

A Profile of Private Vocational Training Schools

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Abstract

This paper outlines the salient features of private vocational training schools in four major regions of Canada. Schools are further described in terms of their operating principles and practices, the range of training programs offered and, finally, the regulatory and governance structures of federal and provincial governments and of the industry itself. This profile outlines the market-oriented nature of the proprietary school industry and is presented with reference to the community college and institute system where, to a limited degree, similar entrepreneurial features are found. On the basis of this comparison, some observations are made as to the potential contribution of proprietary schools toward current government efforts at improving training provision in Canada.

Résumé

Cet article décrit les caractéristiques principales des écoles privées de formation professionnelle dans les quatre grandes régions canadiennes. On trace le portrait détaillé de leurs modes d'opération, de l'éventail des programmes offerts, des structures de contrôle et d'administration imposées par les gouvernements fédéral et provinciaux, et par l'industrie même. Le profil dégagé souligne la forte orientation de marché des écoles privées et une comparaison avec les services offerts dans les collèges communautaires et les instituts techniques publics permet de dégager des traits communs aux deux systèmes par rapport à leur approche entrepreneuriale. A partir de cette comparaison, des observations

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sont tirées sur la contribution potentielle des écoles professionnelles privées dans le cadre des politiques gouvernementales visant l'amélioration de l'enseignement professionnel au Canada.

Canadian proprietary schools in 1989 recorded 190,000 enrolments in various pre-employment business, service, and technical-trades courses. Of these enrolments, 140,000 attended over 1,000 schools and a further 50,000 were served by some 50 correspondence programs (Nichol, 1991). Numbers of this magnitude clearly indicate a meaningful role for the private sector in expanding educational opportunity at the postsecondary level. Yet the private vocational training schools (PVTs) have not figured significantly in postsecondary educational policy statements. Recent federal government attempts to encourage private sector involvement in training have been directed primarily toward upgrading programs, operated or sponsored by business and industry itself. Some attempt to increase diversity of pre-entry provision was, however, apparent with the Canadian Job Strategies scheme under which the indirect purchase of training from proprietary schools was supported. This seems to be a policy direction the new Labour Force Development Board will continue, and even extend (Mahon, 1990). At the provincial level, Ministries of Advanced Education increasingly are including the proprietary school industry in their human resource development plans. Despite changes in policy orientation, there is no adequate body of research on this sector that would inform educational decisions. While there exist some historically important pieces (Jackson & Gaskell, 1987; Moreland, 1977), few studies have examined the industry in any empirical detail (Hope, 1986; Slade & Sweet, 1989; Sweet, 1990a). Selected aspects of the proprietary sector have, however, been presented. Pacquet (1988) discussed the nature of training and education by the private sector. Sweet (1991) examined issues of access and technology as these apply to the private correspondence schools. More recently, Sweet (1993) examined PVTs students' perceptions of their training and the utility of acquired skills to employment.

This paper first outlines the salient institutional and curricular features of proprietary schools, illustrating their presence and position in the postsecondary systems of four regions of Canada. PVTs are further described in relation to community colleges with particular reference to the range of training programs offered, their operating principles and practices, and finally, the regulatory and governance structures of ministries of education, governments, and the industry itself. On the basis of this profile some observations are made on the potential contribution of proprietary schools to current efforts aimed at improving training provision in Canada.

Data Sources

The information employed in assembling this profile was drawn from a variety of sources, the initial reference being the 1986 national survey of alternative training institutions and programs (Statistics Canada, 1988). These included programs available through unions, volunteer agencies, consulting and management firms, and the proprietary schools -- including those operating with traditional classroom formats and those offering correspondence instruction. A reanalysis of the original data file was requested and separate statistics for proprietary schools were generated. The items on the 1986 Statistics Canada survey were updated and elaborated for the 1989 school year by Sweet (1990a) who reported institutional, course, and enrolment information on schools for most provinces. A further data source was a survey of provincial government administrators who provided information on institutions, courses and enrolments (Sweet, 1990a). Descriptions of government policies and activities was obtained from documents supplied by the relevant ministries in each province. Similar documents were obtained from the professional associations of the proprietary schools located in most provinces and through the National Association of Career Colleges (NACC), the national organization representing private career training schools. Because this paper is concerned primarily with the structure and operation of the institutions which comprise the proprietary sector, a detailed description of students is not included. In any event, data on student characteristics are notably absent in the case of proprietary schools. With the exception of Manitoba (Oepkes, 1990), governments have not maintained information on PVTS enrolments or graduate placements comparable to that gathered from colleges and institutes. Although all proprietary schools keep registration records and some follow their graduates through job placement surveys, for the most part such efforts serve government registration requirements or general marketing purposes. This situation is changing somewhat: the NACC recently conducted a survey in Ontario and, when available, the results should provide a comprehensive account of proprietary institutions and their students.

Scope and Structure of the Industry

Most discussions of private post-secondary schools involve their relationship with the public sector, specifically the community colleges which are expressly mandated to prepare students for the work force. There exist important differences between PVTS and colleges, at least when the comparison is made with the traditional, comprehensive college. However, there is considerable variation

in the stated purpose and functions of community colleges. In addition to their training mandate, colleges serve also academic and community education needs (Dennison & Gallagher, 1986; Dennison & Levin, 1988). Although the comparative approach often is helpful to understanding and interpretation, the following analysis of proprietary schools does not attempt a comparison with the public sector at all points. Where the data allow and to the extent they illuminate the nature of the proprietary school industry, some general relationships between the two sectors are presented and discussed.

