

Public Colleges and Democracy*

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ABSTRACT

Classical liberal democratic theorists stressed that, although formal democracy with a universal franchise was all but inevitable, the success of the democratic experiment depended upon the growth of an educated and informed electorate. An essential element in the development of civic competence among voters is accessibility to public educational institutions. This article examines three innovative contributions made by Canadian colleges to practices of equity that bring gendered, racialized power relations into view. Based on recent visits to fifty campuses, we argue first that public colleges have a good record in opening access for those students previously excluded from postsecondary education and in tackling the challenging problem of literacy education which is basic for democratic participation; however, they face enduring difficulties in providing liberal arts education for their students and in recruiting faculty from underserved groups. While college literacy teachers are devoted and skilled educators, they do not feel supported by their administrations in the difficult task of engaging and educating socially oppressed students. Finally, although enrolment statistics suggest that the liberal arts and civic education are alive and well in Canada, we raise a suspicion that education for the practice of democracy through exposure to the liberal arts—including critical analysis in history and the social sciences—falls far short of its potential.

Keywords: equity, colleges, restructuring, literacy, faculty, marginalized groups, democracy

Introduction

We, in Canada, live in an undemocratic moment in our country's history when the son of an oil company executive from a province held captive by the industry has been voted into office as our prime minister (Engler, 2012). His disdain for public institutions such as parliament is palpable; and he has launched what has been called an 'assault on scientific knowledge' through reducing academic research funding for environmental scientists (*Academic Matters*, May 2013). His approach contrasts with President Obama's responsiveness to public outcries about the plans of the oil industry. Panitch and Gindin (2012) have argued that transnational corporations want to keep the public system in place for their benefit, and part of our concern is that public institutions are being hollowed out to serve corporate interests such as the oil industry. We are feminist anti-racist sociologists who know that power relations in the society are glossed in the problematic word 'democracy.' For one thing, 'equality' is a word associated with democracy, but we know that it is not a level playing field for women, racialized minorities or the poor. We call ourselves 'equity' theorists in recognition of broadening the definition of democracy to take these power relations into account.

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Classical democratic theory advocates a robust and active citizenry engaged in a process of self-governance in which the people are represented by elected politicians who are, in some fashion, responsible to the people who elected them. The Anglo-American democracies generally regard themselves as the originators and among the most mature examples of modern democratic governance. Their sentiments are expressed in the antique phrasing of the *Magna Charta* (1215), stirring words of the American *Declaration of Independence* (1776), Britain's Great Reform Bill of 1832 and the British North America Act of Canadian confederation (1867). Arguably with universal manhood suffrage in place from the outset, these countries with their diverse institutions but common political philosophies are exemplars of an approach to politics and government that wins widespread recognition.

The flowery prose of these founding texts, however, hid reservations about whether these experiments in democracy would work, with English reformer John Stuart Mill urging that every effort be made to educate citizens to the responsibilities of the vote. Mill believed that democracy was educational in itself: democratic participation, he said, helped "promote the general advancement of the community," including under that the phrase "advancement in intellect, in virtue, and in practical activity and efficiency" (1910, p. 195). Black American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) had earlier argued for advancing Black participation in democracy through the educating of a 'talented tenth.' Schumpeter later made similar arguments warning that maintaining an active interest and high level of political awareness were too much to expect from ordinary people, instead seeing a plurality of elites performing this function. He offered the more "realistic" view that the democratic method was "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire power by means of a competitive struggle for the peoples' vote" (1943, p. 269).

But American universal manhood suffrage was not implemented until 60 years after Jefferson wrote that "all men are created equal" (and it took 30 years more to free US slaves). Women did not win the right to vote until 1920, slightly preceded by Canada. We have just celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Martin Luther King's famous 1963 "I have a dream" civil rights speech. And Nelson Mandela waited until 1994 to lead a Black South Africa. In recent times, scholars such as Vicente Navarro (1980) have eloquently critiqued the idea that the vote alone could implement democracy. Meanwhile, the people of the UK, the US and Canada are demonstrating historically low levels of participation in the form of voting and historically high levels of apathy and cynicism with regard to the people and institutions that are their putative representatives in government.

But what of the idea that exposure to public education could undergird democratic participation beyond the vote (despite modern advertising campaigns, the growth of public bureaucracies and the enormous influence of corporate culture in ensuring that decisions favour the wealthy and marginalize or suppress options favourable to the working and middle classes)? While we cannot yet answer this question, we have been able to explore what is currently transpiring in public postsecondary education, focusing specifically on those who had historically been excluded from the benefits of civic education in Canada.

