Faculty Perceptions of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition:

A University Case Study

by

Kimberly Faye Browning

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“Examining the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions is akin to opening Pandora’s Box: as you lift off the lid, a host of weirdly shaped creatures fly out. In this case, the creatures are ideas, philosophies, and histories – seemingly more benign than spirits but perhaps just as difficult to capture, organize or domesticate.”

(Diane Conrad, 2014, p. 315)

Abstract

A number of government policy-makers and education researchers have called for new approaches to address experiential learning that more fully recognize the validity and importance of learning acquired outside the formal education system. The term, *experiential learning* is often used in conjunction with non-formal learning that adult learners achieve through concrete experience. In Canada, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is known as Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR).

There are significant economic consequences for failing to address unrecognized learning in Canada, particularly among the immigrant population. In spite of higher education efforts to achieve massification and universal access in North America and around the globe, not all sectors of society have benefitted equally. The research shows that PLAR can be a key driver for addressing changes in workforce participation, an aging population and economic competitiveness, and is an important process for recognizing foreign credentials (Smith & Clayton, 2009; Spencer, 2005). Concurrently, PLAR is a mechanism for achieving access to and widening participation in post-secondary education (Peruniak & Powell, 2007). A cluster of approaches and initiatives that comprise PLAR have been developed and implemented at post-secondary institutions. However, they remain fragmented and seriously under-supported, particularly at Canadian universities.

The purpose of this case study is to advance our knowledge about PLAR within the university setting by exploring some of the elements of PLAR policy and practice identified in the literature. The study focuses on these elements and analyzes them through the *conceptual framework of professional capital*. Data collection was based on document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The findings of the study indicate that on the one hand, there are

differences in understanding often associated with PLAR, on the other, there may be opportunities lost. Additional findings relate to the invisibility of PLAR, and the roadblocks to implementation. The study uncovered an intrinsic belief in the value and benefits of PLAR among participants, as well as insights and constructive ideas for moving forward. The study suggests several research opportunities for PLAR in the future university.

Keywords: PLAR, Professional Capital, Qualifications Recognition, Area of Study

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List of Acronyms

ALC	Adult Learning Centre
APEL	Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning
BAIS	Bachelor of Arts Integrated Studies
BSW	Bachelor of Social Work
CACE	Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education
CAEL	Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
CAPLA	Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment
CEGEP	Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel
CEW	Centre for Education and Work
CICIC	Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials
CIRL	Canadian Institute for Recognizing Learning
CLFDB	Canadian Labour Force Development Board
CMEC	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
COPSE	Council on Post-Secondary Education
FCR	Foreign Credential Recognition
FCRO	Foreign Credential Recognitions Referral Office
FCRP	Foreign Credential Recognition Program
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada
IDDP	International Dentist Degree Program
IEAP	Internationally Educated Agrologists Program
IEEQ	Internationally Educated Engineers Qualification Program

IEP	Internationally Educated Professional
IET	Internationally Educated Teachers
IMG	International Medical Graduate
MPLAN	Manitoba Prior Learning and Assessment Network
NALL	New Approaches to Lifelong Learning
NIACE	National Institute for Adult Continuing Education
NQF	National Qualifications Frameworks
OER	Open Education Resources
OMFC	Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner
PLA	Prior Learning Assessment
PLAIO	Prior Learning Assessment Inside Out
PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition
PLIRC	Prior Learning International Research Centre
PSE	Post-Secondary Education
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
QR	Qualifications Recognition
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
VNFIL	Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning
WALL	Work and Lifelong Learning
WPLAR	Workplace Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

Definitions

Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning – assessing and accrediting learning from life and work experience as the basis for creating new routes in higher education, employment and training opportunities and professional bodies (Weil & McGill, 1989, cited in Peters, 2005).

Advanced Standing – the acknowledgement of academic achievement for the purpose of admission or program progression, based on work completed outside the current program of study, or from another post-secondary institution (University of Manitoba).

Articulation Agreements – credit transfer agreements negotiated between educational institutions. They are designed to promote student mobility and efficiencies in both time and money for students, institutions and governments (Morrissey, M., Myers, D., Bélanger, P., Robitaille, M., Davison, P., Van Kleef, J., & Williams, R., 2008).

Bridge Program – programming that precedes entry into a pre-existing program of study. Such programming offers a bridge between where a person is and where s/he needs to be in order to be able to participate successfully in a given program of study at an educational institution (Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner).

Credential recognition – involves an assessment to determine the comparability of different formal learning achievement expressed through academic course credits, certificates, degrees and diplomas (Morrissey et al., 2008).

Credit Transfer/Transfer Credit – individual course credit transfer occurs when an institution reviews a student's course documentation from another institution and awards academic credit. Transfer credit can occur between public colleges and universities and between those institutions and private post-secondary institutions (Morrissey et al., 2008).

E-portfolio – a personal digital collection of information describing and illustrating a person's learning, career, experience and achievements … (Slatto, 2005, cited in Cameron, Travers & Wihak, 2014).

Experiential Learning – the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Experiential learning is a continuous process of experience, reflection, concept formation and testing (Kolb, 1984).

Foreign Credentials Recognition – the process of verifying that the knowledge, skills, work experience and education obtained in another country is comparable to the standards established for Canadian professionals and tradespersons (Forum of Labour Market Ministers, 2009).

Formal Learning – refers to learning achieved through credit-based programs or courses. For example, credential recognition or qualification involves an assessment to determine comparability of different formal learning achievement obtained through academic course credits, certificates, diplomas and degrees (Morrissey et al., 2008).

Gap Training – specially designed programming that seeks to fill gaps in knowledge and skill where those gaps are identified through an assessment of one's competencies against the accepted standards for entry to practice (Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner, 2013).

Informal Learning – refers to learning gained through life experience, workplace-based tasks, voluntary activities, self-study, hobbies, family responsibilities, etc. PLAR encompasses both concepts of non-formal and informal learning (Morrissey et al., 2008).

Lifelong Learning – refers to the broad set of beliefs, aims and strategies centered on the tenet that learning opportunities should be accessible to all regardless of age and status (Nesbit, Dunlop & Gibson, 2007).

Non-formal Learning – refers to learning gained through participation in non-credit courses, workplace-based training, seminars or workshops but does not lead to attainment of a formal qualification or credential (Morrissey et al., 2008).

Portfolio – a composition of work that a learner has selected and collected to show knowledge, skills or competencies, and includes the reflections of the learning on the selected and collected work. A portfolio presents the evidence of a learner's prior learning (Joosten-Ten Brinke, Sluijsmans, Brand-Gruwel & Jochems, 2008).

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) – is the assessment and recognition of learning acquired in non-formal and informal contexts such as the workplace, life experiences, community activities, independent study and volunteering. Forms of recognition include program and course admission, academic credit and exemption, access to training, employment, promotion, occupational licensing/certification/registration and self-recognition through portfolio learning (Morrissey et al., 2008).

Professional Capital – is the confluence, or systematic development and integration of three kinds of capital – human capital (HC) (the talent of individuals), social capital (SC) (the collaborative power of the groups) and decisional capital (DC) (decision-making capacity) (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Qualification Recognition – the area of work, policy and practice concerned with the recognition of internationally educated professional qualifications. The focus is on activities and stakeholders involved in the recognition of credentials, skills and experience by a competent authority for the purposes of entry into an educational program, trade or profession or for general employment purposes (Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner).

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – the comparison of the previous learning and experience of the learner, howsoever obtained, against the required learning outcomes specified for a specific qualification, and the acceptance of that which meets the requirements for the purposes of a qualification (Frick & Albertyn, 2011).

Regulated Profession/Occupation – is one where access to or practice of a profession is restricted by national law to those holding specific qualifications. An occupation is regulated if a license from a professional association or a government agency is required to practice (Moss, 2014).

Regulator – an association or government body responsible for the governance of a profession. The regulator sets standards of practice and qualifications. It assesses the individuals' education and experience, and must grant them a license before they can legally practice their profession (Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner).

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Since the latter part of the twentieth-century, a number of government policy-makers and education researchers have called for new approaches to address experiential learning that more fully recognize the validity and importance of learning acquired outside the formal education system. The term, *experiential learning,* is often used in conjunction with non-formal learning that adult learners achieve through concrete experience. When applied to post-secondary education in Canada, this is known as Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR).

The reasons put forward for the promotion of PLAR include the need to develop a culture of lifelong learning that recognizes a learner's prior informal and non-formal learning has value that can meet the needs of an increasingly globalized workforce with high-level skills (Pitman & Vidovich, 2012). Various countries such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom (UK) have developed competency-based national frameworks of qualifications driven by a desire to advance social and economic progress by developing a highly skilled workforce.

Concurrently, PLAR is widely recognized as a policy and a practice to address issues of greater social inclusion, equity and access to education, and training and employment opportunities. Within the context of post-secondary education, PLAR provides learners with opportunities to achieve access and equity through the assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning and more flexible learning pathways. The PLAR process itself however is complex and contested (Harris & Wihak, 2011), and invariably, "becomes the terrain where potential tension between economic and social priorities can be manifested" (Wong, 2014, p. 199). This terrain represents a possible impetus for development of PLAR policy in the post-

secondary system, insofar as it offers a mechanism for valuing learning and knowledge from non-formal and informal learning contexts.

PLAR has much potential to grow the population of qualified or credentialed applicants, particularly those without a formal education background but with a relevant life and/or work experience. A cluster of approaches and initiatives that comprise PLAR have been developed and implemented at post-secondary institutions to foster, recognize, and utilize the full range of skills and learning that individuals have acquired through both life and work experience, and formal education and training to address social and economic priorities. These, in turn, help to bridge the key participation gaps that many Canadians face (Morrissey et al., 2008).

The research shows that these approaches and initiatives however, remain fragmented and seriously under-supported, particularly at Canadian universities (Bélanger and Mount, 1998; Conrad, 2010, 2014; Kennedy, 2003; Peruniak & Powell, 2006, 2007; Van Kleef, 2011; Wihak, 2006, 2007)**.** PLAR is therefore an interesting site of study in that it provides insight into how post-secondary education (PSE) systems address these social and economic priorities through policy development and implementation.

Definitions, Meaning and Terminology

Before proceeding further, it is important to be clear about defining PLAR to arrive at a way to use it in the study. The definitions surrounding PLAR have been the focus of ongoing debate, due, in part, to the lack of clear and consistent language with which it is described (Childs, Ingham & Wagner, 2002; Conrad, 2008a; Fox, 2005; Morrissey et. al., 2008; Van Kleef, 2007). In addition to the language difficulty, there are differences in understanding concerning the relationships between credit transfer, qualification recognition and recognizing prior learning

because all of these processes address formal, non-formal and informal learning. Conrad (2008a) illustrates this point quite clearly by relaying a discussion among PLAR practitioners in Canada representing different areas of practice, i.e., universities, colleges, industry, literacy, etc., that "continue to struggle to speak to each other using the same language … prior learning practitioners stumble over their own nomenclature, spending endless hours in discussion trying to get it straight" (p. 105).

One of the most important differences of opinion centres on questions of whether PLAR should include formal learning, generally thought of as processes for transferring academic credits, and recognizing formal education credentials in addition to assessing and recognizing non-formal and informal learning. According to Morrissey et al. (2008), *formal learning* refers to learning achieved through credit-based programs or courses. For example, credential recognition or qualification involves an assessment to determine comparability of different formal learning achievement obtained through academic course credits, certificates, diplomas and degrees.

PLAR is a logical consequence of the theory of experiential learning that suggests that experience acts as a transformational process, bringing about learning, and that learning is based on process, not mere outcomes (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). PLAR can function as a mechanism for granting access to formal study, with the intent of making post-secondary education available to groups of learners who might otherwise not consider entering an institution. PLAR may also function through granting exemption from certain courses or parts or courses or programs; and for awarding credit or advanced standing for learning that may have taken place outside an academic context within the post-secondary institution context.

Universities generally use two mechanisms to recognize academic credentials: transfer credit and articulation agreements. *Transfer credit* occurs when an institution reviews a student's course documentation from another institution, matches content and levels of subjects completed in other courses, and awards credit. *Articulation agreements* are transfer credit agreements negotiated between post-secondary institutions, designed to promote student mobility and achieve efficiencies in both time and cost for students, institutions and governments.

Non-formal learning refers to learning gained through participation in non-credit courses, workplace-based training, seminars or workshops but does not lead to attainment of a formal qualification or credential. *Informal learning* refers to learning gained through life experience, workplace-based tasks, voluntary activities, self-study, hobbies, family responsibilities, etc. PLAR encompasses both concepts of non-formal and informal learning.

An important distinction here is that review of course or program equivalencies such as transfer credit do not provide for the assessment of individual learners. It is the instruction in a previous course or program that is being evaluated or recognized. The assessment of non-formal or informal learning is based on learning from work and/or life experiences (Wong, 1997). PLAR is not about what learning a student has, nor the learning that the university is willing to uncover; it is the ability of the student to describe that learning (Pitman & Vidovich, 2013).

As a process, PLAR can be applied beyond an academic setting. PLAR is premised on the likelihood of learning arising from both formal study and active use of relevant life and work experiences. PLAR is gaining wide acceptance as a tool for assessing and recognizing knowledge and skills for the purposes of occupational or professional certification and workforce entry. The focus of this study however, is on PLAR within the university setting.

Comprehensive overviews of PLAR conducted in Canada over the last decade (Morrissey et al., 2008; Wihak, 2006) provide the definitional direction for this study. That is, for purposes of this study, the definition of PLAR has a more restricted focus and is defined as follows*: the practice of reviewing, assessing and recognizing the information, skills and understanding of learning acquired through non-formal and informal learning, outside of formal education.*

In addition to the definitional challenges, the terminology and acronyms used to describe PLAR or the practice of assessing and recognizing prior learning and experiential knowledge vary greatly. Different terminology emphasizes different aspects of the PLAR phenomenon. A common theme in most concepts is "prior learning" which puts the focus on what has been learned before.

There are many PLAR-related acronyms in use. These include the following: Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) in Canada, Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) in the United States (US), Assessment of Prior (Experiential) Learning (APEL) in the United Kingdom (UK), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Australia and New Zealand, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Assessment and Recognition of Prior Learning (ARPL) in South Africa, and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) in the European Union.

According to Wong (2000a), Canada's federal government advocated for the term "PLAR" in the mid-1990s. The "R" was put in place to ensure that the recognition of prior learning was understood within the context of integrated systems of education, training and learning development. Some jurisdictions, including Canada (Canadian Association of Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA), 2015; Conrad, 2008a, 2008b) however, now consider PLAR as

a combination of formal, non-formal and informal learning in which case they refer to the process as the "recognition of prior learning" (RPL). This study draws from PLAR research in multiple jurisdictions therefore, the term that is used in a particular jurisdiction will be referenced accordingly.

The Multiple and Diverse Functions of the University

Public universities have been and will continue to be leading elements in the education and improvement of society (Byrne, 2016). The tripartite mission of teaching, research and public service remains an ingrained component of Canadian public universities. Broadening access, offering a wide array of academic programs, purposeful engagement with local economies, and undertaking leadership in developing public education remain the hallmarks of public universities (Douglass, 2016).

The contemporary university has become the most important institution in the complex process of knowledge creation and distribution, serving as home not only to most of the basic sciences, but also to the complex system of journals, books and databases that communicate knowledge worldwide (Altbach, 2011). Universities are key providers of training and have taken on a political and cultural function in society. At the same time, academe is faced with unprecedented challenges stemming in large part from a decline in resources. After more than half a century of dramatic worldwide expansion, universities in most jurisdictions are being forced to cut back on expenditures, and in many cases, to downsize (Miles, Verreynne, McAuley & Hammond, 2017).

While the university has exerted enormous influence over the development of modern society, it has also had to adapt and position itself in response to many social, industrial and

economic trends over the centuries. Universities are now more important for socioeconomic mobility, for knowledge production, and for promoting innovation than at any other time in their history. University change has been an iterative process of external and internal forces, marked by the movement from elite to mass to universal higher education (Trow, 1974), from institutions concerned with teaching to an increased focus on creating knowledge, with economic engagement, and with providing a growing array of public services (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2010).

Universities are under pressure to accommodate a more diverse student population, to broaden international recruitment efforts, and to increase attainment rates of under-represented groups to maintain enrolment levels. Universities are expected to deliver a number of skilled graduates to fulfill labour market needs to meet the rising demands of the global knowledge society, and the increasing expectations by government, by the private sector, and by society in general (Kirby, 2011l Steele, 2011). In addition, the aging of the labour force, combined with strong employer demand for skills are likely to place more pressure on universities.

In response to the rapid growth of student mobility on a global scale, many colleges and universities have collaborated to facilitate mobility for their students by offering a mix of program options and services that support pathways from high school to college to university (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Shields & Edwards, 2010). These pathways have generally been achieved through transfer credit agreements between institutions, through collaborative joint programs and dual credit programs, articulation agreements, and through PLAR (Colleges and Institutes, 2011).

A key theme underpinning this study is the widely cited research finding that the assessment and recognition of learning acquired from informal and non-formal means outside of formal education has been under-utilized, and to some extent, resisted at universities (Conrad, 2014; Wong, 1997, 2001, 2011, 2014). As discussed above, universities serve many important functions and face a multitude of pressures to meet a growing list of needs. The intent of this study therefore is not to profile the university in a negative light, nor to suggest that it is somehow "flawed" because it has not embraced PLAR. The purpose instead is to explore in greater depth the explanations behind the perceived under-utilization of PLAR, and to present ideas and recommendations to further the study of the elements of PLAR policy and best practices.

The Evolution of PLAR in Canada

PLAR has existed for decades in many jurisdictions, particularly in the US when the American Council on Education developed a systematic approach to evaluating the education and training of returning WWII veterans. Originally traced to adult education, PLAR evolved quite differently in Canada. It is not as well-known or as widely dispersed, but in fact, "languished in a backwater of indifference until the early 1990s" (Peruniak & Welch, 2000, p. 233).

In 1991, the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB), a national non-profit advocacy group formed, and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), the federal-government department at the time, sponsored several forums and conferences that generated interest and support for PLAR. There were conferences that attracted a range of stakeholder

groups that provided a unifying environment for budding PLAR practitioners in post-secondary education, employment programs, and immigrant integration (Van Kleef, 2011).

The Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA), formed in 1994, is a national advocacy organization that works to promote PLAR. CAPLA hosts annual conferences primarily for practitioners and scholars from different sectors, conducts research, and shares best practices. Examples of CAPLA research and practice include the *Developing Benchmarks for PLAR Practitioners* (Day, 2000) and the accompanying *Guidelines* (Day & Zakos, 2000), to assist practitioners in conducting PLAR assessments. Additionally, in 2015, CAPLA released the *Recognition of Prior Learning Quality Assurance Manual*. The Manual provides alternative, quality-assured assessment and recognition processes, along with a range of assessment tools that are particularly useful when traditional approaches to assessing and recognizing qualifications are not possible.

In the 1990s, pockets of informal PLAR practice took place at colleges as a means to grant academic credit to mature learners for learning achieved outside the education system. By 2006 however, federal funding to PLAR national conferences was permanently terminated which came as a blow to pan-Canadian efforts to expand awareness, understanding and participation in PLAR (Van Kleef, 2011).

In 2002, HRDC led the development of Canada's Innovation Strategy with the release of "*Knowledge Matters*", outlining the federal government's position on skills and learning. The Strategy stated that Canada's learning system must be strengthened to meet skills and labour force demands, and to respond to the challenges of the knowledge economy. The Strategy also acknowledged a significant gap in Canada's skills and learning agenda and that the increased

recognition of prior learning would motivate more adults to gain additional skills, and would remove a significant barrier to full participation and mobility in the labour market.

Examples of early PLAR practice in Canada include the Early Childhood Education Program, Diploma Nursing, and Dental Assisting programs at Red River College in Manitoba, as well as programs offered at the First Nations Technical Institute and Mohawk College in Ontario (Blower, 2000). In 1997, the CLFDB published a set of 14 standards for PLAR that would form the basis for developing benchmarks focusing on the assessment process, practices, and assessor/practitioner training (Day, 2000). The CLFDB remained a strong advocate for PLAR until it disbanded in 1999. Since then, PLAR has expanded in many directions with implementation occurring among the provinces, in secondary schools and post-secondary institutions, through workplace training models, businesses, sector councils and industry groups, apprenticeship, military training and professional accrediting/regulatory bodies (Wihak, 2006).

More recent developments include the establishment of the Canadian Institute for Recognizing Learning (CIRL) in 2003, and the Prior Learning International Research Centre (PLIRC), established at Thompson Rivers University in British Columbia in 2009. CIRL and PLIRC established a partnership with the State University of New York's (SUNY) Empire State College to create a single PLAR-focus research database. In addition, SUNY Empire State College established *Prior Learning Assessment Inside Out* (PLAIO) to publish research and to help legitimize PLAR as an important and distinctive area of critical inquiry (Wihak, Harris, Friesen & Van Kleef, 2012).

With education being a provincial rather than a federal responsibility, most PLAR activity has taken place on a provincial scale. Quebec was the first province in 1982 to

implement PLAR, based on a recommendation from the Jean Commission's *Report on Adult Learning* to implement the "recognition of prior learning" in the adult education sector, including the Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEP) or colleges (Blower, 2000). In 2002, the Quebec Education Ministry released a policy on adult education and continuing education and training, and an action plan that recognized PLAR as a right of all Quebec citizens (Moss, 2011). In addition to Quebec, which has a rich history of RPL literature (Moss, 2018), British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan are considered leaders in the field (Van Kleef, 2011).

PLAR Activity in Manitoba

In 1998, the Manitoba PLAR Centre was established with a three-year mandate as a board-governed, not-for-profit corporation that offered advisory services for practitioners, training providers and a wide range of clients. The Centre was funded jointly by the provincial and federal governments under the Winnipeg Development Agreement (Day, 2000). In addition to Winnipeg, the Centre offered PLAR advisory services in Brandon, the Pas, and Thompson. The PLAR Centre later became the Centre for Education and Work that has a mandate to support adult education and workplace-based credit recognition, blending traditional methodologies with digital multi-media.

In 2001, the Government of Manitoba released a *Policy Framework for PLAR*, established to support a decentralized system of supports, and to increase PLAR capacity at the colleges and universities. The expanded capacity included redirected funds to support a PLAR advisory position at each public post-secondary institution. In addition, Red River College received funds for development and implementation of two levels of PLAR practitioner training.

The Policy Framework also covered increased support for PLAR advisory services at the Adult Learning Centres (ALC) and for workplace and industry projects. At the post-secondary level, PLAR activity is managed by the post-secondary institutions. In 2015, the Government of Manitoba released its *Post-Secondary Education Strategy: A partnership for excellence and student success*. The Strategy provided institutional support for PLAR in connection with the announcement of its online credit transfer portal through *CampusManitoba* in order to "create a more transparent system for prior learning recognition and credit transfer" (p. 4). To date, there have been no further formal government announcements concerning PLAR.

The provincial government has a strong connection to PLAR in at least two other areas: the secondary education level and through the workplace. The government funds the province's Adult Learning Centres where mature learners who, after being out of school for a time, can return and use PLAR to obtain their Mature Grade 12 diploma. PLAR is widely practiced at the ALCs and strongly supported with policies, procedures and training. In partnership with business and labour organizations, the government has also supported industry and workplace-based PLAR (WPLAR). WPLAR works with employers, unions, industry groups, self-regulating professions, trainers and educators to apply PLAR to the workforce. Some examples of where WPLAR is practiced are Magellan (Bristol) Aerospace, Boeing, New Flyer Industries, and Manitoba Hydro.

For more than 20 years, Manitoba has had an active PLAR practitioner network – the Manitoba Prior Learning and Assessment Network (MPLAN) that advocates for PLAR through professional development activities, networking, and sharing resources.

The Drivers of PLAR

Two key themes or drivers of PLAR underlie the tension between social and economic priorities (Cameron, 2011; Gallacher & Fuetrie, 2003). The first driver is the belief that education and training systems must be flexible enough to enable people to engage and re-engage with learning at various points throughout their careers if modern societies and economies are to develop – as part of the knowledge economy and globalization. They must also be relevant to the changing labour needs of the workforce and to the needs of a society and economy where traditional forms of knowledge are, in many cases, being replaced by new ones. This leads to the argument that new forms of knowledge should be recognized and have a much more central role in the post-secondary sector. PLAR can be a critical mechanism for improving pathways to training and work in a setting where a shortage of skilled workers is a major concern for government and the broader economy (Smith & Clayton, 2009; Spencer, 2005).

The second driver of PLAR emerges from concerns related to access, equity and social inclusion. PLAR is seen as having the potential to act as a bridge between informal, experiential types of knowledge and more formal, academic types of learning (Morrissey et al., 2008). However, such a role depends on ensuring that PLAR processes are more accessible to learners of all types of backgrounds. There is a strong argument, therefore, for suggesting that in order to facilitate processes of social inclusion PLAR must be made more widely available to those with few or no formal qualifications and in more formal academic institutions (Cleary et al., 2002). This suggests that PLAR has potential to play a unique role in strategies of access and social inclusion. These two themes in relation to PLAR are explored more fully below.

Workforce Participation and Economic Competitiveness

In knowledge-intensive economies and societies, nations strive to gain a competitive edge and advance societal progress by developing and sustaining a skilled workforce. Like many developed nations, Canada's general and labour force populations are rapidly aging, lifespans among older adults are increasing, and birth rates have fallen. The labour force participation rates for adults is expected to fall from 67% in 2010 to around 60% by 2031, which will be the lowest level since the 1970's (before the increase in female labour force participation) (Martel et al., 2011). Furthermore, the influx of young people into many critical occupations has slowed, while the demand for highly skilled workers is rising (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2014, 2015; Simon, 2013).

Due to the structural changes in the labour force, Canada is likely to become more reliant on people who go through non-traditional school-to-work pathways. Unless Canada's learning recognition systems stay ahead of these trends, Grant (2015) argues that there is likely to be an increase in the number of Canadians experiencing learning recognition challenges in the future. These labour force changes, combined with strong employer demand for skills are likely to place more pressure on learning recognition systems such as PLAR. In addition, there is need for greater coordination and partnerships between employers and Canada's education and training systems (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2015; Conference Board of Canada, 2016).

In 2001, a Report by the Conference Board of Canada titled *Brain Gain* (Bloom & Grant, 2001) stated that a major learning recognition gap existed, presenting obstacles to career advancement for unrecognized learners resulting in a significant cost to Canada. According to the Report, three groups would gain the most if their learning was recognized, credentialed, accepted and rewarded through work: immigrants, people with prior learning, and transferees

between post-secondary institutions. The Bloom and Grant (2001) study estimated that if the learning gap was eliminated through the recognition of prior learning, it could generate an additional $4.1 billion to $5.9 billion in income annually. The study further estimated that more than 540,000 Canadians stood to benefit for an average personal gain of $8,000 to $12,000 each year.

In 2015, the Conference Board of Canada provided an updated analysis to determine whether Canada's learning recognition system had improved over time (Grant, 2015). From the analysis, it was estimated that the Canadian economy would stand to gain between $13.4 billion to $17.1 billion through better employed human capital resulting from improvements to learning recognition. Additionally, it is estimated that more than 844,000 Canadians are affected by learning recognition challenges, reflecting an increase of more than 300,000 Canadians as reported in 2001. Furthermore, an overhaul of Canada's learning recognition system for credentials could boost the annual incomes of those affected by an average of $15,000 to $20,000 per annum.

In comparison with the 2001 estimates, the 2015 Report concluded that since then, little progress has been made, and that the problem of learning recognition has become significantly more severe resulting in stranded human capital. Both reports emphasized that PLAR should be used as a means to improve Canada's dwindling labour supply. However, insufficient PLAR capacity remains an ongoing challenge among post-secondary institutions, especially at universities.

Grant (2015) argues that learning recognition is critical to determining how and whether human capital is employed. If learning is not recognized, then even if a person has knowledge

and skills, he or she is likely to be underemployed. When human capital is underemployed, further development and skills may very well atrophy, leading to *brain waste.* In this context, unrecognized learning is like stranded capital leading to lower returns to human capital and lost output for the economy. Improvements to the learning recognition system are a way of unlocking the stranded capital, referred to as *brain gain*.

Massification, Access and Social Inclusion

Martin Trow's (1974) conceptualization of mass higher education or universal access is a global phenomenon and has contributed to greater social mobility for a growing segment of the population, expansion of the knowledge economy, increasing skill levels on a global scale, and an increasingly diversified higher education system (Altbach et al., 2010). Participation in higher education has expanded exponentially throughout the world during the last several decades. The shift to massification and universal access means making it possible for more individuals to enroll in higher education. Access opens up post-secondary education to young people from a variety of social class and education backgrounds, to students from rural backgrounds and to students who are the first in their families to study at post-secondary institutions. Massification has transformed higher education worldwide. However, it has become increasingly apparent that expansion does not necessarily include all segments of the population (Marginson, 2011; Pitman, 2015; Scheutze & Slowey, 2002). In other words, greater equity does not naturally result from greater access. In spite of many policy initiatives in recent years, broader post-secondary participation has not benefitted all sectors of society equally.

The reality of post-secondary education in an era of access, combined with fiscal constraints, and ever rising costs is that on a global scale, inequality within post-secondary

education is impossible to avoid (Altbach et al., 2010). In the US, early evidence of the inequality cycle was revealed in the path-breaking study (Coleman, 1966) that examined the availability of education opportunities in American public schools as well as factors associated with student educational outcomes. The *Equality of Educational Opportunity Report*, otherwise known as the "*Coleman Report*" mandated by *The Civil Rights Act* of 1964 sought answers to two main questions, 1) how extensive is racial segregation within US schools? and 2) how adversely does that segregation affect education opportunities for African Americans? (Hanushek, 2016).

Despite Coleman's (1966) ground-breaking work and the subsequent impact on education research and policy, the central focus of the report: the development of an education system that provides equal opportunity for all groups and especially for racial minorities has not been realized. Persistent gaps in achievement, academic attainment, earnings, crime, poverty and extensive school segregation that remain provide ample evidence that equality of opportunity remains elusive (Rivkin, 2016).

Canada has one of the highest levels of per capita educational attainment in the world (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2017). However, accessibility continues to be one of the most dominant policy themes in Canadian post-secondary education (Fisher, Rubenson, Jones & Shanahan, 2009; Fisher, Rubenson, Shanahan & Trottier, 2014; Kirby, 2011). As in other jurisdictions, the participation levels of certain populations of Canadians (indigenous populations, adult learners, immigrants, and people with disabilities) (Berger, Motte & Parkin, 2009; Jones & Field, 2013; Kirby, 2009, 2011; Ogilvie, 2011), are well below the universal population participation level as suggested by Trow (1974), i.e., over 50%,

and continue to reflect disparities and inequities of access whether due to geographic location, lack of social capital (first generation learners, financial issues), or other disparities.

PLAR as a strategy to sustain the workforce

The Centre for Study of Education and Work at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UofT) conducted surveys on the work and lifelong learning of adults in Canada. These surveys included the 1998 *New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL) Survey* (Livingstone, 1999) and the *Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) Survey* conducted in 2004 (Livingstone, 2007), and in 2010 (Livingstone, 2012). The three surveys obtained basic profiles of adults' self-reported learning activities, including formal schooling, further education courses, and informal learning. Based on the results of the surveys, the vast majority of adults spent substantial amounts of time regularly in informal learning pursuits related to paid and unpaid work, as well as general interests, leading Livingstone (2012) to conclude that "the iceberg metaphor remains an apt reflection of the massively greater extent of informal adult learning" (p. 60). The 'iceberg' notation refers to the potentially significant, submerged portion of unrecognized learning.

The NALL and WALL surveys revealed widespread interest among adults in enrolling in further education if they could get formal acknowledgement for their prior learning experiences through PLAR (Livingstone, 2012; Livingstone, Raykov & Turner, 2005). There was also strong interest in obtaining credit through PLAR among those who faced barriers to participating in adult education courses e.g., too costly, lack of time, unavailability, and family responsibilities. Livingstone and Raykov (2013) concluded that there was clearly a large unmet

demand for further education courses in Canada and also a strong interest among those with unmet demands to use PLAR.

Livingstone and Myers (2007) argue that the systematic use of PLAR has remained largely marginal in the post-secondary sector, with only a small fraction of those who expressed interest in PLAR being able to use the process to gain advanced credit at Canadian education institutions. From a return on investment perspective, the authors claim that unless programs and services are put in place to support learners, the "human resource wastage" that results among individuals who may well have the requisite skills and knowledge, but lack the confidence to identify and articulate them, will remain excessive.

An important consideration is to promote more active labour market participation of those who are under-represented in the labour market, such as those who did not enter directly from secondary school, are not dominant social groups in terms of gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnic background, and/or are not studying in a full-time setting. A growing trend is the number of more mature-age students in search of a first degree after some time in the workforce, many of whom engage in learning while working (Wong, 2014). Within this context, the key driver for PLAR relates to human capital policy that attempts to address rates of workforce participation, an aging workforce and economic competitiveness within a global economy.

Another demographic reality facing Canada is the growing importance of immigration as a source of skilled-working age people who can replenish the labour force. Despite an immigrant population that is better educated than Canada's domestic population, Canada has not capitalized on the talents of its immigrant labour supply (Conrad, 2008a; Grant, 2015, Guo, 2009; Guo & Andersson, 2006; Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Reitz, 2001, Reitz, Curtis & Elrick,

2014). Being an immigrant and having a high level of education puts someone at risk of having unrecognized learning. In addition, immigrants comprise 75% of the more than 844,000 Canadians referenced earlier (Grant, 2015), and stand to benefit the most: potentially between $10.1 billion and $12.7 billion more in annual income (El-Assal & Fields, 2017).

The lack of adequate foreign credential recognition and a requirement to often repeat advanced programs successfully completed elsewhere in order to qualify for jobs in Canada are among the most significant barriers to better social and economic integration (Buzdugan & Halli, 2009; Elgersma, 2012; Moss, 2014). There is need to grow Canada's labour force through immigration and PLAR is a way of supporting the portability of skills and knowledge. This topic is explored further in Chapter 3.

PLAR as a strategy to facilitate access and social inclusion

Post-secondary education plays an important role in the persistence of inequality, and access to appropriate education provision is key to breaking down barriers or marginalization, and therefore to social inclusion (Reisberg & Watson, 2011). From a social justice perspective, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is considered an important means to alleviate marginalization and to promote equity by opening up learning pathways to formal education to those who have traditionally been excluded (Peruniak & Powell, 2007; Smith & Clayton, 2009).

Morrissey et al. (2008) illustrate the challenges that under-represented groups face in becoming full participants in Canada's economic and social life by metaphorically comparing it to the crossing of a "formidable gulf – a deep wide river, with many hazards" (p. 4), that might require building bridges in order to cross the gulf. The goal is to enable these individuals and

groups to “reach the ‘other side’ of the river that separates them from opportunities for full participation” (p. 5). Bridging the gulf or “participation gap”, speaks to a clear role for PLAR, and is premised on the idea that people learn valuable skills and knowledge through life and work experiences, as well as through formal education and training.

PLAR is a powerful mechanism for facilitating access to education, and progress within education, and has potential for valuing different types of learning and different forms of knowledge in a way that other education processes do not (Pitman, 2009). For this reason, PLAR might be of particular interest to people traditionally excluded from higher education, and to people who are returning to higher education after having been away from the education system for some time. The potential for valuing different types of learning and forms of knowledge is what makes PLAR important in relation to strategies of access and social inclusion (Cameron, 2006, 2011; Cleary et al., 2002; Peruniak & Powell, 2007; Werquin, 2010; Wong, 2014).

While the international approach to PLAR is framed largely within a discourse of individual empowerment, growth and self-esteem, RPL in South Africa at a policy level, is framed philosophically within a discourse of access, equity, and redressing of past injustices and inequalities (Castle & Attwood, 2001; Cretchley & Castle, 2001; de Graaff, 2014; Kistan, 2002; Motaung, Fraser & Howie, 2008).

RPL in South Africa is, on one hand, driven by moral and political imperatives to broaden the participation in higher education of historically disadvantaged adults, many excluded from quality education and a range of occupations in the apartheid years. On the other hand, RPL is a response to economic pressures to develop and manage the knowledge and skills of the

workforce in the interest of global competitiveness (Castle & Attwood, 2001; Osman, 2004a, 2004b; Osman & Castle, 2001, 2002; Van Rooy, 2002).

The *National Qualifications Framework (NQF)* traces its origins back to the labour movement of the early 1970s and the need to restructure the formal education and training system in response to worker and student demands for change. The responsibility for the development and implementation of the NQF was allocated to the *South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)* in 2008. This responsibility included RPL policy-making and quality assurance advice among a number of functions (Samuels, 2016).

As Samuels (2016) notes, SAQA revised its RPL policy in 2013 to define a number of priorities for the resourcing, quality assurance, effective delivery and coordination of RPL by different stakeholders in the system. Together, these clauses reflect a new policy environment that better understands the complex knowledge boundaries and learning pathways of NQF and its sub-frameworks. At the same time, the new policy helps to create the enabling conditions under which provision of RPL programmes and services can make learning and recognition more possible and more inclusive for people in South Africa (Samuels, 2016).

In Canada, the principles and practices of PLAR have been largely described as practitioner-driven with intermittent interest and support from government, policymakers, post-secondary institutions and agencies (Morrissey et al., 2008; Van Kleef, 2011; Wong, 2014). In spite of more than 30 years of innovation, exemplary practice and positive outcomes, PLAR still lacks the strategic and sustained public policy commitment and support needed to enable more people who have traditionally been marginalized and under-represented to participate fully in further education and training, employment and community engagement (Conrad 2014;

Morrissey et al., 2008). PLAR initiatives lie at the very heart of more creative and effective ways to bridge the key participation gaps. However, PLAR is a means to facilitate access to formal learning associated with credentials that has traditionally been under the authority of closed circles of academics (Wong, 2011).

Cleary et al. (2002) argue that in order to facilitate processes of social inclusion, PLAR has to be more widely available in formal academic institutions. Furthermore, higher education institutions need to review and revise their strategies for widening access and look at ways of using PLAR more effectively. If the potential of PLAR is to be realized in processes of social inclusion, the barrier between PLAR and academic knowledge has to be broken down and universities have to reconsider ways in which PLAR can be used to access or obtain credit from programs of study (Scheutze & Slowey, 2002).

According to Cleary et al. (2002), a "cultural shift" is required "in which experiential learning comes to be more highly valued than it is currently in western societies" (p. 17). In addition, if PLAR is to be closely linked to processes of social inclusion, it needs to be operating at a level that is more easily accessible to those with few or no qualifications. Morrissey et al. (2008) stress the importance of exploring how the potential of PLAR can act as a bridge in view of today's social and economic turbulence. As such, "the task of making successful life transitions across the breadth and depth of our society is of paramount concern if Canada is to maintain its standard of living and quality of life – now and for the foreseeable future" (p.12).

PLAR as a Contested Concept

PLAR is about providing a means for individuals, employers, and education providers to recognize, articulate, and demonstrate prior learning by building upon knowledge and skills that

people have acquired experientially in order to fill gaps that need to be addressed. A common thread in much of the PLAR literature however, is the perception that PLAR has the potential to compromise the quality of academic standards (Conrad, 2010; Joosten-ten Brinke, Sluijsmans, & Jochems, 2009; Pitman & Vidovitch, 2013; Wheelahan et al., 2003). Peters (2005) argues that PLAR is problematic in the academic context because the predominant perception of an institution of higher learning is a place where people come to learn, or to be taught, rather than one where people bring their existing knowledge for recognition or sharing.

PLAR challenges and extends the prevailing discourse on learning that focuses almost exclusively on formal education and training (Morrisey et al., 2008). These challenges create inherent tensions across institutional beliefs that impact policies, supports, and practices. PLAR challenges the role of the institution and shifts attention toward the recognition, validation and credentialing of university level learning rather than to the institution as a "fount of knowledge" (Travers, 2013). PLAR forces the negotiation of two worlds – the world of experience and the world of academia (Osman & Castle, 2001, 2002) and raises complex issues around knowledge, learning, qualifications and power (Harris & Wihak, 2011). In addition, some academics may be extremely rigid in maintaining the academic culture and rigour, and believe that PLAR could devalue their own qualifications (Pitman & Vidovitch, 2012, 2013; Singh, 2011).

Thomas (1998, 2000) argues that PLAR is an instrument of liberation, or a "quiet revolution", because it highlights the difference between learning and education, and challenges the historic distinctions between formal and non-formal education. PLAR acknowledges the creation of "important" knowledge outside the education system and calls into question the previously exclusive right of a closed system to control the learning environment.

