Prior Learning Assessment Theory and Practice: Exploring Critical Concerns and Practical Applications

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Alan Mandell, PhD.
Terry Hoffmann, LCPC

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**Agenda**

- Introductions and Overview
- Expectations
- History of PLA and PLA Resources - (Handout)
- Philosophy of PLA - Kolb (Text: Defining College-Level Learning Student Workbook p.4)
- PLA Models
- Portfolio Components
- Exercise – Sample Student Scenarios (Handout)
- Factors for Student Success (p. 5-7)
- CAEL’s Standards for College Level Learning and Assessment (p. 10)
- Evaluator’s Qualifications – Handout
Agenda Continued…

- Creditable Learning (pp.8-12)
- Evaluator’s criteria for CLL – (p. 11-12)
- Applying Kolb’s Model to Portfolio Evaluation
- Evaluator Sample Report
- Group Exercise with Student Samples using Evaluation Rubric (pp. 144-145)
- Issues in Prior Learning Assessment
- Questions and Reflections
- Complete Workshop Evaluations
Workshop Expectations....

- Group Discussion
- Please take this time to introduce one another at your table.
- Then as group, come up with one joint burning question about PLA.
Overview of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

Background Information and History
History of PLA
(Summarized by Terry Hoffmann from Morris Keeton’s presentation at UMUC, 1998 and CAEL’s “Prior Learning Portfolios” 2008)

- 1900 – College Entrance Exams
- 1942 - G.E.D. (H.S. equivalency)
- 1942 – Antioch College awards up to 20 credits for success on entrance exams
- 1945 – American Council on Education (ACE) credits for military experiences
- 1954 – Brooklyn College offers special adult degree using PLA
- 1960s – Increase in colleges using PLA for adults
- 1967 – College Level Exam Program (CLEP)
- 1968-74 – 13 colleges created for adult learners specifically
- 1971- British Open University
- 1970-77 – Origins of CAEL
- 1979 – PLA endorsed by AACRAO if follow CAEL’s standards
- CAEL National PLA Survey of 530 PLA Portfolio Institutions
- 1983 – Norm Evans brings UK scholars to US for PLA exchanges
History of PLA Continued....
(Summarized by Terry Hoffmann from Morris Keeton’s presentation at UMUC, 1998 and CAEL’s “Prior Learning Portfolios” 2008)

- 1984 CAEL Surveyed 1,493 institutions (37% had portfolios)
- 1985, 1996 – CAEL published Earn College Credit for What You Know (Simosko)
- 1995 – Kellogg Foundation establishes need for multinational exchange for PLA
- 1997-98 – Am Productivity & Quality Center and UMUC conduct benchmarking study on Assessment Learning Outcomes
- 2004 – “Portfolio Development and the Assessment of Prior Learning” (Michelson, Mandell and Contributors)
- 2006 – CAEL PLA Retention Study
- 2006 – Earn Credit for What You Know (CAEL) revised
- 2010 – Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success – 48 institution study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes (CAEL)
- 2011 – Underserved Students Who Earn Credit Through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Have Higher Degree Completion Rates and Shorter Time-to-Degree (CAEL)
PLA Resources

- Handout: See History of PLA and Selected PLA Research and Publications

The Learning Cycle

Concrete Experience

Reflective Observation

Active Experimentation

Abstract Conceptualization

Accomodator

Diverger

Converger

Assimilator

Kolb (1984)

p. 4 in Defining College Level Learning Student Workbook (Hoffmann, 2012)
PLA Models

- Standardized Testing (eg: CLEP, DSST, ECE, TECEP, AP Exams)
- Military Competency–based credits
- ACE (American Council on Education) – Military and Corporate Competency–based learning and Training
- Course Challenge Exams
- PLA Portfolios
- Interviews
- CAEL (LearningCounts) and KNEXT Programs
- Other
Generic Portfolio Components

- Goals – Personal, Career, Educational
- Autobiography
- Resume – focused on PLA
- Competencies
- Academic Narrative – Descriptive narrative of knowledge and applied learning
- Documentation – materials to support learning experiences
Student Sample Scenarios

- Handout and discussion
- Choose 1 student scenario and as a group think about how you might work with this student.
Factors for Student Success in PLA

