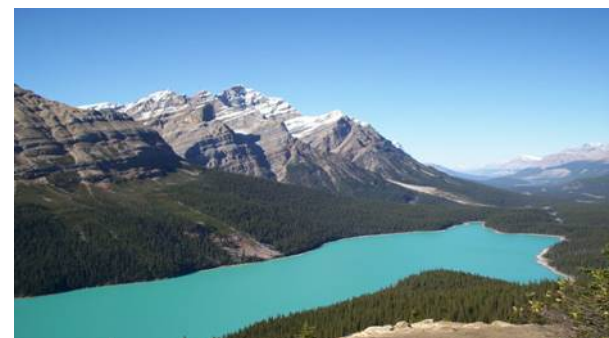




# Schisms and Scapes



## In Canadian Econom/ies

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Feb 04, 2009

# Overview of talk



- What does the 'knowledge economy' mean in Canada?
- Contrasting discourses of (work-related) knowledge
- Schisms: labour market skills structures & the knowledge economy
- Scapes: federal training & employment policies: conflicts & tensions
- Contradictions in knowledge scapes

# Texts: Federal policies & programs for workplace learning in Canada



- *“Knowledge Matters”* (2002)
- *Essential Skills Initiative* (2005)
- *Innovation Strategy* (2002)
- *Workplace Skills Initiative* (2007)
- Human Resources (Skills) Development Canada (HRSDC)

# Building the “knowledge economy”

(HRDC, 2002, HRSDC 2005)



- “creating a more *productive* workforce”
- “Ensure Canadians have the tools they need to *participate fully* in today’s knowledge economy” [concerns for Aboriginal people, new immigrants, and ‘low skilled’]
- “renew and upgrade the *skills* of the workforce”
- “*assessment and recognition* of previously acquired knowledge”
- “promote lifelong learning in the workplace”
- “...a greater number of *innovative people* driving innovation, or applying innovations, to be competitive”
- “individuals who are creative ... highly developed problem-solving and communication skills”
- attracting and retaining “the *highly qualified people* required to *fuel* Canada’s *innovation performance*”
- “building learning infrastructure”
- “*networks* to advance and disseminate knowledge”



# Essential Skills

*“the fundamental skills”*  
*“help people participate fully*  
*in the workplace and*  
*community”*

- Reading text
- Document use
- Numeracy
- Writing
- Oral communication
- Working with others
- Thinking skills
- Computer use
- Continuous learning

# Example: *Retail Sales Manager*



*Essential skills are:*

	complexity level (out of 5)
■ Oral communication	3
■ Problem solving	2
■ Decision making	3
■ Working with others	3

# Innovation Strategy (HRDC, 2002)



- create “stimulating and innovative training environment”
- build new regional, national and international *networks and partnerships*
- promote *collaboration and multidisciplinary*
- promote *world-class*, innovative research or technology development
- generate “*new ideas* and concepts ... *better ways* of performing research or technology development”

