

The Power of VPL

Validation of Prior Learning as a multi-targeted approach for access to learning opportunities for all

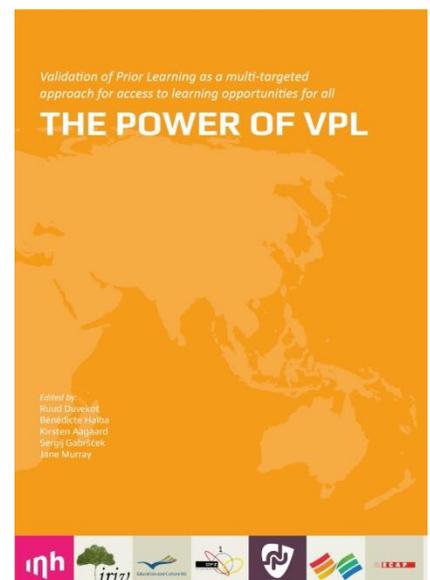
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The publication **The Power of VPL Validation of Prior Learning as a multi-targeted approach for access to learning opportunities for all** is a result of the research activity undertaken by an international partnership involved in the ERASMUS-project 'Access to Lifelong Learning in Higher Education' (517978-LLP-1-2011-1-NL-ERASMUS-ESIN; ALLinHE) and also this book accompanied the 1st VPL Biennale (April 9-11, 2014, Rotterdam) as the pre-Biennale book.

Edited by Ruud Duvekot, Bénédicte Halba, Kirsten Aagaard, Sergij Gabršček and Jane Murray and printed at the Inholland University AS & European Centre Valuation Prior Learning, April 2014, the book contains 14 articles, in which are presented evidence-based, case-studies and transnational studies and benchmarks for strengthening the application of validation of prior learning as part of lifelong learning strategies, for the benefit of all, in particular for those who are in danger of social exclusion.

All contributions present their own story, showing the diversity of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) and its contribution to implementing lifelong learning strategies in any given country and context. They either tell a more general story or a more specific one. The goal is to learn from this diversity.

In the 1st chapter, Ruud Duvekot presents a general framework for developing and implementing the systematics of Validation of Prior Learning in a given context. Nowadays, in the on-going transition to the learning society flexible, continuous and more adaptive learning is required to keep the citizen viable on today's labour market. Staying on top of this development is vital for all actors: individuals, trade unions, schools, universities, employers, legislative and regulatory bodies. Never before in history the individual - or the citizen - got the chance to gain so much control in steering one's career through learning as is the case in the learning society. It is the



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systematic of VPL that offers this 'window of opportunities' with its focus on opening up learning opportunities on people's own demand. This contribution seeks to answer the crucial question how to activate VPL as an effective instrument for linking competences and credits in lifelong learning that appeal to individual learners and the other stakeholders in learning and working contexts?

The chapter of Per Andersson discusses experiences as a basis for admission and particularly eligibility for higher education. The discussion is illustrated by examples from the case of Sweden, a country that has applied measures for widening access to higher education since the 1970s. Particularly the focus is upon the 25:4 scheme, a measure that gave recognition to experience by granting basic eligibility mainly based on life and work experiences – 25 years of age and 4 years of work experiences were the main criteria for granting basic eligibility. The chapter also presents results from a survey among 25:4 applicants, a study which was focussing their experiences of application, admission, entering higher education, and drop-out or completion. The concepts of institutional, situational, and dispositional barriers towards participation are employed to discuss the results.

Hae Young Lee and Young Sang Ko provide insight in the learning culture of South Korea in which the further development of VPL could go well together with the present reforms in vocational (higher) qualifications systems. The gap in South Korea between the labour market and HE creates societal instability and unemployment and ironically, this enhances a skills mismatch that forces young people to seek more education and forces employers to invest more in job training for new recruits. Experts believe that the reform of vocational qualifications systems such as the National Competency Standards (NCS) and the National Qualification Framework might play a critical role in adopting VPL. However, with respect to this reform several issues require attention such as the modularisation of learning programmes/courses comparable to NCS, the development of learning outcomes-based curricula and assessment tools and the development of a transfer system amongst NCS-based academic programmes/courses and the Academic Credit Bank System.

