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Educating for a high skills society? The landscape of federal employment, training and lifelong learning policy in Canada

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Government reports and documents claim that building a knowledge economy and innovative society are key goals in Canada. In this paper, we draw on critical policy analysis to examine 10 Canadian federal government training and employment policies in relation to the government’s espoused priorities of innovation and developing a high skills society and economy. Our findings highlight three areas of contradiction: a tension between high skills and low skills policy, a contradictory focus on the socially and economically excluded and included, and the paradox of both an active and passive federal government. Drawing on state theories such as inclusive liberalism and the social investment state, we argue that while a ‘highly skilled knowledge economy’ may form part of the overall skills discourse, these contradictions raise doubts that it is to become a reality in Canada in the near future.

Keywords: low skills and high skills policy; social and economic inclusion and exclusion; adult education policy; knowledge economy; employment; education and training

Introduction

In this paper, we discuss the findings from a research project which aimed to investigate recent Canadian federal policy in the area of employment and training (E & T). This study grew out of a concern that there appeared to be little known about federal policy in E & T in Canada, despite a growing national and global discourse surrounding the need to invest in policies that help to develop the employment opportunities and skills of the twenty-first century workforce. Indeed, Canada, among many nations, has declared its commitment to, and concern for, becoming a knowledge economy (see, e.g. Government of Canada 2002a, 2002b). Researching federal Canadian policy also presents an interesting case given that most policies in the areas of education and employment are under provincial jurisdiction. That responsibility lies with provincial governments creates challenges for the federal government in developing coherence in implementing policies consistently across Canada.

Our primary goal in undertaking this research was to sketch out a rough landscape of federal policy on E & T in Canada. After an extensive search, 10 policies in the areas of lifelong learning, employment and training, and skills upgrading were identified and subsequently analysed. Through careful analysis, and driven by principles of

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critical policy analysis (Ball 1999; Halpin and Troyna 1994; Walker 2009), we formulated five research questions which we sought to address in examining these 10 policies:

1. What is the role of the federal government in E & T policy in Canada? And, with whom does the federal government partner to deliver policy?
2. What are current policies in E & T seeking to achieve?
3. How are E & T framed?
4. Who is targeted in policy?
5. What are the mechanisms for achieving goals?

This paper proceeds by providing background information on the global discourses of the knowledge economy as they relate to the local context of the Canadian state. A description of the particular critical policy analysis methodology undertaken is described, followed by brief description of the 10 policy documents. The remainder of the paper focuses on our findings and conclusions. Our findings highlight three areas of contradiction, suggesting, we argue, that while a highly skilled knowledge economy may form part of the overall skills discourse, it is unlikely to become a reality in Canada any time soon. The three contradictions are: (1) the tension between low skills and high skills policy and practice, (2) the contradictory focus on both the socially and economically excluded and included, and (3) the paradox of both an active and passive federal government. By drawing on various state theories (e.g. Craig and Porter 2006; Esping-Andersen 2002; Saint-Martin 2007), we highlight some of the reasons why federal E & T policy make it questionable that Canada is becoming the ‘highly skilled’ knowledge economy it purports to want to be.

Situating the study

Any examination of E & T policy in Canada requires situating one’s study within existing discussions of the knowledge economy and state approaches to adult education and lifelong learning. The ‘knowledge economy’ and its various derivatives aimed at developing a highly skilled labour force permeate E & T policy in developed nations, and Anglo-Saxon states especially (see Brown, Green, and Lauder 2001; Esping-Andersen 1996). Human capital theory has underpinned much of this focus on skills and training for the knowledge economy. Indeed, in the Canadian context it has been argued that, while there is not a void of programmes for self-actualisation, human capital formation is the dominant discourse within federal policy on lifelong learning (Schugurensky 2007). This is not to say that all lifelong learning policies are targeted towards human capital formation in all Anglo-Saxon states. For example, the U3A (The University of the Third Age) initiative in the UK, supported through the Third Age Trust, has enabled the establishment of self-managed lifelong learning cooperatives for older adults. However, in the policies we examined, the overriding aim of each policy was economic integration, with personal development and social inclusion as peripheral goals. In the following section, we outline what is known about the Canadian context with reference to other Anglo-Saxon states. In addition, we suggest the theorisations of the social investment state (SIS) and inclusive liberalism as frameworks for expanding upon existing research on E & T policy in Canada.
The knowledge economy

In recent years, knowledge economy discourses have become a favourite among governments of developed countries such as Canada. In situating our study, it is useful to define and explore what the knowledge economy may mean in the Canadian context. In short, the knowledge economy refers to ‘knowledge in terms of factors of production, intellectual property, the skills-based economy, national systems of innovation, the knowledge base, the knowledge-driven economy, knowledge management, knowledge transfer, the learning economy, the learning organisation, the learning regions, etc.’ (Jessop 2008, 18). For the purposes of this study, the most influential aspects of the knowledge economy are those related to education, lifelong learning, and employment and skills training.