# Workplace Skills Initiative



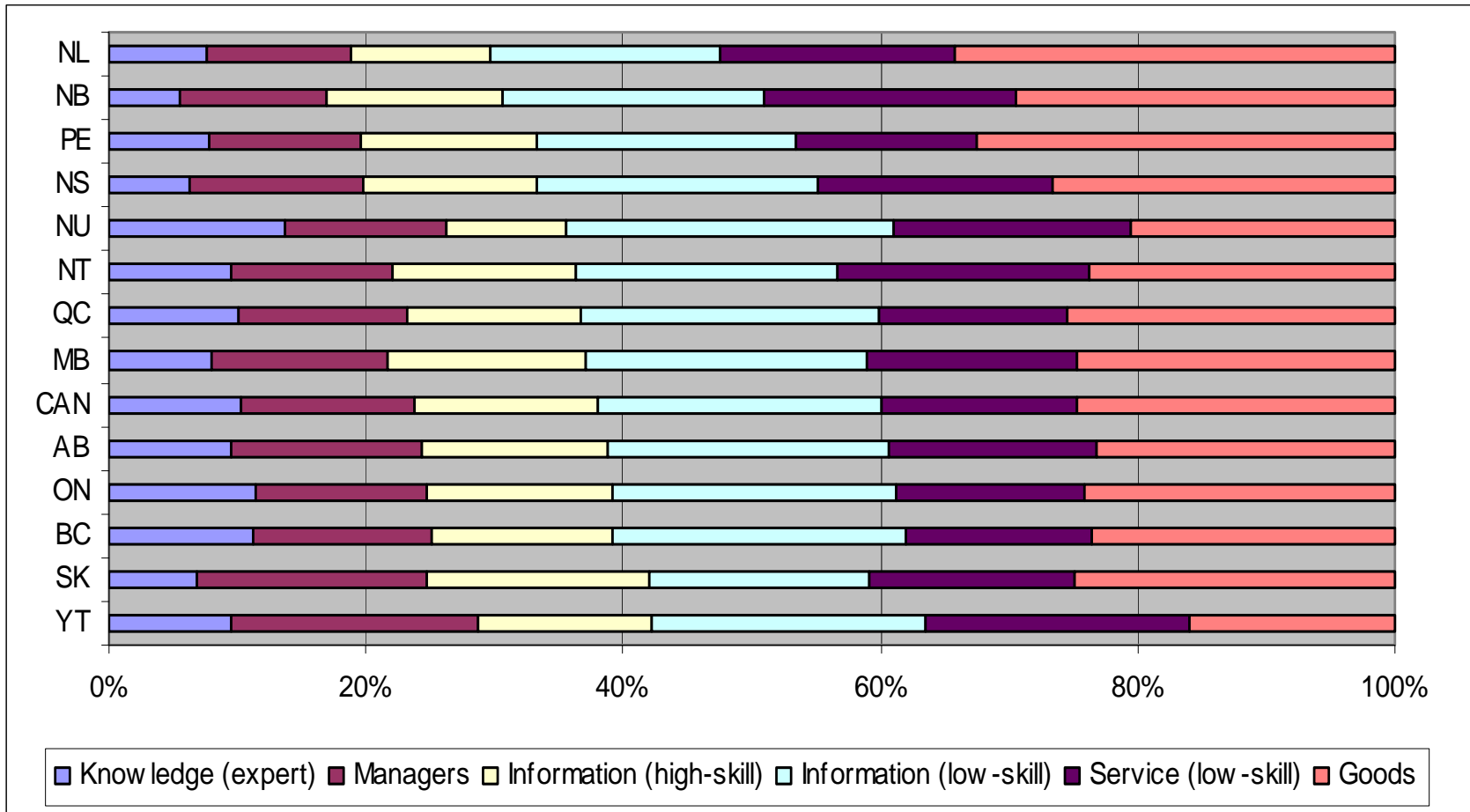
- improve productivity through “innovation, research, worker skills and qualifications”
- projects to improve worker skills: develop solutions - “promising tools and approaches”
- projects must generate “lessons learned/best practices” that can apply across contexts
- projects must be “innovative”, have “impact”, based in workplace activity, diverse partnerships and networks

