An International Research Agenda for PLAR

Dr. Judy Harris, Visiting Scholar, TRU-OL

PLAR: Emergence of a Canadian Community of Scholars
SSHRC, Ottawa
Sunday 7 November 2010
12.30 – 1.30

How did we get here?

The Prior Learning International Research Centre (PLIRC)

PLIRC – Purpose and Objectives

- The **purpose** of the Centre is to provide a forum for networking and promoting effective research, scholarship and policies concerning PLAR.

- To realize this overall purpose, the specific **objectives** of the Centre cover four areas of activity: networking; research; policy; and information dissemination.

State of the Art re: PLAR Research

- Commissioned chapters from each PLIRC Board Member (Australia, Canada, England, EU, OECD countries, Scotland, South Africa, Sweden, United States)
- *Who* is doing the research?
- *What* kind of questions are they asking?
- *How* are they doing the research?
- *Why* are they doing it?
- Focus on research *not* findings…
- Different approaches and understandings of research…..
- → New book: *Researching Prior Learning*

# Re-theorising the Recognition of Prior Learning

- Go beyond adult and experiential learning

- Look at PLAR through other theoretical lenses

- 14 chapters – each looking at PLAR in a different way

Re-theorising
the recognition of
prior learning

Edited by **Per Andersson** and **Judy Harris**

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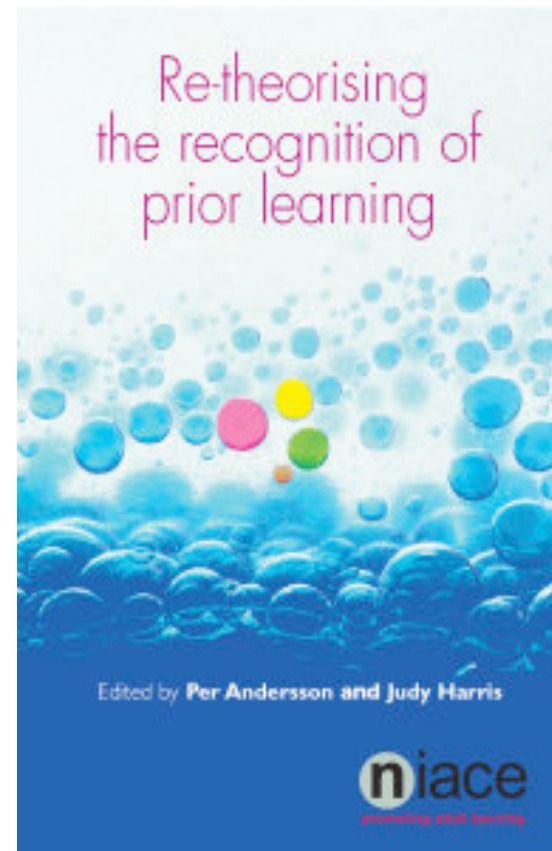
Re-theorising the Recognition of Prior Learning: Endword

PLAR 'is not only a practice that needs *re-theorising*, but one which offers the possibility of *new theorising*' (p. 326)

Harris, J., Breier,M. & Wihak, C. (eds) (forthcoming) *Researching Prior Learning,* Leicester: NIACE.
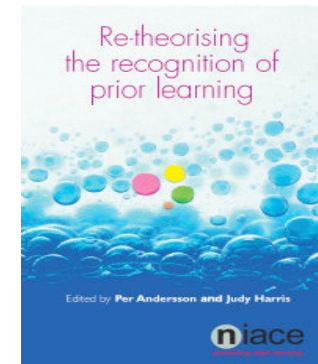
Researching Prior Learning

What themes have emerged from the book chapters?

Themes: What can we say with confidence about **practice** internationally?

1. Definitional confusion make international comparisons difficult

2. Governments embracing PLAR as part of LLL policy and Qualification Frameworks

3. Redress → efficiency

4. Implementation is uneven; take up is low; HE remains resistant

5. Greater differentiation in practices

6. Growing concern about quality assurance, reliability and validity, training of assessors and facilitators

Themes: What can we say with confidence about **research** internationally?

1. Small communities of scholarly research

2. Definitional confusion – what is research?

3. Research has been done but it is fragmented

4. Majority is policy-driven and a-theoretical

5. Mostly qualitative; when quantitative, mostly descriptive

Themes: What can we say about 'islands of good research practice'

1. Theoretical and critical research occurring alongside policy research in South Africa

2. Development-focused research in Scotland

3. Large-scale quantitative studies to assess the actual benefits and outcomes of PLAR for individuals in the US

4. Small focused studies that could be replicated elsewhere in Canada

5. Specialist research literatures are developing in England and Canada

Themes: What can we say about **research directions** needed to advance the field?

1. Consolidate the fragments in favour of cumulative research
2. Extend types of qualitative and quantitative research and the way we do mixed-method research
3. Bring more and different theoretical lenses to PLAR research
4. Bring social science and economic research into dialogue
5. Strengthen links between policy (research) and scholarly research
6. More *nuanced* research – particular role-players, particular issues, bringing specialist and generalist research together, 'knowledge equivalence'
7. More researchers and research partnerships needed

Themes: What **haven't** we said about research needs?

1. **Need for fast, cost-effective, reliable assessment practices**

2. **PLAR in the 3rd sector**

3. **The developing world** (large numbers of poorly educated people)

4. **Cross-cultural issues in PLAR – can methods be exported to countries and populations with very different cultural heritages , education systems and work practices?**

Thank you!!!

- Comments?

- Queries?

- Discussion…

- Strategies?