As in the rest of the Anglo-Saxon world, neoliberalism has come to comprise the raison d’être of Canadian politics over the last two decades (Clement and Vosko, 2003). “It has narrowed the discourse of political, economic, and social debate, transforming what it means to be liberal, social democratic, or even progressive conservative by asserting itself against social entitlements, rights, and citizenship” (p. viii).

In this chapter we will examine how the new political-economic paradigm has transformed the conditions for and meaning of adult learning in Canada. Our analysis starts with a short overview of the political project of adult and lifelong learning as it is being fostered by intergovernmental bodies such as the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). We then focus on the Canadian version of neoliberalism and conclude with an analysis of its impact on adult learning in Canada.

The Political Project of Lifelong Learning

In the 1970s, a time of concern for equality and democracy when many adult educators were informed by critical theory, adult educators lamented over the marginal status of the field. Today the situation is very different. Driven by a mainly neoliberal agenda that has promoted economic or corporate globalization, adult learning has become a central issue in national policies on education, the economy, and welfare in Canada and around the world (Government of Canada, 2002a; 2002b; EU, 2000; OECD, 1996; 2003).

Within adult learning circles there is currently a strong resentment of what is being seen as the colonization of adult learning and its humanistic and liberatory traditions by an ‘economic’ agenda, resulting in a drastic change in the conditions under which adult education operates (Gustavsson, 2002). The current promotion of lifelong learning, with an emphasis on adult learning, signals a deconstruction of welfare through a reconstruction of citizenship as the responsibility of an individual to an economic agenda (Bastow and Martin, 2003).

Critics of the current discourse on adult learning often invoke the ideals and goals that dominated during the first generation of lifelong learning (Rubenson, 1999). The idea of lifelong learning first appeared in the 1970s, at a time when post-World War II optimism about development, prosper-
ity, and the ability of schooling to promote social equality was being challenged. As a result, there were calls for new paradigms to inform educational policy. In this climate and within a humanistic tradition, lifelong learning was advocated—particularly by UNESCO—as a model that would promote a better society and quality of life and allow people to adapt to as well as control change (Dave, 1976; Lengrand, 1970). The concept was one of personal development; people were encouraged to “make themselves” rather than “be made.” An important issue in the analysis of the day was how a “system of lifelong learning” could reduce educational gaps in society. The humanistic generation of lifelong learning saw a strong role for civil society and was primarily promoted by the volunteer sector, and in most countries the state and the market remained largely absent from the debate (Rubenson, 1999). The idea put forward in humanistic tradition and with Utopian vision was diametrically opposed to the neoliberal tide that came to sweep the Western world. Indeed, issues such as equality, democratization, and civil society, which underpinned the first wave of lifelong learning, ceased to inform the educational discourse in the coming years.

Driven by a different ideology with different goals and dreams, the second generation of lifelong learning appeared in the late 1980s. This was a period of change and uncertainty for the OECD economies. In a climate of rising unemployment, declining productivity, and increasing public deficits, “education and the economy” became a catchphrase for those dissatisfied with the status quo of education (OECD, 1989, p. 17). The OECD noted, “The key appears to be the ability of people to cope with changes and to turn them to advantages in the future” (OECD, 1986; as cited in Marginson, 1993, p. 48). The 1989 OECD report *Education and the Economy in a Changing Society* ushered in what has been labelled the second generation of human capital thinking in educational policy, replacing the original theory of the 1960s (Marginson, 1997). These ideas were quickly picked up by the political sphere but not by representatives of the field of adult learning. For example, former US Labour Secretary Robert Reich (1992) argued that in a competitive market economy those who are adaptive to the knowledge economy, as well as marketable, tend to succeed; whereas those who do not possess the necessary skills and technological know-how struggle to stay afloat. In Canada several commissions on economic development made the same connection between learning and economic prosperity, as exemplified in the upcoming section, “Adult Learning Under the Canadian Way.”

