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## Campus in the Country: Community College Involvement in Rural Community Development

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# **Campus in the Country: Community College Involvement in Rural Community Development**

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## **Abstract**

This study was an investigation into college involvement in rural community development through an examination of three cases in eastern, western and northern Canada where this work was reported to be going well. The cases in this study were in contexts of resource industries in transition, usually related to trends in economic globalization. The communities were also impacted by their distance from urban economic and political centres. As community needs were identified, it was apparent that economic and social challenges were inter-related, and that available opportunities required specialized workforce training or retraining, as well as supports for business development. The inquiry revolved around what colleges do, that is, what kinds of approaches and projects were undertaken, how this work was supported or constrained, how college staff were recruited and trained for this work, and how well it was being done, or how success was defined and evaluated. Although community development activities were not well supported by public policy and programs, the colleges were involved in a wide range of development approaches, some embedded into regular college operations, and others specifically organized for particular purposes. Findings from this study have relevance for policy and program development for colleges as they engage with rural communities, for communities as they seek partners to help address rural challenges, and for federal and provincial government departments and agencies with responsibility for community development, post-secondary education and related fields.

Keywords: community colleges, community development, capital

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## **1.0 Introduction**

What do community colleges do in rural communities? What difference do they make? What is the nature of community college involvement in rural community development? These are the big questions that inspired this research. Related questions include: What are the challenges and supports for the work of colleges in rural community development? How does this work get done? (i.e. How are staff recruited, trained and supported for this work?) And how well is it being done? (How is success defined and evaluated?). The academic discourse in this area involves the roles of colleges in society, the tension between academic, economic and democratic goals, and whether the flexibility and diversity of college roles is a problem to be solved or an essential distinguishing characteristic (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). This study examined these questions through three case studies in rural eastern, western and northern Canada where local colleges had track records

of effective involvement in community development. Using an approach that was inspired by Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000), the analysis was refined to consider what social theory would be particularly useful in understanding this work, and Bourdieu's theories of forms of capital proved to be most informative. Therefore, the supplementary questions become: How do theories of social capital and cultural capital inform the understanding of the nature of college involvement in rural community development, the related challenges and supports, the staff who work in this field, and how success is defined and evaluated?

### ***1.1 Community Colleges and Rural Challenges***

The diverse and changing roles of community colleges have been summarized and categorized in many ways usually falling within one of three main themes: academic (Skolnik, 2004), economic (Levin, 2000, 2005), and social/democratic (Griffith & Connor, 1994). In other research, the flexibility and diversity of roles of colleges is not seen as a shortcoming, but a quality that enables colleges to adapt to changes in demographics, social trends, and economic conditions (O'Banion, 1997; Roueche & Jones, 2005).

Regarding Canadian colleges, while there are notable differences between provincial systems, there are generally the same few purposes that community colleges are expected to fulfill, and many similarities with American systems. The most obvious purposes involve education and training programs, particularly focused on vocational, trades, apprenticeship and technological training. Para-professional training and general academic studies (usually including aboriginal and women's programs) are also significant components of community college operations in most jurisdictions. Continuing and adult education, both academic upgrading and general interest, and customized or contract training for business and industry round out the diverse offerings of the colleges (Dennison, 1995; Dennison & Gallagher, 1986; Muller, 1990). There have been a number of different approaches to the relationship of college and university education, with colleges in most jurisdictions having some form of university preparation or transfer programs, or a framework for individual colleges to establish articulation agreements with universities. In recent years several provinces have implemented baccalaureate degree programs at colleges and college-university collaborative degree programs, and these have added more diversity to the educational options available through community colleges (Floyd, Skolnik, & Walker, 2005).

The formation of the provincial college systems was based not only on the provision of training programs, but also on some general principles that were widely believed to be of benefit to Canadian society (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986). These principles included a focus on accessibility that was demonstrated in open admission policies, preparatory programs, encouragement of diversity, provision of student services, flexibility in scheduling, and an emphasis on teaching, rather than a research emphasis as in the universities. At the same time, colleges were designed to be responsive to government direction and changes in the economy, and to provide specialized services as needed in their local communities. This diversity and flexibility of college roles can be seen in many contexts, but is particularly apparent in rural communities (Jensen, 2003; Pennington, Pitman & Hurley, 2001; Rogers, 2004).

## ***1.2 Community Development***

Intentional collective action to address current rural challenges generally falls within the field of community development. Community development is usually defined as a process by which members of a community, whether a locality or a group united by a common interest, determine to take stock of their community, set goals for desirable change, and work toward those goals. (Selman, Cooke, Selman, & Dampier, 1998). The practice of community development is most often identified as being concerned with increasing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of residents, and with increasing the ability of the community as a whole to take advantage of changing circumstances (Cofsky & Bryant, 1994, cited in Halseth, Bruce, & Sullivan, 2004, p. 317).