Perhaps most importantly, PLAR forces us to question our assumptions about *knowledge* itself. For example, Mandell (2000) asks, what counts as learning? What is valuable knowledge? Who has what knowledge? How do we determine when something is learned? How and why is knowledge constructed in the way that it is? Traditionally, the academy has monopolized answers to these questions about knowledge (Armsby, Costley & Garnett, 2006). Mandell (2000) argues that one reason PLAR is viewed with suspicion is that those who have questioned the very notion of evaluating PLAR have correctly recognized its truly radical nature.

Michelson (1996) maintains that not all forms of learning are valued in the higher education context:

> University-based APEL is defended on the grounds that it does *not* challenge academic claims either to privileged knowledge or to epistemological authority: it posits academic knowledge as the norm around which judgements of inclusion and exclusion can be written; extends the academy's traditional gate-keeping function of barring alternative cultures of knowledge and calibrates the legitimacy of students' knowledge according to samenesses and correspondences (p. 193).

PLAR therefore, has become part of the power struggle between different forms of knowledge, where learning situated in a particular context may be in Michelson's (2006) words, "disembodied and depersonalized" (p. 144) in another knowledge context. These concepts are explored further in Chapter 3.

Implementation of PLAR across Jurisdictions

PLAR has gained wide acceptance as a worldwide movement in countries such as Australia, France, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK and the US (Spencer, 2005). Many of these countries have PLAR processes that developed in relation to National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) as a basis for assessing skills and knowledge against performance criteria within the qualifications frameworks (Dyson & Keating, 2005; Gallacher & Feutrie, 2003; Werquin, 2010).

The structure of these frameworks differs considerably among countries and across institutions (Singh, 2011). However, they provide at a minimum, a set of parameters within which stakeholders can understand the meaning of PLAR's complex terminology and processes (Conrad, 2008b). Cleary et al. (2002) found that the lack of a national framework in some European countries has meant that APEL processes have not had a high profile in education and as a result, funding of APEL initiatives has been neglected. In addition, these frameworks have created debates about whether RPL is about 'adapting to the system' or 'changing the system' (Harris, 2006).

Australia introduced RPL as part of a national training reform agenda that included the introduction of a competency-based vocational education and training system, an Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) and training packages. As RPL policy and practice has evolved, it has become more central to the vocational education and training (VET), impacting human capital and workforce development policy and initiatives. RPL is a requirement of any offering of accredited training that is embedded in the AQF. The AQF locates school, work-

based and academic qualifications at all levels in a single framework that is recognized across Australia and internationally (Cameron, 2006; Hargreaves, 2006).

In the US, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) is an advocacy organization that has identified PLA policies and procedures as one of the key elements in creating adult-friendly higher education institutions. According to Travers (2013), PLA is coming into its own, becoming more widely recognized and accepted. More than half of all states have at least one agency or entity that has instituted policies that support or encourage adoption and use of PLAR in higher education (Travers, 2012a). In her retrospective of PLA after 40 years of implementation, Travers (2012a) finds that PLA is "no longer the stepchild cast off into basement offices but is front and centre in many institutions and national agendas" (p. 46).

In some cases, higher education institutions treat PLA programming as an add-on, a separate office from faculty and academic processes that students are either referred to or find on their own. In other cases, PLA is fully integrated into programming in which faculty advise and assist students through the process (Travers, 2012b). Travers (2012b) concludes that marginalized practices such as PLA are beginning to be identified as good practices as research begins to show impacts on student success.

In Canada, where education falls under provincial jurisdiction, the implementation of PLAR has been limited in scope, largely driven through innovations of individual post-secondary institutions, especially colleges (Wong, 2014) and generally associated with the adult education sector (Blower, 2000; Conrad, 2014). Van Kleef (2014) has argued that a general assumption seems to be that PLAR is largely a pedagogical "tool" or device and it is up to post secondary

institutions to determine the purpose, process, outcomes and impacts of PLAR. Additionally, because Canadian education systems are based in provincial jurisdiction, there is an absence of a national framework in Canada with consequent networks of practitioners through which to initiate and develop an inclusive PLAR system that academics are familiar with and supportive of that has made it difficult to implement (Conrad, 2008b, 2010, 2014; Van Kleef, 2011). In general, the consideration of the legitimacy and implementation of PLAR processes has been uneven in post secondary institutions across provinces, with greater acceptance among colleges and more resistance from universities (Conrad, 2014; Wong, 1997, 2001, 2011, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Recognition of prior learning has manifested itself initially through "mature student" designation because of the implied experience in the field of practice, possibly with experiences in the professional systems of practice, such as individuals who have served as teaching assistants in Inclusive Special Education classrooms or financial aid workers in the social welfare of families who aspire to become social work professionals. PLAR can be seen as a practice of acknowledging understanding and skill development in a field of practice. In academic fields of study where social service planning and program delivery are filling demands in legally regulated professional activities that have been under served, e.g., social work, there has been a steady, growing recognition and acceptance among post-secondary institutions. As understanding the identification of competencies and skills through PLAR has begun to "invade" the PSE systems, it has evolved differently in the college and university systems.

The literature suggests that PLAR has been broadly implemented in most colleges across the country. This would seem reasonable since the role of the college has historically been part

of a pre-socialization into university necessary for immigrants and underclass participation as required for massification and universalization (Trow, 1974). Practice-oriented programming could thus be developed in the college systems until they evolved into university colleges or technical institutes through which they could become a center of educational development with a life of its own. The development of this function in PSE of colleges has probably evolved to accommodate the need for re-socialization and competency development as with shifting demographics and socio-economic needs.

Prior experiences of adult students through PLAR could be recognized and given validation so that the adult learning, development and identity could be acknowledged and individual development conserved and transformed rather like a house renovation rather than a build from scratch. So it is possibly because of the role of colleges in adult learning and greater focus on workplace-based training that PLAR continues to be sporadic, fragmented and marginalized at universities (Conrad, 2010; Spencer & Kelly, 2005; Wong, 2011).

It should not be surprising then that the uptake of PLAR at universities remains low (Kennedy, 2003; Wihak, 2006, 2007), and faculty "resistance" is cited as a major challenge (Wong 1997, 2001, 2014). Research suggests that the exploration of PLAR from a university area of study perspective may be a fruitful area for research (Wihak, 2007, 2014; Wong, 2014). Addressing the core issue of marginalization of PLAR in terms of development and implementation across university areas of study forms the basis for this study.

Consequently, it is important to understand the utilization of PLAR within the university context by exploring the perspectives of those who have responsibility for and work directly in the PLAR field. These PLAR "role-players" include administrators, faculty, academics,

instructors, practitioners and assessors. Gaining an understanding of these factors can provide important information on how, why, and in what ways PLAR is considered and implemented within the university. Conducting this case study may be helpful in finding ways to understand further the potential use of PLAR in the university to help meet social and economic priorities, as well as to bridge the participation gap between different types of learners and learning in this evolving institutional setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to advance our knowledge about PLAR within the university setting. The study is designed to explore some of the elements of PLAR policy and practice identified in the literature (Frick, Bitzer and Leibowitz, 2007a; 2007b) through a case study of a single Canadian university. These policy elements include the conceptualization of PLAR, purposes and processes, methods of assessment, and institutional support for PLAR. The study draws on the conceptual framework of professional capital as a lens with which to identify elements of PLAR policy development and practice. These policy elements are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Research Questions

The research questions provide a framework for the study, giving it relevance, direction and coherence during the course of the investigation (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002). The data collection instruments were designed to answer the research questions and provide the basis for data analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006).

The over-arching research question guiding this study is how much of a factor, if any, does PLAR policy and practice play at the university? The following research questions were

proposed to tap into elements of PLAR policy and practice from different vantage points, through the perceptions of those most directly involved.

The three research questions are as follows:

1. What is the role of PLAR by area of study at the University?
2. What are the general perceptions of PLAR?
3. How can the Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) conceptual framework of professional capital provide a lens with which to more clearly see, analyze and draw conclusions about how PLAR is utilized by area of study?

Significance of the Study

PLAR seems to be a practice that permits the assessment of the potential of professional development of students entering the system that have experience in their chosen area of study and want to have that experience acknowledged. The development of PLAR in PSE has been to move students through the process from being practitioners in a field in which they now expect to become professionally, formally recognized and credentialed to become certified for practice and employment, for example in nursing, pharmacy, social work and dietetics. Thus PLAR can be seen as a means to enter into a process with personal experience, both formal and informal, to become bona fide professionals that can result in participation in the PSE system as administrators, instructors, faculty, staff, etc.

While studies describing the power of professional capital in the public school system is discussed in Chapter 2, studies that explore the elements of PLAR policy and practice at the post-secondary level as a way of understanding how professional capital is generated were not found. It is expected that this study will provide valuable insight into the dynamics of PLAR

that are practiced at the university from the perspectives of key role-players who are charged with finding new ways to support the development of individuals that can demonstrate professional capital capacity. In addition, the study has potential to advance our knowledge of professional capital within the context of PLAR in university settings. If there is such potential, why is it not used more than it is?

Research into PLAR policy within the university context can provide valuable insight into prevailing discourses of quality and equity. In their analysis of RPL policy at Australian universities using Bourdieu's social capital theory, Pitman and Vidovitch (2012) found that a key advantage to adopting a social capital analysis of policies and practices of higher education is the potential for it to reveal the motivations and intentions hidden behind institutional policy rhetoric:

> By highlighting the flow and consequences of academic capital in the field of higher education, hierarchies of knowledge/power can be exposed. This is crucial to a critical analysis of higher education policy, especially where there is a desire to make education systems more equitable and inclusive (p. 764).

Pitman and Vidovitch (2012) found that universities are required to address agendas of both equity and quality, but these are widely viewed as discourses in conflict. The result is a type of "cognitive dissonance", or a belief in the importance of both constructs in higher education, but a belief that one (quality) comes at the expense of the other (equity). These findings have important implications for how role-players within a university setting perceive elements of PLAR policy.

The scholarly research on PLAR in Canada is scant, especially concerning universities (Conrad, 2010, Wihak, 2006, 2007, 2011). A significant amount of PLAR work has been survey research, policy-driven, and government funded or commissioned, or "grey literature", for example, (Aarts et al., 1999, 2003; Morrissey et al., 2008; Wihak, 2006), generally used to improve PLAR practices or to develop organizational policies (Van Kleef, 2011; Wihak, 2014). In addition, numerous institutional studies have been conducted that generally take place on the periphery or completely outside the scholarly community (Wihak, 2011).

A search of doctoral theses on PLAR research in Canada within the last 20 years, with the exception of Quebec (see Moss, 2018) revealed at least four studies have been conducted (Blinkhorn, 1999; Lordly, 2013; Moss, 2007; Smith, 2002). A master's thesis based in Manitoba was conducted on the implementation of PLAR in the Canadian apprenticeship system (Riffell, 2004). None of these studies looked specifically at PLAR from a university perspective. In fact, most PLAR scholarly research over the last one to two decades in Canada has been dominated by only a few prominent scholars, including Conrad, Peruniak, Van Kleef, Wihak, and Wong.

In her *State of the Field Review* of PLAR, Wihak (2006) surveyed national and international empirical research related to PLAR to determine what is known about policy and practice in the field. Among the research gaps identified was the need for more PLAR research in colleges and universities, particularly faculty attitudes toward PLAR implementation, as well as PLAR assessment methods, training and quality assurance concerns. Based on the results of another study on the availability and accessibility of PLAR on Canadian university websites, Wihak (2007) suggested that further development of PLAR in the university sector can be assisted by in-depth case studies of PLAR implementation and current practice at those institutions.

This study contributes to the understanding of PLAR based on the perspectives of key role-players (participants). The findings of this study may be systemically instructive as to why PLAR has not been generally accepted within the university context. It may also provide insight as to how PLAR can be more widely implemented as a legitimate learning and assessment process, and in turn, be of benefit to more learners. The results of this research could be of interest to the PLAR community, government policy-makers, post-secondary institution faculty, student learning centers, administration, etc.

Summary

PLAR is a complex and contested concept evolving in the mists of a sea change in post-secondary institutions that are globalizing, internationalizing, philosophically shifting, attempting to keep up technologically, balancing demographic and monetary challenges to survival, among other things. PLAR in practice becomes a site of considerable tension between competing social and economic priorities and the capacity for institutional change. Although often characterized by a myriad of definitions and terminology, PLAR has strong connections to existing experiential learning that adults have as part of their development (Belzer, 2004; Thomas, 2000). From its early association with adult education, PLAR has continued to evolve, and has received intermittent government attention and financial support. In the province of Manitoba, PLAR remains a strong factor in the colleges, the Adult Learning Centres, MPLAN and WPLAR in gaining entry to PSE systems.

Insight into the evolving federal position of the relationship of education to work can be found in the progression of ministry titles of federal government programming around the relationship of education, employment and human resources. When Employment and Immigration Canada became Human Resources Development Canada in 1993

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Resources_Development_Canada], there was a recognition that human resource development was the key to employment generally of a First World Nation. Since then, there has been a progression to Employment and Social Development Canada/Service Canada [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Employment_and_Social_Development_Canada], and since 2015, to Employment, Workforce and Labour [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minister_of_Employment,_Workforce,_and_Labour].

In their ministerial re-organization and activities, the federal government demonstrates the linkages expected between economic well being, individual development, education and other forms of social development and support. It is this formal organization of power and resources that demonstrates federal expectations of educative processes. When there is misalignment between levels of intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions, there can be loss of capacity and power of such systems to productive ends.

Consequently, there can be significant economic consequences for failing to address unrecognized learning or capital that individuals moving between economic sectors experience but in Canada, particularly among the immigrant population who are screened for their human capital potential as a part of their immigration process (El-Assal & Fields, 2017; Li, 2001; Reitz, 2001, 2005; Reitz et al., 2014). In spite of the efforts of post-secondary institutions to achieve massification and universal access in North America and around the globe, the distribution of benefits across social sectors have not been equal.

PLAR could institute change as a key driver for addressing current issues in workforce participation, an aging population and economic competitiveness. PLAR could be a means to

recognize Canadian experience and development as well as the experience and development of those with foreign credentials. Concurrently, PLAR is a mechanism for achieving access to and widening participation in post-secondary education. PLAR has strong social inclusion and social justice undertones, particularly in jurisdictions like South Africa where PLAR became a change-making practice, and a form of restitution and healing to rectify some of the injustices of apartheid (Kindred, 2018), and a means of achieving greater equity and redress for those historically excluded from educational opportunities (Cooper, Harris & Jones, 2016).

The implementation of PLAR has experienced varying degrees of success across the globe, with greater success associated with the existence of national qualifications frameworks in some countries, a long history of successful implementation in the US, and generally mixed results in Canada. PLAR is a contested concept because it challenges the prevailing discourse on learning that focuses exclusively on formal education and training. PLAR questions our assumptions about what counts as learning, and what is valuable knowledge. The chapter concludes with the statement of the research problem, the purpose, the research questions, and the significance of the study.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of seven chapters, the first being this introduction. The next three chapters capture the conceptual framework for the study, the literature review, and the methodology. The findings and discussion are presented in the subsequent two chapters. The final chapter discusses the limitations, implications for theory, practice and research, and the conclusions.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework. Professional capital provides the conceptual framework for the dissertation. Chapter 2 outlines the origin and the three components (human capital, social capital, decisional capital) of the concept and its relevance to an emerging body of research. This section provides a rationale for applying the professional capital construct as a conceptual framework for PLAR.

Chapter 3: Literature Review. In Chapter 3, the literature review includes a critical analysis of elements of PLAR policy and practice to provide the context for the study, and the basis for the interview questions. The chapter presents various approaches and models for describing and categorizing PLAR. Other topics include PLAR and the hierarchies of knowledge and power, and an overview of PLAR research within the Canadian university context. The last section of the chapter explores PLAR and the recognition of foreign credentials, and the role and function of the learning recognition marketplace and stakeholders.

Chapter 4: Methodology. Chapter 4 provides a rationale for selecting a qualitative case study approach. Data collection methods of document analysis and interviews are discussed. Chapter 4 provides details pertaining to data collection and analysis, the site selection and description, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations. Additionally, the methodology chapter presents a number of validity and reliability strategies to add rigour and credibility to the study.

Chapter 5: Findings. Chapter 5 presents the study's findings. An inductive approach was used to analyze relevant documentation and the interviews. The three research questions were answered through the analysis and interpretation of relevant documentation and the

development of themes and subthemes. To support the analysis and thematic ideas, direct quotations from the interviews reflected a range of participant perspectives.

Chapter 6: Discussion. Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of the study using a thematic approach. Research studies are provided to support the analysis and interpretation of themes and subthemes.

Chapter 7: Limitations, Implications, and Conclusions. The final Chapter in the dissertation discusses the limitations of the study, the implications for theory, practice, and further research, and the conclusions.

CHAPTER 2 –CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter introduces the conceptual framework of professional capital for the dissertation. It presents the main ideas and interpretations underlying the concept and explores the perspectives of key authors in the field. The chapter discusses literature showing how the framework applies in different research contexts. A rationale is provided for applying professional capital as a lens to investigate PLAR in a post-secondary context.

The study is informed by the concept of professional capital based on the ideas in the book, *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School* (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). According to the authors, professional capital is about transforming the future of public education and the teaching profession "through a new strategy that harnesses the commitment and capabilities of many" (p. xi). The concept of capital is explored in terms of its importance for professional work, professional capacity, and professional effectiveness.

Largely based on the state of the public school system in the US and to some extent, in the UK, professional capital is grounded in the idea that teaching is at a crossroads: it is hard and technically difficult, and needs to be taken in a radically new direction. Teaching requires "technical knowledge, high levels of education, strong practice within schools and continuous improvement over time that is undertaken collaboratively, and that calls for the development of wise judgement" (p. 37). The power of professional capital is about how to create collective professional responsibility without degenerating into pervasive groupthink or "contrived collegiality". It is about how to reconstruct and re-culture the teaching profession, confront core

problems, present and develop clear alternatives, and turn those alternatives into an energizing reality.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) maintain that the business capital approach to the US teaching profession and the public school system has not worked, where the primary purpose of education is to "serve as a big market for investment in technology, curriculum and testing materials, and schools themselves as for-profit enterprises" (p. 2). With greater de-regulation, increased market competition, fast track teacher training programs, the disinvestment in public education and lack of attention to the nature and quality of initial teacher preparation and absence of concern with teacher retention reflects the "nightmare scenario of American urban education" (p. 39) that is badly in need of reform.

The professional capital that used to exist for teachers and teacher preparation in the US is being stripped away. It is the "obsessions with numerical data, technical gadgetry, and narrow test-driven goals instead of and above everything else, that are dysfunctional" (p.11). Countries such as Finland, Singapore and South Korea are singled out for their high performing school systems. In comparison with these countries, the problems Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) identify in the US, especially in the inner cities, include the following: a generally negative perception of the teaching profession, less than ideal working conditions and support for teachers, low student achievement scores, high staff turnover, the need for better metrics and measurement systems, the failure of merit pay (based on student test scores) as a way to improve practice, declining morale and job satisfaction, and cutbacks in public funding.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue for the need to transform the teaching profession by building professional capital across the education system. As envisioned by the authors, building

professional capital is an opportunity and a responsibility for everyone – from supporting and working with individuals to transforming an entire system. Whole system change, the authors contend, is "not a kind of magic". Rather, "it involves and absolutely requires individual and collective acts of investment in an inspirational vision and a coherent set of actions that build everyone's capability and keep everyone learning as they continue to move forward" (p. xvii). A rationale is provided later for applying professional capital to PLAR, but first this chapter presents the main ideas underlying the concept, and discusses literature showing how the conceptual framework applies in different research contexts.

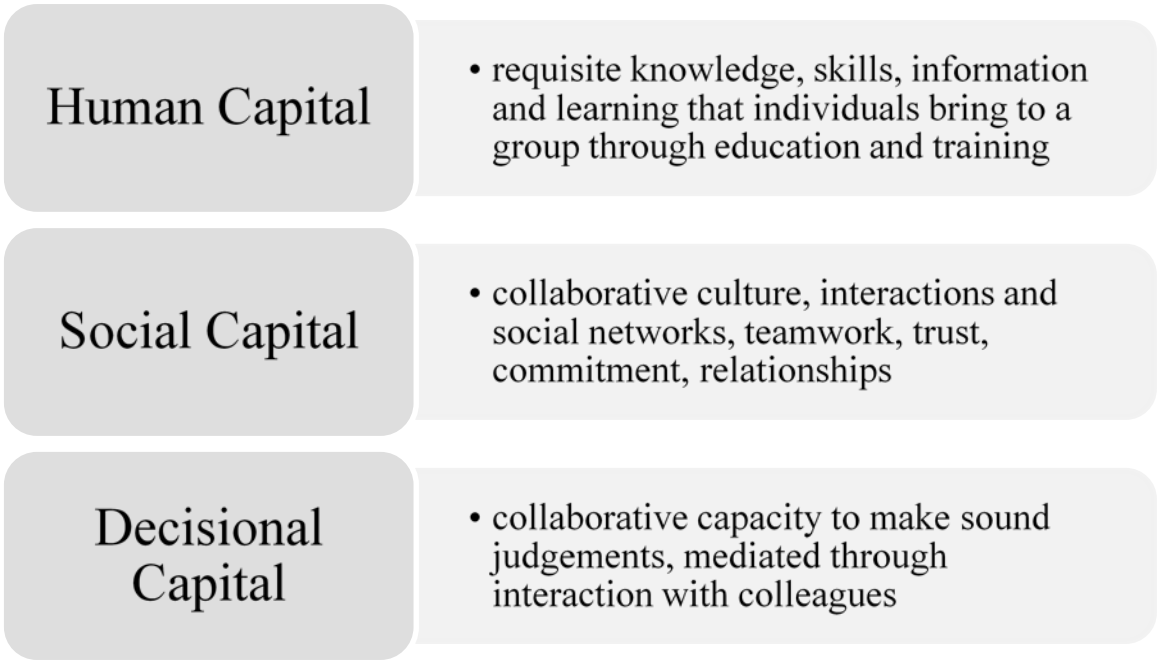
Three Components of Professional Capital

Professional capital (PC) is described as the confluence, or systematic development and integration of three kinds of capital: human capital (HC) (the talent of individuals), social capital (SC) (the collaborative power of the groups), and decisional capital (DC) (decision-making capacity) as represented in Figure 1 below (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). It is the "presence and product of these three forms of capital that is essential for transforming the teaching profession into a force for the common good" (p. 88). Professional capital is essential for effective teaching and is more essential in the most challenging education circumstances. Effective teaching is a product of the three types of capital amplifying each other as expressed in the formula: PC =f (HC, SC, DC) (see Figure 1).

Professional capital involves many different concepts with implications for professional development including developing professional learning and leadership, instructional practice, and "managing up" (p. 160). It is a cornerstone concept that addresses topics of collective responsibility, about supporting and working with others, to transforming an entire system of

education. It is about teaching like a pro, being a change agent, creating high quality and high performance in all professional practice including teaching and is considered vital for the future of the teaching profession and of society. Professional capital makes use of reflective practice that leads to improvements and interventions that benefit students, transforming the psyche and efficacy of the entire profession (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

Figure 1: Professional Capital Components



Source: Hargreaves and Fullan (2012)

The study of the interrelations between human capital, social capital and decisional capital is a relatively new and growing area of research. The social capital literature alone is voluminous. A comprehensive overview is therefore, much beyond the scope of this study. The review here, while not intended to be comprehensive, provides a brief overview of understandings of the inter-connections among the three concepts.

Human Capital

The *human capital* concept, developed by economists Theodor Schultz and Gary Becker in the 1960s, refers to the economically valuable knowledge and skills that could be invested in people – especially through education and training as significant factors in economic growth. In the human capital view of education and economics, investing in people's education and development brings economic returns later on. From the perspective of Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), "*Human capital* in teaching is about having and developing the requisite knowledge and skills. It is about knowing your subject and knowing how to teach it … (p. 89). Human capital is about individual talent, knowledge and skills, but it cannot be increased just by focusing on it in isolation. Some of the most powerful strategies in education involve the deliberate use of teamwork – enabling teachers to learn from each other within and across schools and building cultures and networks of communication, learning trust and collaboration around the team as well (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Human capital in any profession consists of the individual knowledge, skill and capabilities that enable members of a profession to execute effective judgements and actions in situations where evidence, research, regulations and agreed procedures are insufficient to determine the courses of action that need to be taken (Hargeaves, 2016). Human capital of an education profession consists of one's individual talent, including skills, knowledge, empathy, passion, confidence, charisma and leadership. This form of capital resides within an individual (Chapman, Chestnutt, Friel, Hall & Lowden, 2016).

Human capital however, is not the only kind of capital that matters in teaching or any other profession. Social interactions influence human capital in that: "Capital has to be circulated

and shared where groups, teams and communities are more powerful than individuals when it comes to develop human capital. Human capital therefore must be complemented by and even organized in terms of social capital" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 3). To accelerate learning in any endeavour therefore, concentrate on the group. This is social capital. (Campbell, Lieberman & Yashkina, 2016).

Social Capital

In the broadest sense, *social capital* refers to the productive value of social connections in terms of the production of a broad range of well-being outcomes. Just as the concept of human capital enables a more comprehensive understanding of the drivers of productivity, in a similar way, the term social capital conveys the idea that human relations and norms of behaviour have an instrumental value in improving various aspects of people's lives. Including a social element in the analysis of how other well-being outcomes are produced makes sense.

For Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), social capital refers to "how the quantity and quality of interactions and social relationships among people affects their access to knowledge and information; their senses of expectation, obligation and trust; and how far they are likely to adhere to the same norms and codes of behavior" (p. 90). While the development of social capital as a strategy has not yet caught on in the teaching profession, Hargeaves and Fullan (2012) view social capital strategies as one of the cornerstones for transforming the teaching profession: "Behaviour is shaped by groups much more than by individuals – for better or worse. If you want positive change, then get the group to do the positive things that will achieve it" (p. 91).

The impact of professional effectiveness is not only individual but also collective. When applied to the teaching profession, teachers can make a difference or not to students' learning, achievement and development by the impact they exert from working together, not just by the impact each may have on their own. This is the power of social capital in addition to human capital.

Fundamental to social capital theory is the proposition that networks of relationships are a resource that can facilitate access to other resources of value to individuals or groups for a specific purpose (Balatti & Falk, 2002; Chapman et al., 2016). Social capital is the set of resources embedded in social relations that increases the likelihood of achieving particular goals (Struyve, Daly, Vandecandelaere, Meredith, Hannes, & De Fraine, 2016). Social capital spans individuals, existing as relationships or ties between individuals providing access to resources and leverage for change (Chapman et al., 2016). Membership of social networks and a set of shared values are valuable assets. Networks provide a basis for social cohesion because they enable people to co-operate with one another (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

If social capital refers to the set of useful resources available to individuals or groups of individuals by virtue of engaging in appropriate social interactions, then engaging in those interactions is the key to drawing on social capital (Balatti & Falk, 2002). Being able and willing to engage in interactions that draw on social capital is determined by norms of groups or networks in which desired social capital circulates. "Social capital is built when the nature and frequency of interactions contribute positively toward role players' common purpose" (p. 294).

Decisional Capital

The third component in the professional capital concept, *decisional capital* is a notion that comes from case law concerning the ability to make discretionary judgements. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), decisional capital reflects "the capacity to judge and judge well (that) depends on the ability to make decisions in situations of unavoidable uncertainty when the evidence or the rules aren't categorically clear" (p. 93).

Decisional capital, as envisioned by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), is the capital that professionals acquire and accumulate through structured and unstructured experiences, practice and reflections – capital that enables them to make wise judgements in circumstances where there is no fixed rule or piece of incontrovertible evidence to guide them. Decisional capital is also sharpened when it is mediated through interactions with colleagues, i.e., social capital. Social capital is an integral part of decisional capital, as well as an addition to it. Strategies become more precise and more embedded when they are developed and deployed among colleagues that are constantly refining and interpreting them.

Decisional capital is found both within and between individuals as education professionals and communities individually and collectively strive to make wise decisions in complex situations (Chapman et al., 2016). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) believe that development of decisional capital involves time, practice, feedback from peers and reflection.

Definitional Confusion

In spite of the vast amount of academic and policy interest given to the social capital concept in the last quarter century, it remains in many ways a "black box", encompassing a very

heterogeneous range of phenomena (Scrivens & Smith, 2013). One of the obstacles to developing policy-relevant measures has been the lack of agreement over how to define the concept of social capital (Balatti, Black & Falk, 2009; Balatti & Falk, 2002; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Scrivens and Smith (2013) maintain that one reason for the lack of agreement is that there is no one unitary concept of social capital, but rather a number of distinct concepts that have been grouped together under social capital as an umbrella term. More confusion sets in when the metaphorical aspect of the term, evoked by the word *capital* is further extended. There is reference to the building of social capital, contributing to social capital, and of investing in social capital, accessing, using and drawing on social capital. These elements are often mixed in discussions of social capital, thus setting the stage for confusion in the uses and scope of the term.

The approach taken in this study is to sidestep the academic conceptual debate, and to explore a few of the terms that researchers have linked to the concept of social capital such as collaborative relationships, channels of communications and information, formal and informal supports, and professional networks (Scrivens & Smith, 2013). In other words, this study does not attempt to quantify something as complex and elusive as the value of human/social interaction.

Three Perspectives on Social Capital

The roots of the competing perspectives on the interpretations of social capital can be traced back to the key contributions of three authors – Pierre Bourdieu, James S. Coleman and Robert D. Putnam. The work of the three authors is often presented together to show how

contemporary research on social capital does not have a simple, linear heritage, but rather, has evolved from multiple, sometimes contradictory, streams of thought (Scrivens & Smith, 2013). Despite these differences, all three authors consider that social capital consists of personal connections and interpersonal interactions, together with the shared sets of values associated with these contacts (Field, 2003). The contributions of each of these authors to the social capital concept will be discussed briefly below.

Pierre Bourdieu

The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu was primarily concerned with how membership in certain social networks allowed the members of those networks to gain access to resources (including status and power). Bourdieu's interest lay in the way that power relations and hierarchies are maintained in an unequal society. Bourdieu (1984) argued that these imbalances could not be explained by economic reasons alone, and proposed the concept of *cultural capital* to describe how certain skills, knowledge, values and behaviour providing a social advantage to individuals are transmitted by privileged parents to their children in order to preserve the next generations' position in the elite (Bourdieu, 1984).

Bourdieu (1986, 1992) went on to develop the concept of social capital, defining it as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition …" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). The idea that membership in social networks can bring access to valuable resources – material or otherwise – is central to much of the social capital literature. However, Bourdieu's emphasis was very much on the use of social networks to exclude non-members and to prevent social mobility. In this sense, some relationships are

much more valuable than others and the value of networks depends not just on their extent but on the extent of various forms of capital held by other people in the network.

Bourdieu (1986) is clear that economic capital is the most basic form of capital from which the other forms derive. The distinctive features of social capital in this formulation seems to be that it becomes a way of accessing the economic and cultural capital of the group to which one belongs to and therefore acts to amplify the consequences of possessing other types of capital. The density and durability of ties were both vital: social capital represents "an aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network" (p. 249). Bourdieu also acknowledged that the value of an individual's ties depends on the number of connections they can mobilize and the volume of capital (cultural, social and economic) possessed by each connection.

Bourdieu's theory has been vulnerable to criticism in his view of social capital as the exclusive property of elites, designed to secure their relative position. According to Field (2003), Bourdieu believed that social capital was an asset of the privileged and a means of maintaining superiority. There was no place in his theory for the possibility that others, less privileged individuals and groups, might also benefit in their social ties. However, Bourdieu's emphasis on the importance of social capital as a source of power, and as a means for people to advance their interests and secure their relative advantage over the longer term, remains a relevant contribution to the debate.

James S. Coleman

Much like Bourdieu, the American sociologist, James S. Coleman saw social capital as a resource for individuals, but took a broader, more optimistic view, focusing on the capacity of

social networks to generate positive-sum outcomes for members. Coleman (1988) opened up the concept of social capital to a much wider range of opportunities, by arguing that it is "defined by its function" (p. S98). Social capital, Coleman (1990) argued was "not a single entity but a variety of different entities, having characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure" (p. 302).

Coleman (1988) identifies three forms of social capital. The first deals with trust which exists in the social environment and the actual extent of obligations held. Social capital is high where people trust each other, and where this trust is exercised by the mutual acceptance of obligations. The second form concerns informal channels. Here, Coleman cites a university as a place where social capital is maintained by colleagues supplying each other with ideas and information. Third, norms and sanctions institute social capital where they encourage or constrain people to work for a common good, forgoing immediate self-interest (Schuller & Field, 1998).

Coleman (1988) views social capital not only as a private good, but also as a public good that is created by and may benefit not just those whose efforts are required to realize it, but all those who are part of a structure. It therefore demands co-operation between individuals who are nevertheless pursuing their own self-interest. Social capital represents a resource because it involves the expectation of reciprocity, and goes beyond any given individual to involve wider networks whose relationships are governed by a high degree of trust and shared values. Coleman's impact on the development of the social capital concept has been far-reaching; bringing conceptual clarity to what had previously been a somewhat under-theorized notion (Field, 2003).

Coleman's principal area of interest was in education, and he used social capital as a way to shed light on the links between social inequalities and academic performance, as evidenced, for example in *The Coleman Report* (1966). Coleman found that social capital within families and communities could have a positive effect on young people's educational performance, and hence the development of their social capital (McIntyre, 2013). Coleman's main strengths are his recognition that social capital could be an asset for disadvantaged social groups and not solely an instrument of privilege, and his interest in the mechanics of social networks (Field, 2005).

Robert D. Putnam

The American political scientist, Robert D. Putnam has been influential in making the idea of social capital a focus for research and policy. Social capital, according to Putnam (2000) "refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 19). Putnam (2000) describes social capital as a sociological concept used in business, economics, organizational behaviour, political science, public health and the social sciences in general, to refer to connections within and among social networks. The core idea is that social networks have value. Similar to physical and human capital, social contacts can increase the productivity of individuals and groups.

Civic engagement is at the heart of Putnam's view of social capital. He argued that social networks are usually made up of a mix of "horizontal" i.e., bringing together agents of equivalent status and power, and "vertical" i.e., linking unequal agents in asymmetric relations of hierarchy and dependence relationships. Active participation in civic-minded groups such as neighbourhood associations, co-operatives, and sports clubs promotes primarily horizontal

relationships. This in turn facilitates collective action – where individuals in a community frequently interact on an equal footing, their reputation for being trustworthy, responsible and co-operative becomes important and they are more likely to behave accordingly. According to Putnam (1993), this fosters norms of reciprocity and trust within the civic community, as well as endowing engaged individuals with a sense of shared responsibility, skills of co-operation, and a greater tendency to become politically involved.

Putnam (1993) used the 1970 decentralization reforms in Italy as an opportunity to compare the functioning of local governments in the northern regions with those of the southern parts of the country. Putnam identified a very clear pattern with governments in the northern regions of the country being consistently more successful than those in the south. After exploring a number of possible explanations, Putnam concluded that the main reason for this contrast was a stronger sense of "civic community" in the north. For Putnam (1993), this public-mindedness manifested itself through a vibrant associational life and expectations that other members of the same community will probably follow the rules; in other words "social capital, in the form of norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement" (p. 167). He also highlighted trust as an essential component of social capital.

Seven years after Putnam (1993) revealed the linkages between social capital and economic and democratic performance in *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam (2000) applied the framework to a comprehensive assessment of social capital in the US in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* Here, the act of bowling alone – a reference to the disintegration of American after-work bowling leagues – was a metaphor to illustrate the decline of social, political, civic, religious, and workplace connections in the US.

Broadening the concept of social capital to include different forms of interpersonal networks and as social engagement, norms and values, Putnam linked social capital to democracy and economic prosperity of different US states, as well as to education outcomes and child welfare, neighbourhood safety, health status, and subjective well-being. The main message of Putnam's (2000) book was that by all discernible measures, social capital had been steadily declining in the US since the middle of the twentieth-century, and that such decline has brought with it a range of negative consequences for individuals and for community life.

Putnam (1993) is credited with popularizing what had previously been an obscure terminology, rescuing it from abstraction of social and economic theory, defining social capital as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (p. 169). Considered a dominant voice on the social capital topic, Putnam's work, however has attracted controversy. Putnam is criticized for his elitist stance, particularly the tendency to portray social capital as a positive, unproblematic public good, failing to acknowledge that networks can foster both trust and mistrust, and for taking an over-socialized view of behaviour and undervaluing associated political factors wrought by the corporate and governmental establishment (Field, 2003; Portes, 1998).

Altogether, the work of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam provide conceptual roots for much of the social capital literature. In some key aspects however, their contributions are quite different to be able to be combined together to form a unified theory. This helps to explain the ongoing ambiguity that surrounds the meaning of the social capital concept. The three authors reference certain elements such as networks, relationships, and shared values. However, the

assumptions about their nature and function are quite different. These elements also feature prominently as part of the conceptual framework for this study.

Research on Professional Capital

With the launch of the *Journal of Professional Capital and Community* in 2016, research on professional capital is just beginning. Research focuses on the quality and capital of professions and professional communities, primarily in relation to the education profession. Writing in his editorial article, Hargreaves (2016) envisions that the journal will provide a forum for addressing and exploring a wide range of research questions, findings and controversies surrounding the nature and future of the education profession worldwide.

In a study about Ontario's Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP), a joint initiative between the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ontario Teachers' Federation that began in 2007, Campbell et al. (2016) show how the TLLP provides an example to teachers' professional learning and leadership development that advances the concept of professional capital. The study found that TLLP has a profound effect on teachers and their practice and helps develop teachers' individual capacity or human capital; while improvements in community and collaboration mean that the program promotes conditions that support social capital development. The TLLP provides opportunities and conditions where experienced teachers are trusted to deal with challenges, problem-solve, and make decisions in complex situations and therefore, grow and develop human and decisional capital.

Campbell et al. (2016) identified the implications from the TLLP for policy and practice approaches to develop professional capital as 1) professional collaborative benefits from appropriate partnerships and an enabling system with conditions and support for teachers'

learning and leadership, and 2) valuing and supporting teachers taking charge of their own professional learning and recognizing teachers as leaders of their own professional development, individual and collaboration. Decisional capital can be the least developed aspect of policy approaches to teacher quality, yet evidence from the study shows that enabling and valuing teachers' professional judgement and influence is powerful for individual and collective professional learning with benefits for students' learning.

Chapman et al. (2016) investigate the development of professional capital in a three-year collaborative school improvement initiative, using collaborative inquiry networks to close the achievement gap between schools. The process of building professional capital was examined by tracking the substance and flow of information, advice, problem solving, material resources, influence and interpretation through social interactions. Chapman et al. (2016) found that the professional capital model afforded education professionals the opportunities to develop human capital, by gaining new skills and knowledge; social capital, through interactions with colleagues and outside agencies; and decisional capital, through shared discussions and experiences of decision-making and by experimenting collaboratively with innovative approaches. It was also found that professional capital can have a positive impact on students:

> To move from thinking about building teachers' professional capital or educators' professional capital to what is required and how to optimize the support for building professional capital across the public services in more detail will open up new possibilities for supporting holistic development of our children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (p. 194).

Zeichner and Hollar (2016) contrast the approaches to improving teacher quality through initial teacher education (ITE) in Alberta, a consistently high performing system on international comparisons, with the approach taken in the US, which has consistently fared less well than an average country in these comparisons. The study draws on Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) contrast between education systems that invest in building business capital and those that focus on building professional capital.

In their study, Zeichner and Hollar (2016) maintain that the decision by philanthropists, business and corporate interests, and the federal government in the US to invest in the business capital approach and ignore the successes of other countries' decisions to adopt a professional capital approach has led to the growing privatization of public education. The revolving door of fast-track prepared teachers has undermined the ability of US school systems to build social capital in terms of preferred collaboration. Fast track programs are undermining a deeper and broader view of human capital to ensure teachers not only have a deep knowledge of content area, but also understand the social, historical and cultural contexts of education, have strong pedagogical content knowledge, and are able to adapt their teaching to the diverse learners in their classrooms. Public school teachers have limited decisional capital to make their own preferred judgements. Most professional development is top down and aimed at getting teachers to conform to directives.

In comparison with the education system in the US, Zeichner and Hollar (2016) draw a contrast to Alberta's education system that puts the focus on developing teachers as professionals who are able to exercise their judgement in the classroom. In addition, emphasis is placed on developing social capital in schools where the collective impact of highly collaborative work by teachers who stay over time enhances the learning of students. "Investing in strengthening

teacher professional learning is valued in this perspective, and there is a desire to support long-term careers in teaching" (p. 111). Furthermore, Alberta's long-standing culture of mutual trust and collaboration across various education stakeholder groups is the result of a long-term investment in developing the professional capital of teachers. One consequence of the trust and collaboration across education stakeholder groups is the emphasis on teachers' professional learning, rather than on teacher evaluation.

Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan (2016) identify eight essential features of effective networks in education that are connected to improved student outcomes, increasing professional capital, and an enhanced education system. Among the most essential features of effective networks are 1) focusing on ambitious student learning outcomes linked to effective pedagogy, 2) developing strong relationships of trust and internal accountability, 3) continually improving practice and systems through cycles of collaborative inquiry, 4) using deliberate leadership and skilled facilitation within flat power structures, 5) frequently interacting and leaning inwards, 6) connecting outward to learn from others, 7) forming new partnerships among students, teachers, families and communities, and 8) securing adequate resources to sustain the work.

Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo and Hargreaves (2015) propose a new model of professional accountability, called the *professional capital of teachers* that puts emphasis on "*the collective capacity of the profession* and its *responsibility for continuous improvement and for the success of all students"* (p. 6). Effective collaboration nurtures the kind of professional culture needed to create and sustain over time the professional capital of teachers and school leaders across the system. In these cultures, responsibility for success of all students is shared among all teachers and schools in a community.

PLAR and Professional Capital

Based on the notion that the public education system in the US and the teaching profession are in need of transformation, and can be rejuvenated through the power of professional capital, PLAR can be an important means to alleviate marginalization and promote equity by opening up learning pathways to those traditionally excluded by bridging the participation gap. PLAR is a powerful mechanism for facilitating access to education and progress within education, and has the potential for valuing different types of learning and different forms of knowledge in a way that other education processes do not.

This approach involves both learners and practitioners. In their study of the RPL learner profile, Snyman and van den Berg (2018) emphasize the significance of analyzing RPL at the learner, practitioner and institutional level. The study argues that the multi-faceted approach should be considered in an RPL strategy, in that the four perspectives of learner-based, context-based, knowledge-based, and process-based approaches do not function in isolation, but are "interdependent and relate directly to one another, thus justifying a holistic and eclectic approach" (p. 35). The implications for learners are that they should be aware of their profile to enable them to draw on personal strengths such as persistence, skills acquired, and the ability to learn from experience. RPL practitioners are required to have in-depth knowledge of the learner profile, be aware of specific needs of a learner profile that, in turn, should inform and influence the RPL strategy (Snyman & van den Berg, 2018).

These perspectives align with Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) idea of professional capital, comprised of human (skills and strengths of individuals), social (the capacity of the collective), and decisional capital (the ability of professionals to make autonomous, discretionary

judgements). The first, human capital is about individual talent, "having and developing the requisite knowledge and skills" (p.89). Within the context of the study, the concept of human capital is expanded to include the growth of individuals including learners, and others working in PLAR, acting in their capacities as administrators, instructors, facilitators, advisors, and assessors.

At their best, portfolios become vehicles of deep intellectual exploration for both teachers and learners. They are not only opportunities for learners to accumulate credits for their prior learning, they are also openings to new learning for students and for those who work with them and guide them (Mandell, 2000). Portfolios are a structure that enable learners to pause and reflect on prior experiences that facilitate learning; portfolios require learners to use their cognitive skills to make connections between themselves, their professional life and their education (Brown, 2001, 2002). During portfolio development, students must critically reflect as they identify, analyze, and evaluate their learning experiences, potentially contributing to a transformation in their perspectives (Brown, McCrink, & Maybee, 2004).

The skills of individual practitioners are important to individual students. However, it is the skills of the collective that will lead departments to support learning of all students. Practitioners working in isolation does not suffice. Rather, opportunities to develop collective talents and collaboration are vital. This is what they refer to as social capital; collaborative and collegial relationships among people and the resource and information sharing that occurs because of these relationships. PLAR lends itself well to social capital. For example, at Capella University, an online institution located in Minneapolis, MN, facilitators, instructors, and assessors occupy many roles as a PLA team working with learners throughout their PLA experience (Leiste & Jensen, 2011). The PLA team coaches learners to better understand both

the requirements for PLA credit and their ability to meet those requirements. The team stays in touch with relevant individuals to ensure ongoing communication, by sharing knowledge about PLA and implementing best practices (Leiste & Jensen, 2011).

In another situation where PLAR learners have had the opportunity to work collaboratively with mentors, coaches or advisors, their experiences are reported to be positive (Conrad, n.d.). Mentors' interactions with learners span both cognitive and affective dimensions, establishing relationships based on trust, and providing "safe" starting places. Mentors see themselves as metaphorical bridges or catalysts who shepherd learners through a complex process from "positions of naiveté … to positions of assuredness and achievement" (Conrad, n.d., p. 17).

Professional capital is not simply developing and sharing knowledge and practices, it is establishing, cultivating and valuing opportunities for informed professional judgement, decisions and actions – or decisional capital. Just as social capital allows access to another person's human capital, social capital is also key to decisional capital which is enhanced over time through practice and reflection on practice in collaboration with colleagues. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), decisional capital is best developed through interaction with colleagues: the decisions get better and better. High-yield strategies become more precise and more embedded when they are developed and deployed in teams that are constantly refining and interpreting them" (p. 96).

Hargraves and Fullan position professional capital in the teaching profession as a critical component of "improving as an individual, raising the performance of the team, and increasing quality across the whole profession" (p. 23). Within this view of PLAR, role-players are drivers

who are moving PLAR forward and using their collective wealth of knowledge and expertise to learn from one another and make important decisions about the future of PLAR. Consequently, PLAR can create an opportunity for developing professional capital, particularly if it occurs within a collaborative learning environment that values and respects expertise that colleagues bring to the table. From this perspective, the study sought to determine how PLAR can build human, social and decisional capital among its supporters.

Delivery of PLAR is based on each role-player's commitment to development and delivery of information, engaging learners and faculty, assessing applications, promoting PLAR, and sharing decision-making. This model also serves as a conduit for development of role-players` professional capital as they lead and facilitate PLAR processes with their peers. It is important to acknowledge the dynamics and inter-related nature of all three aspects of professional capital as they all impinge on and influence the development of the others. A logical question to ask is how can PLAR provide role-players with the opportunity to develop and build all three aspects of their professional capital? Can they be agents of change, providers of solutions, and creators of new knowledge?

Summary

Professional capital is proposed as the conceptual framework to study PLAR within the university. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe the need for massive change, based on the "nightmare scenario" that the state of urban public education and the teaching profession, particularly in the US and UK are at a crossroads, and can be transformed and regenerated through the power of professional capital. Professional capital is comprised of three kinds of capital: human capital (the requisite knowledge, skills and learning that individuals bring), social

capital (collaborative culture, relationships, social networks, commitment, and trust), and decisional capital (sound judgement in collaborative decision-making).

Given its multidimensional meanings and interpretations, social capital is explored in greater depth through the perspectives of three key authors: Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam. The professional capital research field is rapidly expanding and this chapter presents several examples to demonstrate how to apply the concept in different contexts. This study explores the Hargraves and Fullan public education professional capital concept and applies it to PLAR in the university setting.

To develop an approach for analyzing the development and implementation of PLAR within the university setting, the next chapter presents literature that explores the elements of PLAR policy and best practices. Conceptual approaches and models of PLAR and the hierarchies of knowledge and power are discussed. Other topics include a review of PLAR research at Canadian universities, the area of study approach, and foreign credential recognition.

CHAPTER 3 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

To consider an approach for analyzing the development and implementation of PLAR, the literature review begins with a description of the elements of PLAR policy and best practices that are found to contribute to PLAR program success at the university level. These elements include the conceptualization and purposes of PLAR, assessment strategies, institutional support, professional development, and institutional mission and vision. The chapter then moves to discuss conceptual models and approaches to interpret PLAR, the hierarchies of knowledge and power, relevant PLAR research at Canadian universities, and the area of study approach. The last section of literature considers PLAR and the recognition of foreign credentials.

An important goal of the study is to analyze parts of PLAR practice at an institution and faculty level in order to identify elements of policy formulation. The literature review is therefore based on a number of elements found to contribute to the effective development of RPL policy at a university (Frick et al., 2007a, 2007b). In their university case study, Frick et al. (2007a) found that RPL policy and practice are closely intertwined such that "educational practice and reform cannot be separated from educational policy since to fully understand education, one needs to grasp the policy underlying the practice…" (p. 641).

The following policy formulation elements were found to contribute to the effective practice and policy formulation of RPL: 1) the conceptualization of RPL, 2) the purposes of RPL, 3) shared RPL processes, 4) RPL assessment strategies, 5) available RPL support, 6) monitoring and record keeping, and 7) costs (Frick et. al., 2007a). At the conclusion of their study, the authors found that these elements were helpful in understanding the importance of

RPL in institutional transformation because “policies present a window for the analysis of institutional practice” (p. 651).

The elements of RPL policy identified above bear a close resemblance to five critical factors or best practices that were found to contribute to PLA program success in a research study of program factors within 34 PLA programs across higher education institutions in the US and Canada (Hoffmann, Travers, Evans & Treadwell, 2009, as cited in Travers, 2013, and Travers & Evans, 2011). These program factors include 1) institutional mission and commitment, philosophy statements and policies that support PLA practices, 2) institutional support, financial, administrative support and faculty buy-in, 3) program parameters that set the structure for how credit is assessed and applied, 4) professional development: faculty, staff and evaluators/content experts involved in the assessment of learning, and 5) program feedback and evaluation process: student, faculty and evaluator feedback. Hoffmann et al. (2009) concluded that the greatest opportunities are available for students to have their prior knowledge evaluated for college credit when the five critical factors are in place.

In her commentary on the Hoffmann et al. 2009 study, Travers, (2012a) noted that those institutions with mission, commitment and institutional support for PLA exhibited greater diversity of practices and use of credits. Conversely, those institutions lacking a mission and commitment and with less institutional support tended to be more restrictive in their practices (Travers, 2012a). These practices were fundamental to the philosophical underpinnings of the institution and the ways in which PLA is integrated into the academic process (Travers, 2012b). Furthermore, higher education institutions that address acceptance of PLA credits or provide PLA opportunities within the institutional mission, philosophical statements or core values also have policies to support PLA (Travers, 2013). Travers (2013) acknowledged the strong

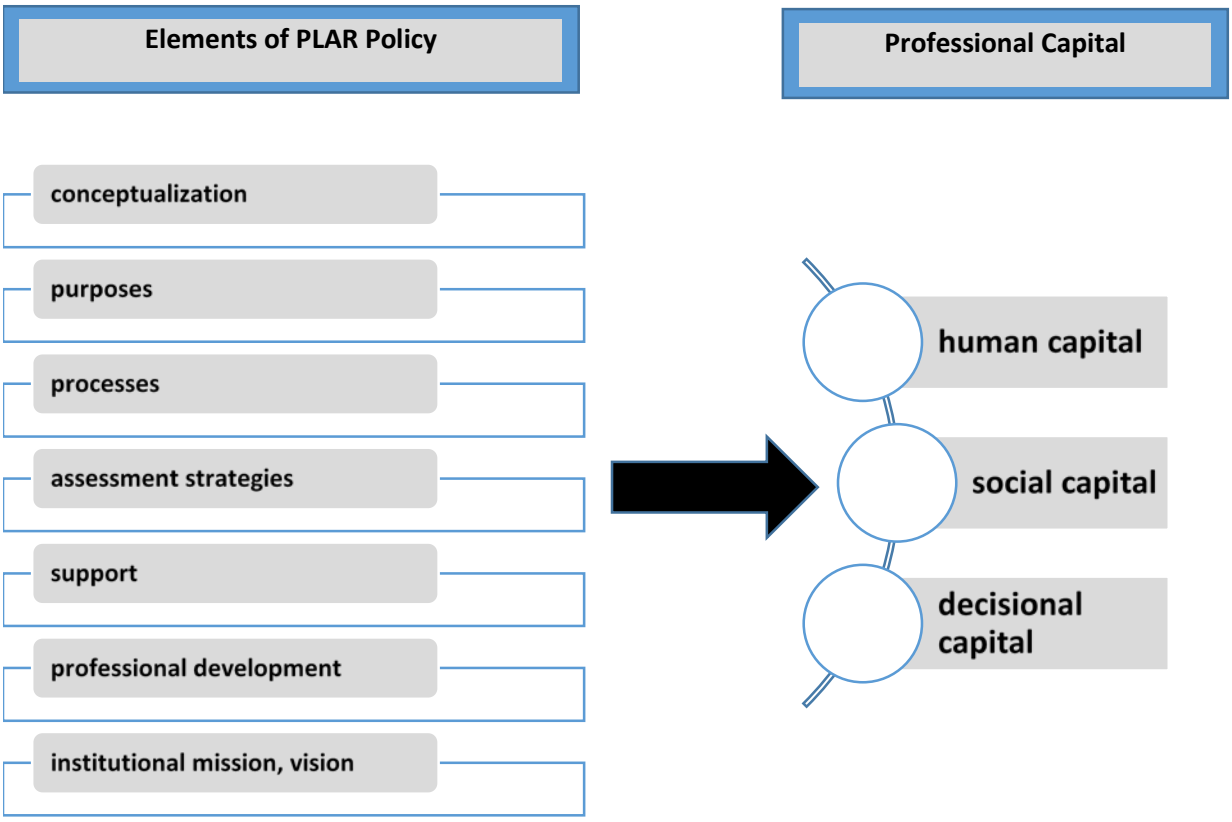
connection between PLA policy and practice: “institutions need to understand the interconnected dynamics of philosophy and practice within their own institutions and align these through policy and professional development across all constituents” (p. 57).

In order to manage the scope of the study, the literature review will focus on a selection of the PLAR policy elements and best practices identified above. These elements include conceptualization, purposes, processes, assessment strategies, institutional support, professional development, and institutional mission/vision. The elements and best practices will form the basis of the interview questions, and are analyzed through the conceptual framework of professional capital (see Figure 2). A review of literature of the implementation of PLAR by area of study, and PLAR and the recognition of foreign credentials is also included.

Conceptualization and Purposes of PLAR

A thorough conceptualization, and a clearly thought through approach to RPL is necessary for effective policy formulation. In the Frick et al. (2007b) study, conceptualization of PLAR is considered synonymous with “contextualization” and is viewed as “something that will have a determining influence on the incorporation of an appropriate RPL model and the practices flowing from such a model” (p. 150). Furthermore, contextualization of the RPL model needs to be congruent with the overall mission and vision of the institution in order for it to be accepted as part of broader institutional processes. It is also noted that developing a clear rationale and purpose for allowing PLAR is an important initial step before establishing policies and procedures (Gambescia & Dagavarian, 2007). Some of the most well known conceptualizations of PLAR found in the literature are discussed below.

Figure 2: An Approach for Analyzing the Development and Implementation of PLAR at the University



Ways of Seeing the Recognition of Prior Learning

Harris' (1999) four models are identified as possible "ways of seeing" or looking at RPL policy and practice. The *Procrustean* approach to RPL assesses individual competence according to prescribed outcomes and standards, with a focus on the future development of specific knowledge and skills. With this approach, RPL practices "recognize only those aspects of individuals' prior learning that 'fit' or match prescribed outcomes or standards" (p. 137). Knowledge is viewed as a measurable commodity with an exchangeable market value.

The *Learning and Development* approach has a less stringent classification of individual competence and prior knowledge. Individual advancement and the democratizing of education underpin this approach. Hierarchical disciplinary knowledge is valued and there is little tradition of valuing learning from experience. An individual's prior learning therefore, has to be molded to conform to fit in with dominant academic discourses and existing disciplinary bodies of knowledge (Frick & Albertyn, 2011). Divergent or diverse forms of knowledge cannot easily be recognized, as knowledge that is constructed outside of existing disciplinary frameworks is not generally recognized as valid knowledge.

Harris (1999) describes the *Radical* approach to RPL as a move towards social change, with a close link between experience, learning and knowledge as socially constructed entities. However, this approach risks idealizing experiential knowledge and thereby excluding more formalized discourses. Finally, with the *Trojan-horse* approach, greater attempts are made to value prior learning in and of itself rather than solely in terms of degree of fit with existing standards or curriculum. This approach holds out the potential for goals such as serious engagement with institutional curricular and pedagogic change and recognition of the diversity and divergence of knowledge, experiences, meaning, and inclusion. RPL therefore, becomes part of the construction of knowledge and curricula.

Butterworth's (1992) conceptualization of two types of philosophical models of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) – the *credit exchange model* and the *developmental model* is perhaps the best known as presented in Table 1. The two models have often been described as two poles on a continuum (Cameron, 2004; Cameron & Miller, 2004; Starr-Glass, 2016; Trowler, 1996; Volbrecht, 2009). Credit exchange is the most efficient model but has the least implications for institutional change as it does not address the issues of equity

Table 1: Two Contrasting Models of PLAR

	Credit Exchange Model	**Developmental Model**
Ideology	Market orientated vocationalism	Person-oriented – associated with a form of humanism
Epistemology	Behaviourist – knowledge and skill acquisition as objectively measurable, aggregative	Knowledge and understanding seen as constructed by individuals and integrated into their cognitive structures
Discourse	Human capital theory Discourse of efficiency, accreditation, competence, access, transparency, equality of opportunity and mobility	Humanist language of 'learner centeredness' Discourse of individual development and empowerment of the individual through confidence building, self improvement and self actualisation
Features	Based on frameworks of Vocational Qualifications – job-role notion of competence Knowledge and competence products Institution driven Sites of formal education provision and accredited training The claimant exchanges proof of past achievement for course credits Onus is on the applicant to provide 'proof' Claimant can receive credit	Reflective process – act as a transformative social mechanism Self-direction basis for enhancing self knowledge Learning process in its own right – with intrinsic value Role of tutor – assisting learners to make links between different learning contexts Centrality of rigorous dialogue with a supportive 'outsider' – trained educator Claimant can receive credit plus significant personal and professional development
Focus	Outcome Commodity exchange 'Equivalence'	Process Learner centred Equity principles embedded

Source: Cameron (2006)

(Frick & Albertyn, 2011; Frick et al., 2007b). This model views assessment as the identification of learning achievements based on standards set by relevant authorities such as faculty, and the focus shifts to credentializing (Harris, 2006).

Credit Exchange Model

The credit exchange model is a competency-based approach in which credits can be exchanged if the candidate can prove a claim of the necessary knowledge, competencies or abilities (Butterworth, 1992). Considered a pragmatic approach to lifelong learning (Osman & Castle, 2002), with more relevance to the college sector (Taylor, 1996; Van Kleef, 2011), credit exchange is equated with the human capital perspective that prioritizes knowledge, skills and values that will be of benefit to the economy (Osman, 2004). Students are viewed as consumers or clients whose passage through higher education must be facilitated by means of modularization and credit frameworks (Breier, 2005). Experience is viewed as a commodity that can be traded and transferred, or a form of currency for access (de Graaff, 2014). It is therefore only experience accredited by an authority or institution that is commonly recognized (Frick & Albertyn, 2011).

The credit exchange model, also referred to as the “technical/market” perspective in which RPL includes the accreditation of learning from informal experience, provided it can be matched against pre-determined learning outcomes – is usually assessed through standardized tests and challenge exams (Breier, 2005). From this perspective, assessment methods and instruments are criticised for their lack of direct engagement with learners regarding the prior learning that might be able to contribute to the new context (Fejes & Andersson, 2009; Osman, 2004b; Pokorny, 2013, Van Kleef, 2014a).

RPL for credit can rob learners of opportunity to contribute to knowledge construction, skills development and value transformation that would empower themselves as well as their peer learner group (Frick et al., 2007b). Unquestioning acceptance of the credit exchange model reduces opportunities to reflect deeply, critique and grow PLAR. It risks narrowing the focus of recognition to the point where only well-prepared and highly motivated learners benefit and the potential of PLAR as a broad-based enabler of lifelong learning is jeopardized (Van Kleef, 2014a).

The credit exchange model is attractive to administrators and RPL assessors because the process is a set of unfolding steps that are controllable and measurable. Knowledge is regarded as universal, neutral and uncontested (Osman, 2004b). This model is unlikely to deliver on equity and redress because "it will not exert pressure on existing curriculum within an institution, nor is it likely to challenge the nature of knowledge, what counts as knowledge, or who produces such knowledge" (Osman, 2004b, p. 141).

RPL for credit has advantages such as giving learners "negotiating power" in terms of the value and significance of learners' prior formal, non-formal and/or informal learning (Frick & Albertyn, 2011; Frick et al., 2007a, 2007b; Thomas, Collins & Plett, 2002), but it removes learners from the learning experience itself. Learning therefore becomes a product rather than a process (Harris, 2006; Van Rooy, 2002). The credit exchange model has also been challenged for its failure to recognize that prior learning is situated learning and valuable because it is different from academic learning (Harris, 1999; Michelson, 1996; Van Kleef, 2014a).

Developmental Model

The developmental model is firmly predicated on experiential learning theory and practice, with emphasis on social justice, inclusion, and democratization of institutional practices (Butterworth, 1992; Harris, 2006). In these types of practices, APEL candidates are actively engaged in evaluating their prior learning; reflection is central; and emphasis is placed on the process of learning. The creation of individual portfolios to attest to prior learning is a central feature of developmental APEL (Harris, 2006; Osman & Castle, 2002).

The developmental model poses more challenges than the credit exchange model because the evidence of experience on its own is insufficient for the awarding of credit (Osman, 2004). The model seeks to reshape fundamental values, beliefs and paradigms in higher education, and can be "a rigorous yet enabling process which values a range of individually and socially constructed learning experiences" (Osman & Castle, 2002, p. 67). In this model through in-depth, critical reflection, and being challenged to question their values and assumptions, students are required to assess and evaluate prior learning acquired through experience. Ultimately, engaging in the developmental approach means confronting the question of knowledge, and whose knowledge is valuable (Osman & Castle, 2002).

Breier (2005) describes the developmental approach as the "liberal/humanist" perspective which emphasizes that "prior learning of learners should be valued and used as a resource for further learning and that learning should be active, meaningful and relevant to real-life agendas" (p. 58). This perspective has influenced portfolio development practices by stimulating personal reflection and contributing to personal and professional development (Breier, 2005; de Graaff, 2014; Osman & Castle, 2001, 2002). In addition, this model has been praised for developing and

empowering those previously oppressed and marginalized (Harris, 1999, 2006; Osman, 2004b; Volbrecht, 2009).

In comparing the two models, in addition to a third model that emphasizes the transformational potential of RPL but is not discussed here, Osman (2004b) concludes that PLAR has the potential to "divide the academic community between those who welcome the destabilization of traditional knowledge boundaries and those who fear it for weakening the university and the specialist role of the pedagogue" (p. 143). Institutional culture plays a role in determining which RPL model is adopted into practice. Most institutions have a combination, or a hybrid approach to the models as a way to conceptualize RPL (Breier, 2005, Butterworth & McKelvey, 1997; Osman, 2004b; Starr-Glass, 2016; Trowler, 1996) with credit exchange being the most efficient, but having the least implications for change as it does not address issues of equity and redress, as in the case of the developmental and transformative models (Frick et al., 2007b).

The conceptualization of PLAR in both philosophical and epistemological terms has implications for the practice of students and will influence students, faculty and institutions (Conrad, 2014; Frick & Albertyn, 2011; Osman & Castle, 2002). In their university case study on the integration of PLAR, Frick et al. (2007b) recommend that institutions need to contextualize PLAR and be clear on their intended approach(s) as this will have a determining influence on the incorporation of an appropriate PLAR model, and the practices flowing from the model. The contextualization clearly needs to be congruent with the overall mission and vision of the institution in order for it to be accepted as part of the broader institutional processes.

As stated at the beginning of the dissertation, the intent of the study was to use a definition of PLAR that focuses on non-formal learning, rather than formal learning, generally associated with the credit exchange model. In the credit exchange or credentialing model, students exchange proof of past learning to earn course credits and use them to meet their graduation requirements (Cameron, 2004; Van Kleef, 2014a). In other words, in the credit exchange model, the knowledge that students are expected to demonstrate has *not* been acquired through non-formal learning or prior experience, i.e., transfer credit.

The developmental model, on the other hand, is generally associated with developing a PLAR portfolio where students document the kinds of learning they possess and what they believe may be accepted for credit (Cameron, 2004). Developing a portfolio is a matter of a product and a process, where product is the outcome of a dynamic process of reflection, self-assessment, and introspection. The developmental model is inherently learner-centred; it is not about descriptions and course equivalencies; but concerns learning that has occurred mainly outside of formal education and training (Starr-Glass, 2016).

Assessment Strategies

When selecting students for admission from backgrounds other than high school completion, universities normally have policies and procedures in place for granting recognition to learning that applicants have acquired elsewhere. This recognition has traditionally been extended to formal learning that has been accredited by other colleges and universities recognized by the admitting institution.

Universities that offer PLAR usually make use of three types of assessment methods (Wong, 2001). The first two types are similar to the traditional processes of assessing formal

learning for the purpose of admission into a course or program, obtaining transfer credit from one program to another, or for granting advanced standing in a program. The third type is used to assess non-formal learning from work and/or like experiences. The three types are summarized as: examinations (standardized, challenge); equivalencies (course, program); and documentation and demonstration of achievement via a portfolio (which can be supplemented by interviews, oral and/or written tests and demonstrations) (Wong, 1997, 2001). In general, the method of assessment is influenced by the circumstances under which it is sought and the purpose for which it is sought (Wong, 2001).

Formalized Methods of Assessing PLAR

The assessment of learning through PLAR may also be viewed as a continuum of assessment methods ranging from highly individualized to highly formalized formats (Frick et al., 2007b; Van Rooy, 2002). The more formalized methods such as standardized examinations and challenge exams have helped legitimize PLAR for admission purposes through, for example, the US-based College Level Examination Program (CLEP), or for advanced study through the Advanced Placement (AP) examinations. The principle and research underpinning these examinations however, were based on a behavioural model – to educate the masses to become a successful workforce for the growing economy (Travers, 2012a).

While these formalized methods of assessment were efficient and opened the door of education opportunity to a broad range of students (Starr-Glass, 2016), a schism emerged however, when some institutions accepted only formal, standardized means of evaluating PLAR while others began developing new ways to assess prior learning (Travers, 2012a). In effect,

PLAR became part of the movement for social justice by providing recognition of knowledge and access to higher education that was unavailable in traditional post-secondary institutions.

These approaches are generally categorized under the credit exchange model (Starr-Glass, 2016), and recognize the right of learners to bring forward their prior knowledge. However, learners are obliged to tailor their prior learning to earn credits that fit into predictable knowledge clusters (Conrad, 2008b). For example, challenge for credit allows learners to fast-track credit acquisition. Rather than participating in a full term course, learners try to meet a combination of course requirements, usually by writing an examination or fulfilling a project assignment. While this is an acceptable model of PLAR, it is not one that gives learners opportunities to build new knowledge that has been acquired through incidental learning, informal learning or prior experiences (Conrad, 2008b; Starr-Glass, 2016).

Individualized Methods of Assessing PLAR

Developing a portfolio, on the other hand, is a process that allows for the recording of a wide range experiential of learning and helps learners connect prior learning to higher education programs or qualifications (Frick et al., 2007a). Portfolios are opportunities for learners to not only accumulate credits for their prior learning, but also to showcase their abilities, knowledge, skills or performance (Conrad, 2008a; Shalem & Steinberg, 2002). Portfolios are increasingly being used as a tool for capturing the "essence of self", and can serve as "a record of accomplishment, a snapshot of that particular experience, or a statement of growth, maturity, participation and citizenship" (Conrad, 2008a, p. 99).

Portfolios can serve as the metaphorical "reflective bridge" enabling learners to pause and reflect on prior experiences that facilitate learning (Brown, 2001), and connecting the

learning experiences from work with academic knowledge. For learners, working through the portfolio process is closely associated with growth in personal and professional competencies such as increasing self-knowledge, self-discovery and personal empowerment, motivation, self-confidence and critical thinking (Brown, 2001, 2002, 2011; Brown, et al., 2004; Conrad, 2010; Hoffmann, 2013; Klein-Collins & Hain, 2009; Rust & Ikard, 2016).

Portfolio development holds the potential for transformative learning, and is often linked to Mezirow's (1991) ideas on the perspective transformations of adult learners **(**Brown, 2002; Conrad, 2010; Stevens, Gerber & Hendra, 2010). In this context, transformative learning in the PLAR experience can be "a deeply personal and insightful shift in how we understand our learning, what it accomplishes for us and the ways in which we are changed by our immersion in it" (Starr-Glass, 2016, p. 9).

In comparison with the more formalized methods of assessing PLAR, Conrad (2008b) characterizes the portfolio approach as being "necessarily guided by sets of university-provided criteria and outcomes (that) serve as guidelines and structuring devices rather than as hard-and-fast targets" (p. 142). Use of the portfolio can "provide signposts around which learners can rally and organize their own learning, rather than stipulating for them what they *must* know in order to be successful (Conrad, 2008b, p. 142). In a similar vein, portfolios are associated with the developmental model in that they allow candidates to document the kinds of learning they possess, and are an exploration of what has been *learned*, rather than a demonstration of what has been *done* (Starr-Glass, 2016).

Other research suggests however, that preparing portfolios takes a significant amount of time and effort (Gambescia & Dagavarian, 2007; Thomas et al., 2002), are difficult to create and

manage (Cameron, Travers & Wihak, 2014), are labour-intensive (Bélanger & Mount, 1998), and can be costly (Morrissey et al., 2008). In addition, learners should receive instruction in how to prepare portfolios for assessment (Conrad 2008b; Conrad & Wardrop, 2010; Rust & Brinthaupt, 2017), as this generally reflects the fact that gaps likely exist between the applicant's grasp of their experiential learning and their ability to capture that learning thoughtfully and appropriately in accordance with the language of the academy (Conrad, 2014).

PLAR as a Challenge for Universities

Before discussing the findings in the literature on institutional support for PLAR, it is important to review the research on how PLAR can pose a challenge to universities, the notion of hierarchies of knowledge and power, as well as some of the research on PLAR and Canadian universities.

While post-secondary institutions are becoming more accepting of PLAR practices, there is great diversity among universities over the extent to which they offer PLAR. As Wong (2014) points out, universities in Canada are self-accrediting bodies established by provincial legislation to confer higher education credentials and have considerable autonomy in developing institutional policies. PLAR is a means to facilitate individuals' access to a type of formal learning that is associated with credentials that have traditionally been under the authority of closed circles of academics (Wong, 2014).

PLAR has had a cool reception and a fragmented presence among Canadian universities since the early 1990s (Wong, 2011). In fact, Canadian universities have generally been described as "suspicious", "resistant" "indifferent", if not "hostile" to PLAR (Conrad, 2008b, 2010, 2014; Morrissey et al., 2008; Peruniak, 1993, Peruniak & Powell, 2006; Wong, 2011).

University resistance and/or reluctance to implement PLAR has also been observed in Europe, Australia, South Africa, and the UK, especially in research-intensive institutions.

A related issue are the questions raised about the quality of PLAR, along with the risks of inconsistent processes and invalid or unreliable outcomes (Van Kleef, 2010, 2012). A lack of institutional confidence in the quality of PLAR was a common research finding in the early 1990s. According to Van Kleef (2014b), perceptions of irreconcilable qualitative differences between prior learning and learning that occurs in formal education programs, a lowering of academic standards, placing institutional credibility and the integrity of credentials at risk, and setting up of learners for subsequent academic failure characterize much of the research. Further, there are concerns about the quality of PLAR creating barriers to implementation (Van Kleef, 2014b).

As Wong (2011) points out, "universities, unlike many other organizations, have unique organizational cultures that transcend national boundaries, many of which have remained unchanged for centuries" (p. 286). Wong further argues that "universities have been given the authority to be the gatekeepers of credentials that reflect the achievement of specific levels of knowledge and skills in disciplinary–based fields of study" (p. 305). Thus, the long-standing suspicion of PLAR as being a "lesser form" of higher education experience has provided traditional educators with a strong base for resistance to PLAR over the years.

Hierarchies of Knowledge and Power

In their study of how APEL relates to issues of social inclusion in five European countries, Cleary et al. (2002) identified "hierarchies of knowledge and learning" to help explain why APEL activity is limited, as APEL raises important questions about different types of

knowledge and learning in western societies. Cleary et al. (2002) found little credence is given to the potential impact of experiential learning, and that the role and status of experiential learning is undervalued such that "an ideological hierarchy of knowledge and learning exists in which experiential learning is regarded as a 'lower form' and academic learning is regarded as a 'higher form' of knowledge (p. 16). The implications of the study's findings are twofold: First, experiential learning plays little part in traditional processes of learning because of the supposed difficulty of accommodating informal experiential learning into more the formal academic context. Second, where experiential learning does play a part, it is associated most strongly with specific types of knowledge and learning such as vocational or workplace-based learning.

In an attempt to answer the question of why RPL has not fulfilled its promise as a means to access formal education, Cooper and Harris (2013) explored the "knowledge question", or the extent to which the nature of the disciplinary or knowledge domain into which RPL candidates seek access determines the feasibility of RPL. The authors also raise the question of whether obstacles to implementing RPL are due to the lack of political will or to knowledge and epistemological constraints – or forms of knowledge that academics can not immediately recognize.

In addition, Cooper and Harris (2013) found that although the nature of the area of study or knowledge domain is important, academics that are committed to opening up pathways for those historically excluded from higher education can play an equally important role in terms of designing diverse and appropriate pedagogic interventions. Conversely, academics opposed to RPL on epistemological or pedagogical grounds, may act as powerful gatekeepers in relation to access, irrespective of their disciplinary background. According to Wong (2014), it can be difficult for academics to change their mindset from being gatekeepers of area of study-based

knowledge to becoming mentors of learners whose knowledge has been gained from life and work experiences.

Other research has explored the unequal power relations and the challenges that PLAR brings to the traditional university's monopoly as the provider of a form of knowledge production that privileges high status learning (Armsby et al., 2006). Pitman and Vidovitch (2012) used Bourdieu's concept of 'position taking' to analyze RPL policy and practice in Australian universities in which hierarchies of knowledge/power can be exposed. The authors argue that in the case of RPL, Australian universities enact policy symbolically, for position taking, rather than for pragmatic reasons. As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, Australian universities are required to address agendas of both equity and quality. However, evidence shows that within universities, these are widely viewed as discourses in conflict. This results in a type of cognitive dissonance, or a belief in the importance of equity and the importance of quality, and a belief that one comes at the expense of the other. Pitman and Vidovich (2012) summarized their findings as follows:

> RPL policy thus becomes an area in which each university can symbolically manipulate discourses of quality and/or equity in order to foreground those elements of academic capital that it thinks is to its best advantage…. While universities simultaneously use discourses of both equity and quality, those of equity are revealed as more subservient, or negotiable, in actual practices of universities. Discourses of quality resonate more strongly than those of equity in higher education perhaps because the knowledge-intensive and research activities of the institutions are at their heart elitist (p. 772).

In a related study examining the RPL policies and practices at three Australian universities, Pitman and Vidovich (2013) found evidence that informal and non-formal learning do not have the same strategic value for universities than formal learning, and that universities prioritize their credentialing role over their mobilizing one. If prior learning is viewed as a threat to a university's position within the field of higher education, it will enact RPL policy in order to restrict knowledge acquired via non-traditional learning processes. Even when these types of prior learning are viewed per se as having value, the primary purpose of RPL policy will still be to serve the interests of the institution, not the student. Thus, knowledge is mobilized not for its epistemological value, but for its strategic, organizational value.

In their university case study on RPL, Frick et al. (2007b) noted that faculty members and administrators are often cautious of RPL because it raises questions about standards that must be set by established criteria against which experiential learning is assessed to determine whether it is adequate for higher education purposes. The study revealed that academics are expected to uphold standards of assessment, but if power over assessment measures of RPL applicants resides totally within academia, alternative forms of learning may go unnoticed and unrecognized. In addition, the analysis of faculty policies found that RPL conformed mainly to the credit exchange model, with less of a transformational focus. Thus, a strong institutional focus on research within the institutional vision, mission and practices was thought to have an influence on the conceptualization and practice of RPL, and the emphasis on formal learning in RPL.

The findings from these studies are supported by Michelson (1996) who argues that RPL practices at universities are embedded in matrices of power that differentiate between, and challenge different forms of knowledge, some that are valued, and those that are not:

> (APEL) challenges the foundations of academic power, specifically its right to evaluate and quantify knowledge. By substituting dialogue and mutual recognition for what was unidirectional judgement, this alternative approach destabilizes the basis on which validation is given and invites a sharing of epistemological authority (p. 194).

Michelson (1996) was also clear in acknowledging that APEL alone could not alter the power relationships within the university but raises questions about different forms of knowledge where learning situated in a particular context may not be valued in another knowledge context:

> The gatekeeping function of the academy is maintained by both honorable scholarship and entrenched social privilege…. APEL policies, on their own, cannot reformulate the relationships among cultures of knowledge or the social hierarchies they justify; … but APEL makes the criteria of judgement visible, and therefore potentially negotiable: for whose knowledge gets to "count", for who may judge whom, and on what basis… (p. 194).

PLAR Research and Canadian Universities

There have been a number of surveys and research studies conducted on PLAR within the Canadian university context since the 1990s reflecting the general resistance to implementation referred to above. Thomas and Klaiman's (1992) study of PLAR among universities and colleges found that PLAR was used extensively at all education levels in Canada, but was

"somewhat primitive in execution" (p. 11). Usage of PLAR was found to be de-centralized and highly discretionary in terms of university faculties, programs and individual faculty members. It was further noted that unless PLAR was accepted system-wide, it would not be successful.

Bélanger and Mount (1998) found that PLAR was rarely a priority and rarely part of the institutional culture. PLAR was more often seen as a community college issue rather than a university one, and often considered as an extension of continuing education. It was concluded that there was reluctance among universities to implement PLAR, and undergraduate universities were likely to move cautiously for fear of eroding the value of the university degree.

Among the first of the government-funded PLAR reports was the *Slice of the Iceberg: A Cross-Canada Study on PLAR* (Aarts, et. al., 1999). The Report's title reflects the metaphorical "iceberg" that conveys the concept that "only a small percentage of adult learning is recognized, as most learning exists below the surface where it is more difficult to identify, access and recognize in any formal way" (p. vii). The Report provided the first national picture of individuals accessing PLAR using a mixed-methods approach. The survey investigated PLAR activities at seven colleges between 1993/1994 to 1997 /1998.

The *Iceberg* study was designed to gather data on PLAR learners, activities, and to determine the impact of PLAR from the learners' and institutions' perspectives. Also included were focus group discussions to gather information on how PLAR learners compete with traditional students in post-secondary programs with respect to demographics and academic achievement. Based on the results of the study, a database of college-level courses and programs was established based on more than 3,500 PLAR learners and almost 12,000 traditional learners. The study found that PLAR learners had equal or better outcomes compared to traditional

learners. However, there were low numbers of PLAR learners and programs. It was also found that there were rigid "lock step" program delivery structures that impaired opportunities for full time learners to benefit from PLAR.

A sequel to the study, *A Slice of the Iceberg Follow-up: A Second Cross-Canada Study of PLAR (*Aarts, et. al., 2003) was conducted a few years later. The study is based on the same seven partner institutions and added three more years of data, representing over 7,200 PLAR learners and 14,000 assessments for a total of eight years. The analysis of longitudinal data provided evidence of PLAR as a sound academic practice, but the total number of PLAR assessments remained low due to wide fluctuations in participation levels. Among the Report's many recommendations was the need for more information on PLAR activities at universities to bring greater understanding to the extent to which PLAR is undertaken at these institutions.

The *Spring 2003 Snapshot: The Current Status of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)* was an online survey commissioned by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) (Kennedy, 2003). The study gathered data from registrars at public post-secondary institutions across Canada to examine the effectiveness of PLAR policies, to determine how PLAR works at the institutions, and to identify issues of institutional, learner and faculty/staff support.

The results of the *Snapshot s*tudy showed that most community colleges (73%) responding to the survey had PLAR policies in place, while this was the case for a minority of universities (31%) that responded. In addition, universities were much less likely than colleges to have plans to institute a policy in the future. Fewer than half of universities that responded had infrastructure support such as PLAR office space, coordinator, academic counsellor, but

more than half of colleges had these services. One result that consistently emerged from the analysis was that compared with the colleges, universities found the PLAR process lacking in credibility and validity. Kennedy (2003) attributes the difference to the observation that knowledge-based learning offered by a university might require a more time-consuming and expensive assessment process than the more skills-based learning associated with the colleges. As a follow-up action item, Kennedy (2003) suggested that further research be conducted to find out why some universities were uncomfortable with PLAR.