In short, discussions on lifelong learning became framed within a politico-economic imperative that emphasized the importance of science and technology, as well as highly developed human capital. It is of interest to note that whereas the first generation of lifelong learning talked about education as enabling individuals to control and adapt to change, the second generation saw learning only as a mechanism for individuals to adjust to a society that was shaped without their input.
Towards the end of the 1990s, policymakers had come to the insight that although the New Economy holds the promise of increased productivity and an improved standard of living, it also introduces a new set of transitions and adjustment challenges for society, industry, and individuals. Sensing a public disgruntled with free-market capitalism and its seeming disregard for social and individual issues, political circles became increasingly aware that these challenges needed to be addressed. Increased exclusion or marginalization of large segments of the population and exacerbated socio-economic divisions were seen as a threat to global capitalism as such. The new understanding in policy circles came to affect the international discourse on lifelong learning and resulted in a softening of the economistic perspective (Field, 2003; Rubenson, 2004). This change is embedded in policy documents on lifelong learning, which are no longer exclusively concerned with human capital issues, but also include references to social purposes (see, e.g., EU, 2000; OECD, 2003).

The current third generation of lifelong learning is a “softened” economistic version that can be seen as a reflection of what has become known as the Third Way (Giddens, 1999), which claims to reinsert issues of social cohesion, civic participation, and democracy into politics. For Third Way governments, in particular, training and education have been identified as playing a key role in easing the transition into a knowledge economy. Giddens wrote that “education and training have become the new mantra for social democratic politicians” (p. 109), and Tony Blair himself is quoted as saying, “Education is the best economic policy we have” (Martin, 2003, p. 567).

According to critics, under Third Way governments up-skilling, training, or lifelong learning are conceived mainly in terms of generating wealth— for the individual and for the country (Newman and De Zoysa, 2001). “The emphasis on education, re-skilling, and lifelong learning are all policies concerned with enhancing the competitiveness of the British economy” (Bastow & Martin, 2003, p. 98). Indeed, although social cohesion and social justice have been a purported mission of Blair’s Labour government, “equity has been tagged on to Labour’s priorities rather than taking a centre stage” (Ball, 1999, p. 204).

From the perspective of implementing lifelong learning, the three generations reflect different roles for—and interrelations among—the three major institutional arrangements: state, market, and civil society (see Figure 1). According to Figure 1, the relationships among these three institutional arrangements are expected to strongly influence the conditions under which adult and lifelong learning operate and hence shape its practice.

The first generation of lifelong learning, as expressed in the UNESCO tradition, saw a strong role for civil society; whereas the second generation privileged the market, downplayed the role of the state, and almost completely neglected civil society. Thus, during the first generation NGOs
came to play a relatively important role, but the emphasis during the second became privatization and deregulation of public education. It is important to stress that these institutional arrangements are not static but interrelated. Therefore the influence of the market on adult learning opportunities cannot be fully understood by referring to the shift from state control towards privatization and decentralization of adult education. Thus, with relevance becoming the key concept driving government policies on adult education and training during the second generation of lifelong learning, the interests of business were privileged, and the sector was given the lead role in defining what competencies and skills the public adult educational system should produce. With a recognition of market failures and growing concerns over large groups not participating fully in social and economic life, the third generation can be read as a shift in balance among the three institutional arrangements. The market still has a central role in adult learning, but the responsibilities of the individual and the state are also visible. The language is one of shared responsibilities. However, a closer reading of the text and the understanding that seems to dominate the current policy debate might lead one to be more sceptical of what looks to be a major shift in the public discourse on lifelong learning. Despite repeated references to the involvement of all three institutional arrangements, what stands out in recent policy documents is the stress placed on the responsibility of individuals for their own learning—something that is underscored time after time. The stress on individual responsibility can be seen to reflect the Third Way program and its ethos that “the precept ‘no rights without responsibilities’ applies to all individuals and groups” (Giddens, 2000, p. 165). Giddens continued, “Governments must maintain a regulatory role in many contexts, but as far as possible it should become a facilitator, providing resources for citizens to assume responsibility for the consequences of what they do” (p. 165).

