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### **Post-secondary (grammar) vocational schools in Poland and Canadian community colleges: A summary of the systems.**

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#### **Abstract**

This article compares Polish post-secondary vocational (grammar) schools with Canadian community colleges. Accessibility, governance and programs are discussed. The theoretical framework for this comparison was supplied by the notion of the school as an organization and social institution. We found that it is necessary for educators in both Canada and Poland to respond to the needs of an aging population and to come to terms with the impact that globalization has on labour force requirements

Definitions: What are post-secondary (grammar) vocational schools (szkoły policealne i pomaturalne)?

Post-secondary vocational institutions, which are part of the Polish secondary school system, prepare secondary school graduates for employment as “skilled manual workers or their equivalent” and for specializations requiring secondary school qualifications (Ministry of National Education, 1994, p. 10). There are three types of schools: 1) public (state), 2) non-public and 3) non-public with state-school status. Post-grammar vocational institution programs lead to a diploma and last up to three years, depending on the occupational track (Ministry of National Education, 1994, p. 10). All programs insist upon the completion of secondary school prior to entry, and medical programs require that a person hold a school leaving certificate (the matura) as well (Kucińska, 23 February, 1998).

What are Canadian community colleges?

The term community college is generic. According to the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, community colleges are characterized by a number of designations including college of applied arts and technology, College d' Enseignement General et Professionnel (cégep), institute of technology and university college . The main task of the institutions is to respond to the educational concerns of vocationally orientated school graduates and the training needs of both the public and the private sector. In the beginning, colleges offered learners only certificates and diplomas; however, at the moment, some of them award university degrees as well, and a number offer university transfer programs (Association of Canadian Community Colleges).

Objective of this investigation and the conceptual framework.

The aim of this paper is to compare Polish post-secondary vocational institutions with Canadian community colleges. The rationale for doing so is that on one hand, many college courses are occupationally

directed and require at least some secondary school attendance prior to admission; on the other hand, one must complete secondary school prior to starting a post-grammar vocational institution course. Moreover, post-secondary vocational schools do not award university degrees, nor do most colleges. Finally, it must be stressed that these two kinds of institutions are comparable but not equivalent.

It is advisable to compare Polish post-secondary vocational institutions and Canadian community colleges now because of the changes that have been taking place in the Polish primary and secondary school system of education, and the anticipated reforms to the post-secondary vocational school sector (Kucińska, 11 October, 2001; Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 1999, pages 3-72; Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 1999, pages 3-80; Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 1999, pages 3-48).

The theoretical framework for this comparison is supplied by the general notion of the school as an organization and social institution.

### Introduction

Post-grammar vocational schools came into being in Poland in the 1970s and (as indicated earlier), they may be state or non-state<sup>1</sup>. The Ministry of National Education and Sport exercises its control over private institutions (as well as government-run ones) in order to protect Poles from unscrupulous educational providers (Kucińska, 28 December, 1998). Non state schools are registered with the appropriate district authority or state on the recommendation of the Ministry, and in order for this recommendation to occur, the following conditions must be met: 1) an institution school must have a written constitution which is in accordance with Polish laws, 2) a school must have a local address and a suitable location, 3) the owner of an institution “must have the right to use the location,” and 4) a school’s headmaster must “have the right qualifications” (Kucińska, 28 December, 1998).

Furthermore, after fulfilling the following requirements, a private post-secondary vocational institution can obtain state-school status, which enhances its credibility (Kucińska, 28 December, 1998; Ministry of National Education, date unknown).

1. Schools can only offer training in areas approved by the Ministry, which limits access to them.
2. An institution's basic curriculum has to be the same as that found in a government - run curriculum.
3. Assurances must be made that learner transcripts and documents are retained indefinitely.
4. Teacher - qualifications must be the same as in state schools.
5. The grading and promotion schemes must be like the ones in effect in public institutions<sup>2, 3, 4, 5</sup>.

Private post-grammar vocational schools that have been granted public-institution designation are able to show their flexibility by making use of teaching methods which differ from those in place in state-schools and in the delivery of their programs thus enabling them to attract potential learners that

may not want to enrol in public institutions (Kucińska, 11 October, 2001). For example, Cracow School of Information Technology offers a computer programmer program on both a full and a part-time basis, and part-time learners are not required to study physical education whereas full-time ones must do so (Policealne Studium).

Our inquiry indicates that community colleges became part of the Canadian educational landscape some years earlier than post-secondary vocational institutions and much later than their American counterparts (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, 13)<sup>6,7</sup>. There are two serious contenders to the title of Canada's first community college: Lakehead College of Applied Arts and Technology (1956) in Thunder Bay, Ontario and Lethbridge Community College (1958) which is situated in the Province of Alberta (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, Appendix B).

In order to qualify for regular membership in the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC), an educational institution has to:

- a. "Deliver post-secondary programs of the academic standard for diploma and certificate qualifications as set out by the appropriate jurisdictional authorities.
- b. Operate as an integral part of a provincial or territorial government's educational activities and be substantially funded through that government"<sup>8</sup>. Membership is not restricted to government-run institutions; in other words, private ones are accepted provided that they meet the above-stated criteria<sup>9</sup>.