Peruniak and Powell (2006) found that PLAR has been a marginal practice in the Canadian university system mainly because universities have always been primarily focused on traditional students under the age of 25 – a group of learners that generally have not acquired informal university-level learning. Three types of barriers to the acceptance of PLAR at universities were identified: 1) attitudinal barriers reflecting a constituency within the actual community that believe university-learning can only take place in a classroom when taught by an academic. In addition, some academics are uncomfortable with PLAR in terms of the implications for their teaching role; 2) legitimacy barriers in that PLAR-awarded credit is viewed as suspect and subjective, and raises questions about standards for responsible assessment. PLAR can cause harm to a university's reputation and credentialing authority, and turn a university into a "degree mill"; and 3) practical barriers that raise questions of how to use PLAR responsibly, how to record PLAR credit, training costs, and policy development. Credibility of PLAR assessment procedures remain a primary concern: "not only must PLAR be credible, but it must also appear credible" (p. 324).

Van Kleef (2007) found that pedagogical forces that can support, promote, limit or prevent offering of PLAR services relate to an institution's philosophical stance on the education

of adults. Factors such as faculty beliefs and attitudes impact PLAR and include conceptual confusion regarding definition and purpose of PLAR. There are doubts about whether learning acquired outside an institution can be translated into academic credit, and the belief that PLAR is only appropriate at the undergraduate level. There are also concerns that the quality of PLAR cannot be assured, that it will lower standards and put institutional credibility at risk. Some faculty may consider PLAR as a threat to professorial autonomy, and believe that only classroom experience matters to post-secondary learning.

Following on the results of the Kennedy (2003) study, Wihak (2007) conducted a survey of Canadian university websites to determine the availability of information about PLAR, the ease of access to the information, and the existence of university-wide policies and/or services for prospective PLAR applicants. Following a review of university websites, Wihak (2007) found that with the lack of clear, accessible information, and prospective adult learners' lack of knowledge about PLAR, it seems almost certain that demand for PLAR will stay low. While several universities appeared to have made a commitment to use PLAR for granting credits by posting information on their websites, Wihak (2007) concluded that universities continue to resist external pressure to introduce PLAR, and that future PLAR research should adopt a disciplinary focus to "reflect the highly disciplinary nature of the university" (p. 108).

In her analysis of adult learning and RPL in Canada, Conrad (2008a) notes that universities had not increased their adult education offering to mature learners, nor had they moved toward acknowledging the value of adults' prior learning through implementation of RPL processes. Building on the narrative, Conrad (2010) argues that similar to university teaching, RPL suffers from a lack of recognition as a viable alternative route to learning, and remains a fragmented and marginalized process at Canadian universities. Conrad (2010) likens this

situation to a “Catch-22” where “a lack of time, combined with misinformation engendered by language confusion, compounded by an academic history that does not provide a motivating reward system, all conspire together to reduce RPL’s potential in the Canadian university system” (p. 158).

Conrad (2014) further argues that among the challenges that Canadian higher education presents to PLAR, these include the following: a long-standing university tradition of academic freedom, privilege to exclusivity, the lack of necessity for traditional universities to implement change at pedagogical levels, a belief in the supremacy of classroom knowledge, a lack of motivation to devote time to learning a new approach, and a system of reward that focuses on research, publication and its associated financial returns.

Institutional Support for PLAR

Institutions that are able to implement PLAR effectively tend to follow a learner-centred approach that is inclusive and supportive (Frick & Albertyn, 2011). PLAR facilitators and assessors have been identified as the most important role-players (Hendricks & Volbrecht, 2003), often playing the role of supportive guide, helping to place the learner’s prior knowledge and skills within a wider system of practice, and as mediator, between the learners’ personal meanings, culturally established meanings and meanings within higher education (Frick et al., 2007b).

Research shows that PLAR policy and practice has been successful where there is a high level of institutional commitment and support (Kistan, 2002; Van Rooy, 2002). Staff development and a strong institutional support system therefore become imperative in the PLAR process (Frick et al., 2007b). For example, Red River College is recognized as a leader in RPL

practice in both Manitoba and beyond (Conrad, 2008a, 2010). The College has a centrally coordinated RPL Services department to guide the development, implementation, integration and expansion of RPL systems and practices. Included within the RPL system are the RPL Facilitator, RPL Advisor(s), the International Credential and Transfer Credit Officer, a college-wide RPL Committee and dedicated staff, faculty and administration [http://air.rrc.ca/RPL/RPL-documents/annual-reports/RRC%20RPL%20Annual%20Report%20June%202017.pdf].

PLAR facilitators play a key role in assisting learners by nurturing their self-reflective, critical thinking and narrative skills, shaping their academic and professional goals and identifying where they need to learn different knowledge and skills (Wong, 2014). Inadequate support can be a major obstacle in the development and implementation of PLAR in the higher education system, and can compromise the quality of PLAR (Motaung et al., 2008). Conversely, faculty training and availability of resources have been found to be critical to achieving student success in PLAR (Hoffmann, 2013; Hoffmann & Michel, 2010).

Professional development opportunities for faculty and staff are the key to implementing PLAR program practices (Travers, 2013). In their study, Frick et al. (2007b) found that collegial networking seemed to be the most frequently utilized resource for advice and support. In addition, workshops and progress report sessions can help build relationships between academic staff and learners. At Red River College for example, many RPL tools, resources, workshops and courses are offered to learners, faculty and staff. Students can access Socrates, an online RPL self-assessment tool to discover what RPL is, and to compare their previous learning and skills to course learning outcomes in at least 11 programs [http://air.rrc.ca/RPL/socrates/default.aspx]. In addition, students can take a course or workshops on portfolio development with the goal of

completing a professional portfolio/e-portfolio upon graduation that documents their skills and abilities [http://air.rrc.ca/RPL/Portfolio-Development.htm].

The Hoffmann et al. (2009) study (as cited in Travers, 2013) on the five critical factors in PLAR programs, found a strong relationship between institutional mission and commitment and institutional support. If an institution is committed to PLAR and has reflected this commitment in its mission and policies, it is more likely to support PLAR programs (Motaung, 2009; Travers, 2013). For example, Red River College's RPL Strategic and Operational Plan (2012-2017) [http://air.rrc.ca/RPL/RPL-documents/RPL%20Strategic%20and%20Operational%20Plan%202012-2017.pdf] includes goals, outcomes, and action statements to further the development, implementation, expansion and full integration of RPL systems and practices that are incorporated as an integral part of the College's services and academic programs. In addition, according to the College's RPL and Transfer of Credit Policies and Procedures, [http://www.rrc.ca/files/File/policies/A14-Recognition-of-Prior-Learning.pdf], the RPL processes follow the *Guiding Principles for Quality RPL Practice in Canada* as set forth by CAPLA. The implications for institutions are clear in that "institutions need to understand the interconnected dynamics of philosophy and practice within their own institutions and align these within professional development across all constituents" (Travers, 2013, p. 57).

Wong (2001) argues that while governments can play a significant role in kick-starting the adoption of PLA, the successful integration of PLAR into the post-secondary teaching-learning system requires the support of faculty, staff and senior administrators of the institution. Furthermore, PLAR can only succeed in universities with the committed participation of faculty and learners (Wong, 2000a, 2000b, 2011).

An institutional policy of PLAR should be clearly communicated with explicit guidelines and include descriptive information for students, faculty and administrators. Without a clear communications plan and accessible information, the potential exists for the misunderstanding of PLAR within the university context (Conrad, 2010), and continuous low demand for PLAR (Wihak, 2007). Understanding the ways in which university staff understand, interpret and deliver formal university policy will provide clearer insight into the extent to which PLAR is supported by the higher education sector (Pitman, 2009).

Frick et al. (2007b) found that it is imperative that information on PLAR be readily available, user-friendly, and updated regularly for both academic staff and prospective PLAR candidates. Furthermore, PLAR will remain a marginalized academic process if adequate resources are not allocated to development and implementation, and that human resources, training, administrative support and adequate infrastructure need to be provided and maintained for the purposes of PLAR (Frick et al., 2007b).

An Approach to PLAR by Area of Study

Wihak (2006, 2007, 2014) argues that an area of study approach is important to further development and dissemination of PLAR, as well as to future PLAR research. Since the majority of Canadian universities continue to resist external pressure to introduce PLAR, what may be needed to convince universities to implement PLAR more widely is evidence that suits the area of study nature of the university (Harris & Wihak, 2011).

In their university case study of PLAR, Frick et al. (2007b) note that the institutional RPL policy provides the framework within which faculties can conceptualize their own contextualized policies. The analysis of faculty policies indicates the importance of faculty-specific

conceptualizations of RPL. In addition, not all faculties have the same need for RPL, therefore their approach to it differs and this can have a determining effect on integration and collaboration with other institutions, professional bodies, and the world of work.

In addressing faculty resistance within research-intensive universities as a major challenge to the growth of PLAR in Canada, Wong (2011) suggests the university department as the focal point of field of study-based curricular reform and changes in institutional policies and practices as an issue that can help with understanding the resistance and development of strategies to counter it. In addition, it is beneficial for PLAR applicants and practitioners to build their understanding of differences between areas of study so that PLAR applicants can better organize and document their evidence of learning to obtain recognition.

Wong (2011) further argues however, that leadership in universities is highly political, and senior administrators cannot easily impose a common vision, curriculum, or even common standards of evaluation. As such, there is a "powerful tradition, especially among research universities of local control over most things that matter…It is often the department rather than the administration that determines how, if not which, policy decisions are implemented" (p. 296). Wong (2011) suggests a logical research question to ask that would begin to address the move from university resistance to PLAR to inspired action is if there are differences among different departments or across different areas of study. This question will be addressed in Chapter 5.

PLAR and the Recognition of Foreign Credentials

Newcomers face barriers that may impede the recognition of their credentials and work experience, with consequences for their labour market performance and broader integration within Canada (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). Anecdotal accounts of physicians and engineers immigrating to Canada only to drive taxis or clean offices are common. The failure to recognize the foreign qualifications of newcomers to Canada is one of the factors attributed to the disconnect between labour demand and supply. The research suggests that foreign education credentials and work experience are often devalued in Canada, denying many immigrants the opportunity to practice their occupation of training (Buzdugan & Halli, 2009; Girard & Smith, 2013; Li, 2001; Reitz, 2001; Van Kleef & Werquin, 2013).

Potential barriers to foreign credential recognition (FCR) include the content of foreign education deemed less relevant to the needs of the Canadian labour market than the country where the education was completed, linguistic ability in English or French, and the entry procedures in some trades and professions. Financial constraints or entry barriers caused by protectionism may also stand in the way of an immigrant's becoming qualified in Canada (Elgersma, 2012).

Another factor is the decentralized accreditation system that can be a hurdle, with numerous trade and professional bodies being involved, and provinces having different standards for evaluating degrees and setting certification norms for trades and professions (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). Issues with FCR are just one of a number of factors that may lead to a skilled immigrant's being unemployed or underemployed in Canada (Elgersma, 2012). The assessment of qualifications may be affected by social characteristics including race and national origin, as

well as gender, age and other individual qualifications; discrimination may be at play (Reitz et al. 2014).

In a review of policy issues related to credential recognition and skills under-utilization by immigrants, Reitz (2005) concluded that despite rising educational credentials among recent immigrants, and high levels of fluency in one official language, immigrants' employment and earnings continue to decline. Reitz argued that problems in the education-work relationship are caused not by inadequate skills levels of immigrants, but rather in the way they are recognized and utilized in Canadian workplaces.

Based on analysis of Statistics Canada census data, Reitz et al. (2014) found the problem of underutilization of immigrant skills in Canada had grown significantly since the mid-1990s when the problem of "brain waste" was identified. The economic impact measured in total annual earnings lost due to immigrant skills utilization was estimated at more than twice what it was in the mid-1990s (from about $4.80 billion in 1996 to over $11.37 billion in 2006). Reitz et al. (2014) suggest that the qualification assessment process is constrained by procedures that vary across provinces and recommends change to better streamline the myriad of employers, licensing bodies, post-secondary institutions and credential evaluation providers involved in the FCR process.

A number of studies underscore the challenges faced by immigrants when their prior learning is not validated at an equitable level in their adopted or host country. Andersson and Osman (2008) describe how validation or RPL acts as a dividing practice and technique for inclusion and exclusion of immigrants in their vocations in Swedish working life. The study considers how this practice normalizes the misrecognition of immigrants' experience and

knowledge and thus affects often negatively, the incorporation of immigrants in their respective area of competence in the Swedish labour market.

In a similar study, Guo and Andersson (2006) found that one of the hurdles preventing the full recognition of immigrants' educational qualifications and professional experience is the prevailing attitude toward a deficit model of difference where negative attitudes and behaviours toward immigrants co-exist with commitments to democratic principles such as justice, equality and fairness as conflicting dialogues or "democratic racism". From the analyses of the difficulties that immigrant professionals have experienced in having foreign credentials and work experiences recognized, Andersson & Guo (2009) and Guo (2009) further point out that PLAR creates a system of governing through excluding, normalizing and dividing practices leading to the devaluation and denigration of immigrants' qualifications prior learning and work experiences. To address the approaches to PLAR for immigrant professionals that act as barriers, the researchers recommend that government organizations, post-secondary institutions, and professional associations dismantle barriers and adopt a more inclusive framework.

In 2006, on behalf of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA), Riffell (2006) conducted research to gather information on best practices in PLAR for foreign-trained individuals. As part of a comprehensive assessment strategy, CAPLA, along with many organizations advocated for the increased use of both credential and competency recognition in an effort to decrease the barriers that immigrants were experiencing in Canada. In response, CAPLA developed a manual with an overview of five PLAR methods (self-assessments, written examinations, oral questioning, demonstrations and observations, and portfolios) to help employers, regulatory bodies and post-secondary institutions to screen and support immigrants in their goal of entering the Canadian workforce (Simosko, 2012).

The Learning Recognition Marketplace

There are a number of stakeholders in the learning recognition marketplace: post-secondary institutions, employers, individuals (employees/students), regulatory bodies, and federal and provincial governments. As depicted in Figure 3, it is the interaction between these players that determines who receives learning recognition and the value of recognition in the job market.

Figure 3: The Learning Recognition Marketplace

Source: Adapted with permission from the Government of Manitoba

Governments at the federal and provincial levels endeavour to shape this marketplace through a variety of policies. Over the last 20 years, federal employment policy has sought to

influence recognition practices by encouraging occupational (regulatory) bodies to adopt open recognition systems (Grant, 2015). With education policy as the primary responsibility of the provinces and territories, provincial policies have an influence on learning recognition systems. Provincial post-secondary policies also have some influence on post-secondary institutions to recognize learning. Post-secondary institutions play the primary role in issuing and recognizing learning credentials. However, a number of ancillary organizations such as education credentialing services, i.e., World Education Services, influence post-secondary policies or provide adjunct recognition services.

Occupational regulatory policy is a provincial responsibility. For example, the Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner (OMFC) oversees the regulatory practices of Manitoba's regulatory bodies. Occupational bodies such as licensing bodies and self-regulating occupations, especially medicine (the College of Physicians and Surgeons) and engineering (Engineers GeoScientists Manitoba) have a strong influence on post-secondary institutions. They may accredit or certify post-secondary programs against occupational standards. The power of an occupational body in relation to post-secondary institutions is directly related to the extent to which the occupational body's approval is a prerequisite for, or an entry to practice, often supported by provincial legislation.

A report by the Advisory Council on Economic Growth (2016) acknowledged the failure of the system including governments and employers to accommodate foreign credentials, or to make reasonable options available to bridge divides between foreign and Canadian accreditation or education standards. To address the problem and create a smoother path to successful economic integration of new immigrants, the Report recommended the federal government

increase collaboration between employers, provinces/territories and accreditation bodies to better understand how foreign degrees and certifications align with Canadian standards.

The fragmented and non-transparent learning recognition marketplace is an inherently complex system because a credential's value has to be determined through frequent and costly interactions between the stakeholders. The role of each stakeholder in relation to FCR and PLAR is discussed further below. Given the changing trends in Canada's labour force, learning recognition systems must continue to evolve if Canada is to get the most out of its workforce.

Post-secondary institutions

It is instructive to consider how learning credentials relate to the ways that post-secondary institutions define their mission and strategic objectives. Credentials are the institutions' testament to knowledge and skill. Each post-secondary institution's reputation therefore relies to some degree on its credential. There is strong incentive to ensure credentials are of high quality. The more the institution controls the education experience, the more faith it is likely to have that its credential reflects a quality education that will sustain its reputation in the long term (Grant, 2015).

Post-secondary institutions dominate learning recognition and are very much based on credit assessments of various types. PLAR is often carried out between individuals and academic departments and tends to break down economies of scale in learning assessment because each learner is assessed separately. That makes assessment costly to conduct and public support for education does not necessarily adequately compensate institutions for that cost. Post-secondary institutions therefore may not have an incentive to undertake PLAR.

Provincial governments have influenced post-secondary practices in the area of articulation agreements and transfer credit. For example, in 2011, the Government of Manitoba developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to Improve Student Mobility. University and college presidents signed the MOU, with the commitment to double opportunities for student mobility within four years. Building on the initiative, the Government announced that Campus Manitoba would transition to an online platform of existing transfer credit course-to-course arrangements and articulation agreements (the Transfer Credit Portal) between colleges and universities. According to the Manitoba College Review (Usher & Pelletier, 2017), the portal was completed but never launched due to lack of institutional agreements and funding.

A chief concern of post-secondary institutions and regulatory bodies is to preserve the integrity of their admission systems and therefore they must have confidence in credentials before admitting students. The question is to what extent will post-secondary institutions make special efforts to verify learning? This clearly depends, in part, on whether they need students. Post-secondary institutions with healthy demand for available spots are less likely to incur additional costs to verify learning of new students. A lack of confidence in learning credentials or prior learning will merely result in refusal to admit. Transfer credit and articulation agreements essentially decrease the cost of admission and increase confidence.

Federal Government Initiatives

The federal government has been active in supporting learning recognition systems for well over a decade. In 2009, the Government of Canada invested $50 million to address the barriers to FCR in Canada (Grant, 2015). The funding supported the development and implementation of the *Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign*

Qualifications. The Framework identified target occupations and emphasized the importance of fairness, timeliness, transparency and consistency in recognition processes (Forum of Labour Market Ministers, 2009).

The federal government provides financial support through the Foreign Credential Recognition Program (FCRP) to a range of bodies involved in credential recognition such as regulatory bodies, sector councils, immigrant-serving organizations, post-secondary institutions, and employers. Provincial/territorial governments and organizations use the funding for programs that help assess and recognize the international credentials and work experience that individuals have acquired in other countries. The FCRP also helps implement the Pan-Canadian Framework. The Foreign Credential Referral Office (FCRO) is a federal initiative aimed at providing internationally trained individuals with information, path-finding and referral services to have their credentials assessed and recognized (Elgersma, 2012).

After Canada ratified the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in 1999, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) established the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) to help Canada conform to the Convention. CICIC has focused on developing standards, resources and tools to support the consistency and capacity for academic credential assessment. In 2012, CICIC published the *Pan-Canadian Quality Assurance Framework for the Association of International Academic Credentials* to provide guidance and standards to support fair recognition of credentials. However, the assessment of academic credentials is decentralized, so significant provincial differences remain, owing to different standards and procedures for submitting and assessing qualifications.

Regulatory Bodies

Regulatory bodies are another set of stakeholders in the learning recognition marketplace whose government-sanctioned role as protectors of public safety authorizes them to assess the knowledge, skills and competencies of individuals, and provide certification or licenses to practice in their area of jurisdiction. In this context, PLAR can be used as a tool to assess and recognize the professional competencies of workers in professions and in skilled trades that have practice requirements (Moss, 2014).

Regulatory bodies are subject to federal and/or provincial government legislation that are both labour-market driven and represent culturally ingrained practices. An occupation is regulated if a license from a professional association or a government agency is required to practice. Examples of regulated occupations are doctors, dentists, nurses, engineers and some trades. The primary purpose of regulated professions is to act to safeguard the public from unqualified practitioners.

As Moss (2014) notes, the need for mechanisms to assess and recognize learning, skills and knowledge attained elsewhere or by means of non-formal and informal learning is a recurring theme in the literature related to regulated professions. Without a valid and reliable structure of assessment, the regulated professions tend to rely on calculating the equivalent of recognizable foreign qualifications. Moss (2014) further argues that the core mission of regulatory bodies needs to be maintained in terms of protection of the public, but not in an exclusionary way in favour of the dominant society. Efforts must continue for PLAR and regulatory bodies to find common ground in developing a shared philosophical orientation to recognition and accredited knowledge, experience and competencies.

According to Girard and Smith (2013), access to regulatory occupations is directly linked to FCR and this is the main explanation for immigrants' disadvantage in the labour market. FCR is the first step in a rigorous process for immigrants to achieve entry into a regulated profession (Brouwer, 1999). The lack of recognition of foreign credentials by employers is one of the key barriers faced by internationally trained professionals in securing suitable work. The consequences are far-reaching as most regulated professionals require either degree equivalency or relevant work experience and generally in a labour market they can recognize as having equitable status to the Canadian labour market.

There are several themes emerging from the literature as issues and sometimes barriers related to PLAR within regulated professions: FCR and assessments, lack of Canadian experience (either degree or work experience) , inconsistent language requirements, and the lack of complete, transparent and accurate information on regulatory requirements and PLAR (Moss, 2014; Van Kleef & Werquin, 2013).

The Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner

The need for PLAR within a profession or occupation is often driven by new regulations either from government or from regulatory bodies. In 2007, the Manitoba Legislature passed *The Fair Registration Practices in Regulated Professions Act,* and created the Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner (OMFC) to administer the Act. Since 2007, the OMFC has been reviewing registration practices of regulators and making recommendations to improve pathways to regulators for immigrants educated outside Canada.

Among the responsibilities of the OMFC under the Act, is to report on regulatory practices related to internationally educated individuals and their registration by regulated

professions, work with regulators to improve learning pathways for immigrants trying to establish careers in Manitoba, and to collaborate with regulators to strengthen the ability to assess international qualifications. The OMFC uses the term 'Qualifications Recognition' or QR in place of Credentials Recognition or PLAR to reflect the idea that work experience, in addition to education credentials must be taken into account to demonstrate proficiency (OMFC, n.d.).

The OMFC (2009) endorses the concept of competency-based learning, with the emphasis on the internationally educated professional's (IEP) individual knowledge, skills, experience and abilities rather than on where or how they have been acquired. The use of competency-based assessments are encouraged to verify skills that a paper credential might not, and to identify gaps to meet qualification standards. Acceptable evaluation methods may include performance reviews, professional references, non-formal learning, and self-assessment exercises (OMFC, 2009).

The OMFC (2016) developed *The Manitoba Fairness Standard Guide* to align with the principal purpose of the legislation, that is, "to review, improve and ensure fair registration practice of internationally educated applicants" (p. 2). The Guide is designed for purposes of evaluating the fairness of assessment and registration practice with the intent of improving professional recognition practices for skilled individuals educated outside Canada. Among the elements listed in the Guide are a number of assessment methods to demonstrate competence and skills as a way to fill qualification gaps. Table 2 presents a subset of assessment practices adapted from *The Manitoba Fairness Standard Guide* that reflect a wide range of opportunities to demonstrate learning.

Table 2: Assessment Methods for Internationally Educated Professionals to Demonstrate Competence

Assessment Method	**Explanation and Examples**
Self-assessment tools	• Support applicant's ability to identify gaps in qualifications to see how their training aligns with what is needed in Canadian practice • Can be an important element of PLAR used by regulators
Multiple methods of assessment	• Paper credentials review • Written and practice exams • Interviews • Peer review • Worksite observation • Performance reviews • Professional references • Professional development workshops and lectures • Supervised practice
Opportunity to demonstrate competence	• Provides opportunities for applicants to show their abilities with regard to critical tasks and areas of practice • Allows individuals to adjust and adapt as they are assessed in real practice settings

Professional work experience considered to determine qualification	• Professional work experience is assessed to:
	  • supplement the assessment of academic qualifications
	  • Reduce or waive examination and assessment requirements
	  • Shorten or waive internship, articling. or member-in-training requirements
	  • Evaluate currency of practice

Availability of supervised practice opportunities	• Allows applicants to show what they can do and address gaps in qualifications
Gap and bridge training opportunities	• Offer a qualifications recognition pathway that is fair, time-efficient, and comprehensive

Source: Adapted with permission from the Government of Manitoba

In 2013, the OMFC released *The Guiding Principles for the Development and Implementation of Gap Training and Bridge Programs* based on a review of nine programs in regulated professions in Manitoba. Gap training and bridging programs offer a QR pathway for internationally educated professionals with the following characteristics:

a) A *fair* pathway that gives applicants multiple and credible opportunities to demonstrate competency whereby the IEP can meet a regulator's requirements for QR,
b) A *time efficient* pathway that allows IEPs to achieve QR and to enter practice as expeditiously as possible without undue delays in assessment, application and admission processes, and
c) A *comprehensive* pathway that allows the IEP to recognize, understand, and demonstrate the professional knowledge, skills and values required for effective professional practice that reflects the unique requirements assigned by a regulator.

For this study, data was collected from five Gap Training and Bridging Programs. These programs are discussed in Chapter 5.

Summary

This chapter compares and combines selected elements of PLAR policy from a university case study (Frick et al., 2007a, 2007b) and best practices that contributed to PLAR program success from a research study (Hoffmann et al., 2009) to develop an approach to analysing the development and implementation of PLAR at the University of Manitoba. Those aspects that form the basis of the analysis include the conceptualization and purposes of PLAR, processes

and assessment strategies including formalized and individualized methods, institutional mission and vision, professional development, and institutional support for PLAR.

Two well-known models for conceptualizing PLAR policy and practice include Harris' four approaches to "ways of seeing RPL" and Butterworth's credit exchange and developmental models as different interpretations of what constitutes a knowledge claim. PLAR presents a challenge for universities and their traditional monopoly as the providers of academic, field of study-based knowledge. The hierarchies of knowledge and power have implications for PLAR and its acceptance as experiential, non-traditional learning. There is a significant body of research on PLAR and Canadian universities, and a rationale is provided for approaching the study from an area of study focus.

The state of PLAR and the recognition of foreign credentials has implications for the underutilization of skills among immigrants, the impact on the economy, and the need to overcome related barriers. The learning recognition marketplace and the individual stakeholders each play significant roles in the recognition of learning systems including PLAR and QR.

To this point, the dissertation has developed a rationale for applying professional capital as a conceptual framework to explore elements of PLAR and best practices from a university perspective. The following chapter describes the methodological procedures used to develop a deeper understanding of PLAR by taking an area of study approach to explore the perceptions of those who have a past or present connection to PLAR at the university.

CHAPTER 4 – METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to explain the rationale for the qualitative case study approach including the data collection methodologies: documentation and semi-structured interviews employed to carry out the study. I provide details pertaining to data collection and analysis, the site selection and description, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations. Additionally, I discuss a number of validity and reliability strategies to add rigour and credibility to the study. All materials used to conduct the study are appended to the dissertation.

Research Design – A Qualitative Case Study

A qualitative research study often begins with being curious about something, to ask questions, and to look for a research problem in everyday experiences. The value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and thematic development within the context of a specific site (Creswell, 2013, 2014). This exploratory approach honours an inductive style that has rigour, building from particular to general themes, with a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A central characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality through interaction with their social worlds. The interest therein lies in 1) how people interpret their experiences, 2) how they construct their worlds, and 3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The researcher is the instrument, with the goal of

"observing action and contexts, often intentionally playing a subjective role in the study, using his or her own personal experience in making interpretations" (Stake, 2010, p. 20).

This study was designed to answer the research questions related to participant perceptions of PLAR from both an area of study perspective and through the conceptual framework of professional capital. A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study because it is grounded in understanding the meanings that people have constructed about their world and their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Working in and through interpretations, the study is situated in a natural setting that fosters pragmatism and draws on multiple methods for exploring a topic. In carrying out my role as the researcher, I obtained perspectives from individual interviews; transcribed, analyzed and interpreted all data; created categories and themes; and composed a general sketching of the larger, complex picture.

The Rationale for a Case Study

Qualitative case studies generally share with other forms of qualitative research the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive and investigative strategy, with the end product being richly descriptive (Stake, 2010). Yin (2014) defines case study in terms of the research process: "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). Case study research starts with the same compelling feature: the desire to derive a close or otherwise in-depth understanding of a single case (Yin, 2014).

Stake (1995) describes the case as "a specific, a complex, functioning thing … an integrated system" (p. 2). In his later work, Stake (2005) envisions the researcher as committed

to pondering impressions and deliberating on recollections and records, seeking patterns of data to develop themes, getting multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, seeking alternative interpretations to pursue, and developing assertions or general concluding statements about the case.

The purpose of this study was to obtain the perspectives of current and former PLAR role-players at the University of Manitoba to identify themes and to draw general conclusions about the overall meanings derived. According to Creswell (2013), this research fits the description of a case study because it involves "the study of a case within a real-life contemporary context or setting" (p. 97). In addition, the case can be a concrete entity such as an individual or small group bounded or described within certain parameters such as a specific time and place (Creswell, 2013). This case study is bounded by time (six months of data collection), place (situated at the University of Manitoba Campus), and participants (having a current or former connection to PLAR).

Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is paramount, and the findings are trustworthy to the extent that there has been some rigour in carrying out the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rigour implies that the researcher validates the accuracy of the study to establish credibility by using one or more procedures for validation (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discuss the trustworthiness and rigour in qualitative research with reference to the traditional terminology of validity and reliability, while recognizing these are contested terms. Several strategies should be used to enhance the validity and reliability of a

qualitative study. However Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest the researcher may choose to focus on methodological rigour, or what the researcher can do to ensure trustworthiness in the study. Ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in as ethical a manner as possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016):

> The potential trustworthiness of a study should be judged not only by how competently it is designed … but also by the stipulated plan for how the researcher will be ethically engaged and therefore, engaging explicitly with the ethics of practice will go far to convince … readers that the study is likely to be designed and conducted in trustworthy ways (pp. 50-51).

I followed all Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) guidelines to address the ethical requirements to conduct my research,

The study implemented triangulation by using multiple sources of data to provide corroborating evidence to achieve a deeper understanding of PLAR within the university setting. This meant comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times from people from different points of view by different means within the methodologies. Yin (2014) argues that a major strength of a single case study data collection is the opportunity to use different sources of evidence. A major advantage of using triangulation according to Yin is the development of converging lines of inquiry. Any case study or conclusion is therefore likely to be more convincing and accurate if based on several sources of information.

Triangulation is a powerful strategy for increasing the credibility and internal validity (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and adds rigour, richness, and depth to the

inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). I conducted member checks with participants so they could confirm that the interview transcripts accurately represented the narrative accounts. The participants received their transcripts via email to check the data for accuracy and to provide any suggested changes or feedback. I notified participants that if no changes were required within a two-week timeframe it would be assumed that the transcripts were accurate and would be used for analysis. Field notes were created after each interview to capture initial observations, reflections and ideas to prepare for the analysis and interpretation of findings. Of the 13 participants, seven respondents acknowledged receiving their interview transcripts, and among those, four provided feedback on the transcripts.

The member checking of interview transcripts adds validity and credibility to the study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants added credibility to the study by offering a range of responses to questions (Chioncel, Van Der Veen, Wildemeersch, & Jarvis, 2003), engaging with, and commenting on the data, and by confirming whether the overall account was realistic and accurate (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

I used another validity strategy by reflecting on my researcher role and disclosing my background assumptions, beliefs and biases that may have influenced my interpretation of the study. Reflexivity is a core characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell 2013, 2014). As Patton (2015) points out, the credibility of the researcher is especially important in qualitative research as the person who is the major instrument of data collection and analysis.

On a final point, this study used rich, thick description to convey the details of the perspectives of participants, as well as the findings with adequate evidence in the form of quotations from the interviews. A qualitative inquiry that is richly descriptive is an important

means for establishing credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Tracy, 2010), as it helps to convey the actual situations that have been investigated and to an extent, the contexts that surround them (Shenton, 2004).

Site Selection and Description

The focus for this case study is the University of Manitoba, located in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Founded in 1877, and formed by the federation of three denominational colleges, the University of Manitoba is the first of western Canada's universities (Morton, 1957). In addition to offering undergraduate education in arts, sciences, and education, the University provides programs in a broad range of professional studies, applied sciences, and performing arts, and is responsible for the vast majority of graduate education and research in Manitoba. As the province's largest university and its only medical-doctoral post-secondary institution, the University of Manitoba is a member of the U15, Canada's largest research-intensive universities with a strong commitment to research, teaching, scholarship and service. The University ranks 12th among Canada's top 50 research universities for attracting research grants and contracts [http://umanitoba.ca/about/factandfigures/#top].

The University of Manitoba's statement of goals and values reflect a strong commitment to equity and inclusion. Among the University's strategic priorities over the next few years is a commitment to increasing enrolment, retention and graduation among indigenous students (University of Manitoba, 2014). In its Strategic Plan, *Taking Our Place (2015-2020)*, the University also committed to "establishing a university-level policy and support for the recognition of prior learning, with specific attention to the prior learning of indigenous peoples" (p. 13). As of fall 2017, the University reported total enrolment (undergraduate and graduate) as

close to 30,000. International student enrolment was 5,268 or 17.9% of the total student population. Self-declared Canadian indigenous student enrolment was 2,455 or 8.3% of the overall student population (Office of Institutional Analysis, 2017).

The University is home to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, housing the largest collection of curated materials on the Residential School system in Canada. As part of that mandate, the Centre "plays an active role in the process of reconciliation, providing a safe, respectful and trustworthy space for Survivors and their families to gain access to records and collect information about their history" (UM Today, 2015, p. 2).

Since 1975, the University of Manitoba has actively participated in the Access Programs, with the mandate to maximize access to post-secondary education among individuals and groups who face significant financial, social and/or cultural barriers. The Access Programs provide supports in areas of academic and personal counselling, course instruction, orientation, tutoring and advocacy for those who otherwise would not have an opportunity to attend the University because of economic, social and academic barriers. The Aboriginal Focus Programs were established in 1998 with the mandate to create and provide community-based programs responding to the post-secondary and professional needs of Aboriginal peoples. In 2011, these two programs were amalgamated to strengthen capacity to provide unique programs in tandem with supports needed to enhance capacity for success [http://umanitoba.ca/student/records/media/2017_2018_Undergraduate_Calendar_Final.pdf]. The Access/Aboriginal Focus Programs serve many important purposes but do not specifically offer PLAR as defined in this study. Further details about PLAR at the University of Manitoba are discussed in Chapter 5.

Sources of Data Collection

There were two sources of data obtained for this study: documents and semi-structured interviews. Making use of different sources and methods of data collection can provide corroborating evidence to leverage a detailed in-depth understanding of a theme or perspective (Creswell 2013, 2014). Locating evidence to document codes or themes in different sources of data is a way of triangulating information and providing validity to findings. The use of multiple methods as an effective triangulating strategy was discussed in detail above.

Documents

Rationale

Documents are often drawn upon in a qualitative study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), and can help uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Documents play an explicit role in data collection for case study research, producing a rich description of a single phenomenon (Stake, 1995). In Yin's (2014) view, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other data sources. Additionally, supporting data obtained from documents can provide a background to, and help explain the attitudes and behaviour of those in the group being studied, as well as to verify particular details that participants have supplied (Shenton, 2004).

Methodology

I first undertook a search of documents to gather information on background, content, objectives as well as the context within which PLAR operates across three areas of study. Documentary analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating material (Bowen,

2009). I accessed documents in two ways. In one method, I independently accessed materials in the public domain, primarily online from the University of Manitoba website and webpages. These materials included annual reports, strategic plans, academic calendars, information and application bulletins, journal and newspaper articles, and program-related webpages and documents. I found most information about PLAR on webpages, and obtained these documents in electronic format.

In some cases, the interviewees voluntarily provided documents referred to during the interviews to me at the conclusion of the interview or afterwards by email. As a second method, I invited interview participants to provide information including documents, or data that was not publicly available but was considered relevant to the research. The participant and I co-signed a Letter of Permission to grant access to these documents (see Appendix A). For example, participants from the Bachelor of Social Work Program and I co-signed the letter to allow me access to PLAR data that is reported in Table 6. The data provided supporting evidence for information provided in interviews and created a consistent picture of how PLAR is working in the program.

Next, I analyzed the data in order to elicit meaning and develop empirical knowledge about PLAR by area of study. This method is fitting to the study as Bowen (2009) emphasizes that document analysis is an appropriate first kind of analysis as it is efficient if the documents are available, and they are independent of the research process. The advantage of gathering and examining documents is that it reveals data on the context, supplies background information, provides a means of tracking change and development, and verifies findings from other data sources (Raible & deNoyelles, 2015).

I undertook a content analysis of the documents by highlighting relevant passages of text related to PLAR, as presented in Table 3, specifically looking for information on elements of PLAR policy and process, i.e., conceptualization, purposes, assessment strategies, institutional support, and links to institutional mission and vision. Searching for these terms was helpful in compiling information about each area of study and drawing conclusions about the findings. For example, searching for several PLAR-related terms (exemption, challenge for credit, transfer credit, portfolios) on the University of Manitoba's website, led to the finding that PLAR is offered as formal learning, rather than non-formal or informal learning. In another example, reviewing the Faculty of Social Work PLAR webpage: [https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/social_work/programs/distance/902.html] helped me to understand how PLAR operates as an exemption in the Bachelor of Social Work Program.

The documentary data was then analyzed and interpreted together with data from the interviews until patterns and themes emerged across all sets of data. A thorough review of documentation provided background information and helped me to understand the area of study context in which PLAR was operating. Documentary data also provided useful information in checking interview data and vice versa. For example, two documents pertaining to the Gap Training and Bridge Programs: 1) the *Summary of Bridging and Gap Training Programs in Manitoba for Internationally Educated Professionals* (Government of Manitoba, n.d.), and 2) the *Guiding Principles of Gap Training and Bridge Programs* (OMFC, 2013) were rich sources of information that served to supplement the interview data.

Table 3: Relevant Passages of Text Related to PLAR

Access Programs
Admissions
Advanced Standing
Application Information Bulletin
International Dentist Degree Program (IDDP)
Internationally Educated Agrologists Program (IEAP)
Internationally Educated Engineers Qualification (IEEQ) Program
Internationally Educated Teacher (IET) Program
International Medical Graduate (IMG) Program
Articulation Agreements
Bachelor of Arts Integrated Studies (BAIS)
Certificate of Adult and Continuing Education (CACE)
Certification in Program Development for Adult Learners (PDAL)
Challenge for Credit
Exemption
Gap Training and Bridge Programs
Government of Manitoba
Internationally Educated Professionals
Joint Programming
Office of Manitoba Fairness Commissioner
PLAR Application Booklet
PLAR Syllabus
Portfolios
Practicum
Qualifications Recognition
Regulatory Body
Transfer Credit

Findings

My extensive search of documents primarily related to elements of PLAR policy and process by area of study revealed the following:

1) Extended Education: most background information about PLAR was found in the University of Manitoba's Undergraduate Academic Calendar. Information about specific programs was accessed on individual webpages.
2) The Bachelor of Social Work Program: there was a webpage specifically devoted to PLAR with links to two main documents: the PLAR Syllabus and the Application Booklet. There were separate links to application components.
3) The Gap Training and Bridge Programs: in addition to the two documents referred to above, application information bulletins were accessed for specific program information. Additional information was accessed from journal articles and a doctoral dissertation.

In sum, the inclusion of documents, in combination with the other data sources not only enhanced the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the study, but also created a consistent picture of how PLAR operates in each area of study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the second data collection method used for the study. Commonly found in case study research, interviews resemble guided conversations rather than structured queries. As Yin (2014) notes, the researcher generally pursues a consistent line of inquiry. However, the actual stream of questions in a case study interview is likely to be fluid

rather than rigid. This type of interview is alternatively referred to as an in-depth interview (Seidman, 2013).

At the root of in-depth interviewing, according to Seidman (2013) is "an interest in understanding the … experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience… being interested in others is the key to some of the basic assumptions underlying interviewing technique" (p. 9). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) describe the research interview as "a conversation that has a structure and a purpose" (p. 5). In this sense, the interview goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views in everyday conversations and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge.

For this study, semi-structured interviewing allowed for a systematic, iterative gathering of data where questions were arranged in a protocol to evoke rich data but were also focused for efficient data analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Interviewing was open-ended and less structured in that individual participants could respond by elaborating on answers, disagreeing with the question, or raising new issues (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview was guided by a protocol with a list of questions flexibly worded allowing me to respond to the issues at hand.

Protocol and Process

The semi-structured interview format helped to capture the interviewees' experiences and perceptions about PLAR and to further my own understanding of how PLAR plays a role within the areas of study. An interview protocol was prepared and referred to during the interviews (see Appendix B). The questions included elements related to PLAR policy and best practice, as discussed in Chapter 3, and were organized in four sections. The first three sections included questions pertaining to professional capital as follows: section one (human capital), section two

(social capital), and section three (decisional capital). The fourth section of the protocol asked respondents to reflect on some general aspects about PLAR. At the end of each interview, I asked the respondents if there were any issues related to PLAR they deemed were important that had not been discussed.

