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**Polish Post-Secondary Vocational Schools and Canadian
Community Colleges: A Comparison using the School as an
Organization and Social Institution as a Conceptual
Framework**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to compare Polish post-secondary vocational institutions with Canadian community colleges. The research concentrates upon programs in tourism and information technology delivered by the two following Polish schools: *Policealne Studium Zawodowe* (Cracow, Poland), Cracow School of Information Technology; and three Canadian community colleges: Centennial (Scarborough, Ontario), Durham (Oshawa, Ontario) and Confederation (Thunder Bay, Ontario). The theoretical framework for this study is supplied by the general idea of the school as an organization and social institution. It is recommended that additional research be carried out, in the future, involving a larger number of institutions.

Introduction

Unlike Poland, Canada does not have a national system of education – each province and territory has its own system of schooling. One advantage of having separate school plans in a country as large as Canada is that regional needs are more likely to be dealt with. Conversely, a single system of schooling might strengthen Canadian identity.

There are guarantees in both countries for private schools.

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 of schooling, 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, 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, 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).

Purpose of the Article

The aim of this study 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 in Poland do not award university degrees, nor do most community colleges. Finally, it must be stressed that these two kinds of institutions are comparable but not equivalent.

Our comparison focuses upon programs in the following areas:

1. Information technology (3) because we live in an information age (*Kupisiewicz, 1999, 111*).
2. Tourism (2) because it closely reflects the economic and political changes that have taken place in Poland since 1989 (the opening up of the country to outsiders and the removal of restrictions on foreign travel). Five times more people visited Poland (87.8 million) in 1997 than in 1990 (18.2 million) and the number of Poles traveling to foreign countries increased from 19.3 million in 1989 to 48.6 million in 1997 (Institute of Tourism, 1998, 8 and 18). Moreover, tourism is an important source of revenue for both Poland and Canada.

Following a very considerable number of inquiries, three Canadian and two Polish institutions agreed to participate in this study: Confederation College, Durham College, Centennial College, *Policealne Studium Zawodowe* and Cracow School of Information Technology (*Szkoła Informatyki AE*)

This investigation is undertaken to provide information in Canada and Poland about programs with a common mission (tourism and information technology) and because of the changes that have been taking place in the Polish primary and secondary school system of education (*Kucinska, 23 February, 2000*)

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

Results of the Study

The Tourism Programs

Policealne Studium Zawodowe admits new students once a year (in September) when in fact their Canadian counterpart (Centennial College) does so every eight weeks throughout the year, thus stimulating enrolment (Centennial College).

As a matter of fact, learners in both programs must intern a practice, which makes them attractive to prospective employers (Centennial College; *Kasolik*, 15 December, 1999).

The Information Technology (IT) Programs

Both of the Canadian institutions (Durham College and Confederation College) and Cracow School of Information Technology are equally accessible to future learners because they admit part-time students as well as full-time learners in their programs (Mather, personal communication, 16 October, 2002; *Wilusz*, 6 October, 2001; Cham, personal communication, December, 2002). Cracow School of Information Technology's part-time course of study in information technology is given in a different way than their full-time one (*Policealne Studium Informatyki*). According to *Dr Wilusz*, who is the School's head, less is expected of part-time learners than of full-time students (*Wilusz*, 9 October, 2001).

Cracow School of Information Technology's program lasts two years as does Durham's whereas Confederation's takes one year longer to finish because students are required to complete two fifteen week paid work placements. Likewise, practices (which are unpaid) are the rule for the Polish students (*Wilusz*, 9 October, 2001). On the other hand, Durham College's Information Technology (IT) program may not always require "hands on", cooperative education, practicums, internships or other field experiences (Mather, personal communication, October, 2002; Durham College, date unknown, p. 39). Consequently, Durham College learners may not be as attractive to potential employers as their Polish counterparts.

Confederation, Durham and Cracow School of Information Technology learners are given written exams (which include multiple – choice tests), but the Polish students also have an opportunity to demonstrate what they have mastered in oral exams as well.¹ (Cham, personal communication, December, 2002; Mather, personal communication, October, 2002; *Wilusz*, 9 October, 2001).

Cracow School of Information Technology and Confederation students formally appraise their teachers, which means that administrators in both Poland and in Canada believe that learners are able to identify good teaching practices (*Wilusz*, 27 October, 1999; Cham, personal communication, December, 2002.) The evaluation schemes in place in both institutions consider faculty as employees (and not as professionals) because they are administered by management (*Wilusz*, 27 October, 1999; Cham, personal communication, December, 2002).

Concluding Remarks

Disabled learners are provided for by Durham College, Centennial College and Cracow School of Information Technology but not by *Policealne Studium Zawodowe*, limiting access to their tourism program (Durham College, 202; Red Deer College; Centennial College, date unknown, 134; *Wilusz*, 27 October, 1999; *Kasolik*, 15 December, 1999).

Scholarships are available to Durham, Centennial and Confederation learners but not to Cracow School of Information Technology, and *Policealne Studium Zawodowe* students making it easier for the Canadian students to attend college (*Wilusz*, 27 October, 1999; Durham College, date unknown, 196-197; Centennial College; Confederation College, date unknown, 10; *Kasolik*, 15 December, 1999).

Students in all of the post-grammar vocational institutions and in two of the colleges (Confederation and Durham) have the right to appeal their marks implying that sound grading practices are important to both Polish and Canadian educators Centennial College; Durham College and University of Ontario Institute Technology, date unknown, p. 98). In fact, all post-grammar vocational school learners attending government-run or state-approved institutions can challenge their grades (*Wilusz*, 27 October, 1999).

Interestingly, Durham has a policy concerning academic dishonesty aimed at students whereas their Polish counterpart does not, meaning that Canadian educators do not tolerate this type of behaviour and Polish educators do. (Durham College and University of Ontario Institute of Technology, date unknown, 99; *Wilusz*, 27 October, 1999).

Articulation agreements are important for both Polish post-grammar vocational institutions and Canadian community colleges.

Centennial has articulation agreements with a number of universities (e.g. the University of Guelph and Ryerson University) when really *Policealne Studium Zawodowe* has only one, which is with the Academy of Physical Education (*Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego*) in Cracow. That means that Centennial students have more opportunities to continue their studies beyond the diploma level than do their Polish counterparts (Centennial College; *Kasolik*, 15 December, 1999).

Durham has no university articulation agreements which makes it difficult for their graduates to continue their studies beyond college (Mather, personal

communication, October, 2002). On the other hand, Confederation has an arrangement with the University of Athabasca and Cracow School of Information Technology has one (not surprisingly) with their patron (Cracow University of Economics), (Confederation College, *Wilusz*, 27 October, 1999). Unfortunately, this agreement applies only to part-time studies (*Wilusz*, 27 October, 1999). Cracow School of Information Technology graduates who want to study on a full-time basis must write the University's entrance exam.

It is recommended that additional research be carried out, in the future, involving a larger number of institutions

Notes

1. It is not clear if Durham learners are examined orally.
2. Special note of gratitude to Dr. Kimberly Grantham Griffith and Dr. William Allan Kritsonis for their assistance in getting this article published in the United States of America. www.nationalforum.com

Interviews

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See: www.nationalforum.com