# Political economy of skills

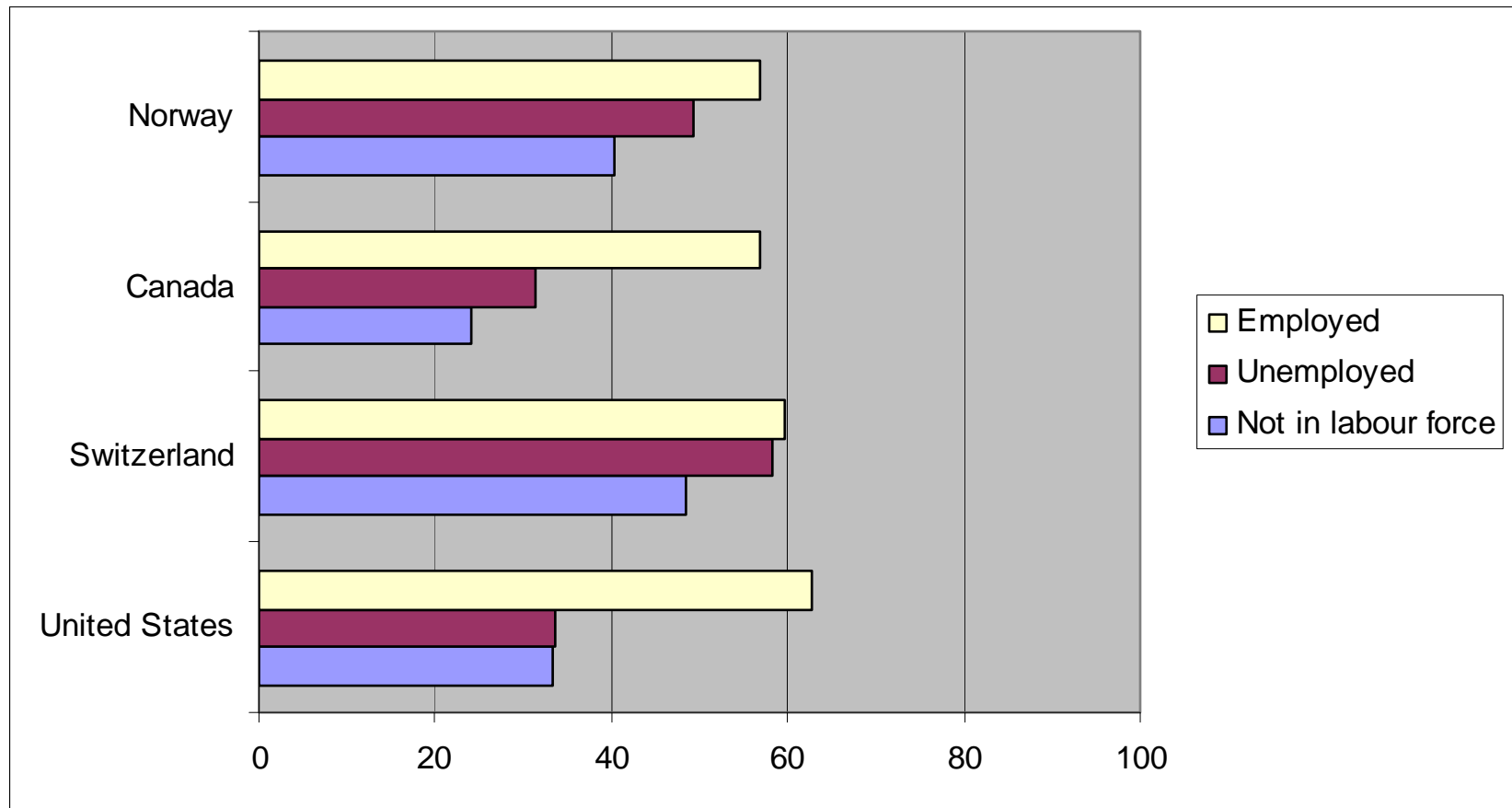


- High skills/low skills equilibrium
- 'Flexicurity'-Market flexibility
- Upgrading the skills of the workforce
- Opportunity & social inclusion