1. School Distribution and Growth Patterns

Table 1 shows the distribution of schools, courses and enrolments in the major regions of B.C., the Prairies, Ontario, and Atlantic Canada for the 1989 year. The information displayed in Table 1 is based on data supplied by provincial ministries through their national organization, the Canadian Association of Administrators of Private Training Organization Legislation (CAAPTOL). Unfortunately, Quebec is not a participant in CAAPTOL and data are not available from that province.¹ Nor are precise enrolment figures available from New Brunswick as that province registers but does not monitor the proprietary schools. As a consequence, Quebec has been omitted from the following analysis and estimates based on a survey of individual schools in New Brunswick (Sweet, 1992a) were used to complete enrolment entries for the Atlantic provinces. Provincial data are aggregated by region to allow comparisons with data originally collected by Statistics Canada (1988) and presented in that form. Provincial profiles are available from the author, as are separate analyses of training school and correspondence data from the Statistics Canada (1988) survey.

Although the private sector is represented in all regions, Ontario and B.C. account for most of the schools. B.C. has the greatest number perhaps because the definition of what constitutes a proprietary school in that Province is especially inclusive (Slade, 1991). But private vocational training in B.C. has a long history. There were, for example, at least a dozen schools operating in the province by 1910, most in or near Vancouver (Moreland, 1977). In fact, historical differences in the urban-rural distribution of schools in all provinces remain quite marked. Most schools operate in or near the major cities (see, e.g., Marshall, 1989). This varies somewhat by the type of training offered but certainly the technology schools and the major business schools are located in the cities. Not only are the large urban centres a source of students, but locating there establishes close ties with local employers, a necessary condition for effective job placement of graduates.

Table 1
Proprietary School Indicators for 1989

Region	Institutions	Courses	Enrollment
B.C.	450	2,390	62,813
Prairies	201	873	24,076
Ontario	275	1,235	37,173
Atlantic	136	391	10,000 ¹

¹ Total includes estimate of New Brunswick enrollments (Millman, 1992)

While some schools have deep historical roots, others are rather recent additions. The industry as a whole underwent a period of rapid growth in the early 1980's. The number of PVTS established between 1980 and 1986 was 412. This represented a three-fold increase over the 1979 level and meant that by 1986 new schools comprised some 61% of the total industry (Statistics Canada, 1988). Between 1986 and 1989 the percentage increases in training institutions, courses, and enrolments for the four regions considered in Table 1 were 76, 101, and 23, respectively.² In at least two of the regions the enrollment figures remained essentially static. This presents an unusual pattern of growth in the Prairie and Atlantic regions: stability in enrolments and significant increases in the number of institutions and courses. It suggests not so much a greater diversity in training opportunities in these regions as the establishment of more schools offering courses in the same areas, for the most part involving business applications of computers. In contrast, both B.C. and Ontario registered significant increases not only in the number of institutions and courses but also in the number of students registered in these courses. Between 1986 and 1989, enrollments increased by over 50 percent in B.C. and by one third in Ontario.

As a proportion of the total student population undertaking formal training in Canada, proprietary enrollments are not as large as those of the community college system. However, they are almost as great as college full time enrollments if one considers similar types of training, specifically pre-employment, pre-vocational and skill upgrading (Statistics Canada, 1990). There are difficulties of interpretation in comparing college 'full-time equivalents' and PVTS registrations since PVTS programs typically are much shorter than those offered in community colleges. But in the case of the private sector, shorter program or

course duration times are quite deliberate: much of their appeal to students is due to program durations that are, on average, half those of the colleges.

It is difficult to determine the degree to which colleges impose an upper boundary on proprietary enrollments. The competitive presence of the colleges is just one element in a far more complex mix of factors affecting student participation or, more specifically, institutional choice. Certainly the college system does not provide access to all who might wish to acquire training. Either because of academic prerequisites, course availability or caps on enrollments, significant barriers to college entry remain in all provinces (Barriers Project, 1989). The private sector may pick up some of this college 'overflow' but, in fact, there is evidence that proprietary schools serve a rather different clientele or at least a segment of the student market with differing educational needs (Oepkes, 1990; Sweet, 1991; 1992a). This situation may be significantly altered with the re-direction of federal government funds to the private sector under the Labour Force Development Board scheme which broadens the base of financial support to students enrolled in proprietary schools (CLMPC, 1990). In any event, the older, more established institutions have maintained consistent annual enrollments. Less stability is found in some of the newer schools and in those established to meet an immediate market need such as data entry. Although, if intelligently marketed, the latter type of program can be remarkably successful. The Academy of Learning, for example, has franchised outlets in six provinces (and the Yukon) using a formula of instructional standardization and tight control of equipment, personnel, and class size.

2. School Types

There are two basic types of proprietary institutions: training schools and distance education schools. Training schools are organized around traditional classroom instruction often with some lab facility or site where practical applications of instruction occur. These form the focus of discussion in the present paper; however, the distance education schools comprise a significant segment of the proprietary school industry and deserve brief comment. Although few in number, the distance education schools account for an unusually large proportion of the total proprietary enrollment. The Statistics Canada (1988) survey included 49 such schools with 37,000 registrations. This meant they represented only 6% of the industry but enrolled over 20% of the students. In fact, nearly all these enrollments are attached to three or four of the largest distance education schools. Sweet (1991) studied these particular institutions and outlined their structure and operation in Canada. For the most part, the schools are organised along traditional, correspondence lines. That is, program delivery relies on the

postal system and the development of course materials is primarily based on an instructional systems design approach (Kaufman, 1989). In this regard, the private sector is not very different from its community college counterpart. Despite its potential, no significant use is made of technology to improve communications among participants. There is some provision for point-to-point telephone exchanges with tutors but this is little used either for tutoring or as an advising and support system. Sweet (1991) found that none of the schools employs audio or computer conferencing technology. The resultant lack of interaction between students and instructors is understandable in financial terms as the costs associated with audio or computer-mediated systems or with television are prohibitive for all but the most well-endowed of provincial distance education institutions. Even where broad government backing is provided, as in the case of the Open Learning Agency in B.C., or Contact North in Ontario, interactive learning projects are difficult to mount and sustain. The first generation or industrial model of course design, and its product – the ubiquitous ‘course package’ comprising text, study guide and perhaps an accompanying audio tape – is consistent with the current level of delivery technology; and it is likely to remain the preferred approach to distance learning among most schools in the private sector.