Kenny (2002) proposed four operating frameworks to help understand the tensions and dilemmas inherent in community development. She suggested that most community work has its roots in charity, state welfare, activism, or the market. Each of these orientations has its own perceptions of social problems and solutions, commitments to community input and participation, and perspectives on related issues. The charity approach is based on the Christian tradition of helping those in need, through patronage and philanthropy. Charity work emphasizes compassion but gives little regard to concerns about equality, or meaningful community participation. State welfare focuses on the role of the state to define and intervene in community problems. This often takes the form of what Douglas (1994) describes as local development, that is, development in the community rather than by or with the community. This approach is usually accompanied by legal or regulatory definitions of rights and equality, as it is based on an understanding of fundamental human rights, and the obligation of governments to provide basic services to all citizens, similar to what Rothman described as a social planning approach. The activist framework organizes community work around concepts of solidarity and mutuality, with a focus on social change (structural, ideational, or practical change), and political mobilization to challenge the structures of society, such as Wharf's (1979) characterization of community organizing. The market approach emphasizes self-help, enterprise, competition, and limited state involvement, with an underlying assumption that community needs are essentially economic. Market (also known as free market or economic) approaches revolve around the belief that economic prosperity flowing from the effective operation of the free market economy will automatically ensure that people will be able to meet their needs and communities will function well. Under the market framework, state welfare programs are frequently decentralized or contracted out, and community groups are encouraged to find commercial or entrepreneurial solutions to their concerns.

Education and training are often critical components of community development and community colleges are frequently key participants in these efforts, particularly in rural contexts (Eddy & Murray, 2007). Colleges are important to rural communities because these communities are facing many challenges, and there are few alternative sources of post-secondary education, career training, adult education, and assistance with community development. An overview of research literature concerning rural community colleges in the U.S. noted that the key areas of focus of rural colleges tend to fall under three themes: educational access, economic development, and civic capacity-building (McJunkin, 2005). This reflects a rural-oriented approach to the three main roles of community colleges: academic, economic, and democratic.

Rural Canada is experiencing many challenges related to trends in economics, demographics, and social issues. Resource-based industries, which have formed the backbone of the rural economy, are in transition or crisis (Hayter & Holmes, 2001). Although the growth or decline of rural communities has varied widely, many rural areas have experienced significant decreases in population, and average educational and income levels remain low (Beshiri, Bollman, Rothwell & Mendelson, 2004). Despite these factors, rural issues are not high priorities on public policy agendas in Canada (Boyens, 2001; Freshwater, 2004; Hall, 2003; Knuttila, 2003). However, there are a number of approaches to rural community development, which have shown some promise for the future (Baldacchino, Greenwood, & Felt, 2009; Dale & Onyx, 2005; Halseth & Halseth, 2004), and community colleges are frequently key partners in these initiatives.

### ***1.3 Forms of Capital and Rural Community Development***

The concept of social capital is used in many ways by sociologists and economists, but most of the usages can be traced to one of three main sources: Coleman, Putnam, or Bourdieu (Wall, Ferrazzi, & Schryer, 1998; Woolcock, 1998). Many theorists using the concept of social capital to describe the resources accessed and exchanged through networks and connections appear to assume that it is a benevolent or at least neutral social construct. However, there have been some concerns that social capital can include discriminatory, exclusionary processes that constrain opportunities and prevent innovation, or prevent equality and justice in social interactions (Dale et al., 2005). Pierre Bourdieu, a professor of sociology at College de France in Paris, has written extensively about forms of capital, including social capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1993). Much of Bourdieu's research has revolved around schools and the social functions of education. According to Bourdieu, economic capital, cultural capital and social capital can exist in many forms, and they are inter-related in many ways. The creation and efficacy of social capital depends on membership in a social group whose members establish group boundaries and patterns of exchange, and the function of social capital is to gain or maintain power in society or within a certain sphere of influence. In this view, social capital has both a negative and a positive side, explaining the forces of domination and control, as well as opportunities for the empowerment of marginalized individuals and groups.

Bourdieu's theories relating to the various forms of capital hold much potential for explaining the dynamics of disadvantaged groups and factors relevant to development work as he accounts for the negative as well as the positive aspects of the interaction of cultural and social capital (Woolcock, 1998). The knowledge and skills that community college staff bring to their work with communities can be seen as a form of cultural capital, which may include formal education, informal learning, and tacit knowledge. This is sometimes known as "border knowledge" as it is based on local cultural capital developed on the borders or margins of mainstream society and often at odds with dominant ideologies (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996; Shaw et al., 1999). This knowledge is typically based on local knowledge, informal learning, and the experiences of a sub-culture, and thus is often at odds with the cultural capital of mainstream society. The groups in society which have the closest links to mainstream institutions and positions of power are able to portray their cultural capital as the "norm" and the cultural capital of those on the margins as "other". Community colleges are frequently places where these two world views collide, as colleges are structured as instruments of public policy,

reflecting dominant ideologies, while college students and staff are often from marginalized sub-cultures. Another challenge in the operation of social capital which Bourdieu articulated is the role of key people in social groups. Specific people may be designated, or take upon themselves, the role of the agent or signifier of the group. An agent can act or make decisions on behalf of the group, while a signifier may act as a figurehead or symbol of the group. These roles can enhance the efficiency of the group in making contacts and alliances with other groups, but also has the inherent danger of the designated individual acting in ways that are contrary to the interests or wishes of the group.