Project Management  Academic Tools  Motivation

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p. 7 in Defining College Level Learning Student Workbook (Hoffmann, 2012)
PLA Assessment and Criteria

Evaluation Processes
Assessment Levels of College-Level Learning in PLA Program

- Course/Mentor Assessment of student PLA submission

- Evaluator Assessment of PLA for specified academic area or course

- Outcomes Assessment for program components
Group Discussion

- What do you think college-level learning is?
CAEL’s Definition of CLL

CAEL (1975) provides a list of criteria for college-level learning. In order to be credit worthy, a student’s learning must:

- “be measurable;
- be at a level of achievement defined by faculty as college equivalent or consistent with the learning of other students engaged in college studies;
- be applicable outside the specific job or context in which it was learned;
- have a knowledge base;
- be reasonably current;
- [have] a conceptual or theoretical as well as a practical understanding;
- show some relationship to your degree goals and/or life-long learning goals; and
- not repeat learning for which credit has already been awarded.”

p.10 in Defining College Level Learning Student Workbook (Hoffmann, 2012)
CAEL’s Ten Standards for Assessment 2006

1. Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.

2. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.

3. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.

4. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.

5. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.

6. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.

7. Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.

8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.

9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.

10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts.

Evaluator’s Qualifications

- See Handout
The Path To Creditable Learning

Why?

How?

Who? What? Where? When?
Faculty & Assessors Definition of College-Level Learning

For faculty requirements for college-level learning, students need to:

- Demonstrate expert level knowledge through how projects were described, the level of sophistication in understanding how things worked and the principles behind them.
- Have the experience necessary to learn what is claimed.
- Define a sequence from simple to complex.
- Show cause and effect.
- Provide an analysis of problem-solving situations, strategies and results.
- Identify and illustrate patterns and connections.
- Know what is relevant to the field.
- Articulate theory and applied learning.
- Have sufficient documentation as evidence of learning.

Summarized from pp.11 & 12 in Defining College Level Learning Student Workbook (Hoffmann, 2012)
Applying Kolb’s Model to Evaluation

- Step 1: Identify Criteria and Standards of Measurement
  - e.g. course objectives or your expectations for the course

- Step 2: Practical Application (Learning Outcomes)
  - e.g. concrete experiences, resume, accomplishments, hands-on expertise, competency-based learning, problem-solving situations

- Step 3: Theoretical Understanding and College Level Learning
  - e.g. body of knowledge, guiding principles, models

- Step 4: Transferability of Learning (Generalizability)
  - e.g. processes, themes, systems that can generalize to other settings

- Step 5: Awarding or Denying Credits
  - e.g. credit for knowledge, theory, application… not experience

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Group Discussion

- What questions do you have or comments?
Evaluator Sample Report

- Review handout

- Read the summarized evaluator report for ideas about what you would like your evaluators to provide you and the student
1. Choose someone in your group who will report your findings
2. Read the Evaluator Assessment Rubric on p. 145 in Defining College Level Learning Student Workbook (Hoffmann, 2012)
3. Choose one of the student narrative samples listed on p. 77 in the Student Workbook
4. Read the narrative
5. Rate the narrative according to the Rubric
6. Report to the group

Note: You may not be an expert in this academic area but you can take a generalist approach and see if you can find potentially credit-worthy material in the narrative. There may be areas of the narrative that fall into multiple levels on the assessment rubric.
Group Discussion
Take out the sheet you completed at the start of the workshop.
Think about all you have learned in this workshop and compare it to your original questions and expectations.
What burning issues do you still see in PLA?
What are some possible ways to resolve them?
Questions and Reflections

- Please feel free to ask us any questions you may have or any thoughts you would like to share.

- Please complete the Workshop Evaluation before you leave....we value your feedback!
References


References


We enjoyed our time together…
Thank You!

Please contact us if you have any questions:

Alan Mandell, Mentor and College Professor of Adult Learning and Mentoring
SUNY Empire State College
Phone: 646-230-1255
Email: Alan.Mandell@esc.edu

Terry Hoffmann, PLA Consulting, Faculty/Mentor for PLA, Psychology & Behavioral Sciences and Former Director of UMUC PLA Program
Phone: 301-890-8434
Website for Instructional Materials: PLAConsulting.com
Email: placonsulting1@gmail.com