Third Way rhetoric is not foreign to the Canadian discourse on the political economy, a topic to which we now turn.
The Canadian Political Economy

Ideological struggle over 20 years has resulted in an acceptance of a reduced role for the state and the taking for granted of free-market forces and global competitiveness as the only alternatives available to Canada (Clement and Vosko, 2003; McBride 2001). In 1995 the Canadian Assistance Plan and the Established Program Financing Act were replaced by the Canadian Health and Social Transfer scheme. The new federal programs came with fewer restrictions on how the provinces could spend the money, but at much reduced funding levels. The situation was made more precarious by severe provincial cuts and changes to their welfare schemes. According to McKeen and Porter (2003, p. 115), this involved privatization of many services, introduction of workfare programs within social assistance programs, and restructuring of education and health. They further concluded that inflation and productivity came to replace unemployment as the core concern. During the previous Keynesian period, which came to an end in the late 1970s, the state recognized that unemployment could be the fault of the economy and not the individual. Consequently, the state assumed some responsibility for trying to keep unemployment at a relative low level and for providing income security to those who were affected (McKeen and Porter 2003). Although some programs had restrictions on eligibility, there was greater emphasis on universality than would have been the case under the neoliberal regime. Under neoliberalism, conversely, unemployment is seen less as a market failure and more as a result of individuals’ failure to invest in their human capital and/or to have the right attitude toward work. Active labour market policies and accompanying changes to the security system are promoted on the grounds that they overcome the previous system’s disincentives for work.

The change in the Canadian political economy has been achieved over the last two decades through two processes, neoliberal constitutionalism and disciplinary neoliberalism (Gill, 2003). The former term refers to the legal institutionalizing of neoliberalism through supranational organizations such as the WTO or the IMF or through free-trade agreements such as NAFTA. The latter term is used to explain the internalization of neoliberal ideology that occurs within governments and individuals. Through self-governance and self-regulation, individuals come to pursue a neoliberal agenda—even though there may be no legal requirement or policy that dictates such action. Consider, for example, the message that global economic forces leave us no choice, which is stressed time after time by politicians and the business community. David O’Brian, former CEO of one of the most influential lobby groups in Canada, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, stated, “The Global economy is at our doors. It is not a question of deciding what we want to do: it is deciding for us” (Watkins, 2003, p. 4).

The Canadian state cooperates with the market—not always because of coercion, but rather because of the neoliberal agendas and desires of the
government involved (McBride, 2001). Rather than hapless recipients of neoliberalism, “governments act as the midwives of globalization” (Brodie, 1996, p. 386). Similarly, there are several accounts of how the forces of globalization have differential impacts on countries. Hall and Soskice (2001) separated the economies of OECD countries into two distinct categories: the liberal market, which comprises Anglo-Saxon countries, and the coordinated market system, which includes the Nordic countries, Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland. Anglo-Saxon countries, they argued, have been more affected by the rhetoric and reality of neoliberalism than have those nation-states within the coordinated market system.

Third Way politics commonly refers to the political philosophy of Anthony Giddens (see 1999, 2000) and the political platform of Tony Blair’s New Labour. It is therefore interesting to note that when in 2000 President Bill Clinton held a summit to explore the Third Way, he insisted that then Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien attend “on the grounds that the Third Way was inspired by Canada” (Coyne, 2000, p. 1). Chretien described the Canadian Way, a term that is attributed to the former Prime Minister (see Coyne, 2000), as “a balance that promotes individual freedom and economic prosperity while at the same time sharing risks and benefits [emphasis added]” (p. 1). As former Minister of Finance and current Prime Minister Paul Martin declared in the Budget Speech of 2000 (Department of Finance Canada, 2000):

The success we have achieved as a nation has come not only from strong growth but from an abiding commitment to strong values—caring and compassion, an insistence that there be an equitable sharing of the benefits of economic growth. (p. 5)

In Canada’s Performance 2002 the President of the Treasury Board (2002) described the Canadian Way as

an approach marked by an accommodation of cultures, a recognition of diversity, a partnership between citizens and the state, a sharing of risks and benefits, and a positioning of government as an instrument of collective action. It is an approach centred on a goal that is common to all Canadians—improving the quality of life for all. (p. 8)