The Association has 150 member institutions throughout Canada (Association of Canadian Community Colleges). Ontario has the most member colleges (27), and the Northwest Territories and Nunavut have the fewest (1 each). Furthermore, colleges appear to have considerably higher enrolments than post-secondary vocational institutions in Poland, which can lead to impersonal learning environments. For example, Red River College in Winnipeg, Manitoba had a student body of about 32,000 in January 2000 when in fact, Cracow School of Information Technology provided instruction to just 40 students in February, 2001 (Red River College, date unknown, IX; Wilusz, 9 October, 2001).

As a matter of interest, in 1998 the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto began a part-time graduate program in higher education at the doctoral level for community college administrators who want to sharpen their managerial skills by attending one of Canada's leading universities (ACAATO). Likewise, one Polish higher school - Cracow Pedagogical University - has a program for people who would like to be responsible for post-grammar vocational school program administration at the institutional level (Professor Czesław Majorek of Cracow Pedagogical University, personal communication, 27 March, 2002).

Universities, private career colleges and "secondary school systems offering enrichment programs" are sources of competition for colleges (Price Waterhouse, 1997, 11). On the other hand, post-secondary vocational institutions compete for potential students with both higher institutions and

higher vocational schools.

There are different reasons as to why colleges and post-grammar vocational schools are able to successfully compete in the marketplace. Colleges are able to do so because:

1. They “provide credentials with the backing of quality associated with the college system.”
2. Their tuition fees are low when compared to their competitors.
3. They provide academic counselling to students, enabling them to make intelligent academic choices.
4. Their programs are usually not as theoretical as those given by universities.
5. They have a “proven track record.”
6. They deliver “a coherent offering of courses” when in fact some private institutions do not (Price Waterhouse, 1997, p. 12).

On the other hand, future learners are attracted to post-grammar vocational schools over both higher institutions and higher vocational schools due to their shorter programs, lower admission standards and absence of tuition fees, implying that such people are less qualified, not as ambitious as and poorer than their Polish counterparts<sup>11, 12, 13</sup>.

The decade of the 1960s was a period of tremendous growth in college education for four reasons (two of which have to do with Canadian federal government initiatives):

1. The anticipated demand for post-secondary education due to the increasing number of eighteen to twenty four year olds in the Canadian population;
2. The effects of technological and scientific advances following World War II;
3. “High unemployment in the 1950s” which prompted the Canadian government to bring in the Vocational Training Assistance Act (1960);
4. The introduction of the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act of 1967, which resulted in federal financial assistance for "academic/technical" programs in both the non-university and university areas (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 12, 15 and 16).

Five issues underlying the need for colleges in the 1960s have been put forth:

1. “A desire to shift national economic development priorities from an agrarian-based to an industrial-based economy;
2. A mismatch between educational programs and labour force needs, exacerbated by rapid escalation in technological

sophistication, creating a need for higher levels of scientific and technical knowledge and skills;

3. Rigid provincial education structures inhibiting access to educational programs relevant to the changing needs of industry and society;

4. Lack of access to educational opportunities for the unemployed, early school leavers, and adults wishing to upgrade skills for enhanced employment opportunities;

5. Inefficiency and redundancy of costly education and training programs offered in institutions operated by various ministries and government departments whose primary purpose was something other than education (Joyner, 1995, p. 245)".

The first issue is not as relevant as it once was because the Canadian economy (as are other economies) is now changing from an industrial to a knowledge-based one, therefore, there are different workforce requirements that must be met. Furthermore, Joyner does not substantiate the fifth point. Also, since the 1960s there has been increased globalization which has impacted upon labor force needs (Levin, 1996).

Recent economic and political changes in Poland have had a dramatic impact on schooling at the post-secondary vocational level. During 1990/91 there were 893 institutions, and in 1999/2000 there were considerably more (2,328)<sup>14</sup>. Likewise, there has been a significant increase in the student population (from 108,285 to 205,538) during the period, of which 133,686 were female, and business programs were of most interest to them<sup>15, 16, 17, 18</sup>. In comparison, there were about 494,955 college learners in 1998/1999, and approximately 270,533 of them were female<sup>19</sup>. This statistical evidence suggests that it is easier to become a college student than a post-grammar vocational school learner and that both colleges and post-secondary vocational institutions are very attractive places for females to study.

It should be mentioned that some people probably become post-secondary vocational school learners to avoid compulsory military service which is a requirement for Poles (but not for Canadians). Needless to say, these people are not always the best students.

The most important function for post-secondary vocational school teachers and college faculty is teaching. Nevertheless, there are people in both types of institutions who are able to carry out research and who would benefit professionally from doing so (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 270). Research is justified because it is a way of "keeping teaching on the cutting edge" (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 270). Institutional research as well as discipline-related research should be encouraged so that institutions gain a better understanding of themselves (Dennison and Gallagher 1986, pages 269-270).