Some of the information shared in the interviews necessitated further questioning, therefore, two techniques assisted in further understanding. In one technique, I asked interpretive questions to provide a check on what I initially understood, as well as the opportunity to ask for additional information and opinions to be revealed. A second technique was to use probes or follow-up questions to seek more information or clarity about what the respondent had just said.

Sample Selection and Recruitment Process

The criteria for selecting participants for the interviews was that participants had to be administrators, faculty, instructors, practitioners or assessors who were, or had been, employees of the University of Manitoba and either had responsibility for, or worked directly with PLAR, in either a current or a previous position. A purposeful sampling strategy was employed to intentionally sample a group of people that could best inform an understanding of the research problem and the research questions posed in the study. According to Patton (2015), "the logic and power of qualitative purposeful sampling derives from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of specific cases: *information-rich cases*" (emphasis in original), (citied in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96).

Participant selection began with the identification of key informants or individuals who could provide insights into the topic and name other possible participants who would be

important to the study. Initially, my doctoral advisory committee members identified four representatives to interview. A key informant list of referrals in the Gap Training and Bridge Programs was generated in consultation with the Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner. I then contacted the informants by email to explain the purpose of the research and to answer any questions. Key informants were asked to pass on the recruitment materials by email to others at the University who they thought might be interested in participating in the study. Snowball sampling was also used to identify referrals who would be important to include in the study.

As the practice of PLAR is relatively limited on campus, I relied largely on University of Manitoba documents, webpages, and key informants to locate instances of PLAR either past or present. Ultimately, interview participants were recruited from the following three areas of study: Extended Education, the Faculty of Social Work, and the Gap Training and Bridge Programs for Internationally Educated Professionals. Among the Gap and Bridge Training Programs, the following fields were represented in the study: Agrology, Education, Engineering, Dentistry and Medicine.

The recruitment process for the interviews proceeded as follows: I initially contacted each referral through the University of Manitoba email system to explain the purpose of the research and to ask potential participants if they would be interested in participating in the study and to arrange a time and place convenient to them. Interested parties contacted me directly, and in response, received the formal invitation letter (see Appendix C) and informed consent form (see Appendix D). In addition, I contacted two potential participants, including a senior university administration official who declined the invitation to participate in the interviews.

In my position as researcher, I offered a $30.00 cash honorarium as a token of appreciation or reciprocity (Creswell, 2013, 2014) for participating in the interview. The honorarium was paid following the signing of the consent form and prior to the start of the interview. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was removed from the data, and pseudonyms were used.

Data Collection

There were 13 interviews conducted in person between May and July 2017, and scheduled at a time and location convenient to the participant. The choice of location, especially one chosen by the interviewee can afford a feeling of comfort, and create a pleasant atmosphere of co-operation with interviewees (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). The interview participants were professional staff representing the three areas of study referred to above. The interviews were scheduled for approximately one hour. The average interview length was 52 minutes.

The interview participants were predominantly female, with two men and 11 women interviewed. Table 4 presents the number of participants interviewed by area of study area as follows: Extended Education (3), Faculty of Social Work (4), Gap Training and Bridge Programs (6). I interviewed one participant from each of the five Gap Training and Bridge Programs represented, with the exception of Engineering, with two participants interviewed.

Table 4: Interview Participants by Area of Study

Discipline/Program Area	**Participant**
Extended Education	Julie
	Jim
	Heather
Faculty of Social Work	Ron
	Linda
	Gail
	Barb
Gap Training and Bridge Programs	Gina
	Nancy
	Carol
	Sharon
	Sandi
	Alison

The participants represented a cross-section of current and former staff positions that included the following: Dean, Associate Dean, Director, Coordinator, Instructor, and Assessor as presented in Table 5. At the time of the interviews, nine participants were currently working in positions related to PLAR, and the remaining four participants were no longer working in, or had responsibility for PLAR. I took care to avoid presenting information that could be linked to identify interview participants and used pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

I digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim the interviews. Fulfilling the three functions of researcher, interviewer and transcriber can have the advantage of bringing together a good knowledge of the research topic, its background, the research context, and the interviewees (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). In addition, an intimate familiarity with the data is created that helps to generate insights and hunches about the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Table 5: Interview Participants by Staff Position and Status

Staff Position	**Status**	
	Current	**Former**
Dean		1
Associate Dean	2	
Director	2	1
Coordinator	3	2
Instructor	1	
Assessor	1	
Total	9	4

Description of the Participants

A brief description of each interview participant by area of study is as follows:

Extended Education

Julie had previously served in an administrative capacity in the Extended Education Division and had been involved in the promotion and implementation of PLAR. Julie had worked closely on developing portfolios in conjunction with the Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) program. Julie was also very involved with the use of PLAR in other jurisdictions.

Jim is in a senior level position at Extended Education and had worked very closely with helping students in preparing and assessing their portfolios. Jim worked with the PLAR Coordinator and was active in PLAR-related discussions at the time. Jim also collaborated with high schools in promoting and facilitating advanced standing to university admission through dual credit courses.

Heather served in an administrative capacity in the Extended Education Division and was very familiar with the challenges that students faced in putting their portfolios together. Heather

was instrumental in developing transfer credit arrangements between the Division's certificate programs and University degree programs, e.g., the Certificate for Adult and Continuing Education Program and the Bachelor of Arts in Integrated Studies Degree.

The Bachelor of Social Work Program

Ron is a senior administrator in the Faculty of Social Work and was responsible for introducing PLAR to the Faculty based on an experience of working and training at another university. Ron maintains a supportive role in helping staff implement PLAR in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Program. He also has oversight for resolving challenges to the process, i.e., student complaints.

Linda works directly with students who apply for PLAR in the BSW Program, and works with her colleagues to assess applications. Linda played an important role in developing the PLAR process currently in place. She conducts PLAR-related research and networks with colleagues in other jurisdictions to remain up-to-date on current developments in the field.

Gail was instrumental in developing a PLAR exemption process for the BSW Program. Gail works to promote PLAR through orientation and information sessions to prospective students and to Faculty. She also works with colleagues to assess admissions to PLAR and advises students about commitments and expectations concerning the PLAR option.

Barb has extensive teaching experience in social work-related courses at both colleges and universities. Barb also assesses PLAR applications in the BSW Program and makes recommendations about changes to the applications process. Barb works actively to support the PLAR option as a means of completing the BSW Program more quickly.

Gap Training and Bridge Programs

Nancy had worked with the International Teacher Education (IET) Program until it discontinued in 2011. Nancy worked closely with students to help them meet program admission requirements, as well as playing a guiding hand in assisting students through the program. Nancy worked in collaboration with education stakeholders (Manitoba Teacher Certification, the OMFC, school division staff, employment counsellors, and other faculty members) to oversee the IET Program.

Gina worked with the Internationally Educated Agrologists Program (IEAP) prior to its discontinuation. Gina played an active role in promoting the program to the University and outside community, including the agrology industry, Manitoba Institute of Agrologists (regulator), and Labour and Immigration (funding body). Gina was instrumental in addressing cultural challenges that students faced, and worked with them to meet program expectations.

Carol has been working with the International Dentist Degree Program (IDDP) for several years. She advises students about the application process and in meeting program requirements. Carol plays an important role in preparing students for meeting the clinical aspects of training including the National Dental Examining Board requirements. She collaborates closely with academics, clinical instructors, and health professionals familiar with the program.

Sandi works with students in the Internationally Educated Engineers Qualification (IEEQ) Program, particularly on language and cultural issues. Sandi also advocates for PLAR as an option for students returning to school after an absence. Sandi collaborates with colleagues in

other bridging programs and stakeholder groups, including MPLAN, Teachers of English to Adults in Manitoba (TEAM), and Teachers of English as a Second Language (TESL).

Sharon served in a senior-level role with the IEEQ Program and worked on developing and implementing the Program. Sharon emphasizes the importance of cultural and language fluency, professional networking opportunities, and social and community supports for students. Sharon promoted the IEEQ Program through workshops and conferences, and worked closely with University stakeholders including Admissions, Senate, Faculty of Graduate Studies and senior administration to support the Program on a long-term basis.

Alison is a senior-level staff member with the International Medical Graduate (IMG) Program. Alison has expertise in assessing clinical skills and providing training to IMG students based on their qualifications. She educates others about learning culturally appropriate medical practices and using a competency-based approach to training. Alison collaborates with Manitoba health-related professionals to share expertise and to develop common principles on practice-ready assessments.

The Role of the Researcher

As a qualitative researcher, I am an investigator and bring different perspectives to the study. According to Stake (2010), "the researcher him - or herself is an instrument, observing action and contexts, often intentionally playing a subjective role in the study, using his or her own personal experience in making interpretations" (p. 20). Given my professional background and experience in the transfer credit field, it is not possible to remain completely objective and free of bias. However, I have attempted to control my initial judgements about PLAR by remaining open to different ideas; learning how participants defined and understood PLAR;

understanding how their ideas aligned with the elements, best practices, and themes identified; and reflecting on how these experiences may have shaped my interpretation of the data.

By way of background, I have worked as a provincial government employee for almost 30 years in the education field, with two-thirds of that time working in post-secondary education. During my 14 years at the Manitoba Council on Post-Secondary Education (dissolved in 2014), I completed initial policy work related to the development of a formal transfer credit system, including the preparatory work towards the establishing of an online transfer credit portal linking all Manitoba publicly funded universities and colleges (Government of Manitoba, 2013).

The provincial government at the time was interested in encouraging transfer credit agreements between colleges and universities that led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2011, with a commitment to doubling articulation agreements over four years. Shortly thereafter, I moved to another position, but remained interested in transfer credit and was prepared to write my dissertation on the topic. Through subsequent conversations with my advisor however, my interest shifted to PLAR that later become the focus of my doctoral research.

Although closely related to transfer credit, PLAR was relatively unfamiliar to me until I embarked on this study. I believe my perspective as an interviewer was minimized as I do not work at the University of Manitoba. I have not used PLAR as a student, nor have I had many formal associations with institutional practitioners, faculty or administrators who work in PLAR. In addition, since I was unknown to most of the participants involved in the study, I have therefore been able to approach this study without any pre-conceptions about the relative merits or demerits of PLAR.

Recognizing Professional Capital

Professional capital is described as the confluence, or systematic development and integration of three kinds of capital – human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. More specifically, human capital is defined as the economically valuable knowledge and skills that can be developed in people, especially through education and training. Social capital is the collaborative power of the group, and decisional capital is the wisdom and experience developed over time to make sound judgements (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

The authors do not prescribe how human, social and decisional capital should be combined, but they do make it clear that any approach to improvement that neglects one or two of the components at the expense of the others is incomplete. As Shirley (2016) notes, "professional capital will not, and probably should not, manifest itself in exactly the same way across all systems and cultures …" (p. 306). Shirley suggests that educators should be encouraged to design their own kinds of professional capital for their own settings. In addition, there is no shared definition of what it means to be a professional in the field of education. Without agreement about what it means to be a professional, it is difficult to fully realize professional capital (Stone-Johnson, 2017).

With this in mind, this study acknowledges the complexity and difficulty of precisely defining elements of professional capital or their combination in various settings. *This research is therefore limited to investigating the power of the conceptualization of professional capital through the perspectives of administrators, academics, instructors, facilitators and assessors as authorities in their discipline in relation to the field of PLAR.*

Ethical Considerations

Prior to each interview, I asked the participants to read and sign the consent form. As a matter of course, each interview began by letting participants know that confidentiality was ensured by using pseudonyms and that all identifiable information would be removed from the data. Participants were assured that they could refrain from answering any questions and had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

My goal was to create and maintain a balance in power and to diminish any threat that participants may have felt by creating a comfortable atmosphere. The intention was to instill a spirit of co-operation with participants by showing respect and appreciation for the information they provided. No participants withdrew from the study.

All data collected including written and printed notes, digital recordings, consent forms, and data were safely stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. All electronic files were securely stored in password-protected computer files. The data were collected solely for the purposes of completing my doctoral dissertation. All data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study, i.e., December 2018.

The study posed minimal risk to participants, beyond risk that may be encountered in daily life. This study received approval from the University of Manitoba ENREB on April 7, 2017 (see Appendix E). A one-year renewal from ENREB was granted effective April 7, 2018 (see Appendix F).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was used to search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes with the goal of answering the research questions. The analysis began with preparing summaries of the interview transcripts. Notes were made in the margins of the transcripts to keep track of initial impressions, insights and patterns. The next step was to form codes based on emerging ideas and reflections, build descriptions, and develop themes (Creswell, 2013).

The coding process involved developing a short list of tentative codes expanding these to several categories and then reducing and combining them to a manageable number of themes. The final list of 40 codes in included in Appendix G. Inductive coding was applied allowing codes to emerge progressively during the analysis. Codes were contrasted and compared with new ones emerging and old ones disappearing until reaching saturation, or the point at which no new insights were forthcoming (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The last step was to interpret the data by organizing the themes into larger units of abstraction to make sense of the data (Creswell, 2013). The themes were based on the multiple perspectives of the participants and supported by quotations that captured the essence of what was said.

Summary

This chapter provided a rationale for *using a single case study approach* to address the research questions posed in the dissertation's introduction. The study employed the qualitative methodologies of documentation and semi-structured interviews to examine general perspectives on PLAR within the University areas of study and using the conceptual framework of professional capital.

The chapter presented details on the site selection and description, sample selection and recruitment for the interviews, gaining access to participants, and descriptions of the participants. I made a case for the credibility of the study by describing a number of validity strategies undertaken including addressing ethical considerations, and using triangulation, member checking, reflexivity and thick, rich description of data. Additional details on data collection and procedures to analyze the data were presented to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of findings, which comprise the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the study and addresses each of the three research questions. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to uncover and explore the perceptions of individuals who either had, or currently have, some level of responsibility for PLAR at the University of Manitoba. The findings of the study indicate that on the one hand, there are differences in understanding often associated with PLAR; on the other hand, there may be opportunities lost. Additional findings related to the invisibility of PLAR, and the roadblocks to implementation. The study documents an intrinsic belief in the value and benefits of PLAR among participants, as well as insights and constructive ideas for moving forward.

Gaining knowledge about PLAR from the perceptions of administrators, faculty members, instructors and assessors is informative in at least two ways. One, it addresses the human capital aspect that is an intrinsic part of workforce participation and economic competitiveness within a globalized knowledge economy. Secondly, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is an important means to alleviate marginalization and to promote equity, access, and massification by opening up learning pathways to formal education to those who remain excluded from educational opportunity.

To answer the three research questions, I used an inductive approach to analyze data from relevant documentation and the interviews. Documentation provided the contextual material to address PLAR from an area of study approach posed in research question one. The interview questions captured perspectives pertaining to general perceptions of PLAR to address research question two, and the three components of professional capital (human capital, social capital and

decisional capital) to address research question three. The analysis and synthesis of data revealed several themes and professional capital themes. To support the analysis and thematic ideas, direct quotations from the interviews reflected a range of participant perspectives.

The three research questions are as follows:

- What is the role of PLAR by area of study at the University?
- What are the participants' general perceptions of PLAR?
- How can the Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) conceptual framework of professional capital provide a lens with which to more clearly see, analyze and draw conclusions about how PLAR is utilized by area of study?

The implications of the study for theory, practice, and further research are addressed in Chapter 7.

Research Question One

Prior to addressing the first research question, I discussed PLAR offered at the University of Manitoba, including transfer credit, articulation agreements, joint programs, and challenge for credit. To address the first research question, I reviewed and analyzed publicly available documents in three areas of study that had either a present or a past connection to PLAR. The purpose of the review was to identify information on content and objectives, as well as potential linkages to PLAR.

The three areas of study were not randomly selected from a sample of many sites at the University, but were those that I found to have some connection to PLAR. The areas of study included the following: Extended Education, the Bachelor of Social Work Program, and a

sampling of the Gap and Bridge Training Programs for Internationally Educated Professionals (IEP). For this latter grouping, I interviewed participants representing the following five Gap Training and Bridge Programs areas:

- Internationally Educated Agrologists Program (IEAP)
- Internationally Educated Engineers Qualification (IEEQ) Program
- Internationally Educated Teachers (IET) Program
- International Dentist Degree Program (IDDP)
- International Medical Graduate (IMG) Program

For purposes of sorting interview participants, there are two levels of categorization. The first level broadly describes all participants by the *area of study*, i.e., Extended Education, the Bachelor of Social Work Program, and the Gap Training and Bridge Programs. The second level specifically categorizes participants by *field of study* or *program.* The *field of study* term categorizes participants from Extended Education. The *program of study* term categorizes participants from the Bachelor of Social Work Program and the Gap Training and Bridge Programs.

PLAR at the University of Manitoba

The review of the University of Manitoba documentation, accessed primarily from the University website reveals that PLAR is available primarily as formal learning through the recognition of academic credentials [https://umanitoba.ca/student/admissions/application/deadlines/transfer-credit.html]. As stated in Chapter 1, the focus of this study was informal and non-formal PLAR at the University of Manitoba. However, there appears to be no evidence of these types of PLAR being available.

A common approach is that coursework completed from a recognized post-secondary institution may be considered as part of the application for admission process. Transfer credit is widely accepted at the University however, regulations vary by faculty or school. Courses are generally evaluated for advanced standing or transfer credit on a course-by-course basis and assigned a University of Manitoba equivalent where applicable. Where a direct equivalency does not exist, students may receive general (unallocated) credit or program hours. Courses deemed acceptable for transfer credit may be awarded, subject to program approval, up to the maximum allowed, based on the faculty or school's program admission standards [https://umanitoba.ca/student/admissions/application/deadlines/transfer-credit.html].

Many University of Manitoba programs offer an advanced entry option and accept applications from students who have completed one year (24 credit hours or more) in university-level studies from another recognized university or college. However, students must meet any additional university entrance requirements, performance levels, and selection criteria stipulated for the faculty or school of application. Through the process, students may qualify for advanced standing. For example, high school students who have completed courses in the Advanced Placement program or the International Baccalaureate program, or have completed certain university-level courses while in high school as dual credits, can also apply for transfer credit to the program they are entering [https://umanitoba.ca/student/admissions/media/ib-ap-info.pdf].

Students enrolled in University degree programs may also take courses at other recognized universities or colleges for transfer credit to the University, subject to individual faculty or school approval. Transfer credit courses are assigned credit hour values and grades to be included in the student's degree and cumulative grade point average. Transfer credit is

searchable through the University of Manitoba's Transfer Credit Equivalencies online database [https://aurora.umanitoba.ca/banprod/ksstransequiv.p_trans_eq_main].

The University of Manitoba has a number of articulation agreements, bilateral and multilateral with other recognized post-secondary institutions whereupon successful admission, students may receive credit within a program which shortens the path to the credential, usually a three-year or four-year degree. Articulation agreements define the terms and conditions for consideration and admission and recognition of prior learning within the context of specific programs or credentials [https://umanitoba.ca/student/admissions/documents/articulation-agreements.html].

There are scores of articulation agreements between the University and other recognized post-secondary institutions. For example, following completion of the two-year Culinary Arts Diploma Program at Red River College, students may enter the third year of the fourth year of the Bachelor of Science in Human Nutritional Sciences at the University of Manitoba [https://umanitoba.ca/student/admissions/media/AA_RRC_Culinary_Arts_HNS.pdf].

Joint programs are another credential completion opportunity that support student mobility. These are bilateral or multilateral agreements between the University and other recognized post-secondary institutions based on a prescribed set of course requirements offered collaboratively between the institutions [https://umanitoba.ca/student/admissions/documents/articulation-agreements.html]. For example, the University of Manitoba and the University College of the North (UCN) jointly offer the Bachelor of Nursing Degree Program. Students are able to complete all four years of the

Program with UCN at The Pas or Thompson campus [https://umanitoba.ca/student/admissions/media/JA_UCN_Nursing.pdf].

Challenge for credit is another form of earning degree credit at the University. This option provides students with a means of obtaining academic credit not otherwise obtainable as a transfer of credit from other institutions for practical training and experience, and/or reading and study previously completed. Students who request a challenge for credit normally do not attend classes and are generally required to write a formal examination for each course that is being challenged [http://umanitoba.ca/student/records/media/2017_2018_Undergraduate_Calendar_Final.pdf].

These formalized methods of assessing learning through PLAR used at the University are generally categorized under the credit exchange model as described in Chapter 3. While challenge for credit and transfer credit are acceptable models of PLAR, they do not provide opportunities for learners to develop and present a new understanding of and a critical reflection of their own knowledge, as would be the case with developing a portfolio, and more in keeping with the developmental model. As described in Chapter 4, and in the next section, the University's Access/Aboriginal Focus Programs serve many important purposes, specifically providing academic, social, cultural and financial supports, but do not offer PLAR as defined in the context of this study.

Extended Education

Similar to trends in other university extension and continuing education units across western Canada, the University of Manitoba's Extended Education mandate shifted over time from promoting the social and economic development of communities to meeting the lifelong learning needs of individuals (McLean, 2008). As McLean (2008) points out, "the distinctive

feature of the ‘meeting needs’ claim is the assertion that the purpose of university extension and continuing education is to provide educational opportunities and post-secondary credentials that serve people’s lifelong learning needs” (p. 97). Those served by Canadian university continuing education are primarily adult, lifelong learners who are often considered as individuals, or members of communities and organizations (McLean, 2007).

McLean (2008) defines *extension* as that which “connotes teaching, research and services practices that connect university faculty members with people who are not in attendance on campus as full-time students” (p. 93). *Continuing education*, on the other hand is defined as that which “connotes the delivery of educational programmes to people having already obtained a certain level of education” (p. 93).

As McLean (2008) points out, the University of Manitoba underwent the following name changes for its primary extension unit: 1) 1949: Department of University Extension and Adult Education; 2) 1968: Extension Division; and 3) 1976: Continuing Education Division. One possible explanation for the University of Manitoba’s return to the Extended Education name based on McLean’s definition may be due more to the Division’s increasing focus on off-campus study [https://umextended.ca/off-campus-study/], distance and online courses, and possibly less attention to whether students have pre-existing levels of education.

Extended Education at the University of Manitoba coordinates a wide range of programs through the offerings of several degree courses and non-degree or certificate courses. Classes are delivered in a range of alternative formats: during spring and summer sessions, in the evenings, off-campus, or via distance education. A central program feature of Extended Education is the Access/Aboriginal Focus Programs, the result of an amalgamation in 2011 of

two distinct areas that combine unique Aboriginal Focus Programs with a wide range of academic, social, cultural and financial supports for those who have experienced barriers to post-secondary education. Access programs are offered in engineering social work, business, nursing and health-related occupations [http://umanitoba.ca/student/records/media/2017_2018_Undergraduate_Calendar_Final.pdf].

According to Extended Education's website [https://umextended.ca/student-services/frequently-asked-questions/], degree courses are drawn from offerings of various faculties, colleges and schools. As an adult education provider, Extended Education offers several options to apply for course credit including transfer credit and challenge for credit. In addition, to qualify as an exemption, a student could receive credit for a required or elective course that was not part of a certificate program but was determined to be closely equivalent in its objectives, content and scheduled classroom hours to the course it will replace.

Extended Education offers PLAR to allow students to obtain credit for equivalent learning gained through work and other life experiences such as independent study, volunteer and community activities. The Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education (CACE), now replaced with the online Certificate in Program Development for Adult Learners (PDAL), was one of the programs where PLAR was available [https://umextended.ca/program-development-for-adult-learners/]. The CACE program prepared adult educators and trainers for leadership roles in the design and development of *adult learner programs, workplace training, and professional development activities.* The CACE is one of several certificate programs for which graduates can receive credit towards the Bachelor of Arts in Integrated Studies Degree [https://umextended.ca/program-development-for-adult-learners/].

The Extended Education website posted information in 2016 that is no longer available, whereby the student could pay an initial non-refundable assessment fee if he/she had decided to proceed with PLAR. The student was to pay a remaining fee if he/she had decided to complete the PLAR process in collaboration with an instructor. The PLAR assessment fee ranged from $350 to $400, depending on the program. The PLAR process could take from six to eight weeks to complete, and the student had to make the request to take PLAR at the start of the program. As of 2018, according to the Extended Education website [https://umextended.ca/student-services/frequently-asked-questions/], PLAR continues to be offered in the form of transfer credit, challenge for credit, and exemptions but there is no information about availability of portfolios nor fee-related information.

The research suggests that adult education programs are making little use of PLAR (Wihak, 2006, 2007), and need stronger conceptual models to increase its availability and utility (Wihak & Wong, 2011). One possible explanation is that university-based adult educators suffer from some or all of the influences that have impeded PLAR implementation in Canadian universities generally. Factors such as rigid curriculum considerations, faculty resistance, administrative concerns, and cost issues emerged as potential explanations. Additionally, the public sector financial model of the continuing education era has been replaced at most universities with an expectation that extension units should operate as entrepreneurial models based on revenue generation or cost recovery from tuition revenues and external contracts (McLean, 2008). Extended education units therefore, continue to face significant challenges in increasing programming due to infrastructure limitations and limited financial capacities (Kirby, Curran & Hollett, 2009).

The interviews with participants from Extended Education helped me to understand the role that PLAR had played in the Division at an earlier time than at present. In addition, two of the three participants were no longer working at Extended Education, and none of the participants had any current involvement with PLAR. Participant perspectives are therefore, based solely on their recollections as discussed in a later section below.

The Bachelor of Social Work Program

The Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Program is a 123-credit hour, four-year degree offered at multiple locations including the Fort Garry Campus, the William Norrie Centre (Inner-City), Thompson (Northern), and by Distance Delivery. According to the University of Manitoba's Undergraduate Academic Calendar (2017-2018), the Faculty of Social Work offers three courses open to challenge for credit. In addition, the Faculty supports the transfer credit policy by granting credit for social work courses taken within the last nine years in accredited programs [http://umanitoba.ca/student/records/media/2017_2018_Undergraduate_Calendar_Final.pdf].

In addition to completing course material, the Academic Calendar states that the BSW students are required to complete two field practicums that may include a variety of community agencies, programs, and settings. Field instruction provides students with an opportunity to engage as beginning practitioners in the processes of social work assessment, planning, intervention, evaluation and integration of theory from classroom to placement setting. Students are required to register for the two field placement courses. However, those who have two or more years of social work employment experience in the last five years may apply to register for the PLAR course (SWRK 3152) in lieu of the first field placement (see details below). To apply

for the 12-credit hour PLAR course, students must also complete a number of pre-requisite courses, a six-credit hour co-requisite course, and maintain a grade point average of 2.5 or higher.

As stated in the Faculty of Social Work's PLAR Syllabus [https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/social_work/landingMedia/PLAR_syllabus.pdf], the offering of PLAR recognizes that some BSW students have relevant experience in social service settings and are therefore eligible to have their prior learning evaluated as an alternative to the first field placement. The Canadian Association of Social Work Education Standards for Accreditation sanctions the granting of academic credit for previous work in lieu of the practicum [https://caswe-acfts.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/CASWE-ACFTS.Standards-11-2014-1.pdf]. In this context, the Association operates as a regulatory body, as discussed in Chapter 3 that outlines accreditation standards for social work education programs and authorizes the use of PLAR to assess the knowledge, skills, and competencies of students in lieu of a practicum placement. PLAR is a self-study course in which the student, upon acceptance, has the opportunity to demonstrate learning in social work-related activities. All students registered for the course are assigned a PLAR assessor. The assessor's role is to provide clarification on workbook assignments, rather than teach or mentor students.

According to the Faculty of Social Work's PLAR Information Booklet (University of Manitoba, n.d.), successful applicants to the PLAR option must complete several workbook assignments. Subject to satisfactory completion of assignments and reports, students are evaluated and graded on a pass/fail basis. Students are evaluated with a grading rubric that ranges from criteria being met (pass) to criteria not being met (fail) on a number of key attributes. Marks are added for a cumulative total to determine the student's final mark of

pass/fail. For example, one assignment requires students to video record a mock interview with an adult in order to demonstrate skills learned in BSW foundation courses. Students are expected to create a social work-client role-play situation to discuss a problem scenario. In addition to conducting the mock interview, students must prepare a pre-interview paper, an analysis of skills identified and a self-evaluation of learning objectives achieved.

To apply for PLAR, as described in the Information Booklet, students must complete a package of documents for review and approval by the PLAR Applications Committee. To be eligible to apply, applicants require a minimum of 3,500 hours within the last five years of social work experience. Of the 3,500 hours, 500 hours can include unpaid or volunteer work. Examples of acceptable social work experience include counselling, community/development/social action, advocacy, and case management.

The PLAR application materials as outlined in the Information Booklet include the following:

- A letter of intent describing the applicant's rationale for requesting consideration of PLAR with focus on paid and volunteer social work experience and foundational skill sets,
- A self-evaluation the applicant uses to evaluate him/herself in different areas using a grading rubric,
- Documentation of relevant paid work history including total hours of employment for each previous position,
- Documentation of related unpaid work history including total hours of unpaid/volunteer work history, and

- Completion of three confidential reference forms from referees who can speak to the applicant's social work knowledge and skills.

The PLAR Applications Committee reviews all applications and notifies applicants about their eligibility to enrol in the PLAR course. Data obtained from the Faculty of Social Work in Table 6 shows that the number of students enrolled in the PLAR course has increased from 21 students since PLAR was first offered in the 2014/15 academic year to 30 students in the 2017/18 academic year. The data show that virtually all students have passed the PLAR course in each of those years.

Table 6: Enrolment and Completion Rates in the Bachelor of Social Work PLAR Course

Academic Year	Number of Students Enrolled	Number of Student Withdrawals	Number of Students Passed
2014/2015	21	0	21
2015/2016	23	1	22
2016/2017	23	1	22
2017/2018	30	1	-

Source: Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba

Gap Training and Bridge Programs for Internationally Educated Professionals

Gap Training and Bridge Programs offer a Qualifications Recognition (QR) pathway for internationally educated professionals (IEP), as described by the Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner (2013): "that allows the internationally educated professional to recognize, understand and demonstrate the professional knowledge, skills and values required for effective professional practice in Manitoba" (p. 3). The pathway ensures that a regulator's requirements for an IEP are fully met.

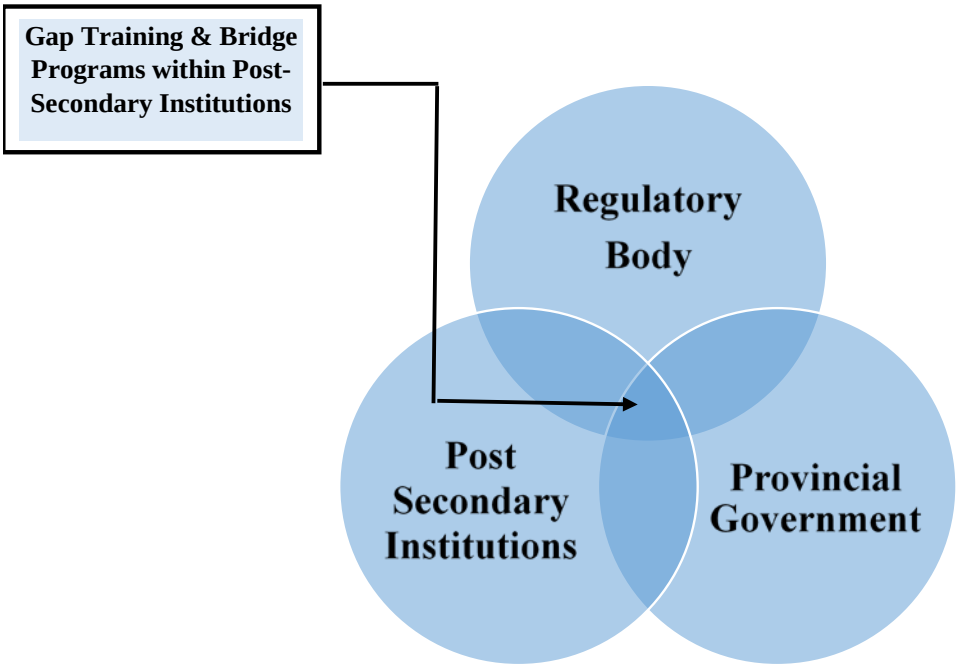
Gap training refers to specially designed programming to fill gaps in knowledge and skills on a case-by-case basis. Gap training helps to meet the requirements of the regulatory

body that enables the IEP to be eligible for professional registration and career entry. Bridge programs offer a bridge between where an IEP is, and where he/she needs to be to participate in a given program of study at a post-secondary institution. An example of a bridge program is the International Dentist Degree Program (IDDP) where IEPs are able to *bridge* directly into the third year of the four-year dental degree program at the University of Manitoba. Upon completion of the IDDP, the IEP receives a Doctor of Dental Medicine Degree.

Similar to the placement of unrecognized learning in the centre of the Learning Recognition Marketplace as discussed in Chapter 3, the Gap Training and Bridge Programs are situated within the priorities and practices of three distinct stakeholders: regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions, and the provincial government, as shown in Figure 4.

According to the OMFC's (2013) description of the Gap Training and Bridge Programs, the regulator's priority is to ensure that the program offers a pathway as equally rigorous as alternate QR pathways offered directly by the regulator. The regulator performs a number of roles including the initial assessment of IEPs non-Canadian credentials and establishing requirements for professional recognition, upon successful completion of a program. Additional responsibilities include the development and ongoing oversight of Gap Training and Bridge Programs and conferring professional recognition. Post-secondary institutions are responsible for delivering the programs and working with regulators and employers to achieve results and financial returns on investment in programs. The provincial government has promoted QR and provided financial support for pilot projects and agencies offering employment advice and support to IEPs (OMFC, 2013).

Figure 4: Gap Training and Bridge Programs and Related Stakeholders



Source: Adapted with permission from the Government of Manitoba

For program applicants from jurisdictions that do not have reciprocity agreements with Canada for professional registration, the QR process begins with the regulator's initial assessment and a verification of education credentials. The IEP's prior professional experience and language proficiency also form part of the regulator's initial assessment, and may also include the following: past career experience assessed by interview and/or résumé; technical competency assessed by examinations, skill, and knowledge assessment or interview; and personals goals and expectations relative to the program and career; also assessed via interview. Following the assessment, the regulator articulates a set of requirements the IEP may fulfill through the gap training or bridge program or through other existing pathways (OMFC, 2013).

Gap Training and Bridge Programs do not offer a full education program. IEPs must arrive with some relevant background and have already earned an academic credential from a jurisdiction outside Canada. IEPs must also be permanent residents. The programs generally run from one to two years. However, they can range from three months to 2.5 years as training is customized to individual need. Gap Training and Bridge Programs are associated with the term *Qualifications Recognition* for IEPs (OMFC, n.d.). Qualifications Recognition is associated with the assessment of foreign credentials and competencies, and incorporates the assessment of formal and informal learning (Riffell, 2006), as does PLAR. This study therefore, includes the Gap Training and Bridge Programs under the umbrella of PLAR.

Program Components

Gap Training and Bridge Programs typically include the same components (OMFC, 2013). However, individual modifications may be needed for example, practice experience may be increased in the health professions. These components include the following:

- An extensive orientation to the university or college campus, a review of all aspects of the program, and the academic environment, standards and policies,
- An academic component on profession-specific knowledge and skills. The courses required generally correspond to the regulator's pre-program assessment of the IEP's credentials. The IEP-dedicated course sections also address sociolinguistic and communication development and socialization to the profession,

- An authentic practice experience, practicum, internship, co-op or clinical experience that allow IEPs to gain Canadian experience to network, and gain exposure to culture and values of the Canadian workplace,
- Sociolinguistic language and communication development including intensive language support within the specific context, culture, and values of a profession,
- Socialization to the profession in Canada including workplace environment, legislation, mandate, and ethics, and
- Mentoring and networking opportunities.

Program Outcomes

One program outcome for IEPs is in meeting requirements set by the regulator and thereby achieving a degree of formal recognition by the regulator in a certain profession. In some cases, the formal recognition is eligibility to write the regulator's licensing exams to achieve professional registration. In other cases, the formal recognition is direct eligibility for registration with the regulator. Additional practical experience and professional development however may be required before obtaining full professional licensure (OMFC, 2013). Another outcome is to assist IEPs in re-entering their profession by bringing them up to Canadian standards of practice and supporting their entrance into the labour market (OMFC, n.d.).

In view of the literature reviewed in Chapter 3 calling for greater QR among IEPs (Grant, 2015; OMFC, n.d.), interviews were conducted with University of Manitoba professional staff associated with five Gap Training and Bridge Programs to gather perceptions from both an area of study perspective and a professional capital framework. Two of the five programs are no longer offered. The reasons for discontinuation of these programs are not well known.

However, some possibilities are changes in labour market demand for certain occupations, low enrolments, re-prioritization in government funding, and the decision not to transfer programs to university baseline funding.

A brief description of each of these five programs follows.

Internationally Educated Engineers Qualification Program (IEEQ)

The Internationally Educated Engineers Qualification (IEEQ) Program is a Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) program by which internationally educated engineers can meet requirements for academic qualification with the regulatory body, Engineers GeoScientists Manitoba (EGM) as part of the process of achieving Professional Engineers (P. Eng.) registration in Canada [http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/engineering/programs/ieeq/whatisieeq.html].

The IEEQ Program offers the option of program completion in one or two years. Originally developed and piloted from 2003 to 2007, the IEEQ Program has been a permanent offering since then. The Program components include English language and communications support, cultural training, networking opportunities, and engineering practices specific to the Canadian work environment (Government of Manitoba, n.d.). The IEEQ Program is an alternative process to writing Confirmatory Exams assigned by the EGM to allow IEPs to demonstrate their academic qualification. Upon completion of 24 credit hours, participants also receive a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Engineering [https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/engineering/programs/ieeq/pdf/ENTERING_AND_LEAVING_THE_IEEQ_PROGRAM_-_Copy.pdf].

In a study of IEEQ program participants and employers, Friesen (2009) found that the FCR process for international engineers tended to focus on the recognition of human capital or formal education, skills and experience. However, the access to and acquisition of social, cultural and in particular, linguistic capital needed to receive equal attention in order to create more opportunities to enter the engineering profession. The study found that the critical value of the program has been in the awareness and facilitation of both social and cultural capital for graduates. In addition, employers recognized their influence as gatekeepers to social and cultural capital within the engineering profession in the power they carried to either perpetuate structural constraints or create access for program graduates. The "gatekeeper" concept resonates as a subtheme in the current study, but from a university perspective, rather than from an employer perspective.

As presented in Table 7, student enrolment data that was available was compiled from the Office of Institutional Analysis [http://umanitoba.ca/admin/oia/publications/index.html] over a ten-year period for three Gap Training and Bridge Programs, including the IEEQ. The data show steady enrolment growth beginning in Fall 2007 with 11 students, and increasing to 48 students in Fall 2012. Enrolment continues to be strong, with 49 students enrolled in Fall 2016.

Internationally Educated Agrologists Program (IEAP)

The Internationally Educated Agrologists Program (IEAP) began in 2007 (Government of Manitoba, n.d.). The Program was suspended in the 2016/17 academic year and is not currently offered. Prospective program applicants worked closely with the Regulator, the Manitoba Institute of Agrology to have their credentials assessed, and to determine eligibility to apply for the IEAP [http://www.umanitoba.ca/student/admissions/media/ieap_bulletin.pdf]. Housed in the

Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, and designed as a one-year program, including a four-month work experience component, the IEAP offered a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Agrology and facilitated the integration of internationally trained agrologists into the Canadian agriculture industry (Government of Manitoba, n.d.; OMFC, 2013).

Student enrolment data shown in Table 7 confirms that uptake in the IEAP was modest which may have been a contributing factor in its demise. The data show there were 13 students enrolled in the 2007 Fall term. This declined to seven students in 2010, increased to 16 students in 2012, before declining again to 11 students in the 2015 Fall term.

Table 7: Student Enrolment in Select Gap Training and Bridge Programs by Year (Fall Term as of November 1st)

Fall Term	IEAP (Agrology)	IDDP (Dentistry)	IEEQ (Engineering)
2007	13	11	11
2008	9	11	17
2009	8	13	25
2010	7	12	35
2011	11	14	40
2012	16	13	48
2013	13	16	45
2014	10	16	37
2015	11	11	40
2016	1	12	49
2017	-	11	41

Source: Office of Institutional Analysis, University of Manitoba

Internationally Educated Teacher (IET) Program

The Internationally Educated Teachers (IET) Program, formally known as the Academic and Professional Bridging Program for Internationally Educated Teachers was offered through the University of Manitoba Faculty of Education. The Program began in 2006, but operations suspended in 2011-2012 due to lack of funding (Dunfield, 2011). The ten-month IET Program

operated on a cohort model with the core curriculum consisting of 30 credit hours including 12 weeks of practical training in Winnipeg schools.