Canada’s federal budgets (Department of Finance Canada, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005a, 2005b) can also provide some insight into the social cohesion/neoliberal divide in the new nation-building venture. Table 1 shows the titles and themes of the budgets for seven years.
Table 1: Themes and Topics in the Federal Budget 1997, 1999-2001, 2003-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/Topics</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1999-2001</th>
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<td>New agenda for achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building the Canada we want</td>
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<td>Securing progress in an uncertain world</td>
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<td>Fiscal progress and better lives</td>
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<td>Tax cut and tax relief plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building today for a better tomorrow</td>
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<td>Restoring confidence in the country’s finances</td>
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<td>Knowledge and innovation</td>
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<td>Federal transfers</td>
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<td>Investing in a stronger society</td>
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<td>Health care and society</td>
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<td>Investment</td>
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<td>Expecting quality of life</td>
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<td>More innovative economy</td>
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<td>Health care</td>
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<td>Tax relief and fairness</td>
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<td>Investing in jobs and growth</td>
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From appearances, all budgets are committed to unifying the country and fit within a Third Way framework of using language around neoliberalism and human capitalism as well as social provision/cohesion. Furthermore, it could be argued that over the seven years shown in Table 1, the language has become more geared towards social cohesion and the humanizing elements of the Third Way—especially since 2004 when community was introduced as a budget priority. In the 2005 budget the Liberals promised “a new deal for Canada’s communities” (Department of Finance Canada, 2005a, p. 1). In this statement it is hard to miss the reference to the New Deal, a term used to refer to Roosevelt’s welfare state. International refers to Canada’s “meeting global responsibilities,” and social entails the government’s guarantee to “secure social foundations” (Department of Finance Canada, 2005b, p. 1). The environment, a proclaimed pillar of the Third Way (Giddens, 1999), signals a commitment to “the green economy” (Department of Finance Canada, 2005b, p. 1). At the same time, although accountability and the economy have been common themes, tax relief no longer figures, nor do specific mentions of finance. Embedded in the 2005 budget is the notion of Canadians’ commitment to each other and Canada’s responsibility to others in the country and overseas; state strength is conceived as more important than GDP.

Similar to the Third Way, the Canadian Way strongly embraces the “no rights without responsibilities” (Giddens, 2000, p. 165) philosophy. However, we would argue that the Canadian Way goes beyond the Third Way, injecting a distinct Canadian flavour in an effort to revive a sense of nation allegiance. Yet the “New Canadian Nationalism” promoted by the Liberal government differs from other interpretations of Canadian nationalism. Critics have stated that the particular understanding of nation, nation building, and national identity, which were integral in the post-World War II citizenship efforts, is missing from the new version (Brodie, 2002). Although in the previously cited quotation, Chretien (as cited in Coyne, 2000) mentioned or alluded to diversity and multiculturalism (two feature factors deemed important to Canadians in defining their identity; see Kunz, 2001) values associated with state services are absent. Brodie lamented Canada’s abandonment of “the social covenant upon which the postwar social citizenship regime was built” (p. 378). Instead, Canadian values are now alleged to be most suited to a competitive marketplace; at a summit for the Business Council on National Issues, the speaker opened with a tribute to Canadian values, asserting that these values are what will triumph in a competitive world (Carroll, 2002).

As we shall try to demonstrate in the following section, just as in Blair’s Third Way, skill building and adult education are considered of vital importance to the Canadian Way.
Adult Learning Under the Canadian Way

In the early 1990s the economistic paradigm started to shape the Canadian discourse on adult and lifelong learning. The federal Speech from the Throne on May 13, 1991 (Government of Canada, 1991), proclaimed, “In the dawning knowledge age, how well we live will depend on how well we learn” (p. 8). Similarly, a 1994 report from the Ontario Premier’s Council on Economic Renewal (p. 2) states: “Lifelong learning, therefore, is the key link between our educational and economic strategies as the twenty-first century approaches.”