3. Facilities and Organization

The typical proprietary school is a small, even very small, operation. Many courses are offered by individuals such as the local hairdresser who will advertise for one or two students to learn the trade in his or her shop. Yet many schools offer a comprehensive program with a variety of courses, and in some cases enroll large numbers of students. These enrollments, usually concentrated in a single area such as cosmetology, business, or computer applications, illustrate the fact that most schools specialize in their program offerings. Sweet (1990b) reported slightly more than one third (36%) of schools in the private sector registered more than 100 students. A major proprietary school then can be the same size as, or even larger than, a college department or division in a technological institute but offer a more limited curriculum. For example, DeVry Institute and RCC Electronics each year enroll, respectively, 2,238 and 400 students; and their graduates fill a significant number of the electronics technician positions required annually in the province of Ontario. Size plays a role in determining the level of educational technology and even pedagogical sophistication available to a school. While PVTs were teaching word processing and data entry before most colleges in the country, these applications represent a relatively low level of technological sophistication. Relatively small size (among

other attributes) may allow responsiveness to training needs but it may also constrain the level of technological training that can be offered by a school.

The internal organization of community colleges and PVTS is highly similar in the sense that classroom instruction in both is characterised by use of the same pedagogical techniques and strategies. However, the external structures and relationships among PVTS display real variety. Other than the stand-alone school, there exist three major organizational relationships: branch schools, franchises, and subsidiaries. As with any business venture, when a school becomes successful it attempts to expand by opening another facility. There are a number of schools that operate in various locations, each school run by a resident manager yet all under a central administration. Examples of these branch schools include The Ontario Business College with eight schools, and the Toronto School of Business which runs three schools as branches and a twenty-six others as franchises. Franchise schools are a fairly recent innovation, at least on a large scale and in the field of postsecondary training. Their development reflects in part the difficulties associated with running a multi-campus organization from a single administrative centre. Like franchises in other areas of business, the essential ingredient to a successful training franchise is a consistent organizational structure and set of operating principles. The Academy of Learning franchise is an example of the application of a 'formula' in its computer applications schools. Each is well-equipped with the necessary hardware and is managed according to set rules. An interesting feature of this system is the limit placed on enrollments to ensure that owner-managers are directly involved with the instructional process. Subsidiaries of larger U.S. companies comprise the third organizational form. There are a number of schools owned by larger U.S. organizations that have either built subsidiaries in Canada or purchased established Canadian schools. These institutions have the advantage of being able to draw on the financial and curricular resources of the U.S. parent firm to improve stability in a difficult market. Often American instructional materials fit easily into a basic training course, while at other times instructional design changes are needed. This can create difficulties although probably no more than are found in the university or college classroom where U.S. curricular material is well enough known, if not always welcome. The proportion of U.S. owned schools in Canada is not large although they tend to be fairly sizable operations. Examples include the Herzing organization which has schools in Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba, and Trend Colleges with two schools in B.C. Perhaps correspondence schools have the greatest potential to expand in Canada. ICS Canadian Ltd. is an example of a distance education school that could, with the financial backing and technological expertise of its U.S. parent, develop a very

significant enrollment were it to employ modern communications technology (Sweet, 1991).

4. Program Areas

The proprietary sector offers courses in five major areas. These are shown in Table 2, together with enrollments for the 1989 year. Although information displayed in the Table can be elaborated to include gender differences in enrollments (and this is very useful in assessing the degree to which the industry contributes to accessibility), only the pattern of enrollment by program area will be employed to describe the structural features of interest in this paper.³

The Program Area labels used here differ from Statistics Canada's Major Field of Study Code Classification Structure, as this scheme collapses most of the categories that most meaningfully describe the vocational nature of PVTS training (Slade & Sweet, 1989; Sweet, 1990b). The Personal Care area includes hairdressing, cosmetology, and fashion design fields. The Business area includes management, computer applications (e.g., word processing) and traditional commercial (e.g., sales) and secretarial studies. Community Service describes health and day care training, and security services. The Hospitality and Tourism category contains hotel management, bartending and general culinary arts in addition to travel counselling training. Lastly, Technology and Trades includes all the technological and technical skills such as computer systems analysis and electronics design and maintenance; trades include truck driving, machining skills, processing and any non-apprenticed trades.

Table 2
Enrollments by Region and Program Area

Region	Program Area				
	Personal Care	Business	Community Service	Hospitality Tourism	Technology Trades
B.C.	3,329	13,065	9,171	6,156	31,092
Prairies	2,793	13,242	770	3,010	4,261
Ontario	4,498	12,230	6,728	2,416	11,301
Atlantic	2,490	5,290	780	110	1,330

The regional pattern of enrollments across program areas seen in Table 2 reveals some interesting similarities and differences. B.C. schools offer the greatest number of courses in the Technology and Trades area. This may reflect the limits on accessibility to technical training in B.C. colleges and institutes; and perhaps also the complementary nature of PVTs training in relation to the public institutions. But technical training, along with the Business area, also is the most significant category in Ontario. In the Prairie and Atlantic regions, business skills seem in greatest demand. This follows the traditional pattern of interest in PVTs in Canada. Likely the more diverse and technologically complex economies of B.C. and Ontario account for the emergence of the technical training schools in those provinces. The significance of the private sector to the personal service industry is often overlooked. While some colleges offer courses in hairdressing, cosmetology, etc., the bulk of training in these areas is carried out by PVTs. In Manitoba recent cutbacks in postsecondary funding have resulted in the transfer of all such programs (as well as some business courses) to the private training sector. Although PVTs training is oriented toward job entry, the industry also supports programming geared to the interests of the hobbyist and leisure learner. Much of this is supplied by correspondence schools in the absence of any significant distance education programming by the colleges and only a very minimal effort in the non-credit field on the part of the universities (Sweet, 1991).