### **Accessibility**

Colleges (except for those in the Province of Quebec) charge tuition fees whereas all public post-grammar vocational schools in Poland do not, thus making them more affordable than their Canadian counterparts. However,

federal government grants and loans are available to Canadian students, which make it easier for them to attend college (Centennial College, p. 35).

As a matter of fact, both colleges and post-grammar vocational schools offer full and part-time programs, indicating that both Canadian and Polish educators are sensitive to the educational needs of working adults.

Colleges also deliver courses from different locations. For instance, Red River College has its main campus situated close to Winnipeg International Airport, a campus in downtown Winnipeg and regional campuses in the Pembina Valley (Winkler), the Interlake (Arborg), Selkirk, Portage la Prairie and Steinbach (Red River College, date unknown, ix). One post-grammar vocational institution operates from more than one place: Prywatna Szkoła Menedżerów Turystyki in Krynica (Porębska, 23 August, 1999).

Our investigation revealed that at least one post-grammar vocational institution - Cracow School of Information Technology - is considering offering distance education courses (Wilusz, 27 October, 1999). In comparison, nearly 80% of colleges in Canada offer distance learning courses (e.g. computer science, programming, data base management and college preparation) using various modes of delivery, such as written correspondence, teleconferencing, audio graphics, the world wide web, the Internet and video conferencing (Price Waterhouse, 1997, p. 8-9). Because Canada is considerably larger than Poland, distance education is probably more important for Canadians than for Poles.

Colleges reach out to potential learners by delivering courses 12 months a year whereas their Polish counterparts operate only from September to June (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 67). There are two good reasons as to why post-secondary vocational schools should deliver their programs during the summer months: 1) current learners would graduate sooner, and 2) student enrolments would increase. However, if they (post-grammar vocational institutions) were to do so, district authorities and states would have to augment their spending on education, and, as a result, other government services might suffer.

As a matter of fact, both post-secondary vocational schools and colleges are on-line; therefore, both kinds of institutions support the new style of behaviour brought about by the Internet in their interactions with potential students, which is important for the educative progress.

Mention should be made of the fact that admission to both Ontario and Alberta colleges has been made easier by the introduction of on-line application services. Ontario permits applicants to apply to more than one college and program, at the same time, which increases their chances of enrolment. Setting-up a similar service throughout Canada would be difficult because each province has its own scheme of education. On the other hand, establishing one on-line application service covering all parts of Poland would be relatively easy because of the country's single system of schooling.

Colleges have opened their doors to many Canadians by offering a wide curriculum (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, pages 70-72). As well as offering two to three year technical, para-professional and career programs, a given

school might also offer the following:<sup>21</sup>

1. "Vocational and trades training programs of different but usually short durations, intended to lead directly to employment by graduates who would be job-ready".
2. "Apprenticeship training programs".
3. "University transfer programs". Bargains concerning credit transfer take place between colleges and universities on a provincial or a bilateral basis".<sup>22, 23</sup>
4. "General academic programs with courses not intended for transfer to universities".
5. "Personal interest and community development programs". A course such as Playing Bridge falls into this category.
6. "Pre-college and upgrading programs".
7. Contract programs which involve supplying training services to both private and public sector organizations.

It should be mentioned that the curriculum comprehensiveness that is present in colleges is not duplicated in any other sort of Canadian institution (secondary or post-secondary), so they are strong competitors in the Canadian marketplace (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, pages 72-73).

Because of their program mix, colleges attract people of various interests, abilities, goals and ages, which in turn leads to enriched learning experiences (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 73). In fact, some institutions have made it practice that learners enrolled in different programs must study together (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 74). Because colleges admit such a broad segment of the Canadian population, student services are a necessary as well as a major function for them so that learners are able to succeed after they are enrolled (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, pages 74-75).

In comparison with colleges, state and non-state post-grammar vocational schools with public – institution status are permitted only to deliver diploma level courses covering a specific number of occupations which are indicated in the Classification of Occupations and Vocational Education Specialities thus limiting their program offerings (Kucińska, 11 October, 2001). Therefore, post-secondary vocational school student bodies might not be as diversified in terms of learner abilities as college ones.

Unfortunately, there is no provision for mature students to enter post-secondary vocational institutions as is the case with colleges. Mature students are people who have been away from school for some time and are unable to fulfil normal selection criteria (Seldenthuis, 1996, XXV). Completion of secondary school is a requirement for all of their programs. Admitting such people would make them more competitive in the marketplace (given that higher schools and higher vocational institutions do not enrol them) and lead to more varied learner populations<sup>25</sup>.

However, if post-secondary vocational schools were to do so they, like colleges, might be required to deliver academic upgrading programs which in turn would add to their operating costs which would have to be totally

absorbed by the taxpayer (in the case of public institutions) unless they began charging tuition fees. On the other hand, it may be relatively easy for private schools to offer such programs because they already require their learners to pay for their studies.

## **Governance**

The Ministry of National Education and Sport in Poland is responsible for matters relating to education in post-secondary vocational schools, and district authorities and states are concerned with financial and administrative matters and therefore there are now more levels of government taking part in the post-secondary and vocational school educational process than there were before 1999 (Ministry of National Education, 2000, pages 28-29 and 31-32)<sup>26, 27</sup>. This new arrangement is geared to respond to the particular needs of individual states and districts.

