

Privatization - a clear and growing danger

Ontario now holds the dubious distinction of providing the least per-student funding of any province. As a consequence, colleges are being pushed into questionable ventures with private colleges and corporations in an attempt to make up budget shortfalls, while cutting corners by privatizing critical functions such as student counselling services.

Privatization takes many forms

Privatization can take many forms in Ontario's colleges, with some of the most flagrant and concerning cases involving partnerships with private colleges, overseas ventures, and the signing of deals that suggest equivalency

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between corporate training programs and public education.

Public diplomas from private colleges

In the first case, partnerships with private colleges, such as the agreement between Cambrian College and Hanson, allow a private college to teach public college courses and provide public college diplomas, without students receiving the quality of education normally provided by the college. These ventures involve the licensing of course materials to the private college without compensation or consideration of the intellectual property rights of the faculty responsible for their creation. They also represent the sale of the brand and reputation of the public college, which is then marketed by the private partner at an increased cost, in many cases to international students, recent immigrants, or other vulnerable populations, who are unaware that they are paying

for a lower-quality service.

Outsourcing curriculum development

Privatization is also occurring in a reverse fashion, where curriculum development is outsourced to publishing, software and educational technology companies. This outsourcing violates academic freedom by eliminating the faculty role in course design and evaluation. It also results in the creation of curriculum that may be limited in scope or skewed in favour of corporate interests.

Questionable overseas ventures

In some cases, privatization takes the form of overseas campuses, such as the ones launched in Saudi Arabia by Algonquin and Niagara colleges. These campuses, one of which was recently closed by Algonquin College after failing to deliver hoped-for profits, raise significant

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reputational and human rights risks. The public, faculty, and students have a right to know what types of ventures our public colleges are involved in overseas, and whether they match our values, yet in far too many cases these deals remain hidden from view.

McDegrees

In other cases, privatization shows up as partnerships that treat corporate training as equivalent to, and interchangeable with, public education. This is the case with the recent deal between Colleges Ontario and McDonald's

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restaurant corporation, which sets a chilling precedent by outsourcing the provision of public education to a private corporation.

This deal will let McDonald's employees who have taken in-house training move directly

into the final year of a two-year business diploma. While these students will graduate with the same diploma as their peers, some will have only received half their education from the college named on their diploma. With the remainder of their education coming from specialized corporate training courses, rather than the broad education offered by public colleges, students will learn only how to function within a specific company, rather than how to succeed in the wider business world.

Setting students up to fail

The deal will risk setting up students to fail, by ignoring the existing Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) process that is in place to recognize life experience while supporting student success. Beyond that, the deal also risks devaluing the diplomas students receive in the eyes of employers, and failing to properly prepare students for the needs of the business world.

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