The degree of overlap or complementarity between college and PVTs sectors has never been adequately studied despite the fact that any rationalization of the postsecondary training would require a knowledge of their respective contributions to programming variety. Such an analysis would have to consider not only the public and private schools but also the consultants who offer in-house training to business and industry. Some initiatives in this direction have been undertaken by the federal government (ISTC, 1990).

Operating Principles & Practices

Proprietary schools hold to a number of policies, practices and viewpoints that differ from their publicly funded counterparts. Briefly, PVTs tend to charge significantly higher tuition, have shorter courses, offer a distinctly practical or 'job-relevant' focus, and attempt to accommodate the personal situations and schedules of their students through such administrative arrangements as rolling enrollments, flexible scheduling of courses and, in some cases, experiential credit for workplace experience. These features reflect operating principles seemingly inconsistent with the effective conduct of publicly funded institutions

such as universities and colleges. Certainly they are when one considers the established, discipline-based faculties and professional programs of the universities or the curricula of traditional comprehensive colleges. The latter are, however, under increasing pressure to adopt more flexible and responsive approaches to program delivery. A reduction in provincial formula funding and the need to pursue government or employer sponsored seat purchase options in the trades and vocational areas compel colleges to adopt more innovative practices. Underlying innovation is an attitude of entrepreneurship expressed in the willingness to generate new ideas and respond to initiatives (Dennison & Benke, 1992). While there are significant differences in the entrepreneurial behaviour of PVTs and the comprehensive colleges, particular departments within many colleges possess 'organizational cultures' that are both enterprising and innovative. For example, the operation of continuing education divisions of universities and colleges and those of PVTs reflect similarities in their respective operating environments of cost-recovery and profit. There remain, however, significant differences between PVTs and colleges in the meaning given entrepreneurship and the derivative view of the student as consumer. These may be seen in statements of organizational purpose and in the administrative styles of PVTs and comprehensive colleges.

1. Entrepreneurship

The most obvious feature of proprietary school operation is the necessity to remain profitable. Recent figures published by the NACC (Nichol, 1991) indicate the industry as a whole succeeds in this regard: the one thousand or so PVTs annually generate an estimated 380 million dollars in tuition revenue. While necessary to the successful operation of the PVTs, fees can present an access barrier to many students, especially those most in need of retraining. Certainly, fees for proprietary schools are significantly higher than those of colleges. Sweet (1991) reported median fees across provinces that ranged from \$1,860 in B.C. to \$3,500 in the Atlantic region. While these give some indication of the general cost levels, there is considerable variability across program areas, with tuition in some courses as low as a few hundred dollars and in others as high as \$15,000. In comparison to fees charged by most colleges these appear exorbitant. Yet they may not be when set against opportunity costs. The greatest financial penalties for any student are foregone earnings and since most students are older, employed, and have family responsibilities, the proprietary option may be less costly. Much the same financial argument can be made for the high school graduate who is not yet employed and requires some form of training to gain entry to the workplace. Increasingly, however, the federal government is

willing to provide financial support either through seat purchase plans by Employment & Immigration or direct student loans. The latter are available to students enrolled in some 350 proprietary schools 'designated' as institutions offering courses the federal government is willing to fund through the Canada Student Loan Program.

The defining characteristic of this industry may not be the profit motive but rather a more general entrepreneurial attitude which views the student as a consumer. Because it is completely dependent on tuition fees for its income, a PVTS can design, develop, and deliver only those courses an individual or business is prepared to buy. While such market-driven arrangements may appear to contrast with the basic curriculum and instruction practices of public educational institutions, PVTS function under constraints similar to those faced by university or college continuing education departments that operate cost-recovery programs. Both offer only those programs that attract sufficient student interest and fee income and thus both employ operating principles and practices required to be financially self-supporting. Blaney (1986) describes the extent to which marketplace incentives shape the programs and operations of university continuing education and which lead to an entrepreneurial organizational culture. Here one finds parallels in the conduct of public and private institutions as each organization responds to similar, although not identical, incentives of cost-recovery and profit. Necessary also to the development of this culture is the inclusion of adult education principles with their essential concern for learner autonomy. The latter is an element in PVTS and continuing education views of the student as consumer. A sampling of the educational enterprise from a market perspective gives some sense of the cultural difference between the entrepreneurial and traditional college approaches to education and training:

1. Priority is given to part-time students.
2. Curricular relevance and quality are paramount.
3. There is a market rather than a disciplinary orientation.
4. Prerequisites are seen as barriers to participation.
5. Entrepreneurial fiscal policies are required.