On the other hand, all colleges function “under provincial legislation and within provincial jurisdictions” (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 179)<sup>28, 29, 30</sup>. Some are under direct provincial administration, and others are governed through boards which allow for direct societal representation (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 179). The relationship between institutions and provincial governments with respect to college governance is not always made clear in government documents, which can lead to conflict (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, 180). In comparison, Canadian universities are substantially independent from government control, and primary and secondary school districts operate “only with delegated authority” from provincial governments (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, pages 178-179)<sup>31</sup>.

No national or provincial accreditation scheme exists with respect to Canadian community colleges (Dennison, 1995, p. 236). (The Association of Canadian Community Colleges does not attempt to accredit colleges “either formally or informally”, Dennison, 1996, p. 237). Institutional accreditation involving quality assessments would make college programs more credible. That would make them more competitive in the marketplace given that universities are not accredited. Nevertheless, an accreditation body would be difficult to create at the national level given that Canada is made up of thirteen different educational schemes (Dennison, 1995, p. 237). On the other hand, provincial and regional accreditation bodies would be relatively easy to establish. But, the task might prove to be a hard one in Ontario since, at one time, the Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technologists and Technicians was not even allowed to accredit programs in the province’s colleges (Skolnik, date unknown, 11).

Two Canadian provincial governments have demonstrated an interest in college performance within their respective jurisdictions. Saskatchewan colleges have been reviewed (Dennison, 1995, p. 36). The Government of the Province of New Brunswick has conducted research to determine if student needs were being adequately met by college programs (Dennison, 1995, p. 64).

Every year the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training surveys all colleges within its jurisdiction for the purpose of making them more accountable to the people they serve (Centennial College, Association of Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology). The survey is given to all stakeholder groups: employers, college students and graduates. In addition, recent results suggest



that Ontario colleges are performing well:

1. “88.7 percent of recent college grads got jobs within six months of graduation.
2. 91.7 percent of employers were satisfied with the quality of the educational preparation of college grads.
3. 81.4 percent of graduates were satisfied with the usefulness of their college education in achieving their goals after graduation.
4. 74.4 percent of students were satisfied with the overall quality of services, programming and resources available to them (seven percent were dissatisfied)” (Association of Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology).

Nevertheless, a fuller appreciation of college performance would result if the opinions of college partners were also considered.

Interestingly, a major review of Ontario colleges (Vision 2000) was published in 1990 by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, which recommended the creation of system-wide college program standards (Ministry of Education and Training). Program graduates, college personnel, employers as well as professional and industry associations take part in the evolution of these requirements, hence ensuring that they are relevant (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training). The establishment of standards makes it easier for programs to be evaluated.

In comparison with colleges, post-grammar vocational schools in Poland are evaluated by the Ministry of National Education and Sport every five years which suggests that institutional accountability is important to Polish educational authorities (Ministry of National Education, 2000, p. 231). Since 1999, superintendents (kurators) have been obliged to write a report about “the quality of education” in each post-secondary vocational school (as well as in each primary and secondary institution) in their state (voivodship) (Ministry of National Education, 2000, 31). In the preparation of a school’s account, parents, teachers and students are spoken to, classes are visited and documents are scrutinized, and the superintendent’s findings are shared with headteachers, parents and local authorities (Kucińska, 11, October, 2001)<sup>32,33</sup>. It might sometimes be difficult to compare post-grammar vocational institutions because the manner in which this procedure is carried out in each state may not be the same (Kucińska, 11, October, 2001)<sup>34,35</sup>.

Such reports are made only about state and private post-grammar vocational schools with public institution status (Kucińska, 11 October, 2001). Private institutions that do not have this designation are supervised differently, and Ministry of Education and Sport Regulations do not clearly specify as to how this supervision should be carried out; a therefore, each state is responsible for developing and implementing its own supervisory practices (Kucińska, 11 October, 2001). Nevertheless, in the Małopolska Region, school performance is measured against institutional objectives, and infringements upon students’ rights are of concern (Kucińska, 11 October, 2001).

Canadian College faculty and staff are unionized, however, the way in which

collective bargaining takes place differs from province to province (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 215). For instance, in British Columbia bargaining is decentralized, in other words, each school bargains separately. Some institutions in the province have separate bargaining units (for example, for support staff) while others do not. In the Province of New Brunswick bargaining groups deal directly with the government on a province wide basis, which increases the likelihood of equitable collective agreements (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 218).

Another form of employee organization which should be mentioned here is “the non-union, professional association model” (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 225). This approach which may be attractive to some teachers because it encourages them to view themselves as professionals more readily than workers, leaves people vulnerable to college administrators (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 225)

As a matter of fact, post-grammar vocational school teachers working in state-run institutions are unionized and therefore they are able to protect themselves against unfair labour practices (OECD, 1996, p. 86).