These understandings of forms of capital and their interactions can provide direction for disadvantaged groups that are seeking to maximize or mobilize their access to various forms of capital by recognizing the value of their cultural capital, and by strategically using their social capital to build up their cultural and economic capital (Dale et al., 2005; Flora, 1998; Wall et al., 1998). The connections and networks of key people in rural communities can be used to build coalitions across communities to instigate and facilitate projects for community benefit. The reliance on local cultural capital, or border knowledge, is likely to facilitate local work, but may leave gaps in expertise or understanding related to complex external issues. There is a danger that the opportunities and impacts of social capital may be seen in the community as characteristics of particular individuals (agents and signifiers, in Bourdieu's terminology) rather than part of the normal function of community institutions. Also, the disconnect between local cultural capital and dominant ideologies is apt to have noticeable impacts on the political processes and public policies relating to college involvement in rural development. A related concern with the reliance on social capital is the likelihood of groups that lack the "right" social capital, or connections and networks to the key facilitators of community work (i.e. the agents and signifiers of influential groups), may find that their concerns are ignored.

## **2.0 Case Study Methodology**

The study described in this paper was designed to examine these issues. The three case studies provided a much more in-depth investigation and analysis of specific examples of college involvement in rural community development, including challenges and constraints that are being faced, the recruitment and training of college staff for this work, and how success is defined and evaluated. In addition to the detailed analysis, these cases were compared with other relevant research around rural issues, roles of colleges, and the field of community development in order to illuminate common themes that can inform the involvement of colleges in rural community development, and ultimately the interaction of colleges with communities of many types. Note that the colleges, campuses and communities have been given pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents in this study.

Since community colleges in Canada are provincial responsibility, there are a variety of types of college systems across the country. Skolnik (2004) categorized college systems as: 1) complementary to but distinct from universities, with a focus on workforce development, in Ontario and Prince Edward Island, 2) vocational and technical workforce preparation, in Manitoba, the Atlantic provinces (except PEI), and the territories, 3) comprehensive colleges which include a university transfer function, in British Columbia and Alberta, and 4)

unique systems – regional colleges and technical institutes in Saskatchewan, and colleges of general education (colleges d’enseignement general et professionnel, or CEGEPs) which include some high school equivalency, career training, and university preparation in Quebec. With these groupings of colleges in mind, a specific effort was made to find a case study location in each of the first three categories, including eastern, western and northern contexts.

Through discussions with staff of college-related and rural-related organizations, three sites were selected. These sites were chosen based on their reputation for effective college involvement in rural community development, the identification of specific activities or projects of a rural campus on this theme, and indications from the campus administrator that there would likely be several people at the campus and in the community who would be knowledgeable, interested, and available to discuss issues related to this field of work. For the purposes of site selection for this study, “rural” was defined as a community with a population of less than 10,000 and more than one hour by road from a town of more than 10,000. This is consistent with a common definition of “rural” used in many national studies (du Plessis, Beshiri, & Bollman, 2002). As the site visits and network sampling progressed, it became possible to interview the college president or designated senior administrator, the campus principal or manager, two to four college faculty or program managers or facilitators, and three to six community representatives in each case, as well as collect a substantial number of relevant documents.

### ***2.1 Shoreline Campus, Maritime College***

Shoreline Campus of Maritime College, the campus at the centre of the first case was part of a large multi-campus community college in eastern Canada. The local community had many advantages over most rural communities in Canada, as it was larger, more economically stable, and closer to an urban centre, although it was not without its challenges. Within this context, and with the resources of a comprehensive college behind it, the Shoreline Campus was able to offer a broad range of services to the community. The general approach of the college to community development was to see this work as integrated into the overall operations of the campus. The provision of a wide range of certificate and diploma programs in business, health and social services, trades and technology, as well as academic upgrading were considered by college staff to be the essence of community development. The participation of students and staff in local groups and activities, both as individuals and in connection to college programs, was also regarded as community development.

College staff were encouraged, by college policy and community needs, to become involved in community development, although they were not provided with specific training or support in this area. Provincial government support for college involvement in economic development was frequently mentioned by respondents, and supported by media reports. However, there were few government funding programs (either provincial or federal) for rural development, and these were regarded by college staff to be difficult to access and administer. Community representatives were generally unaware of the challenges faced by the college in this area.