Documents produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (1996, 1997) assert that survival and growth of national economies in the knowledge economy require a skilled labour force with the capacity to learn and adapt by continually producing and engaging with codified knowledge, particularly through information and communication technologies. Schugurensky (2007) explains that the most prevalent trend in lifelong learning in Canada is learning as a form of human capital for economic development where knowledge is developed and applied in order to improve economic performance. Workers must be engaged in the lifelong process of learning and skill development in order to keep pace with the speed at which technology and information change. As Schugurensky (2007) succinctly puts it, job security is being replaced by skill security. The discourses of the knowledge economy assume that most occupations involve the generation of ideas and ingenuity. However, in the case of Canada, the majority of Canadian occupations require routine data transmission, goods processing or personal service provision (Schugurensky 2007). Indeed, knowledge workers make up a small fraction of the Canadian workforce. The binary categorisation of ‘low-skilled’ and ‘high-skilled’ workers in policy rarely acknowledges the politics of how some knowledge is ‘valued’ while other knowledge is not ‘valued’ (Farrell and Fenwick 2007). Furthermore, Fenwick (2011) argues that ambiguity exists around what comprises innovation and skill within policies influenced by knowledge economy discourses. Despite the questionable status of Canada’s existence as a knowledge economy, the Canadian government has inserted knowledge economy discourses into its E & T policies as evidenced in the 10 documents we examined.

The role of the state in adult education policy

We draw on Hall and Soskice (2002) and Esping-Andersen (1996) in categorising Canada as an Anglo-Saxon state in terms of its overall approach to social policy (notwithstanding the province of Quebec). Esping-Andersen (1996, 2002) describes the Anglo-Saxon model as a liberal welfare state, which favours weaker social protection, greater deregulation of the economy, greater freedoms for business over unions and a greater prizing of individual freedoms in general. Using a similar schemata, in their seminal work Varieties of capitalism, Hall and Soskice (2002) assign a majority of the developed nations to two different economic systems: the Liberal Market Economy and the Coordinated Market Economy, which basically splits between the predominantly Anglo-Saxon countries and continental Europe (plus Japan) respectively. Table 1 illustrates some of the variations between the two camps.
Other authors use similar classifications (e.g. Brown, Green, and Lauder 2001; Wilensky 2002), highlighting the relatively larger inequality ratios in countries such as Canada or the UK compared to, say, Sweden. Brown, Green, and Lauder (2001) have characterised developed nations in terms of their skill policies, finding that Anglo-Saxon countries have tended towards a bifurcated labour market, supporting a large number of low-skill positions alongside a much smaller pool of high-skill ones. Although their research did not look at Canada, Brown, Green, and Lauder's (2001) observations can be extended, at least partially, to all Anglo-Saxon countries.

We argue that the best way to understand the current Anglo-Saxon state of Canada is by drawing on the theorisations of the SIS (Saint-Martin 2007) and of inclusive liberalism (Craig and Porter 2003, 2006). Writing specifically about Canada, Saint-Martin (2007) describes the SIS as one in which economic and social policy become blurred and the state adopts an entrepreneurial and risk-management approach to investing in citizens through education and social programmes to ensure that people are included in the economy. Instead of a welfare state, the SIS has shifted the emphasis away from social and employment security to individualised and continuous skills investment for future, near and far, employability. Saint-Martin (2007) explains that Canada has shifted to an SIS approach in social policy in order to ‘soften’ the long-term effects of the intensified social exclusion that was the result of neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s. Under the SIS, limited state intervention is justified because education and training become important in equipping people with the tools with which to adjust to market demands and fluctuations. Unlike Keynesian economics, where the goal of the state is to ensure equality and social justice, investment approaches focus on generating profit, therefore social policy is targeted to investing in groups that will generate more profits than others in the marketplace (Saint-Martin 2007). Similarly, Craig and Porter (2003, 2006) have used the term ‘inclusive liberalism’ to describe the melding of economic and social policy. An inclusive liberal state would be one which focuses on the notion of ‘inclusion’ in terms of bringing in those who have been excluded from the benefits of a rapidly globalising economy, and in terms of bringing together social and economic partners in supplying programmes (in this case, education). In the area of education and training, inclusive liberalism would entail including both economic and social purposes of a lifelong learning strategy. The inclusive liberal state, like the SIS, places (discursively at least) the entrepreneurial

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<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Liberal market economy</th>
<th>Coordinated market economy</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA</td>
<td>Germany, Japan, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, France</td>
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<td>Unions</td>
<td>Weaker</td>
<td>Stronger</td>
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<td>Non-market actors</td>
<td>Less important to the economy</td>
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Source: Adapted from Hall and Soskice (2002).
individual at the fore, and the poor and excluded are urged to upskill to help themselves as well as their society and/or country. Drawing on state theories such as these provides insight into the purpose and practice of policy in E & T in Canada, and helped form the theoretical frame through which we approached the study. Moreover, studying the case of Canada through the above theoretical lenses has implications for understanding trends in lifelong learning policy in other Anglo-Saxon nations. As argued by the above authors, Anglo-Saxon states have shared a number of similarities in terms of what and how social policy has been developed, as well as the underlying theoretical assumptions in such policy development.