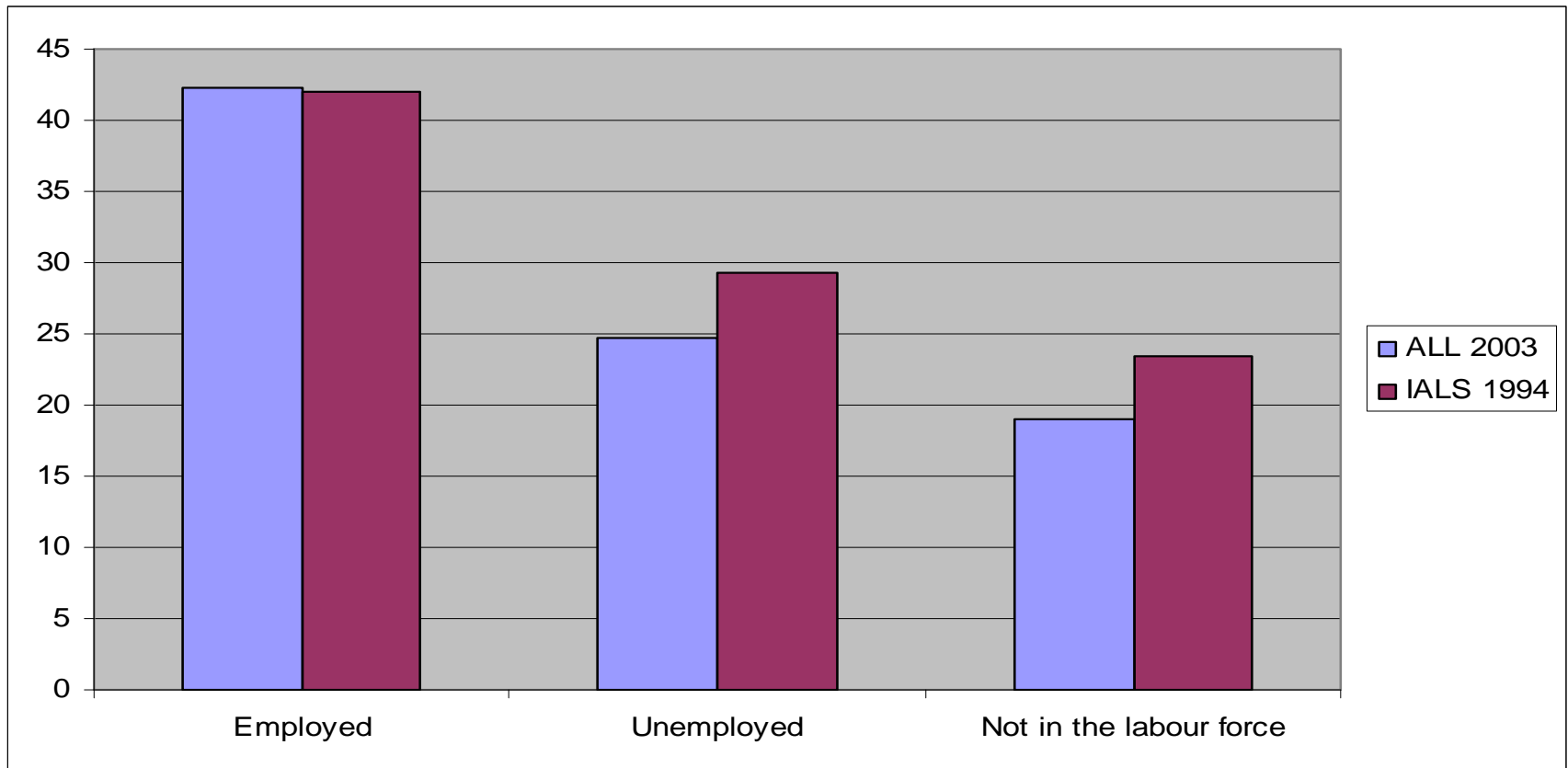
# Percentage of population, 16-65, receiving AET by occupational type, 2002



