:

_____

_____

_____

2. Suppose a student who had signed up for your course came to you after the first class. She or he had looked over the course outline and said he or she already knew the course material through some work she/he had done. What would your reaction be if she or he asked you if they might receive credit through Prior Learning?

_____

_____

_____

PLA Opinion

3. Following, there are some statements about Prior Learning Assessment. Please tick off whether you agree, disagree or if you are not sure, respond no opinion.

a)Sometimes what is learned through life experience can be equivalent to what is learned in a college course   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐   No Opinion ☐

b)I think that PLA can be an appropriate method of assessment   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐   No Opinion ☐

c)When you give credit for PLA you defeat the purpose of why students come to college   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐   No Opinion ☐

d)More NWCC courses could be made available for PLA   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐   No Opinion ☐

e)Giving credit for PLA compromises good education   Agree ☐   Disagree ☐   No Opinion ☐

4.Are you aware of the Ministry's PLA Implementation Guidelines? Yes___ No____

If yes, what issues, comments, questions, concerns, thoughts come to mind about them?

_____

_____

_____

5. What, if any, do you see are the benefits of having PLA at NWCC?

_____

_____

_____

6. What, if any, do you see are the problems with PLA at NWCC?

_____

_____

_____

7. What do you recommend are some ways to address these problems?

_____

_____

_____

Any other comments you wish to add?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Feel free to use the back of this paper.

APPENDIX F

KEY INFORMANT
INTRODUCTION LETTER
PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Dear

As you may already know, I am working towards my Masters degree in Education in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Northern British Columbia. I am working with Northwest Community College as a researcher under the supervision of Dr. Peter MacMillan this year while I am on unassisted educational leave.

The purpose of the study is to determine the nature and potential of Prior Learning Assessment at Northwest Community College. Your participation will provide the college PLA committee with valuable future direction of how to proceed with PLA. I am requesting your participation in this study because it is important the PLA committee receive your perspective regarding PLA, given your college role.

I am requesting to schedule a time with you to interview you about your perspective regarding PLA. The interview should take a maximum of 45 minutes. The relevant interview data will then be typed up. The data that will be used in the final report will be given to you for review prior to use in the final report. It will be referenced by the position you hold, rather than by actual name. For example, "the college president stated"

I have enclosed the interview questions, the participation consent form and the proposed PLA guidelines from the Ministry of Advanced Training and Technology. Please review the guidelines prior to the interview.

I will contact you shortly to determine your participation and to set up an interview at your convenience, should you agree to be interviewed.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please call me at 250-635-6511 Local 5290, or my supervisor Dr. Peter MacMillan at 250-960-5828. If concerns are not adequately dealt with, they may be then directed to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies at the University of British Columbia 250-960-5820.

Thank you,

_____
Karen Chrysler M.Ed. (Candidate) BSW

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may choose not to participate. I understand that the data that I provide will be used when preparing the final report. I understand the interview will be taped for the purposes of ensuring complete understanding. I understand that I will have an opportunity to review and approve the information I provided, prior to use in the report. I understand the information I provide will be referenced as coming by the position I hold at the college and not by my actual name. I will be given back the cassette tape of the interview, after the completion of the project. I understand that I may withdraw from the process at any time. The transcriptions that I take from the tape will be destroyed within 6 months of the completion of the project.

Based on these understandings, I hereby give my consent to participate and to be taped.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

Key Informant
Interview Questions

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is assessment by some valid and reliable means by a qualified specialist of what has been learned through non formal education/training or experience that is worthy of credit in a course or program offered by the institution providing the credit. (British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer)

NWCC's Education Council passed this general PLA policy statement (September 19,1997).

NWCC recognizes that knowledge and skills are acquired through a variety of learning, life and work experience. Opportunities for flexible assessment and recognition of the knowledge and skills gained through prior learning will be offered to learners wishing to acquire credit in a course or a program at NWCC.