The connection made between learning and earning can be seen in titles such as *Lifelong Learning and the New Economy*, a report from the Ontario Premier’s Council on Economic Renewal (1994) or in the 2001 Statistics Canada report on participation in adult education—cleverly titled *Learning a Living*. This language reflects the hegemonic dominance of the economic imperative in learning in today’s society. The economization of lifelong learning and adult education by government can be understood as a response to the changes taking place in the economy. These changes are becoming a threat not only to capital accumulation, but also to political legitimation and social harmony.

Canada’s Innovation Strategy, launched in an aim “to move Canada to the front ranks of the world’s most innovative countries” (Government of Canada, 2002a, p. 2) reduces adult education to an instrument for the development of an appropriately skilled workforce. Two key documents emerged from this government strategy: *Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians* (Government of Canada, 2002b) and *Achieving Excellence: Investing in People, Knowledge, and Opportunity* (Government of Canada, 2002a). It is unsurprising that competitiveness, economic growth, and innovation are placed at the forefront of both documents—ideas and terms that are associated with neoliberal conceptions of education. Up-skilling is promoted as a national concern through which to increase competitiveness and productivity. Individuals are urged to undertake their civic duty and participate in lifelong learning or post-secondary education, knowing that Canada’s education advantage diminishes as other countries’ participation rates rise. The strategy aims to encourage the “individual entrepreneurial spirit” (Government of Canada, 2002b, p. 6), because business and entrepreneurship of individuals are the “key drivers of innovation” (p. 9). These documents do not appeal solely to self-interest, but also to a national interest. The US is often used as a comparison point. We are told that Canadian venture capital remains smaller than its American counterpart, and therefore “we must become more productive and improve at a faster rate than the US” (p. 14). There is the sense that Canadians can band together and if not beat, then challenge the US. The narrow focus on skills framed within a neoliberal ideology may help to explain why the only comparative statistics on participation in adult education presented in the two reports is the percentage of employed adults who participate in employer-sponsored job-related training.
There is a striking contradiction between the language used to introduce the Innovation Strategy (Government of Canada, 2002a) and the framing of adult education within this agenda. The first page of Knowledge Matters (Government of Canada, 2002b) contains a speech by Prime Minister Chretien in which he stressed that Canada should invest not only in technology and innovation, “but also in the Canadian Way” (p. 1). In attempting to reach out to all Canadians, Chretien proposed that we “create an environment of inclusion” and commit to putting forth an action plan “that includes all of us” (Government of Canada, 2002a, p. 2). However, in the sections on building a world-class workforce, there is little reference or appeal to social cohesion or the creation of an environment of inclusion. No attempt is made to analyze the inequalities in access to and participation in workforce training that are so glaring in all official statistics on participation in adult education (see, e.g., Statistics Canada, 2001).

The “rule of ideas” embedded in the second generation of lifelong learning, and more specifically in the Innovation Strategy (Government of Canada, 2002a), to put it in a Gramscian perspective, is translated into structures and activities as well as values, attitudes, beliefs, and morality and becomes the “common sense” of understanding adult education and adult learning. This understanding is reflected in, among other factors, how the concept of adult education has been operationalized in Statistics Canada surveys. Traditionally, surveys on participation have given equal weight to general and work-related adult education, which is reflected in the list of motivations (Rubenson, 2002). Concerns about the state of civil society in Canada are reflected in the questions, and the list of providers includes NGOs, formal educational institutions, and employers.

The Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS), first conducted in 1986 and most recently in 2003, uses a different logic (see, for example, Statistics Canada, 2001). The AETS used work and employment as the main principle for the construction of the survey. In accordance with the mandate of what was initially Employments and Immigration Canada and later became Human Resources Development Canada, non-work-related adult education has not been of primary concern, and the majority of the survey deals with adult education pursued for work- or career-related reasons. In the questions about providers, civil society-oriented adult education is addressed only under the category Other. Following the launch of the Innovation Strategy (Government of Canada, 2002a), with its narrow skills agenda, any reference to non-work-related adult education was completely dropped in the 2003 AETS, which severely restricted the official understanding of adult education in Canada.

