

RESEARCH: AT THE VERY HEART OF COLLEGE NETWORK DEVELOPMENT*

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What are the historical milestones that enable us to understand the development of college research? What role did linking establishments into a network play in this development? What about the initiatives of researchers themselves? Such are the questions we want to address in this article.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLLEGE RESEARCH AND ITS BUILDERS

AN EXCITING BEGINNING

Québec created 34 CEGEPs between 1967 and 1969. This being a new teaching order, with no existing equivalent and no tradition, it had no other choice but to define and invent itself. All those involved in founding the new CEGEPs were convinced of the need to experiment and even to invent new pedagogical approaches. So, in 1968, at least seven CEGEPs and one private college implemented research and experimentation, recruited research and experimentation consultants, created educational documentation centres, promoted animation and pedagogical development, etc.

The 40-year anniversary of CEGEPs is also the 40th anniversary of college research and development.

In recent celebrations to mark this anniversary, very little was said about the proliferation of schools of thought that permeated the educational milieu and society back then. In the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, there was an abundance of new theories, new models and ideological trends that originated from all over and fuelled reflection, debate and teaching: the general rejection



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of authority, the theories of Carl Rogers on non-directivity and the importance of student-centred learning, the “liberal” views on education of Alexander S. Neill presented in the famous *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, the Rousseauist thinking of Ivan Illich that questioned the role of the school, the idea of a “school without walls”, the importance of autonomy and self-direction, etc. Not to mention a 1971 report of the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* which rejected what it called the “mechanistic concept” of education and favoured a more “organic concept”, one that is more focused on the student, on learning and on basic education. These different currents took on a variety of forms of expression within different establishments. In those days, in almost all colleges, one or more pedagogical experiments were taking place, some of them quite avant-garde. This abundance of projects illustrates the fact that even before the advent of research funding, major studies were already being completed using the colleges’ internal resources.

INITIAL RECOGNITION

In 1972, the *Ministère de l'Éducation* made available to college researchers a program of funding for research and development called PROSURE. In the wake of new support services for pedagogical research and development, this backing helped research to expand very quickly resulting in the gradual emanation of a veritable body of knowledge and useful repercussions.

At the end of the 1970s, when CEGEPs had been around for 10 years, they were subject to a number of evaluations and an exhaustive assessment of college research preceded the preparation for the white paper (*Ministère de l'Éducation*, 1978) which detailed the Québec government’s intentions with regard to the college network. Out of this assessment came a strong appreciation for the quality of the research, as well as for its relevance and impact. Also, when in 1980 the Québec government identified CEGEPs as research players in its scientific policy, it was on the basis of work already carried out by college researchers, that those who held this position, notably Camille Laurin, defended this view. Among others, they referred to Pierre Désautels, a Physics teacher at Collège de Rosemont and to his work on formal thought as well as to the prolific research projects of Fernand Landy and his colleagues at Cégep de La Pocatière’s *Département de technologie physique*, such as the famous magnetic retention system for hockey nets and other experiments conducted on fibre optics.

Obviously, this recognition and the resulting creation of funding programs led to the development of other types of researchers. For example, they enabled Michel Perron and Suzanne Veillette to undertake their work on Steinert’s myotonic dystrophy, the starting point for ECOBES (*Groupe d'étude des conditions de vie et des besoins de la population*) at Cégep de Jonquière. Similarly, the work in Physical Technology at La Pocatière, in Metallurgy at Trois-Rivières or in Electronics at Lionel-Groulx led to the creation, in 1983, of specialized centres, now known as college centres for technology transfer (CCTT).



THE STRENGTH OF THE NETWORK

The period which followed, from 1983 to 1988, saw the development of active forces in college research. The credit goes to Bernard Morin and the founders of the *Association québécoise de pédagogie collégiale* (AQPC) for being the first to bring together researchers and practitioners in the Education field. Steeped in the network culture, this new organization was set up to promote the circulation of information on educational innovations and to disseminate the research done in colleges. Professional development was also undergoing rapid expansion during this period and new colleges joined the PERFORMA network. These local players began holding a major role in the distribution of pedagogical innovations and they made good use of knowledge emanating from research and the evaluation of practices being implemented in colleges. Developments in information technologies and the founding of the *Association pour les applications pédagogiques de l'ordinateur au postsecondaire* (APOP) also generated a growing interest in research and development.