Have Public Colleges Contributed to Democracy?

In a critical article concerned with the political economy of educational innovation, Doughty et al., (2009) questioned discourses of liberation surrounding the great expansion of

access to postsecondary education in Canada and elsewhere in the 1960s. Massification indeed disrupted a history of schooling in the classics when “postsecondary education was reserved for the elite”(Doughty et al., 2009: 7). They suggested, however, that it was also schooling for compliance, ‘cooling out,’ and a lifetime of contingent work. In the ‘new’ economy

students are increasingly expected to complete high school and go on to college or university with the intent of becoming contributors to the new, highly competitive, knowledge-based technology-driven global economy—complete with its emphasis on ‘people skills’ and its prerequisite of computer literacy. (Doughty et al, 2009: 9)

The reality, they argue, is that these promises of upward mobility “simply could not be met” (Doughty et al.: 9), and schooling in the 1990s crept towards larger class sizes, less critical content, more psychologizing, and the use of educational technology. In the new millennium, in “teaching to outcomes,” faculty became subject to administrative accountability practices, including treating “students as clients,” thus closing up the few spaces they had to experience academic freedom.

In response, the authors urge a “pedagogy of resistance” for college educators and “critical reflection on power relations that influence our thoughts,” (Doughty et al., 2009: 22) keeping an eye on Dewey’s goal of stimulating “active and informed citizenship” and the ability to “control [one’s] social destiny” (Doughty et al., 2009: 19), as well as Gramsci’s advocacy of emancipatory education for the working class. (Doughty et al, 2009: 20) To Dewey and Gramsci, we would add the emancipatory inspiration of feminists such as Dorothy Smith (2006), who advocates that researchers seek to construct a ‘roadmap’ of power relations for use by activists; Vandana Shiva (1993), whose environmental global activism has made inroads on a “monoculture of the mind” dominant culture; Roxana Ng (1999), who critiqued our multicultural policies before this became fashionable; and Marie Battiste (1995) whose tireless activism has had an important impact in working towards basic respect for Indigenous knowledges.

It is in this spirit that we examine the ‘democratic’ and equity commitments of Canada’s community colleges as expressed to us in interviews which we conducted with more than 300 college faculty and administrators over the past seven years on 50 Canadian public college campuses. We believe that whatever democracy we have in Canada would be much diminished if the public spaces we studied, public colleges, did not exist. To be explicit, we are convinced that if this broad access to postsecondary education did not exist, and specifically, if commitment to literacy by the colleges did not exist, and if exposure to the liberal arts tradition did not exist, our democracy would be stunted. Of course, colleges are not the only postsecondary educational (PSE) institutions in our society contributing to these activities, but we will argue that public colleges are making contributions in these areas that are largely unexplored by critical scholars.

In choosing to focus on colleges in this paper, we depart from the tradition in critical higher education literature which deals almost exclusively with universities and their movement towards neoliberal ‘academic capitalism’ (e.g. Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Newson and Polster, 2010; Klein, 1999). Their arguments are similar to those made by Doughty et al. (2009), except that the emphasis is put on how the research function of universities has become more oriented

towards industry rather than basic science, and how accounting logic has been imported into university functions such as teaching, evaluation, governance and exclusive contracts for services.

This ‘ignoring’ of colleges by critical scholars might make sense if there were few colleges and if they had an insignificant impact on our political economic, social and cultural life. A glance at Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) statistics (Tables 3.1/3.2, p. 39, 2012-3) shows that if you leave out trades enrolments, Canadian universities have more full-time and part-time students than colleges, but we suspect the proportions would be equal if the trades were included. CAUT data also shows college enrolments have grown faster than those of universities in the past 10 years. Also colleges are greater in number than universities (122 vs. 92) and they are considerably more geographically dispersed than universities, reflecting their stated commitments to access and equity for students. They are also smaller on average than universities. Although similar to universities, they reflect their unique provincial contexts. In this paper, we reflect on three democratic missions supported by Canadian colleges and how their work is challenged. These are (1) addressing the elitism of PSE in Canada by drawing in working class, women and racial minorities who may be first generation PSE attenders; (2) offering literacy upgrading to those, who, for various reasons, did not achieve literacy in high school; and (3) exposing students to liberal arts beyond the high school level, increasing their opportunities for understanding and participating in democratic forums.