Optimal operating principles and practices for the postsecondary training system are not easily determined. Significant change and innovation will nevertheless be required of the existing system. To the extent entrepreneurial principles underlie innovative behaviour, the shared operating principles and practices of the PVTS and the continuing education departments offer one response to an unpredictable training environment. The need for innovation was anticipated by

Dennison and Gallagher (1986) who listed five possible directions for change in the college system. Offered as policy choices in the mid-eighties, they serve to describe the system's present day complexity and evolving status:

“..... they can evolve from their (comprehensive) roots; they can become preparatory institutions; they can become training institutions; they can specialize; they can become centres for lifelong learning; and they can decide that these choices are not always mutually exclusive.” (p. 177)

These images of the college were presented as alternatives to meet the general educational needs of individuals living in the ‘information age’ but they specifically reflected a concern with ‘the altered training requirements of the labour force. Dennison and Gallagher (1986) emphasized the value of the lifelong learning option as one which incorporated more open learning concepts: that is, one which was sensitive to the personal circumstances of adult learners and responsive also to the requirements of business and industry. Dennison and Benke (1992: 70) subsequently discussed the activities of this more responsive college system in terms of its ability to innovate. Specifically, this meant a desire to develop creative instructional models, imaginative courses and programs, organizational and administrative structures which are more efficient and effective, and innovative ways of meeting the needs of business and industrial clientele. Innovative activity and an entrepreneurial attitude are displayed with increasing frequency by colleges and universities as they attempt to anticipate changing economic and social circumstances. Dennison and Benke’s (1992) findings indicated that individual colleges employed many unique and innovative practices within their mainstream programming; but, overall, the community college system defined its mandate in ways which differed from the entrepreneurial approach of the PVTs.

2. Goals

At the centre of the lifelong learning option is a focus on the student (Dennison & Gallagher, 1986: 151). In responding to the individual, PVTs attempt to be sensitive to market forces -- both those of the job market and those of their student clientele, who typically wish to acquire job entry or advancement skills as quickly as possible. Some sense of the centrality of the “student as consumer” concept to the operation of PVTs may be seen in a comparison of goal statements of proprietary school owners and public sector administrators and officials. Table 3 indicates their respective positions on a set of goals that reflect the twin concerns of accessibility to students and the relevance of skills.

2.1 Accessibility

As may be seen in Table 3, the general orientation of the comprehensive college and PVTS are similar to the extent that both are concerned with defined areas of vocational training and with education. But their motivations differ. For example, the college ratings of access and responsiveness to community or regional needs suggest a traditional rather than entrepreneurial organizational culture. College responses to these items reflect the concerns of most provincial governments with improved accessibility for disadvantaged groups and the efficient and rational distribution of educational resources across communities. The private sector appears more sensitive to the individual student's immediate employment needs and to the requirements of employers. In other words, PVTS appear organized to react to the demands of a market comprising students and employers while colleges are guided more by social imperatives as interpreted by provincial governments.

Table 3
Goal Priorities of Community Colleges and Private Vocational Training Schools¹

Goal	College Rank	PVTS Rank
1. Provide access to educational opportunities.	1	4
2. Impart knowledge & skills in vocations & specialized fields.	2	2
3. Serve educational interests or needs of community or region.	3	5.5
4. Train for employment.	4	1
5. Encourage exploration & development of individual potential.	5	3
6. Provide broad, comprehensive curriculum for education & training.	6	5.5
7. Provide instruction in basic, general education.	7	6

¹ College ranks from Dennison (1989) and Dennison & Levin, (1988); PVTS ranks from NACC records. College sample = 14; PVTS sample = 19

There are a number of immediate access issues facing postsecondary education institutions, including the proprietary schools. The most significant of these involves a change in student characteristics. Like the colleges, proprietary schools will be forced to adjust to demographic shifts in age, gender, and ethnic composition. Although postsecondary enrollments have not declined to the degree predicted (Secretary of State, 1991), the population of students in the 'traditional' age range of 17 to 24 continues to shrink and both public and private schools must address the training needs of the older, adult student. In fact, many proprietary schools have always served the older learner so this will not be too dramatic an adjustment for them. The significant number of women entering the labour force will, however, have important implications for the pattern of proprietary school enrollment. An increase in the proportion of female students will entail significant alterations in course structure, as greater numbers of women seek not only job entry and upgrading skills but also training for positions in non-traditional jobs, including the trades and technology areas. Predictions for college and university enrollments indicate the number of part-time students will increase significantly. Both institutions are gearing up for older students with family and employment responsibilities who must nevertheless upgrade their work skills. To accommodate these part-time enrollments, colleges are developing distance education programs, training partnerships with business and industry, off-campus facilities and a variety of continuing education and extension activities. Proprietary schools will also have to construct programs with even more flexible entry points and instructional formats than they currently attempt. There is some evidence that the industry is doing so in the form of single courses for individuals or modularised programs tailored to the needs of particular companies (Sweet, 1992a).

Whether or not the proprietary schools operate to expand the social base of access is unclear. Certainly, there are those who argue that private sector training programs in Canada foster class and gender divisions among students, thus limiting the aspirations of some to improved career and social mobility (Bruneau, 1989; Brown, 1989; Kutz, 1989). However, in order to adjudicate this issue, it will be necessary to gather data that describe the backgrounds of both college and proprietary school students and which trace their respective experiences from training through employment.

2.2 Skill

The distinction between training and education is often made in comparing the goals of PVTs and community colleges. Vocational education typically is seen by the colleges to include building a context for skill development or as a means

of enhancing the individual's quality of life. In this form it frequently is claimed by the colleges as a curricular difference that enhances their graduates' job mobility, if not also their job entry prospects. Interestingly, we find in Table 3 that neither group assigns this a high priority. The college respondents' indifferent position toward the goal of providing a 'broadly based and comprehensive' training curriculum is curious, given their stated views on the value of a general education (ACCC, 1986). Neither sector rated as a priority the upgrading function of basic education. Presumably the latter is seen as the responsibility of another level of education (i.e., the public school system). The position of college and PVTS groups on the value of generic skill acquisition cannot be directly read from the available data; although quite different views may be inferred from their ratings of 'training for employment'. These differences are related to issues of skill development for job entry to and work in an increasingly technological workplace.