Teacher evaluation systems in place in Polish post-grammar vocational schools must be concerned with preparedness for promotion. (Teachers must obtain a positive assessment in order to be promoted throughout the categories of teaching posts, Ministry of National Education, 2000, 34)<sup>36</sup>. These sorts of appraisal schemes do not treat teachers as professional but as employees (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p, 231).

On the other hand, some college faculty members have developed and administered their own appraisal programs which have focused on “improvement of performance” (instead of readiness for advancement) (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, pages 231-232). However, non-faculty college workers might object to this approach to performance evaluation being used, if it is not extended to them.

All public and private post-secondary vocational institutions with state-school status make use of the same grading system (because they are part of a single scheme of education) which is as follows:

- stopień celujący (excellent) - 6
- stopień bardzo dobry (very good) - 5
- stopień dobry (good) - 4
- stopień dostateczny (enough) - 3
- stopień dopuszczający (passable) - 2, a passing grade
- stopień niedostateczny (not enough) - 1

A similar six point scale system is used in Polish higher schools which makes it easier for post-grammar vocational school students to transfer to them (Jankowicz, 2001, p. 76). On the contrary, grading schemes are not the same in each college (because Canada has many systems of schooling) which might make it difficult for learners to begin their studies in one province and to continue them in another or to transfer to a university, and for potential employers to assess graduates<sup>37</sup>. For example, the pass mark in each diploma course in all Quebec colleges is 60% whereas students attending Red River

College, which is located in the Province of Manitoba need only obtain a mark of 50 out of 100 to succeed in a course (Government of Quebec (College Education Regulations) ; Red River College, date unknown, A-11).

As a matter of fact, the post-grammar vocational school system is expected to be reformed in late 2005 (Kucińska, 11 October, 2001). Changes have already occurred to other parts of the Polish educational system. The authors of the changes have indicated that completing a post-secondary vocational school program will not be tantamount to obtaining a vocational qualification (e.g. the title of technician) as is the case now (Drogosz-Zabłocka, 1999, p. 52). Post-grammar vocational institution graduates of the future will have to take an exam organized by regional examination boards and a central examination committee (Ministry of National Education, 2000, 28; Drogosz-Zabłocka, 1999, p. 52). The new system will result in more equitable qualifications that will make it easier for potential employers to assess graduates.

Because academic senior secondary school programs now include some vocational training, post-secondary vocational institution programs of the future will be shorter (Kucińska, 11 October, 2001). There will most likely be an increase in the number of people attending them because there will be more academic senior secondary school graduates as a consequence of the establishment of junior secondary school institutions (Drogosz-Zabłocka, 1999, p. 54) and because of the closing down of technical secondary schools (Kucińska, 11 October, 2001).

Lastly, policymakers might want to consider broadening the function of post-secondary vocational schools from that of mainly providing vocational training to recent secondary school leavers to include involvement in government initiatives related to the re-structuring of the Polish economy (e.g. job re-training schemes). This would result in their becoming more visible, and hence, more desirable to prospective learners. Colleges have been instruments of government policy since their inception (Gallagher, 1995, p. 259). For example, Colleges d'Enseignement General et Professionel (Cégeps) have played an important part in the democratization of schooling in the Province of Quebec. But, private schools might be reluctant to take part in such programs because they may not be profitable and therefore public institutions would have to deliver them, that would result in additional operating costs which district and state authorities would be forced to bear.

### **Post-grammar vocational school and college programs**

Some institutions (University College of the Cariboo, University College of the Fraser Valley, Kwantlen University College, Malaspina University College and Okavagan University College) in the Province of British Columbia offer university degrees as well as certificates and diplomas (Association of Canadian Community Colleges). The major reason behind the university-college notion is to increase access to university education for those people residing outside of British Columbia's major cities (Vancouver and Victoria) (Dennison, 1995, p. 135).

Associate in Arts (AA) degree programs have been available at some colleges in British Columbia since 1992 (Dennison, 1995, pages 129-130). These programs are attractive to some people because they are shorter than Bachelor of Arts programs and therefore takes less time to complete. However, perhaps

we should be concerned about their value in the Canadian workplace given that it has been mentioned that they have little worth in the American workplace (Skolnik, 1995-96).

The Alberta government has agreed to allow colleges within that province to deliver applied degree programs in four areas: forest resources management, petroleum engineering technology, communications, and small business and entrepreneurship, which might imply that some other areas of applied study are not worthy of such consideration (Skolnik, 1995-96).

Ontario community college leaders would like to replace diplomas by applied degrees with college programs lasting three years (Skolnik, 1995-96)<sup>38</sup>. There is a precedent in Ontario for these kinds of degrees. Ryerson Polytechnic Institute (which is now Ryerson University) once offered them (Skolnik, 1995-96)<sup>39</sup>.

As a matter of interest, in the Province of Alberta there are creative partnerships which permit universities to deliver their programs at particular colleges (Dennison, 1995, p. 30). An example of such an arrangement (which we will look at again later) is between Red Deer College and the University of Alberta in the area of nursing. Such programs are desirable for learners because they often involve “lower tuition fees and smaller class sizes” when they are attending college, and they enable them to complete part of their studies without leaving home which saves them money on accommodations (Byrne, 1998/1999).