When asked about definitions and evaluation of the success of community development, there was evident scepticism about attempts to establish “expert” definitions of success, and concerns about the temptation for college staff to work toward a college-centric definition of success. Current evaluations, which usually

focused on counting numbers of participants, and financial accounting of project budgets, were generally seen as inadequate or irrelevant means of evaluation of what the “real” successes were in community development.

A review of regional and provincial economic development studies and observation of the local area indicated that there were several issues which could have been addressed by local community development initiatives. Sustainable agriculture, environmentally sustainable development and related issues were featured in many reports, and would have been expected to receive more attention. In addition, some major local employers reported a shortage of university graduates to fill positions that were essential to their operations, but provincial policy permitted very limited transfer of college credits to university degree programs and there was no local university campus. Yet, there was very little discussion of these topics, either by the college or community people interviewed.

Although most of the community development initiatives identified in this case, and the overall approach of the college, was oriented toward economic development, several people defined success in relation to broad social objectives. College staff commented on the stresses of attempting to achieve huge goals with limited resources and expertise in community development, but community representatives credited specific college staff, particularly the campus manager, with building the community relationships that led to successful projects. There was little evidence of strategic analysis and planning to guide community development, either in the college or the community, so some apparent opportunities were missed, and effective evaluation of this work was rarely, if ever, done. Overall, indications from regional economic studies, community statistics, and reports of respondents indicated that the Shoreline Campus was providing a broad range of academic, economic, and social benefits to the region, although there was potential for more effective work in several areas.

## ***2.2 Outlook Campus, Mountain College***

The focus of the second case in this study was the Outlook Campus of Mountain College, a very small campus in a small western town, some distance from any urban centre. The local economy was in transition, with major declines and uncertainties in agriculture and traditional resource-based industries, mainly forestry and mining, exemplifying common Canadian rural trends (Beshiri et al., 2004; Boyens, 2001), but there were many opportunities related to tourism and retirement services. In this setting the Outlook Campus was involved in rural community development in many ways, particularly training and business services that were adapted to the local situation, including basic education, literacy programs, and pre-employment training often targeted at disadvantaged groups. College staff and students also played key roles in local events and improvement projects, as part of college programs and services, and as volunteers. College staff expressed considerable interest in social issues. Some concern was evident that public policy and funding programs, both federal and provincial, were not as supportive of social development as they had been in the past, but campus staff often found creative ways to include academic, social and economic aspects in local development initiatives, such as training for disadvantaged groups and programs to improve participation in the local job market.

Campus staff were recruited with consideration for previous experience in community work, and the college had a full-time community development

manager who provided guidance to this area at all campuses, although staff received little training or support for this role. Defining success was often problematic as project success typically had very narrow and specific parameters, but most respondents spoke of community development success in very broad terms. College staff conducted evaluations of community work as required by various funding programs, but expressed concerns about the administrative burden related to these programs, and the inadequacy of the evaluations. When asked about the goals of community development and what “success” would look like, respondents usually made sweeping statements about the eradication of social problems and creation of vibrant communities, but had few ideas about how achievements in these areas might be evaluated.

Although provincial and regional economic studies included a number of agricultural and other sustainable development opportunities, there was little mention of environmentally sustainable development and no mention of agricultural issues, either by the college or community people interviewed. The need for university graduates in certain fields was also mentioned in some studies, and although Mountain College offered some university transfer programs at its main campus (but not locally), the disconnect between local college training and university degrees was never discussed. Other issues which seemed conspicuous by their absence were First Nations concerns. With a large reservation close to the town, apparently facing similar economic difficulties, more attention to these issues might have been expected.

Overall, the Outlook Campus was involved in rural community development in many ways, and the interest of some campus staff in social issues, as well as evidence of some apparently neglected areas, indicated that the campus was capable of more significant interventions, if more attention was paid to strategic planning and staff training, and if supportive funding programs could be accessed.

### ***2.3 Champlain Campus, Riviere College***

Champlain Campus of Riviere College was at the centre of the third case in this study. Riviere College had a few campuses and several offices and learning centres spread over a vast, heavily forested, sparsely populated area of the Canadian Shield. The economy of this region revolved around the forests and forest-related products since the area was first settled, although these industries were more recently in difficulty or transition. Champlain Campus was in a mill town that had experienced a significant decline, having lost about a third of its population in the decade prior to this study, largely due to ownership changes and global market trends affecting the town’s major employer.

Champlain Campus contributed to local community development, not only through the provision of the usual college educational and training opportunities, but also through innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to specialized training that were linked to community development strategies. The campus was also recognized as a leader or catalyst organization in the development of proposals for funding and the management of related projects, which typically had an economic development focus. Cultural issues, including festivals and events, museums and art galleries, and support for francophone culture were also identified as aspects of community development in which the college was involved.