Colleges, Equity and Access

The Open University in the UK is generally recognized as the innovation that made postsecondary education accessible to working class individuals in that society. In Canada, colleges have served that function. Our Quebec interviewees recalled the democratic mandate of the *Collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel* (CEGEPs), particularly in opening up what had been a church-controlled higher education system to “the world” (Gossage and Little, p. 186). Ontario established its colleges as part of massification of education in the Province which had begun much earlier with the return of veterans from the second world war (Neary and Granatstein, 1998). This might be seen as a ‘democratic’ innovation although, as Doughty et al., (2009) suggest, there was a ‘streaming’ justification for the establishment of colleges to train those who would be skilled workers in the economy. This ‘streaming’ is particularly evident with respect to women. Colleges certainly opened up education to working class women, but many of the occupations that they are educated for remain undervalued both in terms of status and salary (Armstrong and Armstrong, 2010). To the extent that streaming was the goal, a ‘two solitudes’ situation developed between universities and colleges (with lack of transfer credit from colleges to universities and difficulties in administering collaborative programs).

In terms of equity for faculty, colleges are among the most unionized institutions in Canadian society, and have thus been able, in principle, to bargain collectively to improve the quality of education as well as their own working conditions. For example, many liberal studies and also trades faculty with experience on the shop floor have become innovative union leaders. At the same time, faculty unions experience severe disadvantages. Although the employer is nominally at arms-length from the provincial government, the reality is that negotiations take place within a framework in which the employer and the legislators are effectively conjoined. An example of how this relation limits the operation of unions occurs when the right to strike has is

exercised by faculty and government legislates them back to work. Arguably, this happens just about the time when any wage increase is offset by the savings gained while the professors were on the picket line.

As well, it is not uncommon for collective agreements to contain comprehensive lists of “exclusive management functions” that arguably reject academic freedom in principle and deny meaningful influence over educational quality insofar as curriculum, class size and other pertinent conditions are concerned. Thus any improvements in those areas must be negotiated as “workload issues” only. That said, faculty unions have been in the forefront of workers’ rights struggles, especially with regard to harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Moreover, efforts to address issues of equity and social justice have yielded results, often by connecting with civic society groups (such as the “Occupy Movement” and the student demonstrators in Québec in 2012). Even here, however, the authorities have done their best to mute the voice of faculty. In some colleges, for instance, internal processes for dealing with racial and sexual harassment complaints have been turned against the teachers in actions taken against activist faculty. Legal obstacles have also been put in the way of faculty members seeking to organize effective unions. For example, faculty strikes are disallowed in some jurisdictions by including college with other public sector workers as providing essential services (Swimmer & Bartkiw, 2008).

But let us return to our discussion of students in public colleges. As in the UK, in the process of providing access to underserved groups, Canada’s PSE has made substantial efforts developing distance education beginning in the 1970s in remote areas, such as the Yukon, northern Alberta and British Columbia, as well as the east (Davis, 2000). This culminated in institutions specializing in distance education, such as Thompson Rivers University (formerly Cariboo Community College), Athabasca University and Yukon College. Although most of the Canadian population resides in urban areas in the south, there are enough small remote communities that it would be impossible to fly faculty to all of them in our northern regions. Distance technology allows faculty to teach at such remote locations using a blended approach. This approach blends initial face to face contact with the faculty which forms a basis for later contact through either real time technology or virtual delivery. Considerable disagreement exists in the literature about the efficacy of distance education (Côté and Allahar, 2011). Based on our interviews with faculty, we would question the appropriateness of stand-alone on-line teaching for groups such as trades, nursing and Aboriginal students. In ECE and youth and child worker programs, despite the widespread use of distance technology, the necessity of hands-on education would also seem to preclude the exclusive use of distance technology (Muzzin and Meaghan, 2011). But Canada has certainly addressed access in the sense of geography.