The year 1985 is marked by the organization by AQPC of a major conference on research. Also, in 1987, AQPC published a pilot issue of the journal *Pédagogie collégiale*, dedicated, among other objectives, to disseminating pedagogical research and its results. It is also during this period of developing a genuine network—which explains in part the success of college research at the turn of the 1990s—that college researchers gathered to establish ARC (*Association pour la recherche au collégial*). Bruno Geslain, then Educational Advisor in Research and Development at Dawson College, invited all those interested in college research to come together, a call heard by Robert Ducharme who was himself a researcher. Together they founded ARC to support and represent college researchers as well as the people who manage and administer college-level research activities.

In the face of this mobilization of research in the college research milieu and in recognition for the quality of work conducted, in 1987 the *ministère de l'Éducation* created PAREA (*Programme d'aide à la recherche sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage*) and PART (*Programme d'aide à la recherche technologique*), which paved the way for a very productive period.

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A SECOND WAVE OF APPRECIATION AND THE GOLDEN AGE OF COLLEGE RESEARCH

The year 1993 produced a second wave of appreciation for the quality of college research: Pierre Lucier, then Deputy Minister of Education, convinced Minister Lucienne Robillard that it was time to officially recognize the research that had been conducted in colleges for more than 20 years and to write it into the law governing the functioning of CEGEPs. Elsewhere, that same year saw the growth of the networking of college research by the founding of the Réseau Trans-tech designed to support CCTTs and to promote the sharing of expertise among them.

Between 1988 and 1995, thanks notably to the impetus provided by the PAREA program, the number of publications by college researchers reached its highest

level in college history. It is during this period that studies were conducted which are considered to be an essential part of a college's pedagogical life today. Works that come to mind include those of Claude Péloquin on the sequence of intellectual skills in teaching philosophy, the works of Christian Barrette and Jean-Pierre Regnault as well as those of Robert Howe and Louise Ménard on evaluation, the work of Louise Lafortune and Lise Saint-Pierre on thought and emotions in mathematics or those of Marie Soukini and Jacques Fortier on problem-based learning.

THE DESTRUCTURING OF COLLEGE RESEARCH

Despite this success, research activity fell dramatically between 1996 and 1999. To this day, the dynamism experienced at the beginning of the 1990s has still not returned. The reasons for this decline are well documented: they are associated with budget cuts resulting from the "zero deficit" objective that led to the abolition of the "*banque des 150 ETC*" that was used for release time for researchers and also to reductions in funding programs. This situation was even more difficult for researchers to accept given that they had just received outstanding recognition. Indeed, a study conducted by FCAR on the evaluation of researchers' scientific productivity (Brochu, 1996) showed that their productivity was considered to be equal to that of university researchers. In some colleges, where research enthusiasts decided to fight it out and where management was convinced that this was the wrong path, resources that had previously been reserved for college research were protected. However, in most colleges, research almost came to a standstill. At the same time, new government directives linked to the Reform which brought some improvements to college teaching, also had the



effect of taking up a major portion of the colleges' pedagogical resources. In such a context, it is easy to understand why college research was put on the back burner, despite the interest in maintaining it, especially during this period of transformation in teaching.

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TOWARDS A RENAISSANCE OF COLLEGE RESEARCH?

Since 1999, several initiatives have led to the hope that there would soon be a renaissance of college research: the funding agencies have agreed to provide resources for releasing researchers who are collaborating with university teams from their teaching duties, while the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada has introduced a college program, and at the same time, the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* and the *Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation* has considerably increased the amount of funding available for college research.

In this context of openness, more and more colleges are adopting institutional policies linked to research. Because research has thus acquired an official status in some establishments, it may become a greater priority in many colleges. Furthermore, the increasing number of CCTTs raises the hope that technological research will experience strong growth in the coming years.

Also, following the benefits of applied research in the social domain, especially the studies by ECOBES on the drop-out rate, the Québec government announced the creation of three CCTTs in innovative social practices, thereby identifying colleges as potential players in social innovation research.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, the development of college research is closely linked to circumstances, to the development of the network and of the groups of recognized and well-organized specialists that had been established, as well as to the quality of college research itself.

Since the founding of CEGEPs, the work of teachers and professionals has become richer and more complex. There are of course increasing demands and there is a need to be competent in several areas; and that opens the door to more varied, stimulating and rich careers. If we succeed in gaining recognition for research as more than an accidental or exceptional element of this work, college teaching career prospects will certainly seem to be more appealing in the eyes of many.

After a slow period in college research, events of the last few years lead us to see better days ahead and to hope that the college network will mobilize its forces and rise to the challenge of innovation. ●

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