What we already know: gaps in knowledge

While there is evidence that Canada approaches policy from an Anglo-Saxon perspective (embracing a liberal, inclusive liberal or social investment approach to social policy), there is remarkably little known about policy in E & T in Canada – whether at the federal or provincial levels. This dearth of prior research – both empirical and conceptual – forms one of the main rationales for this study. Indeed, while there appears to be a great deal of commentary and policy research emanating from other Anglo-Saxon states, the UK especially (not surprising given its Skills for Life initiative launched under Tony Blair), Canadian research is conspicuously lacking. Corroborating this in a recent chapter on learning societies, Canada-based academic Daniel Schugurensky (2007) notes a marked lack of publications and debate on policies of knowledge, the economy and learning in the country compared to Europe. Any analysis of the Canadian context, he argues, requires inductively examining the literature on lifelong learning given the lack of explicit discussion on policy (Schugurensky 2007).

In terms of research emanating from Europe, there are a variety of different angles from which scholars have endeavoured to analyse policy on E & T. Edwards and Boreham (2003), for example, have explored how lifelong learning and learning societies have been key policy drivers in the EU. In addition, much research has been undertaken on the discourse and rhetoric of lifelong learning and skills in EU countries (Edwards, Armstrong, and Miller 2001; Fejes 2005; Nicoll and Edwards 2004). More focused examinations of policy surrounding lifelong learning have also been conducted, especially at the country level (see, e.g. Heikkilä 2008), including some comparative work (e.g. Green 2006; Okamoto 2008). Tobias (2004) has examined the role of lifelong learning in shaping policy and practice in New Zealand, noting fundamental similarities and differences between New Zealand’s and UK’s and other European approaches. In an article published only a few months before we wrote this paper, Cornford (2009) presented a holistic evaluation of lifelong learning policy in Australia, which, in reflecting on our own findings, highlights some key overlaps with Canadian federal policy.

A handful of notable exceptions to the lack of Canadian literature include an article recently published by Canadian scholar, Jane Cruikshank (2008), who studied the effects of Canada’s lifelong learning paradigm by focusing on Canada’s workers. In this paper, she notes the lack of efficacy in recent lifelong learning policies that have sought to develop Canada’s global competitiveness. Cruikshank’s article looks at how policy has experientially affected workers and workplaces in Canadian companies, following on from an earlier article she wrote (Cruikshank 2007) which addressed the rhetoric of lifelong learning in Canada alongside the lived experiences of Canadian
workers. Studies that have closely examined specific federal Canadian policies, rather than examining gaps between general discourse and practice (which both of Cruikshank’s articles do), appear to be limited to three publications. The first article centred on the federal government’s attempt to bridge its essential skills framework set out in E & T policy with an adult second language education benchmarking framework established by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Gibb 2008). Metcalfe and Fenwick’s (2009) study was perhaps more closely aligned with this research in exposing the conflicting and ambiguous discourse in a number of Canadian federal policies, including the Workplace Skills Strategy, which we also critically analysed and expand upon in the paper. The third, by Fenwick (2011), examines the diversity of knowledge discourses embedded in Canada’s Innovation Strategy launched in 2002. However, none of these studies have attempted to paint a broad picture of federal policy in E & T in Canada, though they are welcome contributions to an attempt to construct some sort of knowledge around federal policy in E & T in Canada.

What is already known from studies such as those cited above is that there is often a gap between rhetoric and practice when it comes to E & T policy; and, that policies are not necessarily cohesive – whether examined across each other, or even when assessing internal consistency. Canada, like Australia and unlike the UK, is a federal state where responsibility is divided between the federal and provincial governments and entrenched in the constitution. Education and training fall under provincial jurisdiction and, as we explain later, this causes particular challenges for the federal government in implementing policy related to these areas. In examining Canada as a federal Anglo-Saxon state, underpinned by principles of inclusive liberalism (Craig and Porter 2006), ideals on social investment (Saint-Martin 2007) and discourses of the knowledge economy, we were able to more fully explore the landscape of federal policy on E & T in Canada.

**Methodology**

We are describing our methodological approach to examining federal E & T policy in Canada as a form of critical policy analysis. However, it could be argued that critical policy analysis is less a methodology than it is a pair of critical glasses that researchers look through to reveal the values and politics of the process of policy-making, the written result of policy, or its translation into practice (Walker 2009). Critical policy analysis, we claim, allows for a richer understanding of the assumptions and operations of policy in education.