In addition to core curriculum, the Program offered language development seminars and professional development workshops to enable international student integration and networking with Bachelor of Education students and school division staff [http://mpue.ca/AcademicandProfessionalBrigingProgram.htm]. To gain admission to the Program, IETs were required to have a teaching degree from an accredited university in their home country, submit an academic writing sample, meet language requirements, and be a permanent Manitoba resident [http://mpue.ca/documents/Brochure2009-10update.pdf].

The IET Program was linked to a rationale for diversifying the Manitoba teaching force as an important strategy for realizing the provincial government's K-12 ethnocultural equity agenda, and to better serve the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population (Schmidt, 2010; Schmidt, Young & Mandzuk, 2010). Related research (Block, 2012; Schmidt, 2010) found that despite their wealth of skills, qualifications and experiences, IET Program students faced systemic discrimination in obtaining teaching positions. Schmidt and Block's (2010) analysis of employment policies among six Winnipeg school divisions revealed a lack of equity and IET-specific content and major limitations in advancing IET integration and in addressing the government's ethnocultural equity policy.

In their overview of the IET Program, Schmidt et al. (2010) described how the Program was based on several related assumptions. These included the following: 1) advocacy, by establishing the need for the IET Program and actively soliciting program funding to support students and staffing costs, as well as advocacy regarding the benefits of a diverse teaching

force, 2) advisory aspects through one-on-one advising and support for IETs, raising awareness among Faculty of Education staff and mentor teachers about employment equity, and professional development for education stakeholders to facilitate integration of IETs, 3) collaboration among all stakeholders including Manitoba Education and Training, Labour and Immigration (program funder), and Winnipeg school divisions where IETs had the opportunity to gain classroom experience, and 4) flexibility, by respecting the uniqueness of individuals, making changes to program and curriculum design, and allowing for additional program elements. The IET Program is no longer offered. However, Schmidt et al. (2010) concluded that while programs like the IET are challenging to establish and sustain, they are crucial to furthering ethnocultural equity agendas, and for challenging systemic discrimination barring IETs from entering their profession.

International Dentist Degree Program (IDDP)

The 32 months-long International Dentist Degree Program (IDDP) is an offering whereby through an extensive admission process, IEPs are eligible to *bridge* directly into the third year of the four-year dental degree program at the College of Dentistry (OMFC, 2013). According to the IDDP Applicant Information Bulletin 2018-2019 [http://www.umanitoba.ca/student/admissions/media/IDDP_bulletin.pdf], applicants submit their application under Track A or Track B and must be a graduate of a minimum four-year dental degree program, not recognized by the Commission on Dental Accreditation of Canada. Track A and Track B each require the passage of certain examinations sponsored by the National Dental Examining Board, plus English language proficiency.

As described in the Information Bulletin, general documents are required for first application to the IDDP, and if successful, then for admission. The selection process for Track A includes an application review, an on-site assessment consisting of a personal interview to discuss education and work experience, an essay to assess English language proficiency, a psychomotor skills assessment and an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE). Only top-ranked applicants are invited to the onsite assessment in Track A and the interview in Track B. Following an eight-week summer orientation program, students enter the third year of the four-year dental program. Upon completion of the last two years of the dental program, IDDP graduates are awarded a Doctor of Dental Medicine Degree. All graduates of accredited dentistry programs, once having passed National Dental Examination Board of Canada exams, are eligible for licensure as a dentist.

Student enrolment in the IDDP as shown in Table 7 is capped each year, and remains consistent with minor fluctuations on a year-to-year basis.

International Medical Graduate (IMG) Program

The International Medical Graduate (IMG) Program began in 2001. The Program is offered through the Faculty of Medicine, and provides internationally educated physicians with different streams for re-certification in Canada. The IMG Program helps to bring candidates up to Canadian standards for practice (Government of Manitoba, n.d.). The IMG Program is intended for physicians who have completed training outside of Canada and have been practicing independently in their own country.

For example, according to the application package materials, the Medical Licensure Program for International Medical Graduates,

[http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/health_sciences/medicine/education/pgme/media/Medical_Licensure_Program_for_International_Medical_Graduates_Application_Pkg-July_25-2017_FINAL_Fillable.pdf] is a one-year training program designed to enhance the IMG physician's previous training and address the specific learning needs of IMGs to prepare them to obtain medical licensure to practice as primary care physicians in Manitoba. IMGs who complete the Program may apply to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba for conditional registration. Successful candidates will subsequently be expected to complete a four-year return of service in an underserviced area of the province.

In summary, the following initial conclusions can be drawn about PLAR at the University of Manitoba and by area of study. One is that PLAR appears to be available only as formal learning, i.e. transfer credit, challenge for credit, advanced standing and exemption. Some years ago, PLAR was offered as non-formal learning through portfolios at Extended Education, but this is no longer the case. Secondly, funding seems to be a determining factor as to whether PLAR or a program offering PLAR continues to operate. For example, factors such as the cost-recovery model, dwindling staff resources, and focus on other priorities place restrictions on implementing non-formal PLAR at Extended Education. In addition, the discontinuation of funding for two of the five Gap Training and Bridge Programs (Agrology and Education) means that IEPs in Manitoba no longer have the opportunity to take these programs as a means to fill gaps in skills and knowledge and enter the labour market in their chosen professions. Thirdly, the support from a regulatory body such as the Canadian Association of Social Work Education Standards for Accreditation that outlines standards and authorizes the use of PLAR may be a determining factor in its success in the Bachelor of Social Work Program.

Research Question Two

I posed the second research question as follows: What are participants' general perceptions of PLAR? To answer this question, I reviewed the data obtained across the data sources to develop, reduce, and revise the general themes for a more complete and accurate portrayal of the findings. Document analysis yielded contextual detail by area of study. Taking an inductive approach, I examined how participants responded to questions about PLAR from the interviews. The data sources provided evidence to support the consistency of the themes. I then identified themes that were categorized as general and those related more directly to professional capital (human capital, social capital, and decisional capital) to address research question two and research question three respectively, as presented in Table 8. I also identified subthemes in this section to reflect the variety of perspectives categorized by general theme.

Table 8: Thematic Categories

Human Capital Theme	Social Capital Themes	Decisional Capital Theme	Main Themes
• Relevant Professional Learning	• Team Collaboration • Commitment	• Shared Decision-Making	• Opportunity Lost • Differences in Understanding • Invisibility • Roadblocks • Intrinsic Belief • Moving Forward

To address the second research question, I analyzed the data to develop codes to understand better the general perceptions of PLAR. The themes encoded revealed the following: opportunity lost, differences in understanding, invisibility, roadblocks, intrinsic belief and moving forward. These themes were pervasive throughout the study and reflected the

perspectives of participants across areas of study. Table 9 presents a summary of the themes and subthemes.

Table 9: Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Opportunity Lost	**Differences in Understanding**	**Invisibility**	**Roadblocks**	**Intrinsic Belief**	**Moving Forward**
Individual Perspectives	Transfer credit and PLAR are equivalent	Lack of awareness and understanding	Resource Challenges	Positive impact on the University	Institutional Commitment and Support
The PLAR Coordinator	PLAR is easy credit	Knowledge is localized	Other Priorities	Increased focus on Competencies and Learning Outcomes	More prominence in University Strategic Plan
Using Portfolios	Learning must be classroom based	Students Uninformed about PLAR	Lack of fit with University Mission	Openness to Important Initiatives	Establish a PLAR Policy
Transfer Credit Success	PLAR lacks rigour	Increase visibility of PLAR	University as Gatekeeper	Benefits to Students	Consultation Education, Expertise
			Enrollment is Sufficient	Values Experience, Signals Culture Shift	Start Small
			Lack of Motivation, Encourage-ment		Embed in Curriculum with Accountability Attached
			Lack of Fit with Existing Standards		Advocacy, Promotion, Collaboration
			Existing Policy Constraints		Dedicated Resources

Themes

1. Opportunity Lost

The Opportunity Lost theme is illustrative of some general findings in the study. First, the theme relates generally to the discontinuation of two of the Gap Training and Bridge Programs as discussed in the earlier section of this chapter. Second, the theme reflects Extended

Education's loss of the government-funded PLAR Coordinator position and the lack of success with portfolios.

In their conversations, the Extended Education participants referred to the provincial government funding for eight permanent PLAR positions of $65,000 each at Manitoba's four public universities, three colleges, and the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology, approved by the former Council on Post-Secondary Education (COPSE). The funding was phased in over two years beginning in the academic year, 2004/2005 (Council on Post-Secondary Education, 2003-2004). The COPSE funding approval included the expectation that the post-secondary institutions would pursue PLAR as a sustainable learning assessment tool. However, the PLAR positions, categorized as "System Restructuring" were one-time only funds that the post-secondary institutions could decide whether they would continue funding beyond the initial government contribution.

Individual Perspectives

Participants first shared their views about their unique roles and responsibilities in relation to PLAR at Extended Education: As Jim recalled:

> There is no PLAR responsibility that I would have now.… I didn't have any direct responsibility for PLAR but certainly we would have been in discussions in a range of ways and places. We would have talked about PLAR. I've been active in terms of attempting to assess students within the PLAR initiatives we would have had here at one time ... I'm not quite remembering when we were spending time on PLAR – probably say over five years going back. I am not sure, I would say maybe a decade ago – so probably in the mid-2000s – from 2004 to 2007 or something like that. It would have been about

> the period that PLAR would have been active here and I would have been in those conversations.

Other participants shared various details about PLAR at Extended Education: As Julie explained:

> It was during those years from 2005 to 2014 that we had targeted funding for PLAR. We began looking at PLAR in light of our own certificate programs and the result was a pilot project with the Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education [Program] where people had an opportunity to put together a portfolio, so that was the process that was designed.

Heather's recollections about PLAR were in terms of having a broader mandate at Extended Education:

> I don't currently have responsibility, but from 2007 to 2013 … we reported to the provincial government on PLAR initiatives largely within Extended Education, but we tried to collect information from the rest of the University. We had within Extended Education a variety of initiatives – none of them frankly very successful for PLAR including portfolio review…

The PLAR Coordinator

Participants shared their thoughts about the outcome of the PLAR Coordinator's position housed at Extended Education, as well as the Coordinator's efforts at promoting and implementing PLAR across the University.

> Jim: There was some funding from the province to support the [PLAR] initiative and that initiative was to support the salary of a person who then would be the lead. … The

> decision was made by the University to house that position here. So the initiative at least under that period of time was here but it [the position] was not for Extended Education only, but for the University …. The position ended because the funding ended …. I do not know if there was any PLAR implementation … but if there was, it was very limited.
>
> Heather: We had one full-time staff member and then some support staff when challenge [for credit] or portfolios came in. We had [PLAR Coordinator A], and then [PLAR Coordinator B], and then I think the funding went somewhere else …. I don't know if it [PLAR] ever ended. It just didn't ever get used. It was still there, but we didn't refill the PLAR position. We didn't have enough [students]. I think by the last couple of years of that position, it was a .5. We just couldn't justify the resources.

Ron from the Faculty of Social Work had also worked with the PLAR Coordinator and offered a slightly different perspective on the success of the PLAR Coordinator's efforts at promoting PLAR:

> We were working on curriculum design and re-development and [the PLAR Coordinator] was a very good resource in that regard …. I went on leave and when I came back from leave … I was [no longer] directly involved, but I do remember hearing from a colleague of mine who also worked with [the PLAR Coordinator] that [the PLAR Coordinator] had essentially left in frustration …. [The PLAR Coordinator] was very good and I think definitely, probably was starting to hit a lot of brick walls.

Using Portfolios

In addition to the PLAR Coordinator, Extended Education allowed students to prepare portfolios as a method to demonstrate PLAR. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Extended

Education offers formal methods of PLAR i.e., transfer credit, challenge for credit, exemptions, but there is no evidence suggesting that portfolios are a current option. In discussing their previous experiences, all three participants were unanimous and quite forthright in their statements about Extended Education's lack of prior success with using portfolios. Jim commented on the difficulty that portfolios posed for students: "The challenge for students is the hard work to put the portfolio together … sometimes it's easier to take the course than put a portfolio together."

> Heather: As for students putting together their portfolios, the comments I heard from students was that it [PLAR] was more work to put the portfolio together than it was to take the course, so they gave it up which is really unfortunate. …. The portfolio process was pretty onerous. It was so expensive in terms of time and money, but mostly time. Students would often challenge for credit, when they would pay half the tuition. That was easier than just bringing in a whole portfolio … It has to be rigorous but I would have liked to have found a way to have it not so onerous for students that they actually just chose not to do it.
>
> Julie: We used portfolios with the Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education [Program] and one of the issues was you have to make the portfolio accessible and user-friendly but it was so extensive that some students just said "I think I would prefer to re-take the course." There also has to be somebody that can work with you on your portfolio. …. The portfolios probably were not streamlined. We didn't provide enough to get people to do portfolios. They [students] have to be pretty intuitive and you have to be able to put your materials in. We don't want to spoon-feed them but this is something

completely new. And for some people when they realize that … did they have all the documentation?

Transfer Credit Success

On the other hand, participants spoke of the success of having at least five Extended Education certificate programs including the CACE Program recognized for transfer credit or for laddering purposes into the Bachelor of Arts Integrated Studies (BAIS) Program. The BAIS is a 90-credit hour degree program developed in collaboration with Extended Education for working adults who have completed some post-secondary education and would like to complete an undergraduate degree The transfer credit feature of the certificate programs provides advanced standing in the BAIS and shortens the degree program by almost one year [http://www.umanitoba.ca/student/admissions/media/arts_is_bulletin.pdf].

Julie described this development as a "big step." Heather viewed this feature as a "real success", and added the following: "we were much more successful on the laddering piece and the transfer valuation of credit courses than we were on the non-formal learning … and somehow quantifying that for credit. We are not very good at that."

2. Differences in Understanding PLAR

In their reflections about PLAR, participants expressed some of the differences in understanding that are often associated with PLAR. These differences included ideas that transfer credit and PLAR are equivalent processes, that PLAR is an easy way to earn credit, that only formal learning in the classroom counts, and that PLAR lacks rigour.

Transfer Credit and PLAR are Equivalent

One of the ideas frequently cited in the literature is that transfer credit processes and the recognition of formal credit-based learning is the equivalent of PLAR (Conrad, n.d.; Morrissey et al. 2008). Julie offered this perspective:

> As part of a larger study at the University to look at the kind of opportunities and … practices [available], we essentially came to the conclusion that in 99.99% of situations and faculties, they identified PLAR as transfer credit for formalized work done in other institutions …. If you look at the University as a whole, it [awareness and understanding of PLAR] would be low because the University is used to recognizing transfer credit. We have a huge recognition of transfer credit from international institutions but I don't think they [the University] see the relationships between different kinds of learning. It has to be learning in something that they can identify with …. Faculties will say "well, we have collaborative agreements with community colleges." People see PLAR in a different way. They do see it as recognition of prior learning from formal institutions …. The general understanding we got was "yes, we do it, we accept transfer credit." Not understanding that it is different, not look at learning outside of some formal setting that is like a university or college.

Nancy agreed that others often view transfer credit, articulation agreements and PLAR as the same idea:

> I don't see how transfer credit and PLAR can be talked about in the same sentence although it's interesting because if you look up PLAR sometimes, you'll find people

talking about transfer credit and articulation agreements between universities as if that is a piece of PLAR, but I don't see it as being the same as PLAR.

PLAR is Easy Credit

Another common way of understanding PLAR that participants identified is that it is an easy way to earn a credential, or is a "rubber stamp" process. The comments revealed that in general, participants did not agree with this thinking.

> Julie: I was talking to somebody [who] actually said; "one of the concerns … is that it [PLAR] is credit for work." It is not credit for work. It is credit for the learning and knowledge and skills acquired in the workplace, or in non-traditional means. You could have done an extensive study on something and I think that [misconception] is really a big stumbling block.

> Jim: Most people around here would be open to listening [about PLAR]. Implementation is another thing … The discussions were always very surprising. When you are talking about students who are gaining credit for a full term of coursework could conceivably have been taught by the same person who teaches the CACE Program [with PLAR], well, they are concerned about giving something away. So, PLAR would be a more difficult sell.

Learning Must be Classroom-Based

Another understanding expressed is the view that real or formal learning must take place in a classroom. This implies that PLAR, based on prior learning and experience that occurs outside the classroom is something lesser than.

> Julie: We are still fairly traditional. You come sit in class, you do the work, you have read the exams, you are assessed, and we give you a credit …. There is always the fear that with PLAR, they have got this, but not the whole thing.
>
> Nancy: there seems to be this sense that the learning that happens in other contexts, whatever those contexts are, is not the same as the learning that happens within a University system, within a classroom, or within a supervised practicum. That we, whoever "we" is, whoever is teaching can control and can assess. PLAR is not really looked on favourably from many within, at least this University system. There is almost a bit of snobbery around it. I have to say that.

PLAR Lacks Rigour

Some participants discounted another understanding that PLAR lacks rigour, which links to the easy credit idea. Speaking from the Faculty of Social Work perspective, Ron offered the following:

> I don't get a sense there's a strong understanding of the rigour that's involved in PLAR. There is a concern which I can understand but it is potentially misplaced that PLAR just means somebody comes in and they've had a job before so we give them a bunch of credit and that's not what PLAR is about …. If it [PLAR] is not rigorously followed and if people have the mistaken view that PLAR is an easy way to get credit, then you could have problems …. It is usually the misinformed and the uninformed who don't understand PLAR, see it as a shortcut, and don't see it as rigorous.

Gail rejected the idea that PLAR is an easy way to earn credit or a "rubber-stamp process":

> In my discussions with students and staff around PLAR, a lot of folks still have this view that, "oh, you've got accepted by PLAR and therefore, you don't have to do anything. Once you're accepted, we'll just give you the credits for field." But no, actually when you get accepted to PLAR, there's still a huge process that follows, and that's just giving you permission to show us specifically and demonstrate the knowledge and skills. So, there is a misconception … Some people often think it's more of a rubber-stamp process.

Gail elaborated further in speaking specifically about the demands for meeting the PLAR-related requirements in the Bachelor of Social Work Program as "a lot of work":

> In terms of the way in which this has developed, it [PLAR] is a lot of work. It does require a lot of demonstration of critical thinking, a lot of demonstration of assessment and interventions, how you use conceptual frameworks in your practice, so it is not as easy as it might sound.

3. Invisibility

The general theme of "invisibility" was chosen to capture the range of views participants expressed about PLAR, i.e., the general lack of awareness and understanding, localized knowledge, i.e., within area of study, the need to make more information available to increase awareness, uninformed students, and need for greater visibility.

Lack of Awareness and Understanding

Through their comments, the participants acknowledged that there is a general lack of awareness and understanding about PLAR. However, noting that PLAR was better known and

of interest to some University staff, such as faculty and admissions, more than other staff. In addition, the participants conveyed the sense of the insignificance and invisibility of PLAR.

> Heather: They [University staff] are unfamiliar with it [PLAR]. It's a very, very small piece of what the University does. The people who are involved know it. The rest.… It's just such a minor concern for others. I think for Admissions folks, they are more familiar. With certain faculties, where it hits their culture and their audience, they are more familiar. For the most part, I think others are not very familiar at all.

> Jim: It [PLAR] is just not part of the landscape here. I mean, if they [the University] had some personal knowledge or interest in it [PLAR] because of some other encounters they have had, they might know something. In terms of the University, they would wonder what you are talking about …. It is not that people would not understand it or know what it is, but it's a pretty foreign concept here.

> Nancy: Oh, there is almost next to nothing. If you did a Google search, you would probably come up with the Faculty of Social Work … and it [information about PLAR] is made available, some in Extended Education as well. Beyond that, you would be very hard-pressed to find any institutional information about PLAR or a PLAR policy.

> Sandi: I just do not know anyone who is implementing PLAR or knows anything about it …. I'm not sure that people actually know to call things PLAR that they're doing. There are some things happening but I do not think people label them or recognize that it has anything to do with PLAR.

Knowledge is Localized

Nancy stated that knowledge of PLAR was localized and varied by area of specialization. She also raised the question of whether there was a lack of acceptance or a lack of understanding about PLAR, while acknowledging there was resistance to PLAR.

> There is a fair understanding of PLAR in general. I would say fair. There are certainly faculty members whose area of specialization is post-secondary education. I think they have a higher level of expertise in that area than perhaps some others …. There is some understanding within the Faculty of Education … as well as the University. It is hard to discern whether it is a question of acceptance of PLAR generally within the Faculty and the University [or] is a question of not understanding or not being favourable to PLAR. There is a great deal of resistance to PLAR. At least that has been my experience.

Students Uninformed About PLAR

It was also clear that students were uninformed about PLAR, as reflected in the comments by Linda:

> Students are definitely not knowledgeable and they are always asking if they can get credit. They understand at the Faculty, they have got something there that they want to be measured on but they have no idea …. They have no idea what it [PLAR] is, or they don't have an understanding of how we measure it or why they have to go through this big process…. Students come thinking that they should be getting it [PLAR].

Increase Visibility of PLAR

Despite the general feeling about PLAR's lack of distinction among participants, others, particularly the Faculty of Social Work participants spoke of the need to make PLAR better known and more visible, especially across faculties. As Linda explained:

> We could definitely work together and not be working in our own little silos. Faculties should maybe be more aware of each other's PLAR programs, share information, and maybe set some standards that are across the board if we are all professionally accredited programs …. We are very Faculty-specific and focused, and most or many Faculties are just so ingrained in our own needs that we often do not think about what is university-wide.

Linda provided more detail about ways to get information out about PLAR to students and faculties more efficiently:

> We just have to be better at advertising, having things on our website, getting students to have a better understanding of what PLAR is …. From a University perspective, each faculty would see PLAR in a little different way. Maybe Nursing would use PLAR as skills-set specific or measuring skills. So maybe a better understanding of what it [PLAR] is and the purpose of it for the Faculty, and then being able to get out there and explain that to students.

Gail agreed with the idea of making information about PLAR more widely available to more students as part of orientation:

> It would be helpful to get the word out to students consistently, just through a video or something, because everything is electronic now. That would be helpful when I talk about PLAR as part of orientation for all students … but you do not get all the students. You do not capture all the students. People are away, people might now be in that particular course …. I try to capture as many [students], but some kind of consistent mechanism which is professionally done that would present some of the information. That would help to make students more well informed.

In speaking about the IEAP, Gina emphasized the benefits of bringing awareness to PLAR and the Program through the efforts of former graduates.

> We need awareness of what PLAR is and how it will benefit the University community because when we bring people with different backgrounds and different ideas and different expectations … we are showing the success of these programs … I used to bring back graduates from the program to share their experiences …. Bringing them into the University community … who are now contributing to society to talk about their experience. [They] can bring that awareness … If people do not know – the University community what it [PLAR] is about and what the benefits will be, I don't know [if] there is going to be any interest.

4. Roadblocks

Building on the invisibility theme that PLAR is largely unknown, participants offered many explanations as to why PLAR does not appear to play much of a factor, if any, at the University. These explanations were considered challenges or roadblocks to PLAR gaining visibility or traction at the University and included the following: lack of resources, other

priorities, the lack of fit with the University's core mission and values, the University as gatekeeper, no need for PLAR as enrollment is sufficient, lack of motivation and encouragement, the lack of fit with existing program standards, and existing policy constraints.

Resource Challenges

For some participants, there are practical challenges of staff time and resources that are a roadblock to implementation. Participants emphasized that existing resources are already stretched or "maxed out", with no room for additional responsibility. From their perspectives, the participants suggested that with no resources forthcoming, there could be no progress made in PLAR.

> Julie: If you use a portfolio approach [to PLAR], it requires training faculty to understand a portfolio. We are trying to teach them how to teach well in the classroom right now. If we were to tell them how to do a portfolio with what we are asking faculty to do now. If you ask them to do one more thing, they will scream.

Another perspective was that if PLAR was more of an enrolment driver at the University, then it would attract more attention and have resources attached.

> Jim: If the University wants to use PLAR as a way to recruit, retain and advantage students, we would need to resource it. You have to have somebody do the actual work … It's going to be academic staff or sessionals and you are going to pay them for doing it [PLAR] …. You would have to find the resources to do it so either you have to pay people or you have to course release and all of that is tough in dwindling, dwindling faculty resources.

> Nancy: there are probably faculty members with expertise who could assist in that process [to implement PLAR] and staff members. Are there dedicated people that could be pulled out of where they are to do that? No, there is not. They would have to do it off the side of their desk kind of thing … You have to have a dedicated administration that wants to have it in place and then to dedicate staff to it. Yes, absolutely … I don't think PLAR can really get off the ground without additional resources, particularly around practicum. Somebody has to put together the policies within that local unit and then has to perform the work.

Other Priorities

That PLAR was not an immediate concern to the University due to other pressing priorities reflecting budgeting and staffing was another roadblock. Julie shared the following:

> PLAR is not high on the priority list because they [the University] do not know it is important. We are moving to a new resource-based model. A new budget model has taken priority completely because that new model is the only way we can look at sustainability… That also lends itself to accountability … It is difficult to find department heads within this new budget model because they [the University] are going in unchartered territory … They are really concerned about getting the right people in the right place – getting the model, so right now, that is imminent.

Julie further added: "I do not know that we will never do it [PLAR]. It is more or less one of those things that would be nice to do but we have got other things we have to do right now."

Lack of Fit with University Mission

The University's broader mission and core values of academic freedom and de-centralized decision-making took precedence over PLAR:

> Jim: The University is becoming more centralized in terms of the decision-making process but it is still a pretty decentralized organization. Deans run the show and faculties, and then departments within faculties, and then faculty members. They do not do what they want, but it's a lot different than the corporate structure where the boss says this and it will happen. Here, it does not work that way … there's academic freedom and all sorts of things.

University as Gatekeeper

Heather alluded to the "fear" of PLAR and the traditional role of the University as the "gatekeeper" of academic knowledge and credentials as significant challenges to PLAR. She added however, that in her view, the "rule-bound" institutional culture needed to "open up."

> One of the things that holds PLAR back is fear. I do not think it is a realistic fear … Universities are gatekeepers. Universities have very particular notions of how one achieves standing in any area of study in which the University engages. There is a bit of the culture that is closed. It is fairly glacial to opening to new ideas and new avenues of acquiring knowledge, of demonstrating knowledge …. It just seems that there is that rule-bound kind of culture of universities. They are gatekeepers and they need to be. However, it is too closed. It needs to open up. We are all in the business of taking down

> barriers but when you look at the organizational culture of universities, some of them [barriers] are still there and they are very firmly entrenched.

From a retrospective approach, Ron recalled how PLAR had historically created a division within the Faculty of Social Work and that there was need for change:

> I do not think there is active opposition to PLAR. There is ignorance in many cases. There is some fear probably in some professions about it [PLAR], but that is based I would say largely on ignorance. [PLAR] has been a matter of discussion within the Faculty as long as I have been here … so ought we to be giving some recognition for people who come in with experience? It [PLAR] has been a division in the Faculty for a long time. I think 25 or 30 years ago, if this had come up, there would have been much stronger opposition to it [PLAR] …. That is both a disservice to PLAR and a disservice to potential students …. I think [there is] recognition that the University cannot just be an ivory tower and that we ought to somehow acknowledge people's experiences.

Enrollment is Sufficient

The idea that there was little necessity for PLAR as a student recruitment strategy because enrolments have held steady was another comment. In addition, the thinking was that the offering of challenge for credit in place of PLAR was sufficient. As Jim explained:

> Maybe in a more competitive market for students … but for the next while we are going to see fewer direct entry high school students. If you are looking to attract non-traditional students, something like this [PLAR] may be appealing, but I just don't think there is any reason to engage in PLAR for a recruitment strategy.… They have got the challenge for credit, so there is this long-standing component of PLAR that exists here and people

> could take advantage of it if they wanted to. People still need to meet the admission criteria and we are recruiting as many students as I think we need … The University enrolments have been steady or rising the last many years … it [PLAR] is not something that they would be particularly motivated to do for reasons of necessity. Altruistically yes, but again, they do have something [challenge exams].

Lack of Motivation, Encouragement

Participants also commented on the general lack of motivation or pressure to proceed with PLAR. Ron stated the following: "If a faculty was to do it [PLAR] and it can fit in the University's categorizations of these things, then sure. But it is not an active encouragement."

> Nancy: I don't know that there is a great deal of motivation for the University's administration to move on this [PLAR]. There is no pressure coming from anywhere to do this. It is not coming from the current Government, it's not coming from stakeholders in the field, or it's not coming loudly enough from a large number of stakeholders in the field. I don't think it is coming from faculty or administrators of units who want this. I don't think they want this because it's hard work in developing a local PLAR policy and one [policy] for a specific course, or a practicum.

Lack of Fit with Existing Standards

Some of the Gap Training and Bridge Program participants commented on the difficulties of implementing PLAR in order to meet specific program standards. Carol from the IDDP had the following comments: "We look at it [PLAR] purely on admissions because they [students] do not get to be exempted from any course because we want to make sure that their standards are

the same as a Canadian standard. It's all about patient safety in the end." Alison, associated with the IMG Program, made reference to the importance of defending existing policies: "We are a high stakes organization for our applicants which means that not only do we want to be internally fair and parallel to the Canadian system, but we also have to have defensible policies."

Sharon with the IEEQ Program explained why PLAR did not seem to fit in with meeting the standards of the disciplinary field of Engineering, nor with meeting the standards of the Regulatory Body, Engineers GeoSceintists Manitoba:

> Our government sponsors had always put PLAR in front of us as something we should integrate more fully into the IEEQ Program …. No matter how we thought about it, talked about it, whom we talked to about it … and probably our Engineer way of looking at things, we could never see how we could in any sort of substantive way integrate that into the Qualifications Recognition process in a regulated profession. The regulatory body gives us the right to title and right to practice. There is so much focus … on an approach that is founded on measurability and so-called objectivity. That is very much an Engineering world view that you have to make decisions that are defendable and being defendable means it is something that can be measured …. Objectivity in the process is very important.

Existing Policy Constraints

It was also clear that maintaining alignment with University program policies would take precedence over instituting PLAR in order to maintain program credibility. Sharon stated the following:

> To the extent that our program might reflect PLAR to some extent, we have developed our internal program policies. But as much as possible, we have to align them to the University policies …. Also for the credibility of the program, if we want to be recognized by our colleagues as a credible program, we have to align our policies as best as possible to those of the other programs in the Faculty.

Sharon pointed out the difficulty of implementing PLAR despite an open-mindedness and support for PLAR, in view of existing University policy constraints:

> There are individuals within the University even in positions of a great degree of decision-making who would be very open to the idea of PLAR and supportive of it. As a publicly funded institution, there are some currents that are hard to escape from, and that is the accountability for funding and the defendability [sic] of choices ... Even decision-makers that maybe very supportive of it [PLAR] may find that the policy structure does not allow them to be as much as they may want to be …. What you want to do and what you can defend doing is sometimes different.

5. Intrinsic Belief

Despite the participants identifying many of the roadblocks common to PLAR, it was clear that there was an intrinsic belief among many participants in the underlying value and potential of PLAR. Intrinsic belief ideas were reflected in the following subthemes: the positive impact of PLAR on the University, an increased focus on measuring competencies and learning outcomes, the openness of the University to important initiatives such as indigenization, benefits to students, the valuing of experience, and need for a culture shift.

Positive Impact on the University

Nancy stated: “PLAR is important and has its place in post-secondary institutions.” Gina remarked that, “we need awareness of what PLAR is and how it will benefit the University community.” Gail noted the following: “we are at a time and a place where we should be looking at PLAR more than we are.”

Sandi commented on how PLAR could have an impact on the reputation of the University, and could boost enrolment:

> There are so many people who could participate in such a process that the University would be missing out on opportunities. I think that it [PLAR] would help the University to be seen as open and inclusive. It [PLAR] would improve the image and the reputation and it [PLAR] would encourage more people to consider University programs as options …. It would be a wonderful thing if it could be part of all admissions processes.

Increased Focus on Competencies and Learning Outcomes

Alison described how the assessment of competencies and skills among international medical graduates is becoming increasingly common:

> We are starting to do competency-based education. So rather than didactics, we look for competencies in certain skills considered to be crucial in the overall medical community.…. We are making it a little bit more open as to how you can get to the destination of being a competent specialist …. I believe there is value in assessing people’s credentials by direct assessment as opposed to just reviewing somebody’s

> medical diploma …. There is a level of expertise that exams will not necessarily address reliably.

Openness to Important Initiatives

Sharon referred to the University focus on indigenization and inclusiveness as an example of openness to other approaches:

> At the University, there is a lot of openness …. As much as the University is policy-constrained and still is, it has the spirit of higher education in the sense that it wants to be inclusive and try new things and to develop new models. The focus in the last number of years on indigenization demonstrates for example that we are willing to think out of the box on what education should be like for different people.

Benefits to Students

Participants also spoke of the direct benefits of PLAR to students in terms of its validating effect and impact on self-confidence.

> Sharon: I absolutely think that PLAR is valuable …It does contribute overall to pathways of learning for students and not only the typical student, the 18 to 23-year olds, but for students of all ages and from all sorts of learning backgrounds as well …. There is also a validation effect that if a person comes in and is validated for that particular experience, especially for newcomers, that could be a big motivational boost …. So a PLAR process can provide that motivational boost. Those impacts are greater than people think and they are almost greater than monetary or time impacts.

> Sandi: It would be great to have some kind of mechanism for students to demonstrate and for us to get a feel for other skills beyond the purely technical skills.… I have had students that have been through some processes with PLAR – making portfolios, e-portfolios, doing a whole reflection and assessment of all their learning and experiences but not for the purposes …for gaining entry into something but more for a tool for themselves. So I see the students who have done that [PLAR] have a greater level of confidence …. It is a wonderful process that more people should be encouraged to go through and present themselves in a way that is showing … their fullest potential.

Julie agreed, citing both the intrinsic as well as extrinsic benefits of PLAR to students:

> PLAR gives students an opportunity. It gives time to degree. It is cost to degree so very programmatically speaking in human resource terms, that's an advantage. The other thing that is really important is it gives them [students] a true sense of self confidence that, "I want this credential at the University, but it doesn't mean that everything that I did before is irrelevant." It is a real sense of self-satisfaction for a student …

Some of the interview participants from the Faculty of Social Work where PLAR can be an exemption to a field placement highlighted the importance and benefits of PLAR to both students and to the University. In her comments, Linda enthusiastically supported PLAR as follows:

> Students who have a lot of working knowledge in a certain area and if it is measurable, it is a win-win really for the students and the University. The student pays the same tuition fee as they would for a course … so it is not like the University is losing money. If it is managed properly and introduced purposefully [PLAR] is definitely a win for the student.

> For our purpose, the student does not have to leave work [or] take that much time off work [as long as] they have the skill sets that are required.

Gail spoke about PLAR as a flexible option for students, especially for adult learners with busy schedules:

> We are seeing students who are working full time and doing classes part time … and all the different demands that people have. There needs to be some recognition of those students' needs who may have experience and may have knowledge that would apply [for PLAR]. It [PLAR] allows us to make the statement that we value people who come in with a range of skills and experience and that we allow some flexibility in our curriculum to recognize that. It [our curriculum] also recognizes that people have different lives and different demands and so it allows students to be able to work on PLAR in a manner that suits them … PLAR is a flexible option for some people and also is recognizing and valuing that not everybody that comes in is just coming in straight out of high school.

In addition to the flexibility benefit, Barb emphasized how PLAR was a way for students to finish their programs more quickly:

> There are a growing number of people who have previous degrees and are using Distance Delivery Bachelor of Social Work [Program] in combination with PLAR to move through a Bachelor of Social Work very, very quickly, and oftentimes a master's program …. For students who generally have the experience, it [PLAR] fast tracks them into the meat of a Social Work Program in the third and fourth years. They get into that faster which is a benefit for students who already have the work experience … Distance Delivery is certainly focused on student flexibility, so for us, PLAR works really well.

Julie explained how PLAR can boost students' self-confidence and sense of accomplishment:

> The thing that is really important is that it [PLAR] gives them [students] a true sense of self-confidence; "that the things that I have done outside the University are recognized; that I want this credential at the University, but it doesn't mean that everything that I did before is irrelevant." It is a real sense of self-satisfaction for a student.

Demonstrates Value of Experience, Signals Culture Shift

Heather pointed out that the University's acknowledging of PLAR could legitimize its value to both the University and to students:

> PLAR recognizes in a very formal way and very positive way that what students bring to a university as adults is valued by us. It is this institution … that says, "what you have done in your life is of value in your undergraduate education; that is what universities are for. They are not to keep you out." Rather, to say, "what you bring is of value." That also needs to move through the teaching culture, that what students bring is valuable.

Heather elaborated on this point by citing an example of the University's pursuit of indigenous and reconciliation initiatives as a way of recognizing and valuing students' experience, leading to a "culture shift" in the University:

> Maybe our recent efforts at reconciliation have awakened in us what our students bring to this institution. They are changed by this institution. But we are changed by them and that is a fundamental change in values. It is so powerful for the University … that culture shift is happening. It is happening in reconciliation. It is also opening our eyes as to who

> is in our classrooms. There is so much experience in our classrooms that we could be using. We are all becoming adult educators in a way that is changing the University.

6. Moving Forward

Participants offered a variety of ideas for moving forward with PLAR. The following subthemes were identified: consider institutional commitment and support, make PLAR more visible in the University Strategic Plan and mandate, establish a specific PLAR Policy, engage in consultation and education and involve experts, embed in curriculum and consider accountability measures, start small and build on the success of others, consider advocacy, promotion and collaboration, and dedicate resources.

Institutional Commitment and Support

For some, obtaining support and direction from senior administration at the University is a key part of moving forward with PLAR. Nancy spoke about the importance of "institutional commitment" and added the following comment: "there are faculty members with expertise … and dedicated people …. I would say even before dedicated staff, you have to have a dedicated administration that wants to have it [PLAR] right in place and then to dedicate staff to it – yes absolutely." Jim shared the following:

> If universities are going to make meaning of it [PLAR] and be serious, not that they were not serious before but would actually want to do something, then you have to be operating at a fairly high level, probably the person would need to operate out of the Vice President (Academic's) Office. There would have to be some clear statement that this is something we want to do as an institution and then put whatever processes make sense in place …

> and state what purposes you are going to use those for. You would need to appoint someone at a significant level and tell people who are making these decisions that they need to pay attention to this.

Julie agreed that higher-level institutional support for PLAR was essential and expressed the following:

> If you don't have buy-in at the Provost's Office at that level and then at the decanal level, it [PLAR] really will be something such as we did here. It [PLAR] was a pilot portfolio for a certificate [program] that never really informed anybody except our colleagues.

Gail spoke about the need for an "infrastructure of support" in response to the question of how PLAR should be managed and implemented at the University:

> I am not aware that there is anything in place that provides a broader structure of support and also guidance in terms of PLAR. My sense … would be that there are probably a lot of inconsistencies across programs depending on which program you are in and what PLAR program you have been approved for. So that would be really, really helpful to have that kind of structure in place where there was some form of directive but at the same time, some balance and flexibility to address individual program needs …. It would be helpful to have more of an infrastructure of support and to come together as well because there are some things that we can certainly do better that maybe we don't know about.

More Prominence in University Strategic Plan/Direction/Mandate

Closely related to the idea of need for administrative support for PLAR was the suggestion to make PLAR a part of the University's Strategic Plan. As discussed in Chapter 4, PLAR is listed as an action statement under the University of Manitoba's *Taking our Place Strategic Plan 2015-2020* to support the goal of enhancing student mobility. In their comments however, participants might be looking for more specifics in terms of operational statements and guidelines. Linda shared the following:

> Most or many faculties are just so ingrained in our own needs that we often don't think about what is University-wide ….The Strategic Plan and Budget … maybe this is a really good place to put PLAR – the PLAR piece into the University Strategic Plan …. I know how the Budget is driving our Strategic Plan and so it would be maybe something to think about.

Julie expressed a similar idea:

> If you are really serious about it [PLAR], it has to be part of the strategic direction … to provide opportunities for all Manitobans to recognize learning …. If you look at institutions that have a strategy in place, it is very helpful for our people to see that …. It is again having a strategic vision of it [PLAR] for the University, having a committed group of people that have some decision-making power.

Gail explained that PLAR should be a part of the University's philosophy and mandate and drew a linkage to the University's commitment to students, particularly adult learners.

> I think that it [PLAR] would be a priority because the University is very much in line with trying to be responsive, be timely, and try to get as many students as possible to apply for their programs …. So that commitment is there …. PLAR … in some ways can be seen as innovative, or at least a flexible option for some people and also recognizing and valuing that not everybody that comes in is just coming in straight out of high school …. We need to respond to their needs and recognize that they might be coming in with different skills then someone who is just straight out of high school.… If I was to think of [PLAR] as being part of the University's philosophy and mandate, I think there would be a will or commitment to doing that [PLAR] because it makes sense.