With employment increasingly divided into 'good jobs' and 'bad jobs' on the basis of stability and income (Picot, Miles, & Wannell, 1990), there is considerable debate as to the role skills play in positioning people in one or other of these categories. It is generally assumed that higher levels of education are required in a workplace increasingly dominated by technology. More difficult to determine is the nature of training required for job entry and continued mobility within the automated workplace: should students be taught generalizable skills such as problem solving, decision making, and evaluation; or is task-specific skill training more useful to the individual? When one examines the programs and stated aims of PVTS, their claim to workplace relevance appeals to students seeking entry-level positions, although the argument is often made that relevance and specificity may not serve students well over the course of their careers (Dennison, 1988; Park, 1989). This seems to be the view underlying current government policy (Economic Council, 1992; EIC, 1989; Prosperity Secretariat, 1992) despite difficulties in determining the cognitive requirements of career mobility. The literature on skill definition and measurement in the workplace is not easily related to the educational requirements of work nor to the prediction of job entry levels and subsequent career paths of individuals (Davies, 1986; Vallas, 1990; Bailey, 1991; Johnston, 1993). And in the context of government attempts to restructure the labour force during a period of economic recession and unemployment, it is even more difficult to disentangle the purposes represented by different indicators of training success. Where job placement is the criterion (e.g., Alberta Ministry), the issue may be more about 'the most basic kind of employability, not about any specific skill

development' (Gaskell, 1991, p. 375). This is the case where training is offered in job areas that promise no growth in employment or involve skills tailored to a workplace that offers little opportunity for career advancement.

In any event, skill development is not simply a question of whether a more generic training would better equip students for technologically involved tasks over the course of their careers. Changes in the organization of work have equally important skills implications. Most discussions of the relevance of training assume a traditional form of work organization which typically is hierarchical and authoritarian, where productive work demands conformity and compliance on the part of the employee. Alternative positions on the nature of relevant workplace skills are, however, emerging and to a significant degree reflect a reanalysis and redefinition of traditional management forms. In these settings, individual initiatives in the production (or service delivery) process are encouraged, as is a conceptual understanding of the total operation of the organization. To the extent collaboration among employees is required for effectiveness and productivity, cooperative interpersonal skills are a necessary part of an employee's skill repertoire (Kern & Shumann, 1987; Streek, 1989).

Both technology and management, then, determine the relevance of workplace skill and have important implications for future training designs and indicators of their effectiveness (see, e.g., Levin & Rumberger, 1989; Elam, 1990). A detailed comparison of the college approach to skill development and that of the proprietary schools is needed to inform future postsecondary training policy. At the present time we can only assume that with their claim to job relevance and short course durations, the proprietary schools develop very task-specific skill sets and likely socialize students to an employee role within current work organization forms. Whether the somewhat different goals and programs of colleges are conducive to generic skill development and collaborative interpersonal skill acquisition among students is not clear. Nor can it be determined whether or to what degree a general education informs both domains. But these are empirical questions and not ones to be decided through conjecture or assertion (Marshall, 1989; Turk, 1990).

3. Personnel

In describing the entrepreneurial nature of continuing education, Blaney (1986) suggests that while distinctive goals are basic to establishing an organization's culture, the decisions that shape its unique character are related to the ways the institution organizes, motivates and develops the professional skills of its employees. This refers specifically to the style of leadership. In the case of proprietary schools, leadership is most often provided by an owner-operator. Only

in the larger schools are managers found and since 64% of proprietary schools enroll fewer than 100 students (Sweet, 1991), many instructors are also school owners. The style of management necessarily is very 'hands on' and most owners are directly involved in all aspects of the training and administration of the school. While there exists no research that would allow one to characterise the typical Canadian PVTS owner, Wilms (1987) describes the 'individualistic' character of U.S. owners and managers, while at the same time cautioning against stereotyping, as they are a group too diverse to permit easy generalization:

“(Proprietary school owners) share some basic qualities that set them apart from traditional educators: a libertarian outlook, a belief in the profit motive, an entrepreneurial spirit, a belief in the free market, and a distrust of public planning.” (p. 16)

A perusal of *The Communicator* (the professional publication of Canadian PVTS) or attendance at their annual convention provides the casual observer with evidence of many of the same sentiments among Canadian owners. However, their notion of government and its role in the training enterprise appears to be undergoing some recent revision. In any event, there are sufficient differences in the Canadian and U.S. social contexts of education (e.g., Skolnik, 1991) that a profile of Canadian owners likely would reveal a unique view.

In terms of their classroom and laboratory arrangements, and faculty teaching responsibilities, the larger schools and chains function in much the same manner as publicly funded vocational and technical institutes. Regardless of size, however, significant differences do appear to exist in the credentialling of faculty and in their employment conditions. Pedagogical training is not a criterion for employment as an instructor at a proprietary school although teaching effectiveness is essential in an institution which views the student as a consumer: one who has paid directly for tuition and is seeking job-related skills. School managers and owners of successful schools are quick to point out that institutional longevity rests on satisfied students and graduates who find employment and that these are in large measure a function of effective instruction. The implications of these evaluative criteria are discussed in some detail by Wilms (1987) who points out their impact on faculty hiring and retention in U.S. proprietary schools. Less is known about PVTS faculty in Canada as little beyond basic demographic data and professional accreditation is available, a condition only now being addressed by ACCC and EIC (EIC, 1992).

Many faculty members of proprietary schools are part-time employees although it is difficult to assess the status of instructors in the smaller establishments

such as cosmetology or hairdressing shops. Full-time college faculty teach approximately 600 hours per year. Sweet (1990b) found that 65% of PVTs faculty taught less than 500 hours annually. Part-time instructors often are employed in areas of business or industry that are instructionally relevant. It can be argued that this builds in a measure of curricular currency, although there are distinct limitations to institutional development and continuity when the majority of staff is temporary. Nor are there consistent ways of ensuring instructors are pedagogically aware or competent; although in the Province of Newfoundland, Memorial University's Faculty of Education is offering instruction and certification to private sector instructors. On the other hand, most proprietary instructors do not face the barriers and constraints to professional development encountered by their community college counterparts who often find it difficult to return to an active role in business and industry, even for a short period of upgrading. This situation is, however, being rectified in some colleges through mandatory study and work leaves (MCU, 1990).

