

The National Strategy for Early Literacy initiative (NSEL)

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John Kenneth Galbraith:

It would be wrong to dismiss the importance of roads, railroads, power plants, mills, and the other familiar furniture of economic development.... But ... conquest of illiteracy comes first.

The Affluent Society (1958) US (Canadian-born) administrator & economist (1908 - 2006)

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NSEL: What, Who, Why, and How?



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NSEL: What?

- *An evidence-informed plan to improve the literacy skills of Canadian children and youth*
- *Two Fundamental Questions:*
 - What could be achieved?
 - What would we need to do?





NSEL: Who?

Organizations on the National Advisory Committee include:

*Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network
ABC Canada Literacy Foundation
Canadian Child Care Federation
Canadian Council on Learning
Canadian Education Association
Society for Quality Education
International Dyslexia Association
Nunavut Literacy Council
2010 Legacies Now*

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NSEL: Who?

- *Organizations and individuals across Canada sharing their experience, expertise and insights*
 - This and other hearings across Canada
 - Written submissions



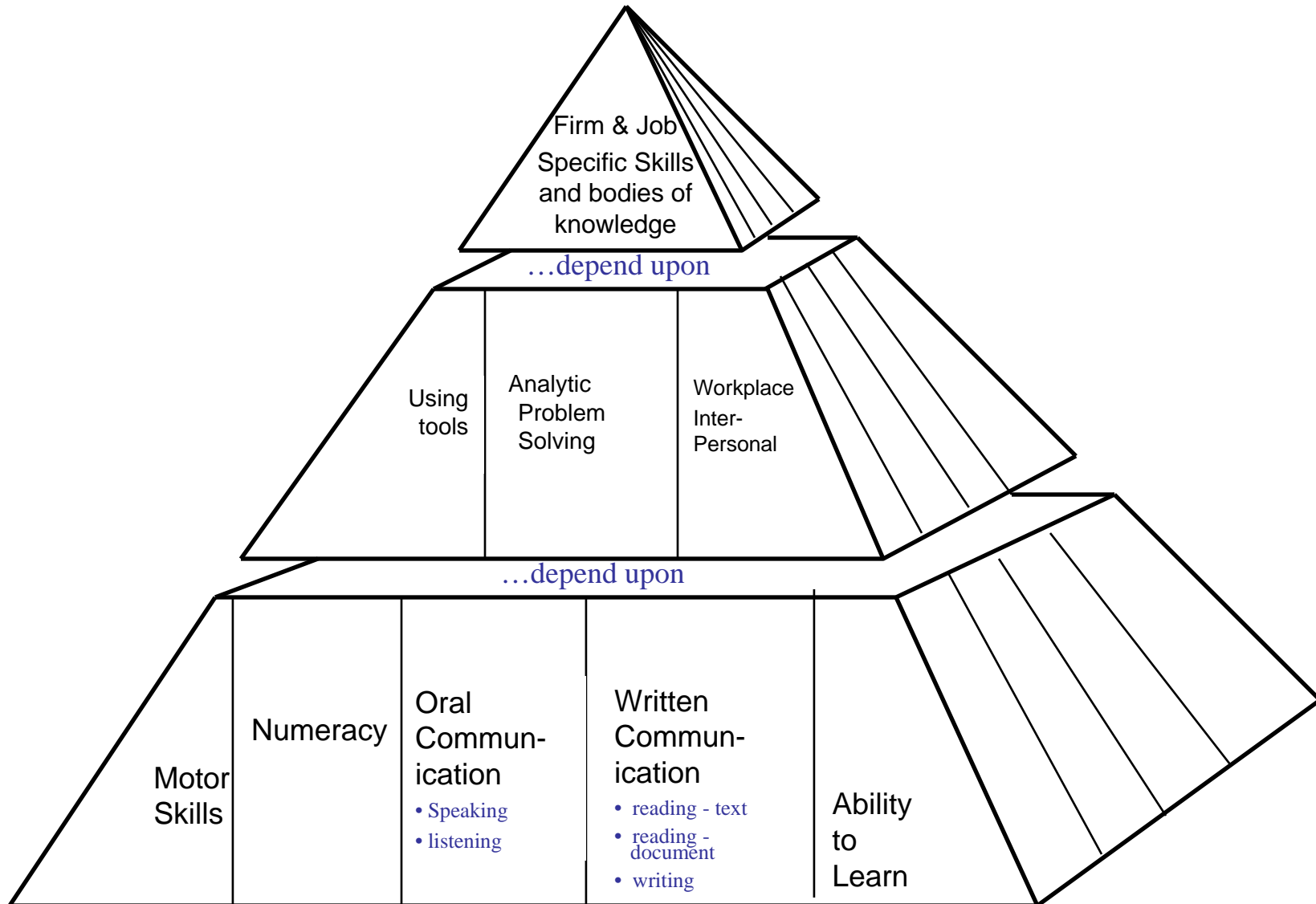


The National Strategy on Early Literacy (NSEL): Why?