Campus staff who were involved in community development had been recruited to the college because of their skills in networking, teambuilding and business management, as well as their knowledge of the local context. Although the college provided little specific training for staff involved in this work, they were encouraged and supported to seek out professional development opportunities that they believed to be relevant. Success in this area was generally defined in terms of positive impacts on the local infrastructure and economy, as well as the general quality of life in the area. Evaluations of community development initiatives involving the college were mostly informal or incomplete. Projects were evaluated as required by the relevant funding agencies but these processes were reported to be unnecessarily complex, and not particularly useful for understanding and improving a broad range of community work beyond the scope of the specific project.

The college and community respondents recognized the strategic leadership role of college staff, and the campus manager in particular. The campus manager not only sought out professional development opportunities in community development, but also in technical areas of concern to local industries, in order to offer relevant college programs and services, and to lead community partnerships for useful projects. Although the challenges facing the local economy were formidable, and government policies and programs were not sufficiently supportive, there was a general sense of optimism in the responses regarding the future of the community. The business development division of Riviere College and the related initiatives at Champlain Campus, were in many ways examples of the key features of the “entrepreneurial college”, including the focus on partnership-building, innovative programming, creative approaches to project design and financing, and collaboration with business, cultural and government organizations (Roeuche & Jones, 2005).

However, some topics, particularly environmental sustainability and opportunities for sustainable agriculture, were not significantly discussed by the respondents although these areas had been identified as potential opportunities in regional economic development studies. When respondents mentioned sustainability, it was usually in the context of the economic sustainability and preservation of the community, clearly prioritizing economic development over environmental issues. Other issues which seemed conspicuous by their absence were First Nations concerns. With a number of First Nations communities in the region served by Champlain Campus facing similar challenges to the town of Champlain, more attention to these issues might have been expected.

Overall, in a challenging local context, the Champlain Campus offered innovative programs and services, facilitated a wide variety of strategic approaches to community development and exemplified many of the distinguishing characteristics of an entrepreneurial college. However, unlike many other rural colleges, including ones in this study, there were no reports of Champlain Campus staff lacking expertise in this field, but they were seen as playing leadership roles in bringing community leaders together, with a particular focus on making connections to other communities and learning from them.

### **3.0 Common Themes Across the Cases**

This study examined what colleges do, that is, what kinds of approaches and projects are undertaken, how this work is supported or constrained, how college staff are recruited and trained for this work, and how well it is being done, or how success is defined and evaluated.

The communities under consideration in this study were facing a number of challenges which are common across rural Canada (Halseth et al., 2004). Resource industries were in transition or crisis, and the degree of rurality and distance to urban centres presented many difficulties for rural communities seeking to diversify their economic opportunities. However, each community in this study had distinct contextual features which contributed to different opportunities, and the availability of the services of a local college campus was a key component of community development activities.

The campuses included in this study were recognized as contributing to community development through a comprehensive range of college services, including academic and skills training programs and customized training for business and industry, and adaptation of educational delivery methods to the local contexts, as well as participation in community projects of many kinds. The inter-connection of the academic, social and economic aspects of community development was evident in such initiatives as academic upgrading and pre-employment training for disadvantaged groups and college facilitation of community projects, including cultural events and “Main Street” improvements. This wide range of services was provided in spite of limited facilities and resources and a small population base. Rural campuses like the three in this study are often key players in community partnerships of many kinds in the face of many challenges that are characteristic of rural areas, (Jensen, 2003; McJunkin, 2005; McNutt, 1994; Pennington & Williams, 2004). The campuses in this study found creative ways to compensate for their limited resources, through partnerships with other institutions and community groups, as well as various arrangements with local businesses.

Many of the employment opportunities in the areas served by these campuses required university education and/or degrees. Although some local people in each location may have been using the upgrading services of the college to prepare for university, access to higher education other than college was not discussed by the respondents during the conversations about community development. Shoreline and Champlain campuses worked within provincial systems that did not include university transfer in the college mandates, and Outlook was part of a college that offered degree transfer programs at its main campus but not at the satellites. Some research on community colleges has examined how non-transferable credentials simultaneously provide and prevent opportunities for college graduates (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Luker, 1990), but there was no reference to this issue by the respondents in these cases.

The overall approach mainly revolved around ad hoc projects, sometimes with innovative aspects, as well as some standard practices in community economic development, although there were very few references to research or literature in this field. Discussions of support for college involvement in community development mainly revolved around the significant needs and expectations of the communities. The major constraints were typically related to the ambiguities of public policy (both federal and provincial) and the lack of supportive programs related to rural community development. At the time of this study, research was ongoing in similar contexts on the New Rural Economy and Community Capacity Building, but none of the respondents referred to this or related research. Subsequent to the data collection for this study, some of the colleges that had been contacted in preparation for this research participated in a research project on colleges as catalysts for Rural

Knowledge Clusters, under the federal Rural Secretariat program: Models for Rural Development and Community Capacity Building.