Simona Sava, Claudia Borca & Elena Danciu state that the need for better access to higher education is widely argued in Europe. Different countries already introduced into their legislation the validation of prior learning outcomes (VPL) as a solution for widening access to different study programs, irrespective of their deliverance at bachelor, master or doctorate level. This contribution discusses how such options can be applied to adult learning professionals (ALPs), in order to provide better access to master levels in countries where such regulation does not yet exist. Different experiences and solutions developed in recent years in this respect are presented.

Antra Carlsen presents in chapter 5 the experience of the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) with networking in adult education as a means of addressing challenges in the Nordic region. The Nordic cooperation and the role of the Nordic Expert Network on Validation within this cooperation is described. This Expert Network is an excellent way of pooling of resources and producing added value to national development work. The Network has developed Nordic recommendations on VPL for decision makers, and has been working with the issues of quality-assurance and competence development in validation. The NVL sets an example for transnational cooperation and

development of 15 policies and instrumentation for lifelong learning and VPL that is beneficial to the participating countries. It also creates synergy with other countries through its affiliation with the European Union and other political entities.

Madhu Singh's contribution has two main purposes: to examine the progress made in member states in terms of the UNESCO Guidelines for the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning (UIL, 2012) and to highlight some key recommendations for education systems, emerging from the country analysis. The title of her contribution links to the 'Faure Report' of 1972 that defined 'the learning society' as one in which learning is valued by all members of society, in which stakeholders invest in recognising and developing human learning potential and everyone regards people's non-formal and informal learning as a cornerstone of lifelong learning strategies. Faure argued that the educational system would need complete overhauling if the learning society was to be reached. It's in this context where Singh reflects on the development of VPL-systematics, or in UNESCO-terms 'the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning (RVA)'. She analyses the countries where mechanisms for RVA are introduced as part of wider education reforms. These reforms typically seek to make education and training better reduce the education-job gap but also make lifelong learning a real possibility for individuals.

The article of Jane Murray focuses on a UK perspective regarding validated prior learning (VPL) as an instrument for access to Higher Education by two target groups identified as marginalised within European and UK discourses. The selected groups are people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and people aged 50-plus. Drawing on data compiled and analysed as part of the ALLinHE-project, the chapter opens with a consideration of the European and UK contexts in regard to VPL. Discussion then turns to characteristics of the two selected groups before moving to focus on VPL processes at macro-, meso- and micro-levels in the UK. The conclusion draws together the UK findings in regard to the two selected groups to posit that a varied picture of VPL supporting Access to HE in the UK exists, influenced by an asymmetric power relationship between HEIs and individual citizens, with HEIs the hegemonic partner.

Furio Bednarz and Giovanna Bednarz draw on the results of the piloting of the AllinHE Model in Switzerland. After the contextualization of VPL practices in Switzerland, the authors shortly present the methodology and the sources of the study, identifying a specific coherent target group (qualified immigrant women), in order to look for convergences and peculiarities of VPL according to 3 diverse modes: VPL as a means for making competences and learning visible, VPL as a means for achieving a qualification, at least a first step in career and lifelong learning pathways, VPL as an entry door to Higher Education. The article takes in account how expectations, goals, processes and outcomes differ from one case to another, putting always learners' narratives at the center, reading institutional impact, strengths and criticalities under this lens, in order to give some relevant inputs for the design of an integrated multidimensional and multi-target VPL- model

The contribution from Aino Lepänjuuri and Eila Burns describes an individual case story of a non-traditional mature (over 50 years) higher education (HE) student with a learning difficulty on his journey to have his skills and competencies recognised in Finnish HE. The process of validation of prior learning (VPL) in the Finnish HE context will be explained and some recommendations based on personal views will be suggested in order to ease and enhance life-long learning opportunities for all learners.