Thus, it is not surprising that studies on adults’ learning behaviour have confirmed an influence perhaps best characterized as “the long arm of the job,” which refers to the fact that participation is increasingly shaped by labour-market conditions. As in other countries (see Belanger and Valdivieso, 1997), this shift has radically altered the Canadian landscape of adult education since the 1970s. The increase in job-related adult education
explains much of the rise in total participation rates from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. Judging from recent surveys, this trend seems to have continued. According to the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD, 1995), 86% of Canadians who had participated in adult education mentioned that they had done so for job-related reasons, compared to only 27% who had taken a course or program for personal reasons. The findings from the 2003 Adult Life Skills and Literacy Survey (OECD, 2005) indicate that whereas the proportion of adult learners who reported job-related reasons was unchanged, the figure for personal reasons had dropped to 17% (Rubenson, Desjardins, and Yoon, in press). The data on sources of direct financial support for adult education and training in 2003 further underline the dominance of employment-related adult education. Slightly over half of the participants reported that they had received financial support from their employers, but only 8% reported direct support from government sources, and the remaining 40% relied completely on self-financing (Rubenson et al., in press).

The rhetoric of the Canadian Way may make frequent references to inclusion and equality of opportunity, but the participation data speak a different language. According to the Adult Life Skills and Literacy Survey (OECD, 2005) 26% of those with less than an upper secondary education participated in 2003 compared to 65% among those with a university education. From the perspective of basic capability equality, to use Amartya Sen’s (1982) concept, it is problematic that whereas only 22% of those with the lowest level of functional literacy (level 1) participated, the rate was 69% among those with the highest level (4/5). Another disturbing finding is the reduction in government support for those who are outside of the labour market. In 1994, 44% of those outside the labour market who had participated in adult education reported that they received direct government support to study. By 2003 this figure had dropped to 20%. Instead, individuals without stable connections to the labour market have increasing difficulties in receiving adult education. Further, those in managerial jobs are much more likely to benefit from employer-supported training. In 2003, 35% of employees in high-skill service benefited from employer-sponsored education compared to only 6% of those in routine manual jobs (Sen, 1982). In short, inequalities in opportunities to receive adult education and training are shaped by a bifurcated labour market. In its review of adult learning in Canada, the OECD (2002) noted the unequal opportunities of different groups to participate in adult education and stressed the need to address the situation for marginalized groups such as Aboriginal populations, the working poor, and those with restricted literacy capacity. The reviewers reported that moving individuals from low literacy (levels 1 and 2) to level 3, which is deemed necessary to fully participate in the so-called knowledge society, realistically takes 12 months of full-time study under the best of conditions. However, according to their observations, very few such possibilities exist for those who really need them the most.
Concluding Comment

Both Canada’s Innovation Strategy (Government of Canada, 2002a) and its federal budgets indicate that the government is interested in portraying itself as sensitive to the concerns of the Canadian citizens: Security, equality of opportunity and access, community building, and human and environmental rights have not been abandoned—at least not in discourse. These policy papers point to a desire to promote lifelong learning for a socially responsible Canada, in which the needs of all Canadians are deemed important. At the same time, though, competition and innovation are proclaimed as an integral part of the new Canadian nationalism and its skills agenda. Under this model, subsidies and protection are discouraged and eliminated because “competition not protection encourages innovation” (Government of Canada, 2002b, p. 25). The call to up-skill as a patriotic duty can be seen as in keeping more with an economic than a social democratic model. In the same way in which Robert Reich (1992) urged Americans to become symbolic analysts to ensure America’s competitiveness, so too has Canada insisted that it is for the sake of the country that Canadians become “Highly Qualified People” (Government of Canada, 2002a, p. 10). We are sceptical of these efforts at nation building because the social cohesion element appears to have been “tacked on” to an economic framework; the social goal of education is more of an appendage to than a partner with the economic goals. In general, education and training are still based on raising an individual’s competitiveness and human capital, as well as his or her capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship. Finally, the presented data on participation reveal a state that has abdicated its responsibilities to lifelong learning for the most vulnerable citizens. Adult learning for all does not seem to be the Canadian Way.

References


Part 3: Contexts of Work and Economy