Using Kenny's (2002) classification system of approaches to community development, market, charity, welfare, and activist, to analyze the cases in this study reveals that the interventions involving these colleges mainly revolved around the market approach. The market approach features an emphasis on economic solutions to social issues, the identification of industry concerns as community concerns, competition for public funding for economic development, and a focus on entrepreneurial, business-like approaches to community work. This approach also involves helping people adapt to, not critique or resist, the consequences of globalization. The market approach describes the dominant view of community development of the participants in this study, consistent with their focus on economic development, and the assumption that economic progress would have a positive impact on other problems. However, there were some references to state welfare and charity themes.

The state welfare approach to community work includes government support and funding for community needs, and the operation of programs according to standardized, equitable, policies and procedures. This describes some of the specific projects and interventions that included college involvement, such as adult education, academic upgrading, and job-readiness programs. There were several comments, particularly related to Mountain College, that this type of community development had been more prevalent in the past, but was now more difficult to operate, a reflection of trends in public policy in recent decades, with an increasing focus on neo-liberal economics, the concerns of business and industry, and the facilitation of global economic integration, rather than the development of fragile communities (Boyens, 2001; Brodie, 1999; Hayter et al., 2001; Kirby, 2007).

Riviere College, and Champlain Campus in particular, embraced the market model of community development, but included more community consultation than is typical in this approach. However, the consultation was mostly with community leaders, not necessarily the "grass roots"; further indication that the strategy was more aligned with market than activist orientations. There were also some references to a charity approach in the descriptions of individual college staff contributing their time to worthy causes. The discussions of minority language rights, and the obligations of governments to support francophone culture, fit the welfare state model of community development and this was identified as an important concern, although economic issues were clearly the priority. Similar to the other cases in this study, there was very little evidence of social activist orientations at Champlain Campus, although there were a few references to activist-like approaches to lobbying and political involvement, but the goals were generally related to economic issues, not social transformation. On the other hand, some people identified the college as one of a few organizations that could make some breakthroughs in this area, because of the regional or provincial mandate of the college, and the non-alignment with particular political or business interests. As in many rural communities, the local college was identified as one of few institutions that can help overcome local isolation and facilitate broader collaborations (McJunkin, 2005; Pennington et al., 2004).

This study examined how the work of colleges in rural community development was carried out. The specific focus of inquiry was how college staff were recruited, trained and supported for this work. Although there were many examples in these

cases of colleges and communities collaborating in community development, the college practices of hiring, training and supporting staff to lead this work were inconsistent. Various networking and learning opportunities were provided by the college for campus managers who were involved in these activities, but the managers had considerable freedom in selecting their own professional development and focusing on particular local projects. This individualized, ad hoc approach resulted in gaps in knowledge and expertise related to community development, especially the lack of strategic analysis and planning, and the lack of awareness of research in related fields. The role of key individuals in the college who showed some leadership in community development was frequently identified as a significant factor in successful interactions in all of the cases in this study. People in the community credited specific individuals, not the institutional roles, for college interventions and related successes.

Definitions of success in all of these cases were very vague and general, mostly related to broad goals of community improvement, economic prosperity, and a healthy society. Evaluations of community development were generally done only when required by the college or the funding agency. College evaluations tended to look primarily at educational indicators (number of participants, completion rates, employment rates after graduation), and funding agencies tended to focus on financial or contractual accountability. It was readily admitted that in most cases these evaluations provided little relevant information about the “real” goals of the projects (i.e. community revitalization and the eradication of social problems), or meaningful indicators of success, or suggestions for improvement of future projects.

### ***3.1 What’s Missing?***

Based on a review of literature on rural development, and local economic development studies relevant to these cases, there were a few topics which were expected to be included in the discussions of local opportunities and strategies. Although a wide range of approaches and activities for community development were discussed, opportunities around agriculture, environmental issues and sustainable development, and collaboration with nearby First Nations communities, were remarkable by their absence.

The communities in this study were in contexts with substantial amounts of agricultural, or formerly agricultural, land. In many instances tree farming, nurseries, low impact crop cultivation, and related uses had been identified in regional development studies as viable possibilities for marginal farmland in the area. But agriculture and related issues were rarely, if ever, mentioned as aspects of community development in any of these cases. Also, these communities were in contexts of natural wilderness, beautiful scenery, and areas well known for outdoor recreation. However, there was surprisingly little discussion of environmental preservation issues by the respondents in this study, or in the projects that were upheld as exemplary practices in college involvement in rural community development.