While educational theorists and academic researchers who undertake critical policy analysis draw on a wide range of philosophical and methodological traditions and have different ontological and epistemological positions, what they all have in common is a commitment to unravelling policy (Gil 1992) by examining and deconstructing the ‘political’. Critical policy analysts are united by a conviction that ‘things need to be pulled apart’ (Troyna 1994, 71). Researchers, therefore, make an attempt to delve deeper into policy formation and process, exposing the nature, scope and distribution of policies. This entails unpacking the politics of policies as they relate to the social context, in terms of the ‘interests, discontinuities, omissions, compromises, and exceptions’ (Ball 1990, 3); and, admitting the values and goals in politics as well as economics (Whitty 2002). In sum, the goal is ‘to plot the changing ideological, economic and political parameters of policy and to relate the ideological, political and economic to the dynamics of policy debate and policy formation’ (Ball 1990, 8).
With this in mind, we developed five driving research questions, as noted above: (1) What is the role of the federal government in E & T policy in Canada? And, with whom does the federal government partner to deliver policy? (2) What are current policies in E & T seeking to achieve? (3) How are E & T framed? (4) Who is targeted in policy? (5) What are the mechanisms for achieving goals?

In our analysis, we also drew from the insights of Norman Fairclough (2003, 2006), who calls our attention to the power of discourse. He shows how powerful discourses can be when operationalised, resulting in concrete changes. In attempting to understand how discourse can ‘act’, Fairclough (2003) suggests that as critical discourse analysts, we look for particular linguistic features, including assumptions, presuppositions, implications; classifications; contradictions; choice of words, rhetorical features, etc. In attempting to shed light on the political landscape, we have drawn on Fairclough’s insights in our examination of policy documents.

**The policy documents**

Ten documents were examined for this research project. While we do not suggest these comprise an exhaustive list of policy in E & T at the federal level, we do believe these policies provide a good overview of the government’s focus and priorities; that is, addressing employer concerns over the shortfall in the availability of skilled labour now and in Canada’s future given an aging population such that 30% of the Canadian population is projected to be over 55 years of age by 2025 (HRDC 1999). To address labour shortages, Canada has historically relied on immigration and more recently equity-seeking groups such as Indigenous peoples, ‘visible minorities’, and people with disabilities. Indeed, seven out of the 10 policies we examined target these groups. Furthermore, these policies were some of the main ones released over the past decade or two and are indicative of SIS and inclusive liberalism. The documents were the following:

1. **Workplace Skills Strategy (WSS)**: The government facilitates consultation among various stakeholders in the Canadian economy to promote the three aspects to this strategy: Workplace Skills Initiative, Workplace Partners Panel (panel of labour and business leaders who collaborate to address regional skills shortages) and the Trades and Apprenticeship Strategy (government to work with provinces and unions). The overall goal of the strategy is to promote skills recognition, partnerships and networks.

2. **Workplace Skills Initiative (WSI)**: Its intent is to address labour shortages by targeting the skills-related challenges of three groups – newcomers to Canada, older workers, and low-skilled workers. The government provides funds for projects that respond to the skills challenges in the workplace of these three groups. This initiative falls under the umbrella of the WSS. At the time of analysis, it was the only initiative of the three listed under the WSS to be operationalised.

3. **Targeted Initiative for Older Workers**: This programme can be understood as part of WSI’s concern for improving E & T for older workers in Canada. The federal government provides funds to the provinces for programming and projects that enhance skills training and upgrading for workers aged 55–64.

4. **Temporary Foreign Worker Programme**: In order to address labour shortages in particular industries (oil and gas, construction, tourism), processing time for
temporary foreign workers are expedited through an Expedited Labour Market Opinion assessment.

5. **Foreign Credential Recognition**\(^7\): The government funds projects aimed at developing processes and/or tools that assist in accelerating the assessment and recognition of immigrants’ foreign credentials in order to ensure they meet Canadian standards. Both the Temporary Foreign Worker Programme and the Foreign Credential Recognition policy fall under the WSI’s mandate of targeting newcomers to Canada.

6. **Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership (ASEP)**\(^8\): The government partners with organisations and businesses to provide ‘training and employment opportunities’ for Indigenous Canadians in ‘oil, gas, mining, forestry, hydro-electric’ industries.

7. **Aboriginal Training Programme in Museum Practices (ATPMP)**\(^9\): A government partnership with the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation to provide training in museum studies (professional and technical training), including an eight-month internship, to people of Aboriginal heritage.

8. **Bold Eagle Programme**\(^10\): Run by the Department of National Defence in collaboration with provincial Indian affairs organisations and nations to provide two-month training camps to young Indigenous Canadians with the option for them to pursue employment in the armed forces.

9. **Lifelong Learning Plan**\(^11\): A policy which enables Canadians to withdraw from their RRSPs\(^12\) up to $20,000 over four years to participate in higher education and training.


**Findings**

Based on the five questions that guided our analysis, we found three areas of contradictions evident in the 10 documents. In this section, we outline what those discrepancies are and provide some examples of each from the 10 documents. Our analysis shows that despite the shift to SIS or inclusive liberalism in order to address social and economic exclusion stemming for neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s, the 10 policies have the potential to exacerbate discursively the tension between addressing social exclusion and developing a high skills society.