The scholarly literature on discrimination in Canada has proliferated in recent years, and it is generally recognized that anti-racist and anti-sexist policies in education are basic in a just society (Wallis and Fleras, 2009; das Gupta et al., 2007). There are large numbers of Aboriginal people near and within urban centres in the south, and a few colleges in our study reported the details of projects to increase access in these areas. For example, a dean at an eastern college reported:

I'm negotiating [college prep] for Aboriginal people to get into our natural resource programs. We're going to be one of three pilots across Canada looking at training and then access into natural resources [programs]. And so I was negotiating with [Aboriginal organizations] and I talked to our VP and said 'you know this is what we're doing'...and he put a lawyer on it...and got the agreement.... So we are looking at on reserve and then moving to our campus.... I have an Aboriginal file because I've dealt for quite a while with the Aboriginal community. And so we have [initiatives] in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, PEI and we've been to Quebec.

In addition to reaching underserved (Aboriginal) populations, Canada's public colleges have also made commitments to inclusion of women in the trades and technology, people with disabilities and racialized individuals, including immigrants. There is a significant Black population in eastern Canada and several college staff members at one multi-campus provincial system described recruiting Black students into business, nursing and ABE (Adult Basic Education). One coordinator talked of pre-trades programs that were working to get Blacks into trade unions, since "they can't get up the ladder and get a higher paying job because they don't have that piece of paper."

It should be noted that while much enthusiasm is shown by public college administrators for recruiting paying students of all types (viz. international, Aboriginal, immigrant), the recruitment of faculty from these groups has not been as vigorous. There are exceptions, such as a college in central Canada that reports 35 percent of its staff are self-identified people of colour (not breaking out the percentage of faculty from staff). But, in general, we found that a trumpeted commitment to equity for students was not reflected in recruiting diverse faculty. In an eastern college, one faculty member commented that in his college's preparatory program, "all the faculty are Black," while "in some campuses we have single digit numbers," whereas in 1994, he had been the only Black staff member in the system. His dean agreed, but cautioned that

on the faculty side we are nowhere [in terms of recruiting Aboriginal faculty] because traditionally on the Aboriginal side they don't meet the educational requirements ... I think if we were to get more programs that were based in First Nation communities you may get more faculty. But to have them leave their community and go somewhere else, that isn't as attractive.

It is not widely known that Aboriginal people are overrepresented in college populations though it is widely cited that they are underrepresented in university populations (Hinds, 2014). However, even for those northern colleges committed to affirmative action, it has been a struggle to recruit and retain Aboriginal faculty. Furthermore, our impressions are that faculty in colleges across Canada are still very White outside of technology and science studies, with a particular underrepresentation of Black and Asian teachers. We also note that feminized programs such as nursing and the liberal arts contain large numbers of contingent faculty. As Rajagopal (2002) has pointed out with respect to university faculty, people of colour are overrepresented among the contingent teaching cadre and we noticed the same pattern of minoritization in colleges.

The *inclusion* of marginalized groups in postsecondary education is only a first step. For those who find their way into the academy, the scholarly literature amply documents what is called a “chilly climate” for women and racial minorities (Stalker and Prentice, 1998; Graveline, 2002; Mogadime, 2002). Although we did discover two colleges in our study with commitments to eradicating chilly climate for people of colour, there was a general ‘colour blindness’ about the existence of a chilly climate for racialized minorities in other colleges, and there were enough instances of all kinds of discrimination reported from across the country that we can assume that we cannot distinguish between colleges and universities in this respect.

Colleges and Literacy

High school is the major institution in Canada dealing with producing literate and numerate citizens, but colleges make a major contribution to literacy in several ways. First, they provide high school equivalencies in the form of ABE for adult students as well as high school credentials in provinces such as Nova Scotia. Second, they provide courses for entrance to particular college programs (called “college prep”) that may have not been part of the student’s original curriculum of study in high school. Third, they engage students whose first language is not English or French, for both immigrants and individuals born in Canada. Fourth, they provide ESD (English as a Second Dialect) education for Aboriginal students. And fifth, they provide what is called ‘upgrading’ to prepare individuals to function in particular work settings.