Another set of community development concerns which were conspicuous by their absence were First Nations issues. Two of the three cases had First Nations communities in close proximity, and were in regional contexts where about one tenth of the population identified themselves as First Nations. The identification of rural people with their communities often has a very narrow, local focus that does not facilitate inter-community cooperation (Day & Murdoch, 1993). This lack of collaboration between nearby communities is a common challenge in rural

development, unrelated to particular First Nations concerns (Odagiri & Jean, 2004). But there are further obstacles to including First Nations communities in regional development activities due to jurisdictional issues between federal and provincial governments, municipalities, and Band Councils (Boydell, 2005; Norris, 1998; Stonechild, 2006). The educational challenges are compounded by the lack of attainment of high school graduation of many First Nations people, which presents a barrier to entry to further education even where it is locally available (Mendelson, 2006). Cross-cultural or multi-cultural post-secondary education is a complex endeavour on a number of levels, and community colleges do not always handle these challenges well (Rhoads et al., 1996).

### **3.1.1 Forms of Capital and College Involvement in Rural Community Development**

Theories of social capital not only illuminate the operation of domination and marginalization, but also provide insight into strategies for challenging domination, for example by redefining public policy problems and solutions, or by mobilizing networks of similarly disadvantaged groups (Bourdieu, 1996; Woolcock, 1998). Globalization has had mixed impacts on the social capital of rural communities. On the one hand, local factories, mills, and mines are now controlled by groups and economic trends that are far removed from local connections and networks. On the other hand, increasing awareness of the impact of globalization on rural and remote communities around the world has increased the awareness of opportunities for small communities to recognize potential allies, to formulate plans for collective action, and to work together (Flora, 1998; Knuttila, 2003). The challenges faced by the colleges in this study largely revolved around the acute awareness of local needs due to the connections of college staff to the community (social capital), and the disconnect between community work rooted in local knowledge and expertise (border knowledge) from public policy trends (related to the cultural capital of dominant groups).

The colleges in this study facilitated the sharing of cultural capital related to community development, and college staff used their social capital to mobilize networks and partnerships for community projects. The centrality of social capital in community development was seen in the roles that key individuals played in the leadership of community work, and the reliance on the networking among these key individuals to facilitate community initiatives. But college staff faced many challenges in accessing and sharing cultural capital relating to such things as strategic planning and evaluation of community work, and consequently missed some opportunities for more comprehensive and inclusive approaches to community development.

The primary approaches to community development revealed in this study tended to focus on the adaptation of educational and training programs to local contexts. This type of community development builds the local cultural capital, and can enable the community to deal more effectively with challenges and opportunities. However, the prioritization of economic development over other aspects of development, and the “market” (economic) approaches to social issues, indicate the pervasiveness of dominant forms of cultural capital on local understandings of global trends and the nature of development work. Furthermore, the disconnect between college and university education frequently results in situations where participation in college training can be an obstacle as well as a pathway to personal and career success (Brint et al., 1989). Seen in this way, college training builds some aspects of cultural capital, but may delay or prevent access to dominant forms of cultural capital.

The recruitment and skill development of college staff who were responsible for community work did not consistently or strategically take into account the cultural and social capital needed for effective intervention in this area. The college staff were frequently operating as facilitators, catalysts and leaders of community projects, and these activities required considerable knowledge and understanding, as well as extensive social networks and skill in using these, yet there were few examples of specific college policies or programs to build up the necessary cultural and social capital. College staff who were directly involved in community work gained experiential knowledge of the operation of social and cultural capital primarily through informal learning.

Lack of expertise in community development was identified as a significant challenge in most of the communities involved in this study. These challenges were reflections of the challenges inherent in sharing cultural capital in rural contexts due to distance and sparse population, and in building cultural capital in a non-mainstream subject area. The emphasis on local social capital, the lack of relevant cultural capital, and the disconnect of the available social and cultural capital from centres of power and influence, were at the root of this frustration. Development of social capital may not be sufficient to help communities achieve their goals, as localized social capital may hinder the development of the necessary forms of “bridging” social capital, that is, linkages to networks outside the local community (Woolcock, 1998). Furthermore, the use of social capital will not necessarily result in access to essential components of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1993). The high levels of leadership expertise and project innovation evident in the Champlain Campus case may be explained largely by the intentional use by campus staff of local, regional and national networks, in both economic and cultural fields.

Leadership, and the role of particular individuals, was a recurring theme in the discussions of college involvement in rural community development. People in the community tended to see key individuals – the agents (people who could act or speak on behalf of the college) and signifiers (people who represented the college) – not the institution as the active partners in collaborative efforts. This is a common feature of the operation of social capital. The reliance on agents and signifiers may explain some of the concerns that were expressed about lack of collaboration between the town of Shoreline and outlying communities, and the lack of interaction of the towns and nearby First Nations communities in the cases of Outlook and Champlain.