Post-grammar vocational institutions do not grant higher degrees (only diplomas), and in order for them to be able to do so they would have to become part of the higher education system. Then they would be subject to the same laws that regulate either higher schools or higher vocational institutions (Ministry of National Education, 1994, Article 4 [2]; Ministry of National Education, 1997, Article 6 [1]). But, three post-secondary vocational schools (which were mentioned earlier) have transfer agreements with Polish higher schools: Prywatna Szkoła Mendżerów in Krynica, Cracow School of Information Technology and Policealne Studium Zawodowe in Cracow. This means that some vocational institution courses are of university standard.

Erika Gottlieb (1995-96) in her article entitled “Reconciling the University with the Community College” reminds us about the overall importance of general education subjects in career-oriented programs. The studying of such subjects leads to personal fulfilment (and the refinement of the mind). Although her comments are directed at colleges, they are equally applicable to post-secondary vocational schools.

Gottlieb does not attempt to inform us as to what the balance should be between avocational courses and vocational ones in such programs and whether or not some students are in greater need of them than others. It should be pointed out that she sees studying general education subjects as “possibly even as preparation for university” and in doing so she might be undermining the notion that they should be considered for their own sake.

A number of provinces in different parts of Canada have voiced sentiments about general education subjects in their college programs:

\*“Every field of education has its discursive and contemplative aspects as expressed in its historical, social and aesthetic components. Within a college program they may be merged in ways that will enable students to comprehend their fields of study not merely as academic or technical but as powerful social and intellectual forces that are deeply and widely influential in human affairs” (British Columbia).

\*“The college’s aim is to provide opportunities to meet learning needs to perform all of life's roles in a satisfying way. Within any one phase of a person’s life he is likely to be filling several roles.... The college staffs undertook to identify needs arising from these new roles and to facilitate programmes that would contribute to the competence of people in all of their endeavours” (Saskatchewan).

\*“There has long been a deficiency in our educational system in regard to the training of technical personnel beyond the high school but short of the university level... An adequate general education is the best basis on which to build and to rebuild the particular work skills which the future will require” (Ontario).

\*[“Colleges will]... provide educational opportunities for the continuing development of individuals in their careers, and within this general framework, for personal growth and development” (Manitoba).

\*“All programs of studies should include the study of general education subjects and specific vocational subjects” (Prince Edward Island).

\*[“The college must]... promote and provide opportunities for continuous learning for the personal enrichment of the citizens for [of] New Brunswick” (New Brunswick). (Quoted in Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, pages 244-245).

However, the Province of Quebec<sup>40</sup> has implemented a coherent program in general education which means that all Quebec diploma learners must take courses in four vocational subject areas:

1. “Language of instruction and literature, 7 1/3 credits.
2. Second language, 2 credits.
3. Philosophy or humanities, 4 1/3 credits.
4. Physical education, 3 credits”. (Les Publications du Quebec, Division III)

Subject area number one is considered to be the most important of the four areas because more credits (7 1/3) are allotted to it than to the others. The Quebec Ministry of Education has the right to “impose a uniform examination” in each of the four subject areas which students must pass prior to being granted a college diploma (Government of Quebec (College Education Regulations)). This would suggest that at least one Canadian province considers general education courses to be an important component of college programs<sup>41</sup>.

As a matter of interest, the only general education subjects available to post-secondary vocational school learners are “languages and sports” (Kucińska, 28 December, 1998). But, post-grammar vocational institution programs are

designed with general secondary school graduates in mind who have already completed avocational courses of study.

“Diversity skills” courses should be included in college curricula and post-secondary vocational school programs, as well, because many employers operate internationally; consequently they require that their workers be able to deal with diverse populations (Milroy, 1996). These courses are also important for students who intend to work for firms that do business only within Canada because of the multiethnic nature of Canadian society.

Eight particular skills are thought to be most important: “intellectual communication”, “monitoring and modifying language”, “critical thinking”, “identifying sources of personal discomfort”, “cross-cultural understanding”, “facilitating group activities”, “flexibility or adaptability” and “recognizing the role of teamwork in the diverse workplace”. Milroy (1996) has mentioned that “diversity skills” training could be included in existing college courses that are intended to teach portable skills like “consensus building and negotiating”. Mind-expanding subjects like philosophy and history and multicultural education courses might also be useful in developing these skills. Schools that offer “diversity training” will find it easier to attract students due to the fact they are teaching skills that are wanted by employers (Milroy, 1996).

Colleges now face the problem of delivering much needed services during a time of tight budgets; therefore, some of them generate additional revenue by taking part in international programs involving foreign students (Knowles, 1995, p. 184 and p. 196). Such programs enrich the lives of both college learners and staff and reduce the dependency of colleges on provincial financing, thus making them more independent (Dunlop, 1998). Likewise, it would be financially advantageous for post-grammar vocational schools to provide educational services to foreign learners. However, it might be difficult for them to do so because Polish is not widely spoken. Instead, they may have to deliver their programs in English, French and German<sup>42</sup>.