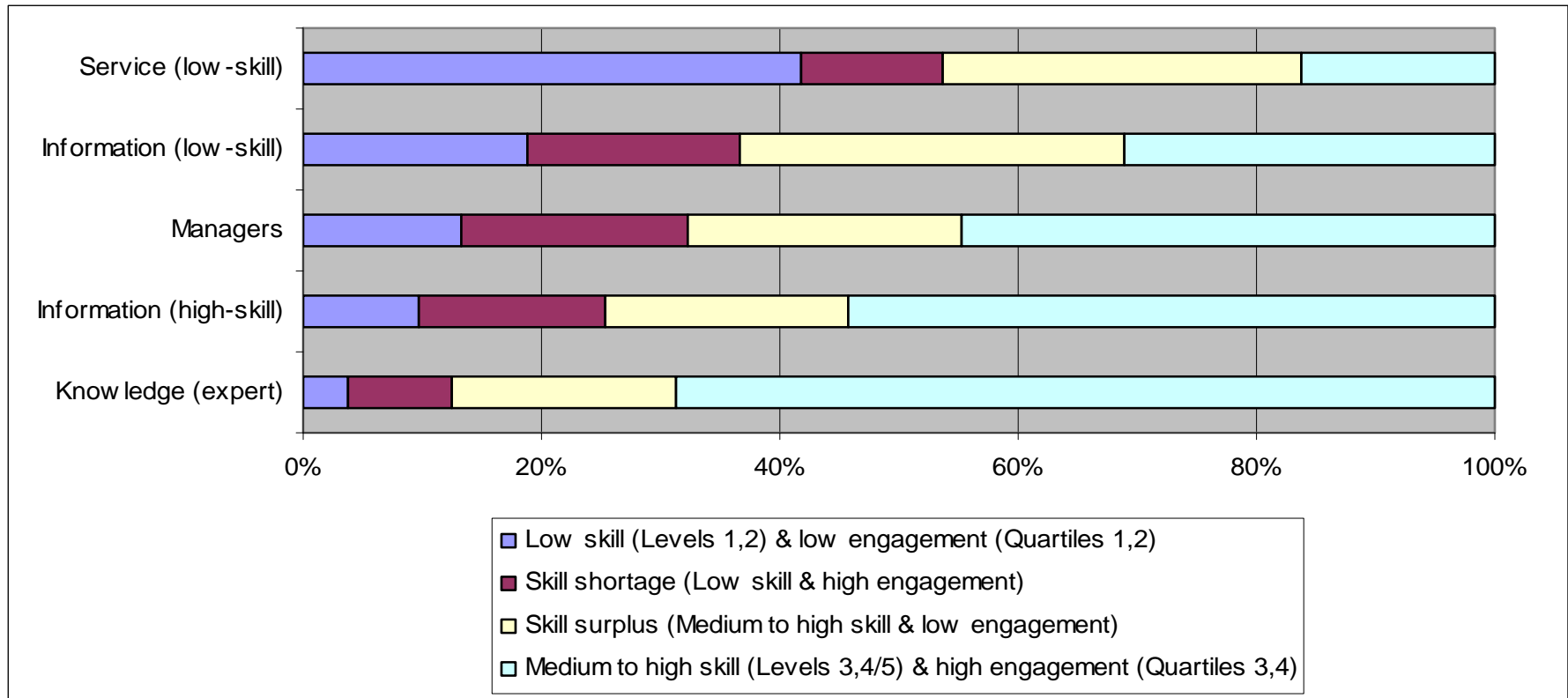
# Percentage of population receiving AET, during 2002. By labour force status



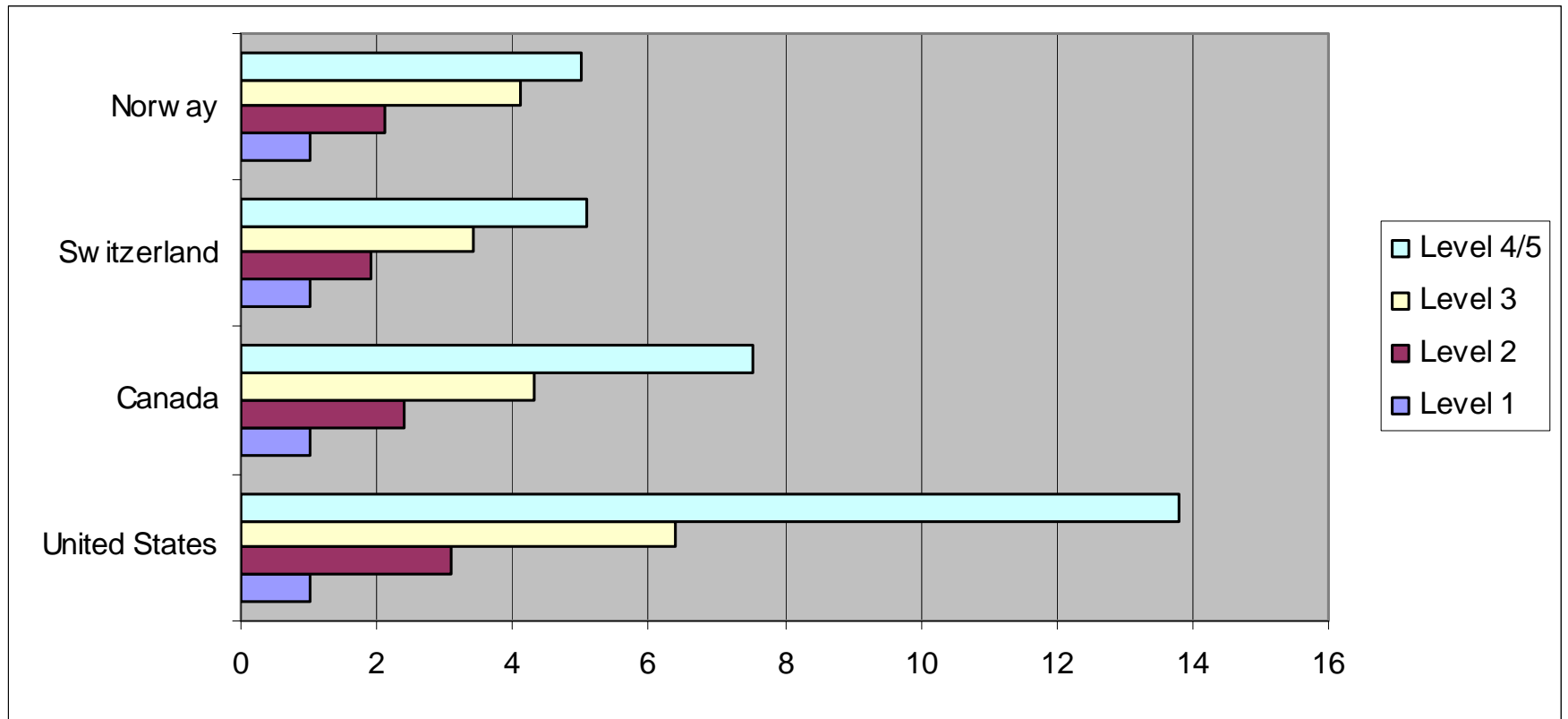
# Percentage of population receiving AET. By labour force status. In 1994 & 2003