**High skill/low skill**

While the 10 documents we examined made reference to developing a highly skilled workforce, to compete in the global knowledge-based economy, or to creating opportunities for innovation and knowledge networks, most of the programmes articulated in the documents were short-term and focused on skill transfer rather than on knowledge generation. Some actually promote low-skill initiatives (or at least obviously non-knowledge economy jobs) while still employing high-skill rhetoric. One possibility for this discrepancy was the fact that the goals of each programme were to be achieved
through the funding of short-term projects to various stakeholders. The result seems to be (at least discursively demonstrated) a lack of consistency and coordination among projects, policies and provision of programmes. Our analysis shows discrepancies between the rhetoric of building a high-skill knowledge workforce and the actual government programmes that tend to focus on the development of low-skilled labour.

The two policies that seem to focus on promoting a high skills agenda are the *Lifelong Learning Plan* and the *Foreign Credential Recognition* programme, yet neither of these policies appear to support an infrastructure where a knowledge economy is fostered in Canada. The *Lifelong Learning Plan* aims to increase the percentage of Canadians in training and education to develop their skills in relation to what the economy demands. Learning is framed as ‘education’ connoting an ongoing process of upskilling for the individual. Individuals withdraw on their RRSPs to engage in training or education programmes for at least three months, suggesting a concern for increasing skills to a level not achievable through short-term training courses associated with jobs not in the knowledge economy sector. The programme does not address issues of sector capability nor does it aid in funding an education system necessary for supporting a knowledge economy. Education courses in which borrowers enrol might support learners’ needs to the level needed for a high-skill society, though this is unknown.

The *Foreign Credential Recognition* programme is another policy, which on the face of it, appears geared towards supporting a high-skilled society. High-skilled immigrants are encouraged to come to Canada in order to contribute to the Canadian knowledge economy, reflecting Canada’s participation in the ‘global war for talent’. Brown and Tannock (2009) explain that the battle for the brightest represents a new phase of neoliberalism in which not only the movement of capital and commodities are liberalised, but high-skill labour is as well. However, many professionals have difficulty with receiving recognition for their credentials by professional associations after they arrive in Canada. The *Foreign Credential Recognition* initiative is meant to address this issue by developing a streamlined and standardised system. The initiative is to facilitate a ‘pan-Canadian’ network to ensure processes are fair, accessible, timely and coherent. However, funding is provided on a project-by-project basis to multiple partners (sector councils, non-profit organisations, professional associations, universities, etc.) to develop assessment tools. The number of potential stakeholders is vast, making it unclear how coherent and collaborative networks are going to be developed in order to ensure consistency across the country. Added to this concern is the fact that many professional licensing bodies are provincially regulated rather than federally regulated. Furthermore, the high-skill education is to be imported by foreign workers rather than fostered in Canada. It is essentially, then, a high-skill employment rather than E & T policy.

Despite these two examples of what could be considered ‘high-skill’ policies, most of the federal policies we looked at were aimed at low-skill E & T. The discourse in ASEP was mainly around basic skills, literacy and upgrading; furthermore, the declared goal of the programme is to promote ‘maximum employment for Aboriginal peoples’ with little concern for what such employment might be. At the time during which research was conducted, the main partnerships funded through ASEP were related to filling the job shortages in mining in Labrador (with the main corporate partner consisting of Voisey Bay Employment and Training Authority, where Voisey is a mining company). Indeed, the policy’s declared goal of increasing
participation in economic opportunities’ is really part of a declared response to the then (and continuing) resource boom (specifically in the areas of mining, oil, gas and hydro), due to increasing demand from China and related labour shortage in these areas.

In addition, the government’s response to ‘raising adult literacy skills …’ cites that the reason to focus on literacy is because it forms the ‘foundation for a knowledge-based economy and society’ (Government of Canada 2003, 1); yet, much of the discourse surrounding literacy is focused on raising the literacy levels of the bottom Canadians to a level that might partially combat low income and health and high crime levels, not raising literacy levels to a rate that might help create more Canadian ‘knowledge workers’. Furthermore, the WSS, and the related Targeted Initiative for Older Workers and overall WSI are all focused on skill deficits and labour shortages. The Targeted Initiative for Older Workers is designed to respond to the immediate labour needs of workers aged 55–64. The initiative, however, only applies to workers living in rural communities experiencing high unemployment or single-industry communities often based on resource extraction. While the possibility that knowledge workers, such as engineers and geophysicists, may make up some of these workers, many of Canada’s resource extraction industries are labour-intensive. Given the initiative focuses on short-term programming such as skills upgrading, resume writing, building self-marketing skills and re-certification, it is unclear how these older workers are to be trained to become participants in Canada’s knowledge economy. In a similar vein, the WSI includes providing opportunities for low-skilled workers who have been ‘underutilised’ and have the potential to ‘contribute to the economy’ by overcoming skills barriers through the upgrading of technical and essential skills. Similar to the other initiatives mentioned the goal is to develop skills such as literacy, numeracy and communication skills within a maximum of 24 months. ‘Knowledge workers’ are to be produced quickly through short-term training schemes focused on basic skill acquisition. Likewise, quite strikingly, the Temporary Foreign Worker Programme focuses on bringing in foreign workers for occupations such as crane operators, food and beverage servers, hotel front desk clerks and retail sales clerks. While nurses, pharmacists and possibly dental technicians (all targeted professions) could meet the criterion of high-skill work or positions, most temporary foreign workers qualifying under this programme would not fulfil the requirements of contributing to Canada’s so-called knowledge economy. Prior to 2002, the Temporary Foreign Worker Programme targeted high-skill workers. However, in 2002 with increasing labour shortages in the service sector, the programme was changed to allow employers to hire temporary workers for low-skilled occupations. The high-skill/low-skill tension is thus quite pronounced within and across all the documents we studied. We argue, additionally, that the lack of consistency, coherence and tangible outcomes and mechanisms for accountability would further stymie Canada’s endeavour to become a high-skill society.