The lack of clear definitions of success, and the inadequate evaluation of community development in these cases, were indications of differences between local and dominant forms of cultural capital around community work. Provincial government policy promoted certain kinds of economic development and federal policy favoured accommodation of global economic trends with little regard for local community impacts. The people associated with the rural campuses in this study had much more comprehensive views of development, more aligned with the concept of sustainable human development (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2001). But due to the nature of their cultural capital, built on local knowledge and informal learning related to community work, they were often unsure how to articulate definitions and indicators of success in this area. Evaluation practices were defined and implemented by funding agencies and government departments with goals that reflected mainstream policy trends. Not surprisingly, these were often quite different than the interests of rural communities. The vagueness of respondents around evaluation practices and purposes

was indicative of the gaps in local cultural capital related to community work and the disconnect between local border knowledge and dominant ideologies.

College staff and other key individuals in the communities relied on their social capital to mobilize collaborative projects, with both positive and negative consequences. The success of many projects was attributed to networking among community leaders, but some local issues did not receive significant attention because they were the concerns of groups without strong linkages (i.e. without sufficient social capital) to the key individuals who facilitated community projects. Although a wide range of approaches and activities for community development were discussed, opportunities around agriculture, environmental issues and sustainable development, and collaboration with nearby First Nations communities, were remarkable by their absence. As Woolcock (1998) has warned, this type of situation is among the dangers of relying too heavily on social capital for community development. The operation of social capital may prevent individual and group success by limiting definitions of problems and opportunities to those that are shared by a core group, and limiting access of disadvantaged groups to potentially helpful networks and diverse cultural capital. Similar analyses of the impacts of over-reliance on local social capital and border knowledge would lead to similar conclusions regarding the lack of attention to the need for linkages to university education or degree programs in some contexts, and the lack of awareness of other relevant research.

#### **4.0 Conclusions, Implications & Future Research**

In summary, the key factors contributing to effective college involvement in rural community development were: a context where the need of, and opportunity for, community development was apparent in the college and the community, a supportive local campus operation and pro-active campus manager, and functional partnerships among a wide range of local groups. While the involvement of the campus was typically focused on the adaptation of college training programs to local needs for the purpose of economic development, there was also some interest in social issues. Public policy was nominally supportive of college involvement in community work, but economic development was clearly prioritized, and appropriate funding programs were difficult to access and manage. Although there was widespread belief that the involvement of the college was highly beneficial to local community development, and there was some evidence to support this, there were few examples of effective evaluation of this work.

Rural communities in need have few institutions which can be relied on to provide meaningful assistance, so in places where there is a campus, the community expectations of the college are often quite high (McJunkin, 2005). In this study, the scope of community needs and expectations was frequently mentioned both as a support and a challenge for college involvement in community development. Rural communities can benefit by being more proactive in making their needs known to politicians and public agencies, and including colleges in the proposed solutions to the many challenges they face (McNutt, 1994; Jensen, 2003; Pennington et al., 2004).

College involvement in rural community development is a logical and practical expression of the missions and roles of community colleges. Offering comprehensive services with limited local resources has been identified as one of the ongoing challenges of rural campuses for some time (Pennington, Williams, & Karvonen, 2006), and the three campuses in this study demonstrated that there are a

wide variety of ways of dealing with this, in spite of a lack of supportive government programs. In order to work effectively in this field, college staff need training and support. Community development work typically revolves around the managers of the rural campuses, although knowledge of this field is also important for faculty and support staff in many departments. College staff can, with appropriate understanding and support, help marginalized communities navigate mainstream policy and program contexts to achieve community goals, without abandoning the essential elements of local border knowledge (Shaw et al., 1999). Since the connections and networks, or social capital, of key college staff appear to be a major means of facilitating college involvement in rural community development, the training of college staff should include a focus on this area. Rural colleges are often a focal point in their regions, bringing together leaders from business, government, education, agriculture and community organizations to shape a shared agenda (Jensen, 2003; Rubin & Autry, 1998). Colleges can be, and should be, among the leading advocates for integrated approaches to sustainable human development that include environmental, social and cultural, as well as economic concerns (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2001). Governments at all levels need to recognize and support the important roles that colleges play in rural community development.

This overview of the themes and implications of this study and related research reveals a number of areas where additional research is needed. Although they illuminated many examples of the important roles of colleges in rural community development, the cases in this study revealed a general lack of comprehensive, strategic approaches to sustainable human development. It would be informative to seek out locations for action research projects that could provide examples of colleges as catalysts of integrated approaches to the uses of social and cultural capital for sustainable community development. Furthermore, the important roles of key individuals in the colleges and the communities, especially the rural campus managers, was a recurring theme in the cases in this study, although inconsistent training and support of these people was also identified as an issue. Other studies of the effectiveness of community development leadership training, such as Emery, Fernandez, Gutierrez-Montes, and Flora (2007), may provide some guidance for this line of inquiry. A participatory action research approach to community leadership training for college staff and other community leaders could provide valuable insights into the development of much-needed local leadership expertise. This approach could facilitate sustainable community development for the benefit of communities in need in many contexts.

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