Côté and Allohar (2011) talk of ‘disengaged’ university students spending more time on social media than studying, but college literacy teachers almost never complain about disengagement, since they see it as part of their mandate to engage. In fact, we were moved as we heard passionate ABE, ESL, ESD and upgrading college teachers from all across Canada (many of them contingent faculty) talking about their challenges in teaching literacy. This pedagogy is sophisticated, difficult and undervalued. The commitments of faculty to teaching excellence go beyond lecturing to provide hands on and total engagement for students with learning challenges, which are seldom appreciated in the mainstream higher education literature. Here is what one ABE instructor told us:

One of the big things about dealing with an adult population which is highly impoverished both economically and educationally is that they feel oppressed, repressed, and they know it, but somehow they feel powerless and they don’t know what to do.... There is no way out as far as they are concerned.... Once people reach that realization, they’ve overcome that major problem, and that is the major problem [for me] in the whole area [of counseling]. They come to you with life problems and you have to deal with them on a very, very personal, very sensitive basis, because to me they are not my issues, but I have to be very, very aware. They are their issues, and their issues affect their learning. So I am not just an academic innovator, I am doing everything. ... It is very difficult of course and I find myself very drained. ... At the end of the day I feel like my mind is just ready to go off the deep end.

Other teachers not in the field of literacy complained, providing a glimpse into the issues their literacy colleagues face—such as a business instructor describing first-year CEGEP students who arrive after Grade 11. In her words,

... they are very young and need some time to mature... Some of them are weak in written language and math, so we have to build in special tutoring sessions for these students in the [Business] program.

She talked of one part time faculty member “running a little tutoring program” though “not that many attended...[even though] administration found some money to run some clinics in the summer prior to students coming into the program and then again in the fall of their first year.” She did not know how well these efforts were working, though she noted that some students “needed more than a six-week crash course in writing and there just isn’t funds available.” Basically, she complained, faculty workload increases to make up for such student deficits. A colleague elaborated that when the Quebec government (like every other provincial government in Canada) tries to apply the competency standards for pre-university programs to the vocational stream, they have difficulty translating skill-by-skill competencies for many fields and do not

take into account that introductory college students can’t write well, do not express themselves well and we have to build into our programs compensation for these difficulties.... [T]he program says “in 15 minutes all the students will be at this level.”

The business faculty member goes on to describe all the efforts being made to address these problems including by administration to mandate more office hours, and concludes that contingent faculty like herself are heroes, not deficient themselves, in doing one-on-one tutoring with very needy students. Another contingent faculty member critiqued the government’s “student success ideology”(the equivalent of Bush’s “no student left behind” policy) by arguing that

this whole approach of getting in and getting out with the fewest rejects possible and fast, when you look at it, makes no sense. ... There is little that can be done to speed up the learning process. ... [Administrators] don’t want to provide more resources, to lower the teacher/pupil ratio, to provide tutors for the students, etc. but they want a change in the outcome.

She continued the critique by pointing out that her education ministry has “created the problem” by insisting that “no one should fail elementary school.” And so students get “passed on.”

Colleges and the Liberal/Civic Arts

Attaining literacy arguably is just the fundamental level of education required to function as a citizen. In order to participate politically and socially, some exposure to history, philosophy, language heritage, the arts, and so on is also a necessity. Historically, the universities have been considered the bastion of liberal arts education and in fact, are critiqued for dwelling on non-vocational education by right wing critics(see Livingstone, 1999). In the founding of the largest college sector in Canada—Ontario community colleges—where, as we have noted, colleges were envisaged as alternatives to universities, courses in the liberal arts were also included to “keep the door open should the student wish to proceed to university studies.” (Ontario Minister of Education, 1967) Ontario colleges, therefore, despite their reputation for practical vocational

training, originally offered substantial liberal arts education. This is also true in Quebec, where a huge investment in the humanities is maintained in CEGEPs.

According to CAUT statistics, 21 percent of total FTE Canadian community college enrolments (excluding trades) are in the humanities and another 6 percent are in the social sciences. This represents over one quarter of all college enrolments, suggesting that the liberal arts are alive and well in Canadian colleges (CAUT, 2012-3, Table 3.8, p. 41). On closer inspection, the two college systems in the two largest provinces account for almost all of these enrolments. A full 73 percent of all humanities enrolments are in Quebec, as are 24 percent of the national social science FTE enrolments. Arguably, however, compulsory enrolments in French and English grammar classes account for the bulk of the humanities enrolments in Quebec. Here is what a contingent faculty member trying to teach French literature and the francophone culture that she loves (and in the process contribute to the emancipation of francophone students) has to say:

What is very annoying is that I am taking all my semester to teach them how to write an essay. So, it's kind of becoming a methodology course instead of a literature course....I see the difference when I am teaching a course in the art and literature program.... They are learning a lot because I am asking them to work on some kind of big project.... They are impressed about it and do a wonderful job. It's a shame because we could [encourage] them to learn something more important and something bigger.... [Literature studies was promoted as] a kind of equity [project] so everybody would be equal.... But everything is low.... low equity.... We are [eliminating] all the creativity.