**Reaching the excluded?**

Inclusion seems to be a concern of the 10 documents examined, supporting an inclusive liberal approach to policy (Craig and Porter 2006). Issues around social cohesion and raising the living standards of the marginalised are themes articulated throughout most of the documents. A close analysis, however, reveals that inclusion in fact only
refers to those who already possess certain amounts of social or educational capital. Those not meeting minimum requirements do not have access to the programmes. Documents that focus on particular target groups include: ASEP, Bold Eagle and ATPMP, which all concentrate on the Aboriginal population of Canada (including First Nations, Métis and Inuit); the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, designed to provide re-training for workers aged 55–64 in rural resource industries or communities experiencing high unemployment. Deeper analysis of these documents raises doubts about whether the socially, economically and culturally excluded are actually further included into Canadian society and, more specifically, a Canadian knowledge economy or society.

In the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, for example, the federal government distributes funds to provincial ministries responsible for education and employment who in turn distribute the funds on a project-by-project basis to educational institutions and community agencies. Projects are short-term and tend to be targeted towards workers who have been employed in the past and already possess particular levels of skill and therefore do not require significant amounts of re-training. Even though the goal of the policy seems to be employment inclusion of those considered ‘older’, the structure of the programme does not target those older workers at the lowest levels of the socio-economic spectrum. In addition, because the focus of this initiative tends to be on labour and resource sectors, it is unlikely that many women in this age bracket would qualify for assistance.

In a different example, ASEP claims to have at its heart a concern for the economic inclusion of Aboriginal Canadians into the workforce, though the operationalisation of this goal and the concern for the economic welfare of Indigenous Canadians is called into question by the other espoused goal of the policy which is to save on ‘income support programmes’. What is most striking in the reports on allocation of funding through ASEP is how ‘success’ is defined. There is an explicit category in the policy that focuses on ‘social assistance displacement’; this entails calculating to the dollar the savings to the state by moving people into employment. ASEP’s objective of trying to ‘help communities and families’ lies alongside, or perhaps even secondary to, the concern with saving money on social services. The Bold Eagle programme is only a short-term training course and with the dual goal of manning the Canadian armed forces, concern for economic and social inclusion appears to come second place. Furthermore, all three documents – the Bold Eagle programme, ATPMP, as well as ASEP – discriminate based on educational achievement level, either requiring of applicants a Grade 10 or Grade 12 completion. In fact, to even be considered for the eight-month internship with ATPMP, applicants must have an undergraduate degree in museology, social science or humanities.

These would not appear to be such rigorous requirements were it not for the fact of the very low high-school achievement levels of Indigenous Canadians. Indeed, in the latest Census (2006), it was found that less than 40% of Aboriginal Canadians aged 20–24 had completed high school (Richards 2008). This percentage decreases quite rapidly when considering older First Nations who would make up a sizable proportion of those funded under ASEP. The rate is also substantially lower for on-reserve compared to off-reserve Indigenous Canadians (Richards 2008). The very socially marginalised and excluded appear to continue to be excluded by federal E & T policy. And those lucky enough to qualify for the above-mentioned programmes are often only rewarded by short-term courses leading to low-skill and low-security employment (see http://dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/Collection/RH64-25-2003E.pdf).
Passive/active government: the nature of the Canadian state