### **Concluding remarks**

Educators in Poland as well as those in Canada must respond to the needs of an aging population (Dunlop, 1998). Sixty eight percent of the people in both countries are between 15 and 64 years of age, and about 13% are 65 years and over (<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ca.html> and <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/facbook/geos/pl.html>). Public post-grammar vocational schools might have more difficulty dealing with older learners than their Canadian counterparts because they are part of a secondary school educational scheme and colleges are not. Secondary institution systems of schooling are designed with younger people in mind. Nevertheless, post-secondary vocational institutions could favourably respond to the educational requirements of older people by admitting “mature students” into their programs.

Post-secondary vocational schools like colleges ought to come to terms with the impact that globalization is having upon labour force needs (Levin, 1996). Unfortunately, three college systems (Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia) have not done so in a favourable manner by proposing that institutions within their jurisdiction emphasize programs that train people for a specific job instead of programs like community education that impart “knowledge and

learning” (Levin, 1996). The suggestion disregards the particular concerns of colleges learners and communities (Levin, 1996). On the other hand, if colleges undertake this proposal it would be an opportunity for them to generate much needed revenue in a period of fiscal restraint.

One way for colleges (and post-grammar vocational institutions) to successfully tackle the problem of changing employment requirements resulting from global economic forces would be for them to assist their students in developing skills (e.g. personal management ones like creativity and adaptability) that will permit them to become independent learners (Gallagher, 1995, p. 267). Another way for them to deal with this challenge is to collaborate on a country-wide basis (Gallagher, 1995, 263)<sup>43</sup>. Moreover, it would be relatively easy for post-secondary vocational schools to do so because they are part of a single system of education.

### End Notes

1. Mgr Theresa Kucińska, telephone conversation, 29, January 2001.
2. High tuition costs might be a major obstacle influencing enrolment in private post-secondary vocational schools. In 1998, tuition fees for daytime students attending them ranged from eleven hundred to fourteen hundred and twenty zloties per semester (Drogosz-Zabłocka, 1999, p. 50). In comparison, students attending public post-grammar vocational schools do not have to pay for their studies.
3. Most private post-secondary vocational schools had this status in 1997/98 (Drogosz-Zabłocka, 1999, p. 46).
4. It is desirable for a non-state post-secondary vocational institution to obtain and maintain public-school status because such institutions receive government subsidies and their learners are entitled to tax-deductions (Kucińska, 28 December, 1998).
5. Interestingly, the Polish government has funded private schools that did not have public institution designation. That has encouraged people to continue operating them (Białecki, 1995, p. 68).
6. The first American College (Fresno College) was established in 1910 in California because it was felt that there was a need for “an intermediary level (of institution) between high school and college (university) where academic maturity could occur” (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 13). (At the time, the Americans had an “open door” policy concerning admission to university). Newer colleges have diversified their programs to include technical training (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 14).
7. Two reasons have been put forth as to why Canadians did not found colleges until much later than their American neighbours: 1) their unwillingness to accept the notion that high school leavers ought to be given automatic acceptance into

post-secondary programs and 2) their belief that some subjects (e.g. mathematics) are “college subjects” and others (e.g. gunsmithing) are not (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, pages 14-15).

8. Ms. Louise Slocombe, Executive Assistant to the President of ACCC, 2 March, 1999, e-mail message.

9. Ms. Judy Barbeau, Information Services, ACCC, 17 December 1999, e-mail message.

10. Interestingly, Saskatchewan has established an aboriginal college: the Saskatchewan Institute of Indian Technologies (Baker, 1995, p. 213; Association of Canadian Community Colleges).

11. Programs in these institutions last from three to five years whereas the longest post-secondary vocational school ones last three years.

12. All higher school and higher vocational institution programs require the possession of a school leaving certificate prior to entry when in fact only post-grammar vocational school medical ones do.

13. Regular higher school students are not obliged to pay tuition, but part time ones must do so. On the other hand, no post-grammar vocational school learner attending a public institution has to pay for his/her studies.

14. Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, 2000, 236.

15. Similarly, admissions to Polish higher schools increased dramatically during the 1990s: from 394,313 to 1,463,303 (Ministry of National Education, 2000, p. 37).

16. Post-grammar vocational institutions are a popular destination for many secondary school graduates - in 1998/1999 every third graduate continued his/her studies in one of them (Drogosz-Zabłocka, 1999, p. 43).

17. Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, 2000, p. 237.

18. The same kinds of programs seem to be popular with college students (Statistics Canada).

19. Statistics Canada.

20. This remark applies only to full-time diploma students; on the other hand, part-time learners must pay for their studies (Gouvernement du Québec, 1995-2001, chapter 24.2). This provision impedes the learning process because it divides the college learner population.

21. English as a second language (ESL) programs can be added to this list.

22. As a matter of interest, on December the 1, 1998, the Ontario - College - University Transfer Guide website was launched (The 2000 Environmental Scan). The site provides information about post-secondary learning opportunities open to Ontario learners.