Regulation & Accreditation

Ensuring program quality involves matters of accreditation and accountability. The private post-secondary education sector is regulated, managed or influenced by a variety of agencies and forces, some external to the industry and others developed within the industry itself. These may be categorised as: *provincial governments*, which impose minimal standards of operation and guarantee a measure of consumer financial protection; *industry-based trade associations*, which promote a positive image of the industry and work to improve the professional standing of its members; and the *market*, comprising students and employers who respectively choose to enroll and hire thus providing a measure of quality control. It should be stressed that the agencies, external and internal, whose task it is to set and promote standards must be viewed more as potential than real. In some provinces, government evaluation of proprietary schools is not always an annual undertaking and certainly school membership in provincial and national trade associations or with any national accreditation agency does not involve the total industry. The market is, however, a constant and in an important sense the final arbiter of quality.

1. Provincial Ministries

The most obvious external agents are the provincial governments which regulate with two legal instruments: through legislation such as the B.C. apprenticeship act; and with an annual monitoring procedure involving inspection and

assessment of a school's operation. Both serve the primary purpose of holding proprietary schools to minimal standards of program quality. Regulations within the various provincial acts governing the private post-secondary industry contain a wide array of sections: precicensing requirements, government fee structures, the approval of instructors, bonding requirements, advertising constraints, school management, sale of courses, cancellation agreements, stipulations concerning diplomas and certificates, and the business performance of agents who sell the courses. Annual monitoring can extend from a cursory collection of enrollment data to a thorough evaluation of staff, facilities, instructional materials, and administrative procedures. In some provinces, student evaluations are being gathered from those currently enrolled as well as graduates.

An analysis of provincial government variations in the observance of these criteria was presented in Slade and Sweet (1989). Annual reporting clearly aims at maintaining a quality control of the industry and is potentially the most powerful external regulatory influence upon the industry. There currently are a number of changes in the organization of individual provincial departments. Some are designed to strengthen existing regulations, while others appear to express the view that the industry should be largely self-regulating (Slade, 1990). In 1987, the provincial administrators of the legislation formed a national association to exchange information and consult on policy development. The annual meeting of this group allows an exchange of information and a sharing of effective practices. It would appear that very different approaches are being taken by the various ministries. Ontario is making every effort to consult with the industry as they make more efficient their application of the existing act. Newfoundland is requiring that proprietary school instructors take instruction in pedagogy from the Memorial University Faculty of Education. Alberta is enforcing standards of school performance as a condition of their eligibility for financial support. These conditions include specified dropout rates and job placement rates. In B.C., a commission has been established to determine an institution's eligibility for student loan support. This commission would be independent of government and the industry although the schools would be called upon to finance its operations through a levy additional to the annual registration fee. While there are obvious differences across provinces, there also is an interest in establishing a national exchange of information for the resolution of problems and the more rational development of policy. The further development of the provincial administrators' professional association will facilitate these exchanges.

2. Industry-Based Trade Associations

Quality is influenced by the industry itself through the different trade associations established on both provincial and national levels. Here, the purpose is not to set minimal standards of program quality but to promote higher standards of educational and training excellence. Provincial associations exist in all four regions but in only five Provinces: B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Newfoundland. New Brunswick is in the process of organizing an association. In general, the aims of these associations are:

1. to present the industry's views to government agencies, legislatures and other agencies;
2. to promote mutual respect, goodwill and understanding among members;
3. to foster a positive image of the industry to the public;
4. to encourage improvements to curriculum through research and training;
5. to provide members with data pertinent to the industry;

At the national level, a number of schools belong to the National Association of Career Colleges (NACC). Serving some 73 members, the association has general aims and objectives similar to those of the provincial associations, but provides some additional services including a national network of examination sites for association members and vocational competency testing in some 40 fields. The NACC publication, *The Communicator*, serves the industry as an information exchange and forum for continuing professional education.

Affiliated with the NACC is the National Accreditation Commission. Founded in 1984, it is an industry-initiated organization which exerts a professional influence upon member organizations towards a goal of "Excellence in Education". Organizations seeking accreditation, and the obvious status and credibility that accompanies professional scrutiny, submit themselves to an evaluative process based on admission procedures, faculty expertise, program features, scope of facilities, student services and business practices. Initial entry consists of submitting basic school documentation with later on-site evaluations carried out by the organization's commissioners or their delegates. Potential members must have been in business for at least two years and an earned accreditation is for a five year period. While the number of institutions granted accreditation status remains quite small (thirty-one main schools and six branch schools in May, 1989), a professional standard is in evidence, based upon criteria

of excellence rather than upon minimal standards. The potential for institutional improvement is likely greater through the professional development efforts of the associations than as a consequence of government monitoring.

Support for the trend toward greater coordination of accreditation activity is limited to relatively few institutions, but among those who have involved themselves are the larger institutions and the correspondence schools which, by the very nature of their business, tend toward a broader, national perspective. The NACC is moving to become the parent body of all the provincial trade associations. As an 'umbrella' organization, the NACC would be better placed to involve the proprietary schools in the political process of the Labour Force Development Board's attempts to establish a national training scheme. In fact, despite their individualism, the proprietary schools have been acting on a national level for many years. Where the colleges have been constrained by their regional, 'community' mandate and by federal-provincial jurisdictional constraints, the proprietary system has established a national infrastructure for curriculum, testing and institutional accreditation.