The final tension we identified in the 10 policy documents was concerning the nature of the federal Canadian state in E & T policy. At first glance, the policies give the flavour that the federal government is actively developing a knowledge economy and innovative society. However, within the structures of the Canadian federal state, education and training are devolved to the provincial governments. Furthermore, it is the organisations that are called upon to be active in their competitive application for programme funding. Indeed, the partnership approach, characteristic of inclusive liberal governance, is clearly the manner in which the Canadian government has opted to approach E & T nationally. Accountability structures appear weak or vague and there appears to be little consistency in the programmes that are enacted as a result of funding made available by the federal government through some of these policies. The provincial government plays a strong role in federal E & T policy and is alluded to in all documents bar the ATPMP and Lifelong Learning Plan. Not all provincial governments appear to be actively involved, however. The only provincial governments involved in the Bold Eagle programme are Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba. At the time of analysis, the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers was available in only six of Canada’s 10 provinces and two of the three territories. It was also difficult to determine to what extent the initiative was being taken up consistently across the provinces and territories involved. Information made available on provincial and territorial government websites ranged from very detailed – the community partners, project goals and designs (e.g. Nova Scotia) – to the most minimal – such as the name and phone number of a contact person in the provincial/territorial ministry (e.g. Northwest Territories). Although we cannot at this point project definitive conclusions, it appears that target group members’ ability to access these federal initiatives is dependent on each province’s/territory’s capacity and resources to make use of the available funds. Even though it appears that such initiatives are meant to redress Canada’s existing regional employment and standard of living disparities, further research is needed to ascertain whether this goal is coming to fruition or not. The manner in which organisations or the provincial government partners with the federal government is not always clear or consistent and accountability to the government is not always known or is vague. Moreover, given that the policies tend to target low-skills development, it is questionable whether they will result in a more knowledge-based economy. While Canadian banks may run the Lifelong Learning Plan with sustained funding, other programmes involve supplying short-term funding to NGOs and universities to carry out particular research projects and pilot programmes – such as those which may benefit older workers, rural and low-skilled workers, and immigrants. Particularly striking about Canadian federal policy in E & T is the lack of information about requirements, how programmes are funded, and exactly how much funding has been allocated to operationalising policy. ASEP, a policy for which funding is known, was provided with $215 million between 2003 and 2009 to help employers provide 50 long-term sustainable jobs for Aboriginal peoples. Yet it is not known how this money is allocated, what is meant by ‘sustainable’ and whether there are serious accountability requirements to the federal government. In another example, the Foreign Credential Recognition programme has provided $68 million to accelerating assessment, and recognition, enhanced language training and bridge to work programmes, and providing $2 million for non-profits for up to five years. Where this money is actually allocated and how it brings about the policy’s intended
aims is difficult to ascertain. It also seems that some policies may benefit few people – for example, the ATPMP has only funded 75 interns since its inception in 1993. Overall, the government rhetorically demonstrates its support for lifelong learning, training and education for better employment, yet this may not necessarily move much beyond discourse, such as in the Government Response to Raising Adult Literacy.

The Canadian federal government appears to be active in its support of learning yet has devolved responsibility for it to organisations, the provincial governments, companies and individuals – with little apparent mechanisms for ensuring accountability. This is best exemplified by the LLP which directly imbues an active role to the citizen and a passive one to the government: as quoted in the documents, ‘Canadians know that their ability to continue earning depends on their ability to continue learning’ (Government of Canada 1998). In other words, the federal government will take care of learning passively (in the form of loans and basic funding) as the individual will actively engage in her education to improve employability. The result is that a series of fragmented and uncoordinated policies are produced, rather than a holistic framework in which the policies speak to one another with a unified voice promoting an actual pan-Canadian E & T strategy.

Conclusions
In returning to our research questions which we set to answer upon embarking this study, we respond.

What is the role of the federal government in E & T policy in Canada? And, with whom does the federal government partner to deliver policy?

The role of the federal government in E & T policy in Canada is more passive than active, committed in discourse to a pan-Canadian approach though not necessarily in practice. The government generally adopts a partnership approach in delivering policy and forms (limited) relationships with the provincial governments across the country, to varying degrees, and again often provides money to NGOs, universities and companies through grants – acting, in many senses, as a silent partner. Furthermore, the concentration of some partnerships with industry, rather than with other training and service providers, may lead to less planning, more short-term thinking and a concern for profits and savings above long-term economic and social amelioration for the individual undergoing training.

What are current policies in E & T seeking to achieve?
This question still stumps us, as what they seek to achieve is somewhat paradoxical – a high-skilled inclusive society in discourse and to maintain a resource/service industry economy in practice, supporting the low, but not very low, skilled and marginalised, and devolving responsibility for ‘high skills’ to other countries and to higher education institutes which are managed provincially. Indeed, immigrants, First Nations and older workers are targeted to meet (what were) skill shortages in old-economy and service industry jobs.
How are employment and education framed?

High employment and targeting unemployment are goals which are apparent in these documents.

Yet, the type of employment the government seems to be actively supporting is not predominantly associated with the knowledge economy. Passively, the federal government is supporting high-skill positions through the Foreign Credential Recognition and Lifelong Learning Plan – yet targeted E & T policy is focused on low-skill positions. In terms of education, it is inconsistently framed as learning, skills or training.

Who is targeted in policy?

The priority demographics of the Canadian government appear to be: the low-skilled, immigrants, older workers and the Aboriginal population. Yet, as we have shown, the most marginalised of Canadian society continue to be left at the margins through the support of short-term, overly targeted requirements of high-school completion or supporting those already in work.

What are the mechanisms for achieving goals?

The mechanisms appear poor. This is not to say the goal of supporting 50 jobs for Aboriginal peoples will not be achieved – quite likely it will – but the overall goal of building a Canadian skills strategy is unlikely to be met, and the sometimes uttered and espoused aim of building a knowledge society is also a desire that will probably remain desirable in the absence of policy that could make a tangible difference.