23. As a matter of fact, three post-grammar vocational institutions also have transfer agreements with Polish higher schools: Prywatna Szkoła Menedżerów Turystyki in Krynica, Cracow School of Information Technology and Policealne Studium Zawodowe in Cracow (Porębska, 23 August, 1999, Wilusz, 27 October, 1999, Kasolik, 6 December, 1999).
24. It should be noted that Cracow School of Information Technology also provides similar services (Cracow University of Economics, date unknown, 21).
25. In order to become either a higher school or a higher vocational institution learner one must possess a school learning certificate (Ministry of National Education, 1994, Article 140 (1); Ministry of National Education, 1997, Article 71 (1)).
26. Post-grammar vocational institutions as well as other vocational schools are allowed to develop modules in order to tailor their courses to local employment requirements which makes them more attractive to potential students (Kucińska, 11 October, 2).
27. One other government ministry has been involved in the development of a post-secondary vocational school program which ensures its relevance. In 1996, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare developed a three year nursing program in co-operation with the Ministry of National Education and Sport (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Ministry of National Education, 1996).
28. The federal government is also involved in college educational matters (ACCC International, 1998/1999). For example, they have established two programs (The Program for North American Mobility in Higher Education and the Canada → European Community Program for Co-operation in Higher Education and Training) for the purpose of stimulating college and university partnering with post-secondary institutions located outside of Canada.
29. There are thirteen college systems, whereas only one post-grammar vocational school scheme exists.
30. There is one provincial association of colleges - the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario (ACAATO).
31. The Quebec Government's legislation concerning educational institutions at the university level supports this view (Gouvernement du Quebec, 1995-2001).
32. The Ministry's assessment would be more complete if the views of program graduates and employers were also solicited.
33. The procedure used in the Małopolska Region is outlined in the following publication: Biuletyn Informacyjny Małopolskiego Kuratorium Oświaty, 2000, pages 11-17).
34. As a matter of interest, a written account must also be produced every five years concerning the quality of schooling in

each state (Ministry of National Education, 2000, p. 31). Prior to 1999, reports were written after a two week inspection period, and they were not as comprehensive as they are now (Kucińska, 11 October, 2001). This would imply that more attention is currently being paid to the quality of education in Polish schools than previously.

35. Based upon my interviews with representatives of the three post-grammar vocational schools which took part in this study, it appears that Ministry of National Education evaluations, of some sort, do in fact take place (Wilusz, 6 October, 2001; Masio and Sarnak, 5 April, 2000; Kasolik, 6 December, 1999).

36. The Teachers' Charter regulates the teaching profession in Poland.

37. Transferring from one educational institution to another can be problematic for a number of reasons (Byrne, 1998/1999). For instance, courses may not be the same in each one. Nevertheless, if all colleges agreed upon a single grading system then, at least, one difficulty would be removed. Furthermore, it is necessary for institutions to be concerned about transferability issues given that students are faced with changing workplaces resulting from global economic forces (Byrne, 1998/1999).

38. Applied degrees originated in Europe for programs considered to be "hands on" whereas the associate degree came about in the US at the beginning of the last century (Skolnik, 1995-96). And initially, it (the associate degree) was aimed at learners who were only able to complete two years of a four year university program (Skolnik, 1995-96). However, nowadays it is granted by community and junior colleges "upon [the] completion of a two year program for which [students are given] credit towards a four year degree at most universities" (Skolnik, 1995-96).

39. "While the layman might assume that there are well established criteria which a program must meet in order to qualify for a degree, such is not the case. What constitutes degree level study is essentially what institutions which have the authority to grant degrees are willing to put their imprimatur on, and there is considerable - but, of course not unlimited - variation in the nature of the learning experience which different institutions deem necessary for a degree. The determination of what constitutes a degree is thus to at least a considerable extent a matter of politics" (quoted in Skolnik, date unknown, 19).

40. Quebec's educational scheme is unique in Canada. After completing 11 years of primary and secondary school, students can progress to a College d'Enseignement General et Professionnel (Cegep) where they enter either a pre-university or a technical stream.

41. Prior to 1986 Quebec was the only Canadian province to include general education subjects in all of the college programs, which suggests that Quebec learners then received a broader education than their Canadian counterparts (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, p. 247). At the time, Quebec students were obliged to take fourteen avocational courses (two of which had to do with the Province of Quebec, which is not surprising given the interest there was in Quebec separatism during this period): “language and literature (four courses), philosophy or humanities (four courses), Quebec civilization (one course), Quebec economy (one course), and physical education (four courses)” (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, pages 247-248).

42. The Jagiellonian University delivers MA programs in English which are aimed at foreign students and therefore the suggestion that post-grammar vocational institutions offer educational services to foreign learners is not an unthinkable one (Jagiellonian University, date unknown, 3).

43. An outstanding example of college partnering at the provincial level is Contact South. Contact South is a group of colleges (19) in Ontario that deliver on-line distance learning courses (The 2000 Environmental Scan). A course is developed by one member of the consortium, which in turn is used by other members.

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 Contents

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