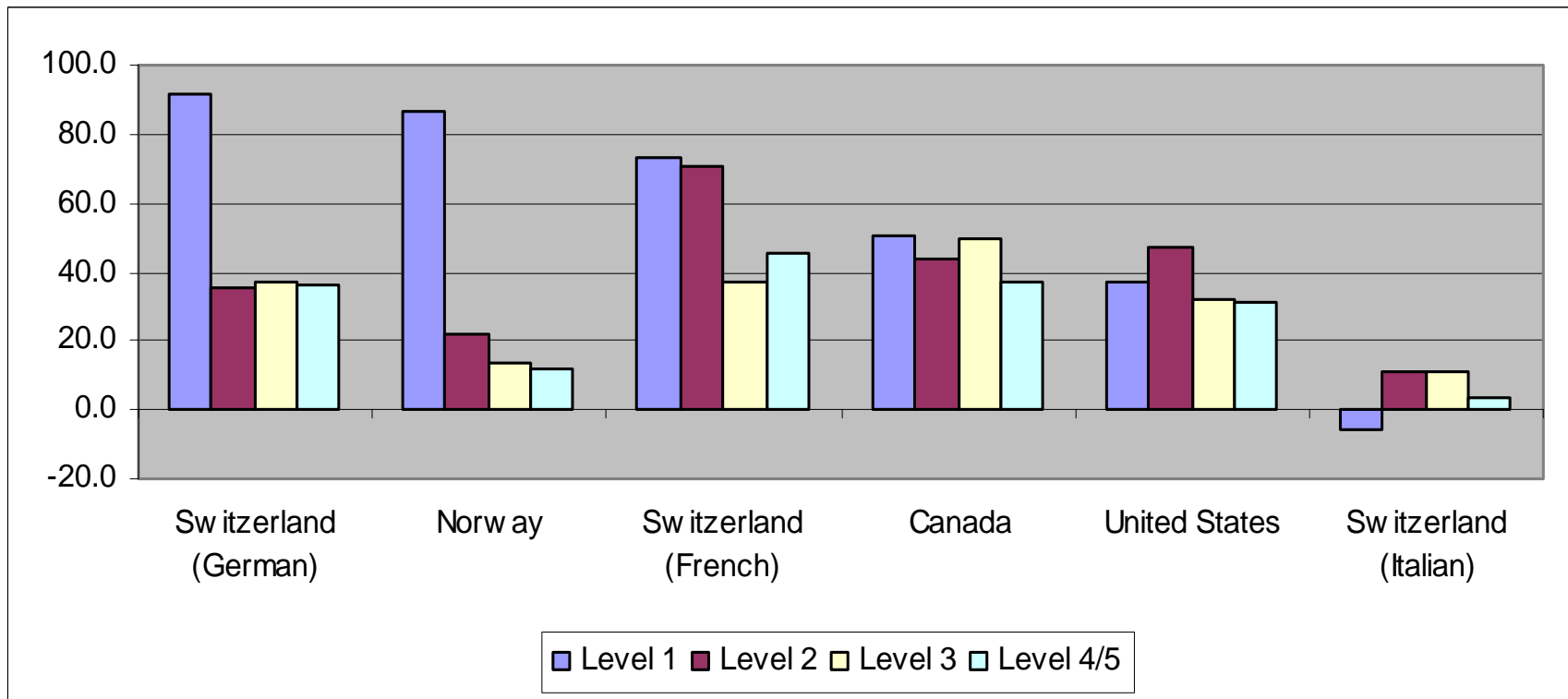
# Match & mismatch b/w individual literacy skills & literacy engagement in the workplace in 2002. By occupational type.