Despite these observations, the statistics show that the size of the Quebec commitment dwarfs the next highest provincial FTE humanities enrolment—British Columbia. BC accounts for 15 percent of the total humanities enrolment (but only six percent of social science enrolments). This is not entirely a function of size, because the largest province, Ontario, has a mere eight percent of the total humanities FTE enrolments—though it does have 60 percent of 35,411 FTE social science enrolments, which arguably are more explicitly directed towards citizenship issues.

Unfortunately, these social science commitments are a tiny 6 percent of all Canadian FTE college enrolments, an island in the sea of technology, business and health enrolments (not to mention trades, which are not included in the statistics). Many colleges have only a sprinkling of liberal arts subjects such as eastern colleges which subsume liberal arts under “access.” The lack of liberal arts outside the three largest provinces partly reflects the origins of most other colleges as technical vocational schools for working class youth being streamed away from the liberal arts-based universities. Further, even in Ontario, Dennison (1995) notes that the inclusion of liberal arts was disputed by the government in establishing community colleges. And although historically larger urban colleges in Ontario had separate liberal arts departments, these enclaves have been downsized (see Doughty, 2010 a,b,c), and we would note that the casualties include labour studies, women's studies, war and peace studies, and courses on class differences.

There is built-in access to liberal arts for college students in the universities in western Canada, where the trend has been to transfer credit to universities, as we have noted. In recent years, there has actually been a flourishing of liberal arts there in locations where colleges were transforming into university colleges or universities.

Predictably though, in colleges where Aboriginal self-determination is taught (a subject certainly conducive to emancipation and democracy), it is taught on the university 'side' of the institution(s). Similarly, where colleges have become feeders for universities, it is recognized that liberal arts preparation is essential but again, the liberal arts teaching is not situated in the college sector. We also noticed a trend towards hiring liberal arts faculty as service providers to vocational and other college programs, and the perverse tendency to tie teaching outcomes to an emancipatory curriculum.

Finally, we should add that public colleges always had commitments to continuing or lifelong learning in the form of continuing education (CE) units. This was related to them being termed 'community' colleges. Now they also offer professional upgrading in nursing and other professions, providing bridging programs at all levels from technician to post-diploma and degrees. This is a highly contested area in terms of democracy. On the one hand, colleges specializing in applied science provide the upgrading and advanced applied sciences that are not provided by universities which then support the lifelong learning of these professionals. On the other hand, it was hard for us not to notice that CE units have changed their stripes from their historical offering of community-based general interest courses to offering lucrative packages of contract training and continuing education credentials for the workplace. Further, CE faculty are not part of the collegium, and as such are not covered by collective bargaining. And finally, some full programs that are arguably professional, but which are marginalized, such as Early Childhood Education, have often found themselves plunked into these ghettos. This causes problems for fulltime faculty when students try to transfer CE credits into day school, even within the same college.

Conclusions

In the first part of this article, we linked scholarship on social justice for marginalized groups with discourses of democracy, arguing that public spaces such as colleges have been envisaged as incubators for those who have historically been excluded, providing basic literacy and numeracy for those who did not finish high school, and providing exposure to the liberal arts and civics for those pursuing technical vocations and trades or transfer credit to universities. By interviewing those who know the college system best, its teachers, we discovered that they are indeed committed to these causes. Further, their administrators have made what can be construed as emancipatory efforts, following inclusive policies to recruit students from Aboriginal and other historically excluded racial groups, as well as women and the working poor. Further, we find a remarkable commitment to anti-oppressive teaching across Canada, particularly by literacy college teachers. And finally, despite challenges to their integrity, the liberal arts are still being taught in central Canadian colleges where they were originally added to the curriculum as part of a democratic innovation.

Thus our conclusion is that our democracy, such as it is, would be much diminished without them. However, we are suspicious that the universal postsecondary education that colleges are helping us to attain is actually possible. Like the vote, it is taking a long time to recruit college teachers from among the groups that students in the colleges now represent, particularly Aboriginal, Black and Asian peoples outside of science studies. Literacy has also been an elusive goal for racially marginalized groups. And the liberal arts, while ardently fought for by those who believe that education is the pathway to democracy, seems to be difficult to expand beyond its university base and almost impossible to teach when literacy must be addressed first.

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