In anticipation of our interview, I would like you to consider the following questions with regard to your current role at Northwest Community College.

1.What, if any, do you see as the benefits of Prior Learning Assessment at NWCC?

2. What, if any do you see as the problems with Prior Learning Assessment at NWCC?

3.What do you recommend as some ways to address these problems?

4. What issues, comments, questions, concerns and thoughts come to mind for you regarding implementation of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology guidelines (provided in this package) at NWCC?

5. What would be some ways to address these issues?

APPENDIX G

STUDENT SUCCESS TEAM
INTRODUCTION LETTER
PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM
QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear

As you may already know, I am working towards my Masters degree in Education in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Northern British Columbia. I am working with Northwest Community College as a researcher under the supervision of Dr. Peter MacMillan while I am on unassisted educational leave.

The purpose of this study is to determine the nature and potential of Prior Learning Assessment at Northwest Community College.. Your participation will provide the college PLA committee with future direction of how to proceed with PLA. I am requesting your participation in this study because it is important the PLA committee receives input regarding PLA from Student Success team members.

You are asked <u>to answer the enclosed questionnaire and return it with the signed participation consent form(enclosed with this letter)</u>.

The data you provide will be used when preparing the final report. It will be accessible only to my university supervisor and myself. If the information that you provide is cited in the report, it will be referenced as coming from a Student Success team member. You will not be identified by campus or by name.

All questionnaires will be destroyed, within 6 months after completion of the college report.

Thank you,

_____
Karen Chrysler M.Ed. (Candidate) BSW

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please call me at 250-635-6511 Local 5290, or my supervisor Dr. Peter MacMillan at 250-960-5828. If concerns are not adequately dealt with, you may then direct them to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies at the University of British Columbia 250-960-5820.

Participant Consent Form

I,_____ have read the above information. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may choose not to participate. I understand the information that I provide will be used to develop recommendations for PLA at NWCC. I will not be personally identified in the final report, should my information be cited. I hereby give my consent to participate.

_____   _____

        Signature   Date

Student Success Team Questionnaire

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is assessment by some valid and reliable means by a qualified specialist of what has been learned through non formal education/training or experience that is worthy of credit in a course or program offered by the institution providing the credit. (British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer)

This means that students have an opportunity to have the learning that they have acquired elsewhere other than the college, assessed for course credit at NWCC.

NWCC's Education Council passed this general PLA policy statement. (September 19, 1997).

NWCC recognizes that knowledge and skills are acquired through a variety of learning, life and work experience. Opportunities for flexible assessment and recognition of the knowledge and skills gained through prior learning will be offered to learners wishing to acquire credit in a course or a program at NWCC.

1. Some NWCC programs are currently offering opportunities for PLA, and more are in the process of developing tools and procedures to do so. The college PLA committee wants to find out how much student demand there has been for PLA.

   In the previous two years, how many students have asked you about Prior Learning Assessment? Tick off the box that applies.

None	☐	31-40	☐
1-10	☐	41-50	☐
11-20	☐	50 +	☐
21-30	☐		

2. If you have not had students ask about Prior Learning Assessment, why do you think they didn't ask? Tick off the box(es) that are the most appropriate to the situation.

☐ Student didn't know about PLA.
☐ The program they were considering did not offer it.
☐ They would not have been eligible (no relevant learning experience).
☐ Student didn't think they would succeed at PLA.
☐ Other. (please describe).

_____

3. If you have had students ask about Prior Learning Assessment, can you describe the outcome for the students that have asked about it. Tick off the box(es) that are most appropriate to the situation.

☐ Referral to the program coordinator.
☐ Referral to the PLA coordinator.
☐ Received NWCC's PLA brochure.
☐ Other (please describe).

_____

_____

_____

4. What questions do you have in your role as an advisor, about PLA at NWCC?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Feel free to use the back of this paper.

Thank you for taking the time to complete and return this questionnaire!