# Likelihood of participation in AET by literacy level. In 2003



# Percentage change from 1994-1998 to 2003 in participation rates of AET by document literacy levels



# Landscapes of federal training & employment policies: Conflicts & Tensions



- 11 recent federal employment & training policies
  - Aboriginal, older workers, foreign workers, workplace & literacy skills.
  - Paint landscape of training and employment policies at the federal level
  - Tensions in what is being said & what is happening

# Driving questions



1. What is the role of the federal government in E & T policy? Who are its partners?
2. What are policies seeking to achieve?
3. How are key issues framed?
4. Who is targeted in policy?
5. What are the mechanisms for achieving goals?

# A high skill agenda?



## ■ **LOW SKILL:**

- ❑ Deficit, temporary, 'old economy' programmes for '**target groups**': Aboriginal peoples, immigrants, older workers (e.g. TFWP, Lit, OW, ASEP, BE)

## ■ **HIGH SKILL:**

- ❑ Entrepreneurial innovation economy to be imported or to be addressed in higher education system. Paid for by the individual
  - Facilitated by 'Lifelong Learning Plan', 'Foreign Credential' policies

# Training/employment for the excluded



- Social justice & concern for social cohesion in target groups:
  - Immigrants, older workers, Aboriginal peoples & workers in general
  - “Aware of their rights” (TFWP)
  - Low-skilled workers “receive few opportunities” “should have greater access” (WSI)
  - Focus on prisoners, Bold Eagle “fostering social inclusion, self confidence for Aboriginal youth”
  - Increased employment for Aboriginal peoples (ASEP)

# Or is it?



- ❑ **ASEP:** Above Grade 10; states explicitly desire to save money on welfare cheques; for those deemed employable
- ❑ **Bold Eagle:** Above Grade 10; passing criteria
- ❑ **Ab. Museum:** Grade 12 and above
- ❑ **Lifelong Learning Plan:** Only those employed
- ❑ **Foreign Credential:** High credentials
- ❑ **Temp. foreign worker:** Only 12 occupations expedited; individualized application; labour rights
- ❑ **Older Workers:** Short-term; favours more skilled in industry; men.

# Gaps & tensions in government response



- 'Partnership': collaboration with the provinces, & organizations stressed; 'unified strategy'

YET

- Devolution of responsibility to provinces and agencies (suggesting autonomy without support...); division of responsibility
- Issue of federal system: Provinces taking up call in different ways

# Cont...



- Semblance of action framed w/i discourses of the knowledge economy

YET

- Lack of accountability frameworks
  - When do we know whether the “mission has been accomplished” with vague ideals but often undefined goals
- Unclear sense of operationalization of policy
- No real coordinated Federal E & T strategy



# Schisms

## in approaches to conceptualizing and building skill and knowledge



'Essential skills' - reproducing

Human capital formation

Discrete isolated skills

Measurement/prescription

Certainty, control

"Best practices"

Individual acquisition

Focus: individuals in deficit

'Innovation' - transforming

Knowledge mobilization

Knowledge networks

Trust, openness

Uncertainty, emergence

Decentralized

Collective knowledge

Focus: system constraints and enablers

# Contradictions opened in the knowledge scapes



- *Innovative knowledge?* separated from skill
- *Systems?* central in 'innovation' production, not mentioned in workplace
- *Collaborative knowledge sharing?* (individualist competitive market structures, proprietary knowledge)
- *Producing high skill/high paid workers?* All focus is on low paid flexible casual workers
- *Trust/experimentation/collaboration?* in Hi/Lo structures