Overall, then what can we conclude about the Canadian federal government’s approach to E & T policy? What is the Canadian federal government hoping to achieve through the policies it has enacted in recent years? One goal of course is greater integration of Indigenous Canadians into the workforce, into education and into mainstream Canadian society however that be conceived; through ASEP, ATPMP and Bold Eagle we see acknowledgement of cultural issues and a concern for increased participation in training and employment. We also see a concern, specifically, for using E & T policy to combat perceived skills shortages by targeting immigrants (including temporary ones) and older workers. It is an inclusive liberalism (Craig and Porter 2003, 2006), in that inclusion is a main concern (at least rhetorically) of the policy which has been written specifically to be based on a partnership model including the public and private spheres in the forms of governments, NGOs, educational organisations and businesses. In some ways also, E & T is considered a wise social investment – again, at least rhetorically. Saint-Martin (2007) explains that the SIS is one in which economic and social policy becomes blurred and the state adopts an entrepreneurial and risk-management approach to investing in citizens through education and social programmes to ensure that people are included in the economy. The SIS approach to policy shifts emphasis away from social and employment security to individualised and continuous skills investment. Education and training are promoted to provide Canadians with the ability to ‘bounce back’ from whatever fluctuations and uncertainties the changing economy presents. Furthermore, our study mirrors much of Brown, Green, and Lauder’s (2001) insights into the high skills strategies of the UK and USA, as tending towards a low road/high road high-skill pattern. The high-skills/low-skills divide appears to be further entrenched by recent policy which, in effect, favours a continuation of low-skill jobs and workers and a small pool of high-skill workers.
whose skills are to be developed either outside the country or to fall almost completely under provincial jurisdiction. However, the market approach to E & T in Canada remains within the social investment/inclusive liberal state. This clearly has influenced the direction many policies have taken towards short-term, short-sighted goals and programmes with certain limited criteria for participation.

In some ways, our analyses of federal Canadian policies on lifelong learning, E & T raise more questions than they answer. It would be informative and revealing to further investigate the implications and impact of these policies on the lived experiences of policy-makers, businesses, employers and the people for whom the policies are intended – that is, the target groups of skilled migrants, Aboriginal peoples, low-skilled, unemployed as well as ‘regular’ Canadians. We encourage the further investigation of the operationalisation of these and other policies, a task which we may undertake ourselves in the near future through interviews with the various policy actors.

Nonetheless, it is unsurprising that little to nothing has been written about Canadian federal policy on skills, employment, training and/or lifelong learning. There is little comparison to be made between Canada – with its menu of different policies which are enacted differently across the provinces and which relate little to one another – to, say, UK’s ‘Skills for Life’ strategy or more holistic skills strategies being undertaken in New Zealand and other countries. We find it curious that Howlett and Ramesh (2003), in their treatise ‘Studying Public Policy’, contend that federalism helps explain the limited policy capacity of the Australian government. Interestingly, also, Cornford (2009) very recently concluded that there was no real lifelong learning strategy in Australia. Our findings almost mirror this conclusion, and we, too, wonder if the nature of federalism in fact prevents Canada from undertaking a national strategy surrounding E & T. Whether this is the case or not, what we do argue, in drawing on our findings, is that Canada has not put forth an E & T strategy to help build, and/or contribute to, a knowledge economy, despite certain instances of rhetoric to the contrary. The purpose of recent policy on E & T can, in contrast, be better understood as enabling Canada to ‘keep afloat’ in the economy it already has.

In sum, despite the questionable, and often paradoxical, aspects of the knowledge economy, national governments appear to be under pressure to be seen as building a highly skilled workforce even if it contradicts the material conditions of a nation’s existing economy. Canadian E & T policies project building a future (imagined) knowledge economy while at the same time developing economic and social inclusion. As our analysis here illustrates, the extent to which this is currently possible is limited.

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Notes
1. Hall and Soskice (2002) also make mention of another system to which a number of other European countries belong, including Spain, Italy, Greece and Turkey, which they call the ‘Mediterranean System’. While they do not go into any detail about this third group, it appears that their economic system (in terms of the relationship between the state and
companies) is a hybrid between the Liberal Market Economy and the Coordinated Market Economy.

2. Note that all the links to the following policies are included as notes rather than having been included in the overall reference list. Please refer to these URLs for further information.

5. See http://www.hrle.gov.nl.ca/hrle/findajob/TIOW.pdf
10. See http://www.army.forces.gc.ca/boldeagle/contents.asp
12. RRSPs refer to the Registered Retirement Savings Plan, a provision in the Canadian Income Tax Act. An RRSP is an account that provides tax benefits for retirement savings in Canada.
14. Since the completion of the research, eight other projects in the sectors of oil and gas, forestry, fishing and construction have been negotiated between the federal government and the provinces of New Brunswick, Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba, and the territories of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. These projects were funded until 2009. An additional 16 projects have been funded until 2012 adding tourism and aerospace to the list of industries. Saskatchewan, Quebec, Nova Scotia and the Yukon have joined the list of provinces and territories. The only province that has not negotiated an agreement is Prince Edward Island. See http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/employment/aboriginal_training/index.shtml
15. This is when First Nations, Métis and Inuit are included. When only First Nations are considered, the rate is around 56%.

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