Consultation, Education, Expertise

Nancy expressed the need for consultation and education to improve understanding about PLAR:

> There needs to be a lot of consultation and a lot of education around what is PLAR, what is our understanding. We all need to have an understanding of PLAR and what it actually is and what we hope to accomplish, both at the institutional level, and then within our own units. We need to have general policy guidelines on what we need to do to establish PLAR within a course or with a set of courses at the faculty level …. My preferred (*sic*) is to see the University take a position that is favourable to PLAR that enables other units to move ahead. Notwithstanding that, some units who do believe in PLAR have gone ahead and done so and put policies in place at their faculty level even though there isn't one [policy] at the University.

Heather explained that the management and implementation of PLAR should involve a variety of experts and include quality control:

> The [PLAR] process should be well articulated with adequate quality control …. and carefully with very clear guidelines and processes. If those are not in place, then we wouldn't be doing an adequate job of assessing knowledge and skills that students bring. You would want content experts involved. You would want curriculum experts involved, but also adult educators, people who might be able to translate how that knowledge and skills in the professional life of an adult learner translates into the knowledge that the University can recognize. [The] University's reputation will be at stake, and so ensuring that those processes are clear and pretty tight for quality control would be important.

Start Small

Another idea to move PLAR forward was that it should "start off small", and continue from there. In addition, building on the success of others who practice PLAR is considered an important step. Heather shared the following:

> There were concerns in the past where some post-secondaries [post-secondary institutions] were giving PLAR for anything and everything which alarmed the University …. So in order for it [PLAR] to become part of the culture, it needs to start off small, demonstrate success to overcome some of those … fears, and those attitudinal barriers…. Use those successful units to start that change. If Social Work is successful, then have them lead the way in terms of us learning from their experience …. If it is working well, let's learn from it.

Heather elaborated on this point with the following: “Universities often do not want to be the first, so if you can convince them someone else has done this and they are not at risk, then they might nose it ahead.”

Sharon expressed the same idea, while at the same time, suggesting that PLAR may be more appropriate for some areas of study more than others:

> There are some areas where PLAR is a much more natural fit than it is in Engineering. I mentioned Education, Early Childhood Education, K to 12 Education, possibly within Social Work or Nursing, that there may be pockets where PLAR has a role to play. I would say focus on some of the low-hanging fruit… It might be a good place to … pick those contexts to demonstrate how it [PLAR] does contribute overall to pathways of learning for students.

Advocacy, Promotion and Collaboration

Another suggestion that participants offered for moving PLAR forward was advocacy and promotion that may be a response to the invisibility theme discussed above.

> Nancy remarked that, “you have to be committed and be open and be an advocate for that [PLAR] and believe in that [PLAR].” Gina stated that, “we have examples here of what can be done. So, just the willingness to go there … and somebody who can say ‘ok, let’s promote it’ and just making people aware.” Sandi expressed a similar idea that, “it would be great if there were an entire office of staff who could go through an assessment process with individuals wishing to have that assessment and to actually get out there and encourage people to participate in it [PLAR].”

Speaking from the Social Work perspective, Gail commented on the benefits of working together and learning from others in moving forward:

> I know that there are PLAR people out there. If there is a way to bring that group together, that would be a benefit, not only to the ones thinking about doing PLAR, but to all of us who are involved in some capacity. I am sure there are definitely some sort of ways of working that people may help us in Social Work and vice versa.

Dedicated Resources

Scarce financial resources were a roadblock to PLAR, but at the same time, resources were essential to supporting PLAR and programs like the IMG Program. As Alison explained:

> It [the IMG Program] is well supported because it is funded and we are funded by Manitoba Health but housed within the University …. The employees are University of Manitoba employees but their funding does not come from the University of Manitoba. We use the infrastructure of the University. We assign our administrative support to it but if Manitoba Health stopped funding the program, we would just fold.

It was also clear that financial resources would be required to move forward to implement PLAR. Gina stated the following: “There are a lot of people here who are very keen and they have the experience and they can implement a project … but in the end, it comes down to money.” Nancy agreed: “If there was pressure internally or externally for development of PLAR across the institution, then most definitely, there would also be a question of resources. If something is important, then you have to have the resources behind the initiative.”

Research Question Three

I posed research question three as follows: How does the conceptual framework of professional capital assist in understanding PLAR? To address the research question, I followed the same procedure as discussed under Research Question Two, by reviewing data obtained from the interviews and analyzing codes to identify the presence of professional capital within the context of PLAR. As discussed in Chapter 2, professional capital is the confluence of three kinds of capital: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. All three forms of professional capital are dependent on relationships between individuals. The results of the analysis revealed four themes: relevant professional learning, team collaboration, commitment, and shared decision-making.

Human Capital Theme

To capture perceptions of human capital and PLAR, I asked the interview participants questions that included the following concepts: awareness and understanding, communication and information, sources of knowledge, information and research, and professional development and learning. The theme of relevant professional learning emerged in response to the questions.

Relevant Professional Learning

The term, *professional learning* is often used interchangeably with *professional development* (Donohoo, 2017). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest that professional learning focuses on learning something new that is potentially of value and involves many aspects of learning, but may also involve team building and team development. In addition, there is a lot of overlap between the two concepts. Donohoo (2017) argues that professional learning can take

on many shapes and forms and can be very broadly defined. For this study, professional learning refers to learning opportunities situated in PLAR practitioners' practice, activities, and/or approaches.

Ron described a study opportunity taken to learn about PLAR at another university and then used that learning to start PLAR at the Faculty of Social Work:

> I was involved while on sabbatical in a Program that was part of the National Vocational Qualifications [Framework]. There was a form of PLAR in this Program and I was involved in the Program in its first year …. The Program was called the Diploma in Probation Studies which was taking the place of a Social Work qualification for people to be probation officers. It was offered through the Social Work Department … so I learned a lot more about it [PLAR] there …. but when I got back here at the time, there was not a lot of interest in the Faculty to pursue it, but that changed and we did come out with it [PLAR] around 2013, I think it was.

Gail explained how being a member of the PLAR Admissions Committee and conducting research contributed to her professional learning and shaped the PLAR Program here:

> Before I started the PLAR Admissions Committee, my knowledge and awareness and understanding of PLAR was probably not great but as I think through that process, I have learned a lot more in terms of what PLAR is and the different kinds of options that one might use for PLAR. I have learned a lot more also by looking at models like the Social Work Program in B.C. They use PLAR and our self-study option is similar to B.C.'s model.

Similarly, Linda described how conducting research and sharing information with other universities informed the development of PLAR at the Faculty of Social Work:

> We did a lot of research from our own Faculty when we were developing PLAR …. We worked closely with the University of Calgary and the University of Victoria to help us develop PLAR. We worked with each other from other schools that have PLAR, so that is how we learned from each other and what fits for Social Work.

Linda commented further on how her knowledge and understanding played a role in facilitating PLAR:

> I have been involved except for the first year PLAR was developed. I have worked very hard with [my colleagues] to just really, get a good understanding of whether or not a student is ready to do something like PLAR. I am very knowledgeable in what happens when a student is placed into PLAR with regards to how they are being assessed.

Alison from the IMG Program spoke about the sharing of expertise among a national organization of colleagues to discuss practice-ready assessment:

> There is a national organization that deals with that [practice-ready assessment] …. This is so unique but it is a minority of what is done in the medical field that you really need somebody else with similar expertise to share your kind of expertise because the problems change as the groups of physicians change. Their training changes because they come in waves … We really benefit from sharing that expertise, so it is really good that there is a national organization.

Alison elaborated on how her group of colleagues function as a resource and an educator to the University:

> We are people who have the expertise that most people use on an ad hoc basis. We are trying to be the resource, we are trying to educate people, we are trying to quarterback things. We insert ourselves into discussions where this becomes relevant where possible. We try to educate the University in the importance of the process and guard the fairness of it …

Social Capital Themes

To tap into the participants' social capital perceptions about PLAR, I asked questions pertaining to the following concepts: working independently or in collaboration with others, the level of commitment, willingness to share information, and level of support for implementing PLAR. The analysis of the participants' responses revealed two themes: team collaboration and commitment.

Team Collaboration

From the participants' responses, team collaboration was clearly an essential factor in implementing PLAR. Ron commented that collaboration was evident in the Faculty of Social Work: "If I am doing anything, I work in collaboration with our unit …. The people who deal with PLAR, they work very closely but with each other. Whether or not they work outside Social Work, I don't know."

Linda described the team efforts as a "very strong social work network in the field", and spoke about working independently as well as collaboratively:

> I work collaboratively with [my colleagues] and our Committee members which include faculty and PLAR assessors when we are admitting students into PLAR. I work independently when I am dealing with students and they are asking questions about PLAR … My assistant answers questions as well, and then I work very closely with the two PLAR assessors.

Gail also spoke about working independently and collaboratively while emphasizing that this was limited to the Faculty:

> In terms of my role, it would be very much collaboratively with others …. My role is clearly to work with the [PLAR] Applications Team. I work with individual students as needed. So if a student said to me, "I am looking at PLAR, I have questions." I would meet with them one to one. For the most part, my role has been … working as part of the team [but] it would be very specific to Social Work.

Gina explained how she built social capital through collaboration with different stakeholders in the support and recognition of the IEAP:

> I was always consulting with the Manitoba Institution of Agrology – the Regulatory body, with the Faculty and Associate Dean … We worked collaboratively on a presentation about our bridging program. Within the Faculty, people were supportive of the Program, student services, advisors …. When we had events, we always made sure we invited Faculty, just to put the Program out there, to make them aware … and little by little, it [the IEAP] was more recognized and more accepted within the Faculty… I had to be working with the industry very closely and provide them with cultural workshops. I had

> to do co-op visits and sometimes I acted as facilitator because there were always misunderstandings.

Commitment

A commitment to PLAR among colleagues was another theme important to building social capital. Barb stated matter-of-factly: "The office in this room are my colleagues. Within this group of people, the commitment would be very high. It [PLAR] would be very positively viewed …"

Ron commented that staff commitment was important to implement PLAR: "Among colleagues, the people involved in PLAR, I would say [are] very committed. If they were not as committed as they are, it [PLAR] probably would not have happened. So they are very committed."

Gail remarked that there was faculty support and commitment for PLAR:

> I felt very well supported by faculty and …. So I think the commitment is there from the Faculty. I have felt that there was a commitment at the larger level too – just in terms of the support we received, so I think that there is a commitment there.

Linda also spoke about the commitment and support for PLAR but was unsure if this extended to the Faculty:

> Honestly, I think the level of commitment is just the field folks that are very committed to giving the student the opportunity. But as far as faculty? I mean the Dean and the Associate Dean support it, but the faculty? I am really not sure. I can't answer whether they [faculty] support it [PLAR] or not.

Decisional Capital Theme

Decisional capital is the capital that professionals acquire and accumulate through structured and unstructured experience, practice and reflection. Decisional capital is enhanced by drawing on the insights and experiences of colleagues in forming judgements (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Social capital in the form of collaboration and commitment is an integral part of decisional capital as well as an addition to it. The data analysis revealed that shared decision-making emerged as the decisional capital theme.

Shared Decision-Making

The participants' comments showed the importance of working together in sharing decision-making about PLAR. Barb shared the following; "We work as a team … I'm pretty happy with decision-by-committee. We meet usually twice a year to talk about PLAR. We meet as a Committee to review applications [for PLAR] and approve those or not."

Linda expressed her thoughts about sharing decision-making with her colleagues:

> Between myself and [my colleagues], if there are decisions to be made, we practice the same policy and procedures that we would use for any course. So we would take it [PLAR policy procedures] to the Committee which both [my colleague] and I are sitting on. Then, the Associate Dean presents it to the Committee, so we are very involved if we are changing or tweaking anything.

Gail provided more detail about decision-making by committee:

> At the front end, I had a fair bit of decision-making with the PLAR Applications Committee when we were developing it [the PLAR application] …. We make decisions at

> every level in terms of looking and evaluating specifically the references … We look at work-related experience and actually go through what they have described in their job description …. so we have to make a lot of decisions around that.

Sharon described the collaborative decisions made in the early stages of developing the IEEQ Program:

> We had to make decisions about what the program would be and what it would not be so we decided iteratively. We decided that it was focusing on technical courses for technical confirmation on co-op work experience for Canadian labour market experience …We made the decision to include language and communication development and to include authentic networking opportunities for newcomers. We made decisions to do it in a cohort process so we only had one entry per year. That was partly to simplify our internal processes, but it was also that we saw a lot of value in people starting together and building relationships throughout the program.

Alison gave an example of stakeholder-engaged decision-making in the IMG Program:

> We make decisions of who enters the Program. We make decisions as to who graduates from the Program …. That's the general context and then we made little decisions along the way about how to implement the process. We engage appropriate stakeholders when we make higher-level decisions. We have Advisory [Group] meetings twice a year with all stakeholders if we want to implement changes. That's the level of decisions we make.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings related to the perceptions among stakeholders who either currently have or previously had some responsibility for PLAR at the University of Manitoba. The stakeholders included administrators, faculty members, instructors, coordinators and assessors. Using an inductive approach, I analyzed these perceptions in response to the three research questions posed in Chapter 1 of the dissertation. The findings are supported by evidence in the form of quotations obtained in the interviews.

Prior to addressing the first research question, I presented an overview of PLAR at the University based on document analysis. The analysis revealed that PLAR is defined at the University of Manitoba primarily as formal credit-based learning in the form of transfer credit, articulation agreements, joint programs, and challenge for credit. These findings are confirmed in other research. In a review of university websites in Australia, Pitman (2009) found that there was preference for a "blanket' policy" in which RPL was included with all forms of prior learning. The study concluded that RPL in the post-secondary sector suffered from a lack of clarity and consistency in definitions and terms.

To address the first research question, I presented documentary evidence for three areas of study with a linkage to PLAR: Extended Education, the Bachelor of Social Work Program, and a subset of five Gap Training and Bridge Programs for Internationally Educated Professionals (Agrology, Education, Engineering, Dentistry and Medicine). In Extended Education, some aspects of PLAR continue to be offered. However, PLAR played a stronger role in the past than at present. The Bachelor of Social Work Program offers a PLAR self-study course as an exemption to a field first placement. The Gap Training and Bridge Programs offer qualification

recognition for IEPs, and are situated within the roles and responsibilities of three important stakeholders: regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions, and the provincial government.

To examine the second research question of how stakeholders generally perceive PLAR at the University, I identified six themes that summarized the main ideas shared by the interviewees. Each theme to some degree conveys a broad concept. However, the themes to some extent overlap and should not be considered mutually exclusive. In addressing the third research question of perceptions of PLAR within the context of professional capital, the analysis revealed four themes. Chapter 6 discusses the findings in detail, and situates the results within the literature base of PLAR.

CHAPTER 6 – DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the three research questions posed at the beginning of the study. To provide context for this chapter, the statement of the problem and the research methodology are revisited. The qualitative approach to the study provided the opportunity to reach beneath the surface of initial impressions in order to deepen my understanding of PLAR as seen through the perspectives of others. The data collection methodology served to confirm the findings, rendering contextual information as well as deep insights into the participants' opinions about PLAR. The study was also descriptive with the primary objective of increasing our understanding of PLAR within the university setting.

Approaching the research from an area of study perspective revealed differences in how participants viewed PLAR. In addition, perceptions were flavoured by past and present experiences with using PLAR. The Opportunity Lost theme related primarily to Extended Education's participants' past recollections of limited success with the sustained engagement of a PLAR Coordinator and the unsuccessful experience with offering portfolios. The Bachelor of Social Work Program, on the other hand, was experiencing success with using PLAR as an exemption – a finding supported in the study with student data, and was where most evidence of professional capital could be found. The Gap Training and Bridge Programs, currently operating in Engineering, Dentistry, and Medicine also demonstrated success and showed evidence of professional capital.

Review of the Statement of the Problem

The statement of the problem is framed around the central theme of the dissertation that despite steady growth in PLAR practices among post-secondary institutions, and in outside jurisdictions, PLAR remains generally fragmented and marginalized at Canadian universities (Conrad, 2010; Morrissey et al., 2008; Wong, 2011). The study explores the perspectives of PLAR role-players, including administrators, faculty, instructors, facilitators and assessors who have or had a connection to PLAR at the University of Manitoba to understand the factors behind the under-utilization of PLAR.

The problem statement is supported by the literature suggesting that PLAR poses a challenge for universities as self-accrediting bodies with considerable autonomy in developing institutional policies (Wong, 2014). The long-standing suspicion of PLAR as a lesser form of the higher education experience has provided a base of resistance that links to the hierarchies of knowledge and power (Conrad, 2010, 2014; Cooper & Harris, 2013; Pitman & Vidovich, 2013; Wong, 2011, 2014).

The problem statement is further supported by the following evidence in favour of universities becoming more active in PLAR: a) PLAR can be a key driver for addressing changes in workforce participation and economic competitiveness. Failure to address unrecognized learning through PLAR has economic consequences, b) Canada's increasing dependence on immigrants and refugees to fill labour market needs suggests more efficient methods are needed for foreign credential recognition, and c) PLAR can be a useful mechanism for creating access and social inclusion, thereby widening university participation among under-represented populations.

To examine the problem, the study takes an area of study approach as research shows that faculty-specific conceptualizations of PLAR are important as not all faculties have the same need for PLAR and therefore, their approach to it differs, and this can have a determining effect on integration (Frick et al., 2007b; Wihak, 2006, 2007, 2014; Wong, 2011). The study addresses the problem statement by examining the elements of PLAR policy and best practices in terms of conceptualization, purposes and processes, method of assessment, support, and institutional mission and vision.

The following research questions were proposed to address the problem statement:

- What is the role of PLAR by area of study at the University?
- What are the participants' general perceptions of PLAR?
- How can the Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) conceptual framework of professional capital provide a lens with which to more clearly see, analyze and draw conclusions about how PLAR is utilized by area of study?

Review of the Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore PLAR at the University of Manitoba. Data was collected and analyzed from documents and interviews. The purpose was to obtain participants' perspectives of PLAR from an area of study approach. The case study also used professional capital as a conceptual framework to study the development and implementation of PLAR. I obtained documentary evidence by area of study to provide background and contextual information. The interview participants who were purposively selected had either a past or present connection to PLAR, and could provide insights that could best inform an understanding of the research problem and research questions.

The interview questions were based on elements of PLAR policy and best practices, and were organized by four sections that corresponded with the components of professional capital as follows: a) human capital, b) social capital, and c) decisional capital. General questions about PLAR comprised the fourth section. As principal researcher, I digitally recorded, transcribed and analyzed all data. Data analysis began with preparing summaries of the interviews, followed by the emerging of codes, and organizing by themes.

Summary of Themes

The Differences in Understanding theme related to factors such as the tendency to equate transfer credit with PLAR, to view PLAR as easy credit and a rubber stamp process, the idea that "real" learning must take place in-class, and the lack of credibility and rigour often associated with PLAR. The participants however, were well aware of the differences in understanding often linked to PLAR, and were quite prepared to challenge them.

The Invisibility of PLAR theme underlined the unawareness and general lack of understanding about PLAR among staff and students, the tendency for knowledge and practice to be localized, and need for greater visibility of PLAR beyond individual faculties. The Roadblocks theme pertained to the logistical challenges of staff time and financial resources to dedicate to PLAR, other pressing priorities deemed to be of greater importance, and PLAR's presumed interference with institutional core values of academic freedom. Other subthemes included fear and resistance, the University as "gatekeeper", the lack of external motivation or pressure to offer PLAR, and the need to maintain existing program standards and alignment with university policy.

In spite of the darker-tinged themes discussed above, the analysis revealed an underlying intrinsic belief among participants in the inherent value and benefits of PLAR for students and the University. The subthemes here related to the impact that PLAR could have on the image and reputation of the University, the increasing importance of assessing learning outcomes and competencies, the link to the University's focus on indigenization and reconciliation initiatives as examples of openness to other approaches. The participants also pointed out the many benefits that PLAR accords to students including saving time and costs, shortening time to completion, the validation effect, increased self-confidence and empowerment.

The final theme of Moving Forward reflected ideas and suggestions to advance PLAR including the importance of institutional commitment to PLAR, support and direction from senior administration, the inclusion of stronger policy and action statements in the University Strategic Plan. Other subthemes included education and consultation, involvement of experts, starting small, advocacy and promotion, and the need for dedicated staff and resources.

Opportunity Lost

As the adult education organization originally associated with PLAR (Thomas, 2000; Wihak, 2011), one might expect that PLAR would be actively pursued in Extended Education. However, missed opportunities such as the limited success of the PLAR Coordinator and the unsuccessful efforts at offering portfolios characterized most of the perspectives from Extended Education participants.

The general finding that extended education programs are making little use of PLAR is supported in the literature (Wihak 2006, 2007). One possible explanation is that university-based adult educators suffer from some or all of the influences that have impeded PLAR

implementation in Canadian universities generally. The participants expressed concerns about "faculty resistance", "dwindling faculty resources" and "academic freedom" as potential explanations for limiting PLAR at Extended Education (Wihak, 2006, 2007). In addition, Extended Education participants pointed out that an adult education division based on revenue generation or cost recovery faces significant challenges in increasing programming due to infrastructure limitations and limited financial capacities (Kirby et al., 2009).

One explanation for the Opportunity Lost theme, as discussed in the literature, is that adult education units with research-intensive universities tend to have marginal status. Not all adult educators are familiar with PLAR and some may actually resist the intent of PLAR, feeling that it dilutes their credibility as university scholars. In addition, faculties that have expressed some interest in PLAR in part because of student demands, the reward system works against those who invest time and energy in advising and supporting PLAR candidates (Wihak & Wong, 2011). One suggestion is that adult education programs need a stronger theorization of PLAR to increase the availability of PLAR in degree-level programs to overcome faculty resistance, and to take leadership for implementing PLAR within the larger university community (Wihak and Wong, 2011).

Another explanation for the emerging Opportunity Lost theme is that in adult education within the university context, a tension may exist between honouring the learner and honouring the curriculum when using PLAR to grant admission and/or advanced standing. Tension arises because adult education curriculum stresses honouring the learner while the university context stresses honouring academic standards (Kawalilak & Wihak, 2013). Finding a way to approach PLAR that theoretically and pragmatically reflects both of these influences for university-based adult education programs should be considered.

The Extended Education participants described past experiences with using portfolios as a method for assessing prior learning as “onerous”, “too expensive”, and “time-consuming”, with the responsibility resting with students to be able to put their portfolios together. The participants stated that given the difficulties with implementing portfolios, it was easier for students to take the courses. Extended Education no longer offers portfolios to assess PLAR for credit. These findings reflect the practitioners’ negative experiences with portfolios but also point out the challenges that students have in accessing and obtaining credit for non-formal PLAR, particularly when they have such little awareness and understanding of PLAR.

As discussed in Chapter 3, portfolios are one of the best instruments for visualizing and evaluating competencies acquired in informal and non-formal contexts (Brown 2001, 2002; Joosten-ten Brinke, Sluijsmans & Jochems, 2010). In addition, the process of preparing a portfolio can increase self-confidence, critical thinking, and self-reflection (Brown et al., 2004; Mandell, 2000). The study found however that the students’ experiences in preparing portfolios takes a significant amount of time and effort (Gambescia & Dagavarian, 2007; Thomas et al., 2002). Portfolios are difficult to create and manage (Cameron et al., 2014), and are labour-intensive (Bélanger & Mount, 1998).

One explanation for the difficulty that students experienced in putting together portfolios is that learners need instruction in how to prepare a portfolio for assessment pointing to the need for a mentoring or coaching process (Conrad 2008b; Conrad & Wardrop, 2010; Rust & Brinthaupt, 2017). This may reflect the fact that gaps likely exist between the applicant’s grasp of their experiential learning and their ability to capture that learning thoughtfully and appropriately in accordance with the language of the academy (Conrad, 2014). Ideally, this should be negotiated with the applicant to increase chances of success and to contribute to

fairness in assessment (Frick et al., 2007b). In addition, the digital movement is offering solutions with the introduction of e-portfolios and portfolio management systems, a topic explored further in the next chapter.

Differences in Understanding

The literature supports many of the different understandings about PLAR as revealed by the interviewees. One common understanding found in the study is that transfer credit processes and recognition of formal credentials are the equivalent of PLAR. Confusion about the term, PLAR, and what it entails is a focus of ongoing debate as discussed in Chapter 1 (Morrissey et al., 2008). The definitional issue is often confused by international debates that are centred largely on the place of non-formal learning (Fox, 2005; Pitman, 2009). This finding is consistent with Conrad (n.d.), noting that university-level applications of PLAR practice are "wildly diverse", and often suffer confusion around process and terminology.

One explanation for viewing transfer credit and PLAR as equivalent processes is that the language of transfer credit is an 'audit' type of language that does not recognize twin notions of individual meaning making and achievement. From this web of misunderstandings, comes the downgrading of experiential learning activities that can be earned through a portfolio-learning format to gate-keeping activities (Conrad, 2010a). Conrad (2014) argues that differentiating between PLAR and an administrative practice such as transfer credit is critical to the success of PLAR as an academic venture and therefore, to its perceived value and importance.

The subtheme of PLAR as being a credit 'give-away' or a 'lesser' form of the higher education experience has provided traditional educators with a strong base for resistance to implementation (Bélanger & Mount, 1998; Conrad, 2014). PLAR is sometimes viewed as not

quite legitimate (Thomas et al., 2002), and less than the real thing that could lower the prestige of a credential (Wolfson, 1997).

Closely related to the "easy credit" theme is the understanding expressed by participants that PLAR lacks credibility and rigour, in that PLAR faces opposition from those who cite issues around credential integrity and academic standards, a finding strongly supported in the literature (Conrad, 2010; Joosten-ten Brinke, Sluijsmans, & Jochems, 2009; Pitman & Vidovitch, 2013; Wheelahan et al., 2003). Promoting PLAR to critics depends on being able to demonstrate a system that is rigorous, sound, and capable of initiating self-reflection and critical thinking (Conrad, 2008b). As discussed in Chapter 1, the lack of understanding the rigour associated with PLAR causes unease among some in the university community (Kennedy, 2003), as universities are more likely to question the credibility of PLAR assessment practices but also less likely to have policies in place that could ensure consistent application and validity of practices.

Academics perceive knowledge as only valid if it may be presented in an academic or classroom format is another understanding about PLAR revealed in the study. The literature suggests that PLAR poses challenges to the intellectual foundations of university learning, and confronts the formal education system's powerful monopoly on socializing learners and evaluating ability (Thomas, 2000). PLAR requires the system to acknowledge that much learning takes place outside of institutional settings.

The resistance of faculty members to the idea that learning occurring outside the formal education system could not be considered worthy of academic recognition is supported in the literature (Wong, 2011). That is, while academics may concede that learning occurs elsewhere, they contend that the learning is different in substance as opposed to what is taught in formal

education. Successful PLAR practices feature both inclusion and transparency, measures that can result in engagement within institutions. Strategies to promote transparency include cross-institutional communication strategies, developing quality assurance techniques, establishing a bank of assessors, and participating in institutional hierarchies and governance structures (Conrad, 2014).

The participants also revealed that students were generally unaware and uninformed about PLAR. The literature suggests that when learners do not understand differences between transfer credit and PLAR, they assume the PLAR process is mechanical and checklist in nature. This blurs a basic tenet of PLAR that separates the concept of *doing* from the concept of *knowing* (Conrad, n.d.).

Invisibility

The need for greater awareness, understanding, and increased visibility of PLAR among faculty and students emerged as a general theme. Staff who understand PLAR most clearly are those who are closely involved with the process, inferring that PLAR procedures "pass by most academic staff" (Taylor & Clemans, 2000, p. 270). PLAR works best among staff who fully understand the issues and take it seriously The most successful PLAR processes tend to take place in faculties where PLAR is specifically mentioned in course information, application forms, with guidelines attached and step-by-step procedures outlined (Frick et al., 2007b).

The need to increase student awareness of PLAR is a critical factor in gaining acceptance for PLAR. This finding is supported in Wihak's (2007) conclusion that the lack of clear, accessible information on university websites and prospective students' lack of knowledge about PLAR seems almost certain to ensure that demand for PLAR will stay low. The study

participants emphasized that information on PLAR be readily available to both staff and students, be user-friendly and updated regularly (Frick et al., 2007b).

Increasing the availability of easy to find information may be a key factor in moving PLAR forward in the Canadian university sector. Thomas et al. (2002) found that most student respondents encountered PLAR by accident, with only a few students initially setting out to make use of learning opportunities with PLAR. The study's findings concur with Thomas et al., (2002) that PLAR needs to be publicized more widely, be more available, and requires wider recognition outside the formal education system to employees and governments both for information about procedures as well as for legitimacy purposes. Inadequate communication not only hinders the growth of PLAR processes but also the quality and degree of its acceptance across the institution (Conrad, 2010).

Roadblocks

Many of the roadblocks to PLAR identified by participants are consistent with other research findings. The participants identified a combination of factors including time and resource challenges, actual fear and resistance, not a priority, and lack of motivation or pressure to pursue PLAR. In addition, there was less likelihood of implementing PLAR due to pressure to meet academic standards and to align with university policy, and the concerns about quality of PLAR.

Participants expressed concerns about the lack of time to devote to PLAR, often feeling overwhelmed by the demands of the university system. PLAR is one more demand that faculty need to deal with and do not see it as critical to their role. As one participant, Julie noted, "if you ask them to do one more thing, they will scream", confirming other research findings that PLAR

tends to get bumped to the margins of faculty workload and concerns (Taylor & Clemans, 2000; Wolfson, 1997). In addition, the financial viability and lack of structural funding was found to be a major obstacle in developing PLAR. Effective implementation demands clarity in terms of allocation of resources (Frick et al., 2007b), and a solution for time-consuming and bureaucratic procedures (Joosten-ten-Brinke et al., 2008).

The sources of resistance to PLAR including concerns about the quality of PLAR, the purpose of a university education, and relinquishing control over what learning should 'count' towards an academic credential are confirmed in other research (Van Kleef, 2011, 2014a). According to Wolfson (1997), faculty resistance to PLAR centres on the degree to which it is perceived as threatening to faculty roles. Until such time as faculty fears and issues are resolved, PLAR will remain on the fringe of the institution. As discussed in Chapter 1, in the main, the general attitude of the Canadian university community toward PLAR is one of suspicion and resistance (Peruniak & Powell, 2007).

The study confirmed other research findings that universities are often described as the "gatekeepers" of credentials reflecting achievement of specific levels of knowledge and skills by fields of study (Conrad, 2010; Pitman & Vidovitch, 2013; Wong, 2011). Wong argues that it is important that PLAR advocates and adult learners beyond the academy understand that the type of learning that universities value represents only one type of learning, and does not denigrate other types of learning.

As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the reasons why some academics and administrators resist PLAR is the mistaken belief that credit is awarded for experience only. In fact, recognizing the learning that arises from experience rather than the experience itself is one of the

foundational tenets of good PLAR practice. Promoting PLAR to its critics depends to a meaningful pedagogical level on being able to demonstrate a system that is rigorous, sound, and capable of initiating self-reflection and critical thinking (Conrad, 2014).

Participants noted that faculty and administration are often cautious about PLAR as it raises questions about maintaining existing program standards, a finding supported in other research (Frick et al., 2007b). In order for knowledge or learning to be recognized by the university, it must be presented according to norms and regulations laid down by the institution. Guidelines may reference flexibility, social inclusion and diversity. APEL procedures are generally implemented through the process of matching learning to the existing learning outcomes drawn up within the institution (Peters, 2005).

The importance of alignment with University-based policy was another finding confirmed in Wihak (2007) such that: “in the process of aligning such learning to University-defined standards of valued knowledge, any learning that does not readily conform may become distorted and/or devalued” (p. 98). According to Pitman & Vidovich (2012), the university’s focus on equity does not mean the discourse on quality is marginalized, but quite the opposite. The university’s policy on RPL has as a guiding principle the need to ensure academic standards will be protected and maintained. Participants were equally concerned that the use of RPL to make the institution more inclusive does not come at the expense of quality within universities. Equity and quality are widely viewed as discourses in conflict (Pitman & Vidovich, 2012).

Intrinsic Belief

The study found that in spite of the challenges that PLAR presents, participants were generally supportive and believed in PLAR. The participants recognized the importance and

need for awareness of PLAR, the link to the assessment of outcomes and competencies, PLAR's many benefits to students, and the need for a "culture shift." Research shows that despite PLAR's low profile in Canadian universities, most respondents did not agree with the idea that PLAR is inappropriate in universities, but rather that PLAR should form part of academic credentials in future (Belangér & Mount, 1998).

Wolfson (1997) found that those who have adopted PLAR have done so because it seems to fit with their existing beliefs and practices. While faculty may appear to support PLAR in theory, they resist it in practice. A survey of the Faculties of Education in Australian Universities found that almost all faculties espouse the principles of RPL. However, there was wide variation in the scope and style of RPL delivery (Taylor & Clemans, 2000).

Cooper and Harris (2013) questioned whether obstacles to implementing RPL are due to lack of political will or to knowledge and epistemological constraints, but found that experiential knowledge was generally valued across university sites or fields of study. There was also significant evidence of experiential knowledge being drawn upon as standard pedagogic practice within the curriculum to contextualize formal knowledge, to critique formal knowledge, to enrich both formal and experiential knowledge, and to produce new knowledge.

The participants acknowledged the strong connection between PLAR and the assessment of learning outcomes and competencies. University faculty may dislike competency-based standards, believing that true learning is holistic and not segmented into discrete facts and skills, Wong (1997) argues however, that University faculty can reconsider existing curriculum content without compromising the underlying philosophy of a formal education. Course and program structures and processes can be reconfigured to match the intent and spirit of PLAR, that is, to

recognize that adult learners can achieve academic-relevant learning from several sources – both formal study and active use of relevant work and life experiences.

Participants noted that learning outcomes comprise a foundational piece of RPL providing clear and accessible targets against which learners can focus their quest for recognition of their prior learning. RPL practitioners recognize the value and need for clear and accessible learning outcomes. However, universities in the main have been slow to adopt learning outcomes as a viable measure (Conrad, 2014).

Van Kleef (2011) confirms that PLAR is consistent with supporting an approach to the assessment and use of learning outcomes as the criteria against which all learning, including prior learning should be judged in academic settings. Learning outcomes are generally viewed as standards that integrate knowledge and skills expressed in terms of performance. They are established for courses, course clusters, and in some cases, programs.

Competency is used in some academic settings but can also refer to criteria against which prior learning is judged in regulated occupations. For example, competency-based education, a concept closely associated with PLAR, focuses on what students know and can do through demonstration of pre-defined competencies, rather than how they learned it or how long they took to learn it (Klein-Collins, 2013).

The participants were keenly aware of the intrinsic (self-confidence, self-motivating, empowering) and extrinsic (time and cost savings, flexibility) benefits that PLAR can offer to students, as confirmed in the literature. PLAR is seen as a cost-effective way of earning credentials from both the standpoint of students and society by avoiding unnecessary duplication of training, and shortening the time, effort, and money required to obtain them (Klein-Collins &

Hain, 2009; Peruniak & Powell, 2007; Smith & Clayton, 2009; Wihak, 2007). The potential for cost savings however may depend on the fee charged by the institution for the assessment service (Wong, 1997).

Participants confirmed that PLAR has the potential for producing students who are capable, not only of learning, but of building their self-confidence, self-esteem and sense of empowerment (Brown, 2001, 2002; Cleary et al., 2002; Conrad & Wardrop, 2010; Rust & Ikard, 2016; Thomas et al., 2002). In addition, PLAR offers flexible entry and exit points in programs allowing for the utilization of prior learning and for an individual pace and level of learning (Frick & Albertyn, 2011).

One other subtheme related to the intrinsic belief theme was the institutional culture shift idea as a way of creating more acceptance for PLAR and legitimizing its value. This finding is confirmed in relation to APEL in the Australian context, where Cleary et al. (2002) argue that a culture shift is required if the potential for APEL is to be fully realized in the processes of social inclusion in which experiential learning comes to be more highly valued than it is currently. In this context, the barrier between APEL and academic knowledge has to be broken down and universities have to reconsider ways that APEL can be used to access or gain credit for programs of study.

Moving Forward

The participants offered several constructive ideas for moving PLAR forward, many of which are confirmed in the literature. An important suggestion included the importance of institutional commitment and senior-level support and direction for PLAR. Research confirms that implementation of PLAR depends heavily on the university context and mission (Frick et al.,

2007b), and will be seriously counterproductive if not accepted system-wide (Thomas & Klaiman, 1992). As discussed in Chapter 3, Frick et al. (2007b) argue that post-secondary institutions need to contextualize RPL and take a clear stance on their intended approach(s) to RPL. This will have a determining influence on the incorporating of an appropriate RPL model and practices flowing from such a model. In addition, the contextualization needs to be congruent with the overall mission and vision of the institution in order for it to be accepted as part of the broader institutional processes.

As an example, Conrad (2008b, 2010) describes Athabasca University, Canada's largest open and distance learning institution, where recognition and accreditation of prior learning is firmly rooted in the University's mission statement that embraces flexibility, reducing barriers to learning, and is enshrined as part of the University's central mandate. Conrad (2014) views the operation of PLAR processes within post-secondary institutions as dependent on the vision and mandate of the institution.

Closely related to mandate and vision as revealed in the study, is the importance of institutional commitment and support (Belangér & Mount, 1998; Kennedy, 2003). According to Wong (2011), PLAR can only succeed in university with the committed participation of faculty and learners who believe their engagement in the process will be valued and recognized. Wolfson (1997) argues that without the support and approval for change at the departmental level, PLAR will not become entrenched within the system. The impetus needs to come from within the organization rather than from external forces. Therefore, a critical factor for academic change to occur is the perceived level of departmental/disciplinary support for PLAR.

The careful planning of policy is linked to widespread acceptance of PLAR principles (Taylor & Clemans, 2000), and centralized service that works toward legitimizing PLAR (Conrad, 2010). PLAR as a mere policy without real academic and administrative commitment however, will not realize its true potential. In an institutional culture that incorporates PLAR, implements PLAR-friendly policies, and is supported by informed and committed personnel are support factors that influence successful implementation of RPL (Frick et al., 2007a). In their study, as discussed in Chapter 3, Frick et al. (2007b) found that careful planning of policy implementation procedures, the appropriate selection of assessment instruments, and the creation of a truly learner-centred approach to RPL are factors that can greatly enhance the quality, and therefore, successful implementation of RPL.

Involving outside experts and seeking professional development are also suggestions for moving ahead with PLAR. As confirmed in the literature, Brown (2017) recommends that universities should aim to incorporate professional development opportunities for staff in terms of RPL advisor roles, ensuring that advisors are also subject specialists where possible. Peters (2005) suggests collaboration take place with academics and others outside post-secondary institutions who have expertise relevant to PLAR and bring a wider range of knowledge and ways of assessing PLAR claims that can counterbalance the perspectives of academics. Hoffmann (2013) argues that providing faculty/mentors and evaluators with training and resources is critical.

Participants stated that advocacy also plays an important role. Conrad (2014) confirms the importance of the PLAR advocate, where championing the process has been shown to contribute to PLAR success in post-secondary education. As Conrad points out, it is important that PLAR champions are able to engage in ongoing dialogue and activities with institutional

personnel at all levels. Starting small is also a relevant factor. Bélanger and Mount (1998) suggest that PLAR is more likely to occur where its use is part of a network or consortium rather than lodged in a single institution. Otherwise, it is more likely to be accepted incrementally via linkages with community colleges. Wihak (2007) contends that Extended Education and disciplinary units need to build relationships with other areas to encourage greater use of PLAR, drawing attention to where it is already in use within different fields of study and at other universities.

Finally, the participants underscored the need for dedicated resources as an essential component for moving forward. Wihak and Wong (2011) suggest that until the issue of cost is addressed, PLAR services will not be integrated into the mainstream of student services at Canadian universities. Kennedy's (2003) survey of PLAR at Canadian universities found that dedicated staff and funding are needed to improve the implementation of PLAR, and in some cases, a dedicated staff person to manage PLAR. Frick et al. (2007b) conclude that RPL will remain marginalized if adequate resources are not allocated to its development and implementation. RPL continues to be a resource-intensive endeavour, therefore human resources, training, administrative support and adequate infrastructure need to be provided and maintained for purposes of RPL.

Grant (2015) argues that post-secondary institutions have not made a serious commitment to improving learning recognition as measured by priority-setting and resource allocation. Post-secondary institutions do not see learning recognition as core to their business model, particularly in attracting additional students. Therefore, they do not invest in creating systems for dealing with students who come through non-traditional channels and rely heavily on formal, credit-based recognition of learning for evaluating students. It may be costly initially to

implement PLAR, but when it leads to qualified applicants who may study for two to three years after receiving recognition, the business case can be made.