The article of Ellen Enggaard and Kirsten Aagaard is based on two case studies investigating the potential of VPL processes in a social inclusion perspective and of VPL as a means to empower the individual. In the Danish context the right to have prior learning assessed is embedded in the educational system. Therefore the educational institutions play an important role in VPL, not only in assessing prior learning but also in dealing with the entire process of validating prior learning. The first case study focuses on the individual's meeting with the educational system in his wish to gain formal acknowledgement of his prior learning. In the second case study they focus on the meeting between the individual, the work place and the educational institution. The case focuses on the potential and challenges of using VPL as a means in a strategic competence development project initiated by the work place. They discuss the problems and the conflicts of interest that might arise in such a project, where different stakeholders collaborate in a VPL process. The focus is on meeting points in VPL processes, concerning the mutual process in understanding each other and – more specifically - the mutual interests and perspectives of the VPL-candidates, the educational system, and the workplace

Bénédicte Halba argues that while Valuing Prior Learning (VPL) has become a major issue in Europe, in France the process of VPL already had and has a long history with the highlight of the 2002 Act dedicated to Social modernization. This act paved the way for assessing professional experiences understood on a broader sense than usual (paid, unpaid and voluntary activities). On the basis of three former projects implemented since 2003 (Vaeb, Va2el and Vab), she illustrates the progress in identifying, valuing and assessing different kinds of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. She emphasizes the added value of the ALLinHE project, focused on people with special needs (50+, migrants and disabled people). In the last part of her article she explains the support to be provided to migrants and councilors to enhance the process of VPL, based on a French experience, in the framework of workshops offered at the Cité des Métiers in Paris (2012-2013).

Deirdre Goggin, Irene Sheridan and Tim Horgan report on an interesting case of VPL in industry focused programmes. They argue that as organisations focus on economic indicators and return on investment, their approaches to learning and development opportunities are transformed. In a challenging, competitive climate there is a need to ensure that the long and short term benefits are maximised. The authors describe the experiences and issues raised for Cork Institute of Technology, a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Ireland in implementing programmes developed in partnership with industry which are mutually beneficial and maintain academic standards. It also addresses the enablers, challenges and barriers in customised course development.

Camilla Alfsen describes in her article how Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, has developed guidelines for validation of prior learning towards exemptions in higher education in Norway. The guidelines were developed in 2013 in cooperation with representatives from the sector. Since 2001, adults in Norway without general admittance certification have a legal right to seek admission to University Colleges or Universities based on validation of prior learning. The law also states that students may seek exemption from parts of the study programme based on their prior learning. Validation of prior learning (VPL) for admittance to higher education is well established. Practice linked to validation towards exemptions in higher education is less well known however. Vox therefore conducted a national survey to find out how many institutions that use this kind of validation and how it is done. Based on this survey, Vox developed guidelines for validation towards exemptions. This article presents highlights from the survey and the development of the guidelines.

The final contribution in this book from Ruud Duvekot, describes and analyses the way in which VPL as a tool for and a vision on lifelong learning strategies is introduced the historical and cultural setting of the Netherlands. While describing the features of development and implementation of VPL in the Dutch setting, not only the necessity to contextualize VPL in order to make it an effective approach and tool in lifelong learning strategies becomes apparent but also the way of doing this in a national learning culture with its specific systems, institutes and the critical success factors that prevail in this culture.

With this book, the aim is to show that lifelong learning is possible in any context, country and culture, and that there are always shared elements that make it possible to make a manageable tool for lifelong learning out of the methodology of VPL. Why this is so relevant and of value to the citizens and their organizations across the globe is explained in the variety of approaches, practices and visions, presented in this book.