3. The Market

An external influence on program quality is the market itself. This would include students as consumers of training who have a measure of choice in their selection of schools, either private or public. Continued enrollments as well as positive student evaluations of the training experience are indicators of quality. There is, however, little available evidence of program quality that has been gathered from students. The follow-up surveys of students conducted by the schools themselves may be discounted, as they represent successful graduates willing to respond to a questionnaire. However, the Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training in 1988 and 1989 surveyed students and graduates. Those who did not complete the program or course were also surveyed. As reported by Oepkes (1990), the results indicated a reasonably high level of satisfaction with those aspects of instruction that most directly concern students: teachers, curriculum materials, and the facilities and amenities of the institution. Obviously, results from one Province do not allow generalization or comparison but they do give some indication of the reaction of students to proprietary school training. More than anything else, they reinforce the Economic Council's (1992) recent call for more and improved data on the postsecondary system in general and the private sector in particular.

A second market force consists of the employers of the PVTs graduates. To the extent employers are satisfied with the entry-level skills and attitudes of proprietary school graduates, their hiring preferences operate as a quality control

guide to the schools. For example, acceptance by Alberta schools of the job placement criterion for accreditation by the ministry in that province suggests a willingness to operate successfully within a market-driven model. Certainly, one of the implied (and sometimes stated) outcomes of the task-specific skills training offered by proprietary schools is successful job placement. To strengthen this relationship further, many schools operate placement services, while others maintain close, personal contact with business and industry to ensure program relevance and to facilitate the transition of their students to the workplace. Yet among the many surveys of Canadian employers, none has sought detailed information about proprietary school graduates. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business did study employer preferences in hiring graduates of postsecondary institutions (CFIB, 1989). Employers were asked to rate their degree of satisfaction with the 'preparation for employment' of graduates from college, university and proprietary school. The PVTs were decidedly superior in the view of small business employers. While there were some obvious methodological limitations to this research, the point nevertheless is made that the training and attitudes of proprietary school graduates are highly valued among employers who hire from this sector.

Conclusion

Concern with the relationship between vocational education and work, as expressed by governments and business at the turn of the century, parallels our current preoccupation with globalism, competition and the role of education as a means of improving competitive economic advantage (Lyons, Randhawa, & Paulson, 1991). As was the case then, government continues to shape the relationship between public and private education sectors. This is apparent in broad policy statements concerned with developing a 'learning culture' (Prosperity Secretariat, 1992) and in more specific initiatives such as the Labour Force Development Boards (CLFDB, 1991). In addition to its commitment to improved education for marginalized workers, the labour force strategy promotes the direct involvement of the private sector in post-secondary training. It likely does so with the aim of introducing a degree of competition to the post-secondary system although the more pressing requirement is the mobilization of all available training resources in Canada. The Canadian Labour Market Productivity Centre (CLMPC, 1990) and other policy bodies have consistently and repeatedly stated in their recommendations to government that the demand for training so far exceeds the capacity of the established education system that all post-secondary sectors must be involved if the labour force is to be upgraded

and made capable in the restructured economy of the 1990s. To the extent government policies promote diversity among Canada's training institutions, a complementary role for the PVTs and colleges likely will emerge. There are obvious gains in efficiency from such a development but they are not without qualification.

The continued polarization of the Canadian work force, made evident in the rapid growth of service sector employment (part-time with minimal pay), defined the shape of labour markets throughout the 1980s. Mobilizing Canada's training resources to help overcome these divisions through a policy of institutional diversity does imply complementary roles for PVTs and the community colleges and institutes within the postsecondary system (Hatton, 1990; Sweet, 1992b). At the present time, postsecondary education in Canada is stratified along lines which roughly parallel the mental-menial divisions of the work force. In both educational and employment arenas, greater value is accorded professional than vocational pursuits, largely because the former confers greater career mobility. It is, consequently, important that PVTs attend to the skills they develop in students. Where the schools contract with a company to present an employee training program, highly task specific instruction probably is appropriate. For the most part, proprietary schools train for entry-level employment and the job-relevant nature of their programs may limit the career opportunities of their graduates. Certainly, training for work that is terminally menial or has little potential for advancement does not serve the long term interests of students. Within a framework of government regulation, funding and policy direction, private vocational training schools and some divisions of community colleges have responded in innovative ways to meet the training demands of students who themselves are required to meet rapidly changing conditions of work. The operating principles and practices of the PVTs in particular exhibit an innovative spirit which is consistent with the need for institutional responsiveness. Both colleges and PVTs are likely to benefit from government policies designed to encourage efficiencies in the provision of training through institutional diversity. However, as they assume a more meaningful role in Canada's postsecondary system, PVTs must join with the colleges and institutes in defining their respective contributions to improved training and human resource development. The practices of the proprietary schools and those segments of the public sector that display an entrepreneurial attitude can provide a model or metaphor for institutional change. However, to the extent complementary roles for college and PVTs continue the traditional division between the curricula of public and private sectors along lines of 'job entry relevance,' they will reinforce rather than alleviate the polarized condition of the labour market.

Notes

¹ Quebec established different categories for proprietary schools in 1987. Relatively few qualified for government accreditation and the Ministry declined to participate in the 1989 survey (Sweet, 1990b). At the present time, the only comparative data available are to be found in the 1986 survey by Statistics Canada (1988).

² It seems likely Statistics Canada included the B.C. Telephone Company's Education Centre in its 1986 survey. At the time it enrolled approximately 20,000 students. The practice of the B.C. Ministry is to discount these enrollments in the annual tally, as the Centre offers very short-term courses and most of their training is for B.C. Telephone employees (Sylvester, 1991). Consequently, the Statistics Canada (1988) entry for B.C. has been adjusted.

³ A re-analysis of the 1986 survey data (Statistics Canada, 1988) showed obvious gender divisions in enrollments for business (secretarial) and technological program areas. A similar pattern emerged from 1989 data collected in a survey of proprietary schools (Sweet, 1990b).

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