Summary of Professional Capital Themes

Building professional capital formed the basis of the third research question and provided the conceptual framework or lens with which to explore perceptions of PLAR within the university setting. The study findings provide evidence of generating professional capital within the context of PLAR and QR. There were examples of integrating human capital by contributing knowledge and information to develop processes, conducting research, sharing expertise, and functioning as a resource and educator. Social capital was present by colleagues working collaboratively as a team and a social network, building relationships, maintaining commitment, and supporting each other. Decisional capital was evident through the shared decision-making informed by committee and advisory group to support processes and practices, and by engaging stakeholders.

Human Capital

Evidence of human capital was most prevalent among the Bachelor of Social Work participants where PLAR can be an exemption and a self-study option in to earn formal credit. Relevant professional learning emerged as a theme, particularly the experience of learning about PLAR in outside jurisdictions and bringing the expertise back to develop the home-based program. Conducting research and sharing information among colleagues contributed to developing PLAR as an option in the program.

Participation on the PLAR Admissions Committee contributed to building knowledge and understanding. Similarly, the sharing of expertise among the IMG Program colleagues played a helpful role in addressing problems encountered in the Program. In addition, the IMG Program colleagues were knowledgeable, offering expertise, and acting as a resource and an educator to the larger University community.

Human capital among colleagues is about having and developing the requisite knowledge skills. Just focusing on human capital in isolation will not increase it. To accelerate learning, human capital involves deliberate use of teamwork, enabling colleges to learn from each other and to build cultures and networks of community, learning, trust and collaboration around the team, in other words, social capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Social Capital

The findings suggest that among colleagues on the social work team, collaboration was essential to implementing PLAR. The participants spoke of a "strong social network" and emphasized the importance of working independently as well as collaboratively. Building social capital through collaboration was also critical to generating support for the Gap Training and Bridge Programs. For example, to build momentum for the Program, the IEAP participant explained the process of reaching out to stakeholders including the University, the regulatory body and the industry to garner acceptance and recognition for the Program.

The participants who worked directly with social work students in the field commented on the importance of their commitment to giving students opportunities to apply for PLAR and successfully pass the course. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) cite research that links effectiveness to teachers' commitments in their work, commitments to students, to the work itself, and

becoming more capable in it. Commitment has a direct effect on self-efficacy (teachers believe that they can actually make a difference), and in turn, on student achievement. Commitment, therefore contributes to capability. Hargreaves and Fullan argue that both concepts are reciprocal in professional capital and drive each other whereby: "you get more good teachers by having more great colleagues who are able and willing to work together for the same cause" (p. 60).

In their study on building professional capital as interpreted through the lens of Alberta educators, Tong and Razniak (2017) found that teachers grew in their confidence and were more willing to share their newly developed teaching practices with one another that further promoted collaboration, thereby increasing social capital. The study also found that by creating and promoting professional learning and sharing among staff members, a collaborative learning community is created thereby confirming the importance of these forms of human capital and social capital.

Decisional Capital

The study participants provided evidence of social capital and decisional capital through their shared decision-making in a collaborative environment. For example, in reviewing applications for PLAR, the social work staff worked closely with the Admissions Committee in making decisions about approving applications. In addition, the Gap Training and Bridge Program participants also generated decisional capital. For example, team members engaged in collaborative decision-making to develop the IEEQ. Stakeholders employed joint decision-making to implement processes related to the IMG Program.

These findings agree with Tong and Razniak's (2017) example of decisional capital fully integrated through student resource team meetings. The meetings intend for teachers to share their knowledge and expertise with students identified as requiring supports. During the meetings, leaders collaborate with teachers in making sound judgements about learners and planning for meeting their learning needs. In addition, the meetings promote positive and professional communication among teachers, thereby developing social capital within the school.

Challenges to Interpreting Professional Capital

One of the goals of this study was to begin a dialogue about the need to nurture and broaden the notion of professional capital and PLAR in a way that leads to shifting of ideas both within and beyond the University, from emerging to empowering. However, this is not without its challenges. The findings point to the essential ingredients of collaborative leadership, clear articulation of goals, mandate and policy that are PLAR-focused and supported by senior administration, faculty, instructors, administrative staff and students.

The findings also point to exploratory suggestions as to how an area of study approach to professional capital can broaden knowledge and perspectives, create a strong circle of support, and leverage expertise through shared decision-making and informed consultation. For example, the findings from the Schmidt et al., (2010) study indicated that aspects of professional capital including collaboration and flexibility among stakeholders were key assumptions in maintaining the IET Program. Other factors intervened however, leading to the program's demise that suggests a program may not always be successful in spite of the presence of some professional capital.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) caution that events such as “contrived collegiality” or professional learning communities that are focused on existing practices, replication, or networking for their own sake, do not necessarily translate to meaningful organizational or systemic changes. Harris and Jones (2017) argue that groupthink and consensus building do not equate with automatic advancement in student outcomes, rather, positive change is optimized under authentic approaches to collaboration. If poorly formulated, professional collaboration in the form of prior learning communities can regress into little more than superficial co-operation. Collaborative inquiry presupposes that collaboration is positive and empowering. If weakly constructed and realized, it can prove to be little more than groupthink and low-level consensus (Harris & Jones, 2017).

Tong and Razniak (2017) found that collaborative leadership was key to building professional capital whereby, “leaders must take on the responsibility of promoting school environments that foster collegiality, collaboration and innovation within the school community” (p. 38). Leaders and teachers must build professional capital by fostering a collaborative environment. In addition, leaders can build a stronger, more cohesive staff by supporting the need to engage their staff in on-going feedback and dialogue and understanding their learning needs that in turn, enhances the power of professional capital.

Tong and Razniak (2017) identified a number of obstacles to building professional capital that included the following: the lack of time to develop a meaningful professional learning community to ensure groups collaborated effectively, workload issues that kept overburdened teachers from pursuing further development of skills, and the lack of sustainable and adequate funding from the provincial government. These are all factors identified as roadblocks in this study as well.

Summary

In summary, this chapter provided an in-depth discussion of the themes and subthemes identified in the study. Embedding the findings within the larger body of PLAR-related research not only adds credibility but contributes to a greater breadth and depth of understanding the state of PLAR within the university setting. In addition, the themes related to professional capital are supported in the literature. The study provided evidence of professional capital as a conceptual framework. However, the research suggests there are challenges with interpretation and measurement.

CHAPTER 7 – LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This final chapter presents the limitations of the research, the implications for theory, practice and further research, and the concluding statements.

Limitations

One of the factors that became clear to me early in the data collection phase was the scarcity and the invisibility of PLAR at the University of Manitoba that necessitated the choice of purposive, non-random sampling of participants for the interviews. Identifying and recruiting participants was one of the more challenging aspects of the study. Validity requires that participants are competent to answer the research questions, but reliability requires variety, i.e., participants are able to provide a range of response to questions (Chioncel et al., 2003).

As well, there is the question of optimal sample size. The individuals who participated in the interviews may have possessed a greater interest in PLAR, and may have held different perspectives that might have had an impact on the data. With a selection of other participants, the results may have been different. In addition, my own biases as researcher, may have led me to identify particular themes.

The purposive sampling of participants also limits the external validity, or the degree to which the results of the research can be generalized to larger populations. Research suggests however, that it is not appropriate to treat results from qualitative case studies as though they were findings from quantitative research (Yin, 2014). In fact, doing so can be damaging if the researcher's attention is drawn away from features important for understanding the case itself

(Stake, 2005). As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) point out, "in qualitative research, a single case or a small, non-random, purposeful sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many" (p. 254).

Despite the inapplicability of statistical generalization, knowledge generated through qualitative methods can still transfer and be useful in other settings. Patton (2015) promotes the notion of extrapolating rather than making generalizations where findings can be extrapolated beyond the immediate confines of the data and applied to other situations under similar, but not identical situations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that instead of relying on formal generalizations, qualitative research can achieve resonance through *transferability* or transferring the results to another setting by the readers of the research. In this case, the general lies in the particular. On this basis, I believe there is an obligation to provide a detailed description of the study. However, it is up to the reader to decide whether the findings can transfer or apply to his/her particular situation and therefore render judgement on the study's credibility.

Approaching this case study of a single university from an area of study perspective and applying the professional capital concept revealed some differences in perceptions about PLAR. The findings however, pose obvious limitations in terms of generalizability and in drawing comparisons to similar settings. In addition, as discussed in earlier chapters, the measurement of professional capital remains challenging. For example, Harris and Jones (2017) argue that there is a great deal of empirical evidence pointing to the centrality of collaboration as a powerful form of professional learning as a way of building professional capital. However, the literature concerning the evaluation and measurement of the impact of professional collaboration remains less well developed and poses an ongoing challenge.

Implications for Theory, Practice and Further Research

This study has implications for theory, practice and further research as discussed below.

Implications for Theory

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a growing body of research examining the development of professional capital within the teaching profession, including the building of collaborative cultures, establishing teacher-led professional learning opportunities, and creating school and community-based partnerships. This study expands the professional capital literature by exploring the link between professional capital and elements of PLAR policy within the university setting.

An important objective in applying the professional capital concept is not only the transformation of the teaching profession, but also the improvement of learning achievement and life chances for all students. Although this dissertation focused exclusively on staff, the perspective of learners is equally important. As a learner-centred process, PLAR presents opportunities to extend the professional capital concept from practitioners to learners.

PLAR offers learners the opportunity to optimize their experiential learning through critical reflection enabling them to re-examine their lives resulting in increased confidence and self-esteem. This allows PLAR as a tool for transformation to realize its potential by making visible the human capital that learners with experience bring to the learning context. At the same time, mentoring and coaching are important to learners as they engage with, and take ownership of their own learning. They have the opportunity to work collaboratively with mentors in developing their portfolios. The concepts of social capital and decisional capital can be explored

as mentors draw on techniques in their interactions with learners, practicing respect, patience, trust and through the notion of empowerment, negotiate the value and significance of PLAR. This further builds mentors' decisional capital, which includes the autonomy and inquiry skills to collaborate with their peers to examine evidence of student learning, make judgements about learners' needs, and evaluate and reflect on the success of new practices within their own contexts (Osmond-Johnson, 2017). Exploring professional capital in this context can be a starting point for an inquiry into learners' and mentors' understanding of learning processes and learning styles that characterize PLAR.

An important component of this study was the representation of interaction among various stakeholders (employers, students, regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions, and federal and provincial governments) through the learning recognition marketplace in terms of who receives qualification recognition or PLAR, and the value of the recognition in the learning market. Further study could explore the professional capital of "collaborative cultures" among stakeholders. Collaborative cultures, as envisioned by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) build social capital, and therefore professional capital within a learning community, and can exist in different forms. The collaborative culture idea could be extended to stakeholders as "professional learning communities" that comprise three elements (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012):

Communities – where educators work in continuing groups and relationships, where they are committed to and have collective responsibility for a common educative purpose,

Learning communities – where improvement is driven by the commitment to improving students' learning, well-being, and achievement, and

Professional learning communities – where collaborative decisions are guided by experienced collective judgement and where they are pushed forward by challenging conversations about effective and ineffective practice.

The collaborative cultures and professional learning communities constructs can be a potential model in terms of how well it can promote professional capital and all of its three components among stakeholders within the context of the learning recognition marketplace.

Implications for Practice

A key theme in the study was the invisibility, lack of awareness and differences in understanding that participants commented on about PLAR. In addition, the participants, particularly in the Bachelor of Social Work Program, reported that students were equally uniformed about PLAR and unlikely to make inquiries or advocate for making it more widely available. These findings point to the need for education and a support system as factors that can contribute to PLAR program awareness and student success.

As part of the process of preparing a portfolio, Hoffmann (2013) emphasizes the importance of best practices and the need to provide students, instructors and mentors with guidance and instructional resources to bridge the gap between identifying experience and the learning gained from experience. The literature suggests there are a wide range of services and courses available to provide learners with skills and knowledge necessary to enable them to complete their PLAR portfolio (Gambescia & Dagavarian, 2007; Klein-Collins & Hain, 2009; Leiste & Jensen, 2011; Rust & Brinthaupt, 2017; Rust & Ikard, 2016). Variants of the portfolio approach range from a one credit-hour seminar in which learners prepare a portfolio suitable for

course credit to institutions that assign a mentor who can guide them through the process without formal classroom instruction.

As part of an adult degree completion program, Rust and Brinthaupt (2017) surveyed students who had completed a three credit-hour online semester-long course in preparation for PLAR portfolio development and submission in order to inform practice at institutions currently utilizing or considering the PLAR portfolio method. In this approach, students received credit toward graduation requirements for completing the course plus any credit for prior learning awarded based on the portfolio assessment. The course helps students through the PLAR review process, providing information needed to document prior learning gained from work and life experiences and planning their portfolio. The survey results showed strong support for offering a full-semester online course to assist students in preparing their portfolio for assessment. In addition, students reported wishing that they had learned about PLAR courses earlier in their academic career that suggests that university faculty need to make students aware early on about the potential for PLAR credit, even if students are not currently candidates for PLAR.

Portfolios, and more recently e-portfolios have been used in the higher education sector to assess competence, facilitate critical reflection and display student achievement in many different disciplines, including teacher education, the medical and allied health fields, business, nursing, dentistry, pharmacy, midwifery and the arts (Wuetherick & Dickinson, 2015). An e-portfolio can be used as an online repository in which students store and share a variety of informal and formal learning experiences, collected over time using written, visual and auditory artifacts (Parkes, Dredger & Hicks, 2013; Slade, Murfin & Readman, 2013). E-portfolios are viewed as construct-rich assessments that can be used in virtually any learning experience to document both individual student accomplishments and specific course goals across a curriculum

(Kelly-Riley, Elliot & Rudniy, 2016). E-portfolios facilitate accountability and autonomy because they encourage students to take responsibility for their learning needs, as well as the direction, progress and quality of that learning (Green, Wyllie & Jackson, 2014). In addition, e-portfolios offer significant technological advantages including increased security, data storage and backup, the ability to add digital data and multimedia artifacts, the ability to include hyperlinks, and enhanced interaction and feedback with instructors (Garrett, MacPhee & Jackson, 2013).

Two professional disciplines (nursing and pharmacy) can serve as best practices in which e-portfolios have been incorporated for assessment of competency. Learning portfolios have long been accepted in nursing education as an efficient method of reflecting, documenting and evaluating student learning, program outcomes, and clinical competencies (Green et al., 2014; Harris, Dolan & Fairbairn, 2001; Kear & Bear, 2007; McCready, 2007; McMullan, 2006, 2008; Ryan, 2011).

Nursing education is rooted in experiential learning theory and is a hands-on approach to education. The focus of nursing education is the acquisition of knowledge and skills and the student's ability to demonstrate competence (Garrett et al., 2013). Karsten (2012) describes competence as "the acquisition of knowledge, the development of psychomotor skills, and the ability to apply the knowledge and skills appropriate in a given situation" (p. 24). As an example, Karsten explains how the use of patient simulation provides realistic experiences in a risk-free environment without concern for patient safety. Combining simulation with e-portfolios is a relevant way for students to demonstrate their clinical competence. Each simulation exercise is videotaped for debriefing and video clips can be made that demonstrate competence with selected skills and procedures. Integrating the video clips with e-portfolios can

be an innovative way to demonstrate and accumulate a video-link of competencies in a technologically advanced manner. In spite of some logistical and technological challenges (Andrews & Cole, 2015; Birks, Hartin, Woods, Emmanuel & Hitchins, 2016; Collins & O'Brien, 2018), e-portfolios are growing in prominence in nursing education as an efficient method of documenting and evaluating student learning and program outcomes (Haggerty & Thompson, 2017).

Much like nursing, pharmacy education has a long association with competency-based assessment of student performance, knowledge and skills (Austin & Dean, 2006; Austin, Galli & Diamantouros, 2003; Hill, Delafuente, Sicat & Kirkwood, 2006). A fundamental goal of pharmacy education is producing graduates who are generalist entry-level pharmacists. This approach advocates creating a set of learning outcomes that explicitly define what students should be able to do as a result of completing a program of study, and then designing educational experiences to achieve those outcomes. Ability-based outcomes in the context of pharmacy curricula focus on results of instructional experiences rather than on discrete knowledge, skills or attitudes (Kelley et al., 2008).

In the US, the Accreditation Council of Pharmacy Education directed that colleges and schools of pharmacy use a system of evaluation of curricular effectiveness that includes web-based student portfolios to document achievement of competencies throughout the curriculum and practice experiences (McDuffie, Sheffield, Miller, Duke & Rogers, 2010). In addition to assuring quality experiences for students, the web-based patient care portfolio was developed to allow demonstration of the provision of pharmaceutical care to meet established education outcomes (Lopez et al., 2011; McDuffie et al., 2010).

In sum, the provision of education designed particularly for portfolio preparation can go a long way toward introducing learners to PLAR as well as guiding them through the assessment process. As well, the increasing focus on assessment of competencies, learning outcomes, reflective practice and growth in professional disciplines such as nursing and pharmacy can be efficiently captured through e-portfolios. These developments have important implications for the future practice and direction for PLAR in the university context.

Implications for Further Research

This study contributes to the emerging body of PLAR research that is evolving, particularly on a global scale. In Canada, the establishment of the Prior Learning International Research Centre (PLIRC) at Thompson Rivers University in 2009 offers access to a database of scholarly research studies that links researchers, policy-makers and practitioners around the globe (Harris & Wihak, 2011). The research field however remains scant and fragmented, particularly in Canada (Wihak, 2006, 2007) where provinces and territories address PLAR differently, thus posing a challenging context in which to make general statements about PLAR on a national scale (Van Kleef, 2011). Building on the results of this case study, the following opportunities for further research on PLAR therefore remain limitless.

1. PLAR is essentially a learner-centred process, therefore obtaining students' perspectives is essential. A future research study could focus on the Bachelor of Social Work Program, gather data on PLAR and non-PLAR students, and compare differences concerning time to completion, learning outcomes, academic progress, and student experiences.

2. Another possibility is to conduct a study of IEPs who have completed Gap Training and Bridge Programs and collect data on their qualification recognition experiences from regulators, their program experiences, and labour market outcomes.
3. Another potential avenue to research is how PLAR can assist in reclaiming knowledge, and building individual self-growth and identity construction among indigenous learners from different cultural perspectives (Hawkeye Robertson, 2011). This would closely align with the University's Strategic Plan priority of creating pathways to indigenous achievement.
4. It would be beneficial to gather quantitative data so as to not only inform research results, but to meet a larger need to move the PLAR research field forward from small-scale, exploratory qualitative studies to quantitative research, building on the richness of understanding that has developed to date (Van Kleef 2011, 2014b; Wihak, 2014).
5. This investigation used an area of study focus as the first research question, an approach strongly supported in the literature. Wong (2011) emphasizes the importance of understanding disciplinary perspectives as a prelude to generating support for PLAR among faculty members. Wihak (2006, 2007, 2014) recommends that future PLAR research adopt an area of study focus given the highly disciplinary nature of the university. As discussed in the previous section, the literature suggests there are many possibilities for conducting PLAR research in fields of study such as nursing and pharmacy.
6. The inclusion of a wider range of informants is another avenue for further research, particularly in relation to the Gap Training and Bridge Programs. Drawing on the

learning recognition marketplace concept, the study's findings could be enriched by gathering perspectives from other stakeholders including IEPs, the OMFC, regulatory bodies, employers, post-secondary institutions, and government officials.

7. Another research opportunity could examine institutional PLAR policies and practices across Manitoba post-secondary institutions, with implications for potentially collaborative partnerships and sharing of best practices. A research question might be, are there ways that colleges and universities can partner and build on their existing transfer credit, articulation agreements and joint programs to do more in PLAR?
8. Another potential avenue to pursue is whether there are opportunities for the University of Manitoba to collaborate on PLAR with Red River College, given its national profile, the integration and expansion of PLAR systems and practices within the College, and the availability of many tools, resources, and training for faculty and learners.
9. As discussed in the previous section, the findings of the study have implications for expanding the professional capital framework as a powerful model for transforming the work of PLAR role-players. An important question to ask is how can stakeholders (employers, regulators, post-secondary institutions, government, OMFC, and IEPs) in the learning recognition marketplace build on their professional capital that will translate into an efficient and fair system of qualifications recognition, and drive success in the labour market for IEPs? Another interesting question is whether universities are more likely to collaborate with other stakeholders in offering and

maintaining bridging programs such as dentistry, engineering and medicine that are accredited and regulated by outside agencies.

10. Another approach to investigating the concept is how can Manitoba's universities and colleges build on their existing collaborative relationships as a means for harnessing professional capital to advance PLAR? How and under what conditions can professional collaborations yield intended outcomes and skills needed to generate professional capital?
11. The use of various technologies to implement PLAR is a cutting-edge field with much potential to revolutionize higher education. E-portfolios and digital portfolio management systems are gaining momentum as educators become more cognizant of the implications for access, participation, pedagogy and skills recognition (Cameron et al., 2014). Increasingly, students can demonstrate learning through a variety of multimedia modalities including audio, video, blogs, mobile apps and social networking sites. Open Education Resources (OERs) through massive open online courses (MOOCs) are rapidly expanding and opening doors to opportunities to acquire non-accredited learning outside the formal education system (Conrad & McGreal, 2012). Friesen and Wihak (2013) propose that OERs could provide the gap training needed when students cannot meet all of the learning outcomes for a particular course, thereby increasing the likelihood of a successful PLAR outcome.
12. Digital badges, an alternative credentialing system and method for packaging information on accomplishments, skills sets, and competencies are quickly becoming an efficient way that students can signal achievement to potential employers (DiSalvio, 2016). Digital badges engage students in learning and broadening avenues

to acquire, demonstrate, document and display their skills. Some platforms allow organizations to create, issue, earn, and display digital badges on websites, social media pages and résumes (Shields & Chugh, 2017). Badges can speed the shift from credentials measuring formal academic learning to ones that more accurately measure competency, and can help account for both formal and informal learning in a variety of settings.

13. Finally, in response to concerns about the validity of digital badges and whether they can be viewed as "trusted credentials", blockchain technology is increasingly being used as a digitized, decentralized platform for verifiable and permanent transactions. Blockchain technology can apply to eLearning through the logging of digital credentials on secure public platforms or professional networks to issue, store, verify and share credentials (Iafrate, 2017). Third parties such as employers can access blockchain technology to verify and accept digital credentials or badges awarded by post-secondary institutions to individuals as valid (Chatiani, 2018).

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study revealed a number of important findings that add to the emerging PLAR literature. First, the findings confirm that approaching the study from an area of study perspective within the university setting is viable. This approach builds on the recommendations from earlier research (Cooper & Harris, 2013; Frick et al., 2007b; Wihak, 2006, 2007, 2014; Wong, 2011) that investigating PLAR from the focal point of area of study-based policies and practices can help to shed light on understanding differences in faculty conceptualizations, acceptance, and support for PLAR. A relevant finding in this study is that PLAR is very much localized in that participants had little or no knowledge of PLAR activity in

faculties or programs other than their own. However, they were quite willing to share their knowledge and best practices with others.

Second, the evidence presented shows that all three components of professional capital (human capital, social capital and decisional capital) exist at the University of Manitoba where PLAR was in play, specifically in the BSW Program, and in the Gap Training and Bridge Programs currently operating. One implication here is can these so-called "pockets" of PLAR function as a prototype for leveraging professional capital and generating support for PLAR in other areas of study?

Third, the themes and subthemes identified in the study are confirmed in previous research. From a holistic perspective, the themes underlie the consensus in the literature that PLAR remains marginalized, invisible, misunderstood, and under-utilized, and to some extent, resisted within the university. The participants' responses confirmed yet again that PLAR remains a contested and challenged terrain in the university system. On the one hand, participants were quite articulate about the misunderstandings and roadblocks besetting PLAR, as well as the enormous tasks of generating support, resources, development and implementation. On the other hand, the participants were knowledgeable and well informed about PLAR. They maintained a strong belief in its inherent value and benefits to students, and to society in general, offering many suggestions on ways to proceed.

The study has significance by adding to the scant scholarly PLAR literature, particularly in Canada. In addition, this investigation employs the Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) professional capital idea, adapted from the K to 12 schools' context and applies it conceptually to the post-

secondary environment. The study also presented evidence that supports some compelling reasons for universities to be more actively pursuing PLAR. Specifically, these include:

1) The failure to address the increasing amount of unrecognized learning within the context of the globalized 'knowledge economy' is creating economic consequences for Canada (Grant, 2015);
2) Canada's increasing dependence on immigrants and refugees to fill labour force needs suggests the need for more efficient methods of recognizing foreign credentials and qualifications, and filling education and training gaps (Andersson & Guo, 2009; Guo, 2009); and
3) PLAR is a useful mechanism for creating access, equity, and social inclusion and could be a natural fit with the University's mandate for increasing student accessibility and opening doors to those who traditionally have been under-represented, i.e., indigenous students, international students, and adult learners.

Investigating PLAR from a pedagogical or an epistemological perspective challenges researchers due to the attention paid more to application and practice. As Conrad (2010) points out, "the lack of critical discourse on prior learning has permitted the subsequent discussion on the relationship of RPL to flexibility in university learning to languish" (p. 159). As PLAR continues to struggle to gain recognition in the post-secondary environment, its pedagogical role must not only continue to be seen, shared, discussed and debated, but research must continue to evolve and be critically assessed (Conrad, 2011).

Finally, at the heart of PLAR is very much the differentiation of knowledge whereby experiential knowledge gained in the workplace or through community engagement is different

in character, structure, and purpose to formal academic knowledge. PLAR practice contests the rules about what forms of knowledge will be recognized and assessed (Andersson & Guo, 2009; Armsby et al., 2006; Cooper & Harris, 2013; Michelson, 1996, 2006). Cooper, Ralphs and Harris (2017) argue that RPL inevitably brings these knowledge struggles and contestations to the fore. The 'politics of knowledge', the political and institutional power to determine which sites of knowledge production and forms of knowledge will be included and excluded in curriculum and pedagogy can influence the degree of inclusivity of PLAR.

Cooper et al. (2017) contend that recognizing the differentiation of knowledge is a critical assumption underpinning the view of PLAR as a form of specialized pedagogy. At the same time, socially useful knowledge is produced not only in post-secondary institutions, but also in a range of sites outside academia, within informal environments, as well as workplaces and other processes of community engagement. Socially useful knowledge however, should not, by definition be pitted against 'powerful knowledge'. They are not mutually exclusive, but in fact, both forms of knowledge are relevant and needed.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Letter of Permission: Access to PLAR-Related Documents

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA | Faculty of Education

Letter of Permission: Access to PLAR-Related Documents

I, Kimberly Browning, Principal Investigator and doctoral candidate, request permission to access University of Manitoba documents(s)/information/data pertaining to Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) that are not publically available as part of data collection to complete my doctoral research and that may be referenced through peer-reviewed publications and conferences:

Research Project Title: Finding Elements of PLAR Policy Formulation: Assessing Perceptions within the University Disciplines

Principal Investigator:
Kimberly Faye Browning
Doctoral Student, Adult and Post-Secondary Education
University of Manitoba
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: brownikf@myumanitoba.ca

Supervisor:
Dr. Marlene Atleo
Email: XXX

I understand that my permission will remain effective from the date of my signature until the study is completed in fall 2018 and that all identifying information, data and documentation will remain strictly confidential. This means that only I, the Principal Researcher and my Faculty Advisor will have access to such information, data and documentation.

_____ _____

Principal Investigator Date

I hereby give my permission for access to documents pertaining to Kimberly Browning's doctoral research and that my permission will remain effective from the date of my signature until the study is completed in fall 2018.

_____ _____

University of Manitoba Representative Date

Appendix B – Interview Protocol

Research Project Title: **Finding Elements of PLAR: Assessing Perceptions within the University Disciplines**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this research project. The interview is being conducted for my doctoral research on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) within the university disciplines. For purposes of this study, PLAR is defined as the assessment and recognition of learning acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

Research shows that PLAR remains under-utilized within the university system and therefore I am interested in gaining a better understanding of why that is and if it can be better implemented as a policy and practice at the University of Manitoba. The questions are designed to tap into your knowledge and experiences with PLAR and are categorized on the basis of the conceptual framework of professional capital.

If there any are any questions you do not wish to answer or you need further explanation of a question, please feel free to stop and ask for clarification. You have read and signed a copy of the consent form that indicates you have given consent to participate in this interview. Your identity and all your responses will be kept strictly confidential. The interview will be recorded and transcribed by me. You will receive an honorarium of $30.00 as a token of my appreciation for your time and participation prior to the start of the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Human Capital

1. Please describe your role or responsibility with regards to PLAR at the university? For what length of time have you assumed this role or responsibility?

2. How would describe your level of awareness and understanding about PLAR?

3. How would describe the level of awareness and understanding about PLAR among university staff in general?

4. How would you describe the communication/information that the university makes available about PLAR?

5. With regards to the university, please tell me what you know about

    a) the purposes that PLAR is use for, i.e., for admission, advanced standing, exemption from courses
    b) the methods that are used for PLAR, i.e., challenge exams, interviews, portfolios, e-portfolios
    c) PLAR policy, guidelines or practices

6. Does the university have a policy on PLAR in place? If not, does the university have a plan to develop a policy? If so, how will the policy be implemented?

7. Do you think PLAR has the potential to compromise academic standards at the university?

8. How should PLAR be managed and implemented at the university?

9. Should there be plans for wider implementation of PLAR at the university? Please explain.

10. Please describe the level of staffing and resources you have in place to implement PLAR.

11. Are there areas where you would like to see more resources made available for PLAR?

12. What, if any, sources do you consult for more knowledge, information or research about PLAR?

13. Are there professional development or network opportunities available to PLAR practitioners? Please explain.

Social Capital

14. With regards to PLAR activity, do you work independently or in collaboration with others? Please explain.

15. With regards to PLAR, do you have any collaboration with any of the following?

    a) colleagues in other disciplinary fields
    b) university staff in general
    c) colleagues outside of the university
    d) professional networks such as the Manitoba Prior Learning Assessment Network (MPLAN) or Canadian Association of Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA)

16. Provide examples of how you work with your colleagues to implement and/or promote PLAR.

17. How would you describe the level of commitment to PLAR at the university – among colleagues, faculty, administrators, students?

18. Would you say there is a shared vision among university staff about PLAR?

19. Is there a willingness to share information about PLAR practices with others at the university?

20. How would you describe the overall level of support for implementing PLAR at the university?

Decisional Capital

21. Please provide examples of any decisions you make with regards to implementing PLAR?

22. Do you make decisions about any of the following?

    a) determining student eligibility for PLAR
    b) the purposes for which PLAR is used, i.e., for admission, advanced standing, exemption from courses
    c) the methods that are used for PLAR, i.e., challenge exams, interviews, portfolios, e-portfolios
    d) PLAR policy, guidelines or practices
    e) actual implementation or practice

23. Are there other areas where you like to make more decisions about PLAR? Please explain.

General

24. What are the benefits to students who successfully use PLAR to enter the university?

25. What are the main challenges to making PLAR available to more students?

26. How would you describe PLAR as a priority for the university?

27. Is there anything we haven't discussed that you think is important to know about PLAR at the university?

28. Do you have any other general comments?

29. Are there any others that you recommend I should speak to?

Appendix C – Invitation Letter for Interview Participant

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA | Faculty of Education

Invitation Letter for Interview Participant

Research Project Title: **Finding Elements of PLAR: Assessing Perceptions within the University Disciplines**

Date:

Dear (Participant's Name):

My name is Kimberly Browning and I am a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba. I am conducting a case study on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) policy and practice in different disciplinary fields at the University of Manitoba. In the post-secondary system, PLAR offers a mechanism for assessing and recognizing learning from non-formal and informal contexts, and is a means for addressing important social and economic priorities.

Research shows that PLAR remains under-utilized within the university setting. The purpose of this study is to further our knowledge about the under-utilization of PLAR policy and practice in disciplinary fields within the university setting. It is therefore important to understand the factors behind PLAR policy and practice from the perspectives of those who have responsibility for and/or work in the field of PLAR including administrators, faculty, academics, practitioners and assessors. In addition, the study may hold potential to advance our knowledge of professional capital as a conceptual framework within the context of PLAR.

I am writing to invite you to participate in this study to share your knowledge and experiences related to PLAR. If you would like to be interviewed, I will arrange to meet with you at a time and place that is convenient to you for about an hour. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You are free to not answer questions or to stop at any time during the interview. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time.

The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed by me. The interview transcript will be emailed to you as a participant at which time you will be asked to provide feedback and confirmation to verify that your views have been accurately reflected. The time for this task is estimated to be no more than one hour.

The data is confidential and will not include your name; pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. This means that only I, the Principal Researcher and my Faculty Advisor will have access to such information, data and documentation.

All written and audio information will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet in my office and all electronic data will be securely stored on a password-protected computer. All data will be kept secure for the duration of the study and then destroyed at the end of the study in fall 2018.

Please note that you are also invited to participate in a focus group discussion on PLAR that will be scheduled following completion of the interviews. Please see invitation letter and consent form under separate cover.

If you agree to participate in the interview, you will be provided with a consent form to sign that provides more information about the study.

I hope you will consider participating in this study. Your feedback will be very helpful in understanding PLAR from the university perspective, and can provide valuable insight as to how PLAR may be more widely implemented through policy as a legitimate learning and assessment process, and in turn, be of benefit to more learners.

An honorarium of $30.00 will be provided as a token of my appreciation following the signing of the Consent Form and prior to the start of the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX, or by email: brownikf@myumanitoba.ca, or my research supervisor, Dr. Marlene Atleo by email: XXX.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If there are questions or concerns about this study, contact myself, my supervisor or the Human Ethics Secretariat at (204) 474-7122 or by email: humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Signature of Principal Investigator

Kimberly Browning
PhD Candidate
Department of Ed Administration, Foundations and Psychology
Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba
Email: brownikf@myumanitoba.ca
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Appendix D – Informed Consent for Interview Form

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA | Faculty of Education

Informed Consent Form to Participate in Interview

Research Project Title: Finding Elements of PLAR: Assessing Perceptions within the University Disciplines

Principal Investigator: Kimberly Faye Browning
Doctoral Student, Adult and Post-Secondary Education
University of Manitoba
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: brownikf@myumanitoba.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Marlene Atleo
Email: XXX

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Background:
My name is Kimberly Browning and I am a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba. I am conducting a case study on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) policy and practice in different disciplinary fields at the University of Manitoba. In the post-secondary system, PLAR offers a mechanism for assessing and recognizing learning from non-formal and informal contexts, and is a means for addressing important social and economic priorities.

Purpose of the Research:
Research shows that PLAR remains under-utilized within the university setting. The purpose of this study is to further our knowledge about the under-utilization of PLAR policy and practice in disciplinary fields within the university setting. It is therefore important to understand the factors behind PLAR policy and practice from the perspectives of those who have responsibility for and work directly in the field of PLAR. In addition, the study may hold potential to advance our knowledge of professional capital as a conceptual framework within the context of PLAR.

Data Collection Procedures:
For this study, I will use a multi-method approach of interviews and a focus group discussion for data collection.

The interview will take approximately one hour at a time and location that is convenient to you. I will be asking questions pertaining to conceptualizations of PLAR, purposes and processes, methods of assessment, and institutional support. The questions are organized within a conceptual framework of professional capital.

Please note that you are also invited to participate in a focus group discussion on PLAR that will be scheduled following the completion of interviews. Please see separate consent form and invitation letter for information.

Audio Recording:
The interview will be recorded with a digital recorder. I will be responsible for transcribing the recording.

The interview transcript will be emailed to you as a participant at which time you will be asked to provide feedback and confirmation to verify that your views have been accurately reflected. The time for this task is estimated to be no more than one hour. You will have two weeks to complete the transcript check. Should you not respond within the allotted time frame, it will be assumed that the data in the transcript is accurate and will be used for analysis.

All audio recordings and subsequent transformations will be password protected and deleted at by me the end of the study.

Confidentiality:

All identifying information will be kept strictly confidential. This means that only I, the Principal Researcher and my Faculty Advisor will have access to such information, data and documentation. All written and audio information (digital recordings, interview transcripts, consent forms, protocols) will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. All electronic data will be securely stored on a password-protected computer.

Confidentiality will be assured through the use of pseudonyms for all participants in the study. Findings will be reported by generalized themes and supporting quotations will be stripped of any identifying information. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and will not appear in any portion of the dissertation. All data will be kept secure for the length of the study and then destroyed at the end of the study.

Description of risks/benefits:
There is minimal risk to participating in this study beyond risk which may be encountered in daily life. Your participation in the interview is completely voluntary. You are free to refrain from answering any questions you prefer not to answer, or to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or consequence for doing so.

By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to express your thoughts and ideas about PLAR and to provide valuable insight as to how PLAR may be more widely implemented within the university setting as a legitimate learning and assessment process, and in turn, be of benefit to more learners.

Honorarium:
You will be provided with an honorarium of $30.00 as a token of appreciation for your participation. The honorarium will be provided to each participant following the signing of the consent form and prior to the start of the interview.

Dissemination:
The results of the study will be published as part of my Doctoral Dissertation submitted to the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Graduate Studies. Results may be further disseminated through peer-reviewed publications and conferences in order to draw attention to PLAR as a legitimate learning and assessment process that can be of benefit to more learners, as well as a strategy to help meet social and economic priorities. As mentioned above, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and will not appear in any portion of the dissertation.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me by email at brownikf@myumanitoba.ca or by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX. My supervisor may be reached at XXX.

Feedback to Participants:
You will be provided with a copy of the summary report following completion of the project (approximately fall 2018). Please include your preferred method of delivery (circle one: Mail/Email) and complete the associated contact information in the space provided below:

Name: _____
Street Address: _____
City: _____
Province: _____
Postal Code: _____
Email: _____

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a participant. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence, simply by contacting me at the contact information on this consent form. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Researcher: Kimberly Browning
Doctoral Student, Adult and Post-Secondary Education
University of Manitoba
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: brownikf@myumanitoba.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Marlene Atleo
Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba
Email: XXX

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management / Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix E – ENREB Protocol Approval

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA | Research Ethics and Compliance

Human Ethics
208-194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB
Canada R3T 2N2
Phone +204-474-7122
Email: humanethics@umanitoba.ca

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

TO: **Kimberly F. Browning** **(Advisor: Marlene Atleo)**
Principal Investigator

FROM: **Zana Lutfiyya, Chair**
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: **Protocol #E2017:032 (HS20644)**
"Finding Elements of PLAR Policy Formulation: Assessing Perceptions within the University Disciplines"

Effective: April 7, 2017 **Expiry:** April 7, 2018

Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) has reviewed and approved the above research. ENREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the research must be submitted to ENREB for approval before implementation.
3. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to ENREB as soon as possible.
4. This approval is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
5. A Study Closure form must be submitted to ENREB when the research is complete or terminated.
6. The University of Manitoba may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

Funded Protocols:
- **Please mail/e-mail a copy of this Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer in ORS.**

Appendix F – ENREB Renewal Approval

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA | Research Ethics and Compliance

Human Ethics
208-194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB
Canada R3T 2N2
Phone +204-474-7122
Email: humanethics@umanitoba.ca

RENEWAL APPROVAL

Date: March 20, 2018 **New Expiry: April 7, 2019**

TO: **Kimberly F. Browning** **(Advisor: Marlene Atleo)**
Principal Investigator

FROM: **Zana Lutfiyya, Chair**
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: **Protocol #E2017:032 (HS20644)**
"Finding Elements of PLAR Policy Formulation: Assessing Perceptions within the University Disciplines"

Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) has reviewed and renewed the above research. ENREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.*

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Any modification to the research must be submitted to ENREB for approval before implementation.
2. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to ENREB as soon as possible.
3. This renewal is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
4. A Study Closure form must be submitted to ENREB when the research is complete or terminated.

Funded Protocols:
- **Please mail/e-mail a copy of this Renewal Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer in ORS.**

Appendix G – List of Codes

1. Academic Freedom
2. Admission
3. Advocate
4. Awareness (lack of)
5. Best Practices
6. Collaboration
7. Communication
8. Commitment
9. Competencies
10. Consultation
11. Culture Shift
12. Decision-Making
13. Easy Credit
14. Exemption
15. Fear
16. Flexible Option
17. Foreign Concept
18. Gatekeeper
19. In-Class Learning
20. Industry Need
21. Information Sharing
22. Labour Market
23. Learners/Students
24. Learning Outcomes
25. Network
26. PLA Community
27. Portfolios
28. Priorities
29. Professional Development
30. Regulator
31. Resistance
32. Resources (staff and financial)
33. Senior Administration
34. Stakeholders
35. Start Small
36. Strategic Plan
37. Transfer Credit
38. Validation Effect
39. Visibility
40. Vision