1. *Broad and growing concern with pervasive poor literacy results for Canadians -- unchanged for more than a decade*
2. *Growing recognition that literacy is unlike other skills – literacy is foundational*
3. *Growing recognition that literacy is acquired most easily, early in life – so getting that right must be a key focus.*



Literacy is Foundational: One example -- Skill Supply and Demand





Literacy is foundational

Literacy and education →

Literacy and employment →

Literacy and health →

Literacy and social engagement →

Literacy and crime →

Literacy and welfare dependence →

Impact of literacy on the success of our democratic society



Literacy is foundational - Health



Public Health Agency of Canada Agence de la santé publique du Canada

Canada

PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY of CANADA
www.publichealth.gc.ca

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Home > Health Promotion > Population Health > How Literacy Affects the Health of Canadians > What is Literacy Factsheet

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What is Literacy Factsheet

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- Health Literacy Portal**
- Chronic Disease Tool
- HIV/AIDS

Frequently Asked Questions
Expert Panel on Health Literacy
Health Information on the Internet
Health Literacy Resources
Partners and Organizations

For more information, contact: ssullivan@cpa.ca

Health Literacy Portal

This Internet portal is designed to provide easy access to key information about health literacy in Canada for health professionals, researchers and interested individuals. It features the Expert Panel on Health Literacy's final report as well as links to other key Canadian and international health literacy resources.

What is Health Literacy?

Health literacy is the ability to access, understand and act on information for health.

Accessing health information and services can be difficult, especially for someone feeling ill, anxious or in pain. Being able to access and understand information makes a difference to health and well-being.

Health professionals who provide clear, reliable information are essential to helping people manage their health.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
Answers to common questions about the nature and scope of health literacy in Canada.

Expert Panel on Health Literacy
This section describes CPHA's Expert Panel activities and links to all the related resource materials, including A Vision For a Health Literate Canada: Report of the Expert Panel on Health Literacy.



Literacy is foundational - Health

Literacy is a major factor influencing health in a variety of ways:

- There is substantial evidence from Canada's major surveys of health status that literacy is closely related to healthy lifestyle practices. Low literacy skills can be a barrier to finding and accessing health information and services.
- Errors in the use of over-the-counter and prescription medications often result in overdoses leading to hospitalizations.
- Failure to respond to prescription drug treatment because incorrect doses are taken at the wrong time of day or failing to comply with medical direction due to an inability to read written instructions or understand verbal instructions also leads to increased hospitalizations.
- Infant formula instructions can be misinterpreted by adults with low literacy skills, placing babies at risk. For example, some mothers are not diluting concentrated formulas, and others dilute ready-to-feed formulas because they misunderstand written instructions.
- Difficulty comprehending written and pictorial instructions on the use of industrial, farm and recreational machinery, and household appliances results in increased accidents and injuries.
- People with limited literacy skills tend to be under a higher degree of stress. They are more likely to have limited self confidence and to feel isolated. They have a limited range of choices and fewer resources to be able to cope with stressful situations.
- Canadian and international research has made a link between poverty and ill health. Low literacy affects health by reducing access to well-paid employment and increasing the likelihood of poverty.





J. Maxwell: Literacy is Foundational, but CANADA IS IN DENIAL

- Most Canadians agree that literacy skills are the foundation for self-reliance at work, in the family and in the community.
- Yet most Canadians deny that 42% of working age adults do not have the level of literacy required to handle the tasks of modern life. “It can’t be true.”
- Because we deny the facts, we are not addressing the problem.

Maxwell: The social cost of low literacy skills





J. Maxwell: CANADA IS IN DENIAL

We pay a heavy price for this failure to address the literacy deficit

Low literacy skills

- impede wealth creation,
- undermine competitiveness
- create a significant cost burden on federal, provincial and municipal budgets

- Opportunity costs
- Remedial costs
- Inter-generational costs





Opportunity costs

Economic, social, cultural and political benefits are foregone because 9 million adults cannot function at their potential

- *They earn less money and are less likely to vote or volunteer. Governments collect less tax revenue*
- *A 1% increase in average literacy can increase labour productivity growth by 2% in the long run*
- *47% of working age adults at Level 1 literacy reside in low-income households*

Maxwell: The social cost of low literacy skills





Remedial costs

Extra costs to society to mitigate the damage of low literacy to health and well-being

- *Higher costs for health care services*
 - Patients with low literacy in the US had average annual health care costs four times the overall population
- *The criminal justice system*
 - 70% of Canadian inmates have not completed high school
- *Social assistance and social services*
 - 65% of social assistance recipients have weak literacy skills

Maxwell: The social cost of low literacy skills





Inter-generational costs

Literacy gaps in one generation can be passed along to the next

- A child's capacity to learn is strongly influenced by the parents' literacy skills and attitude to learning
- Half of the adults whose parents did not complete high school have Level 1 or 2 literacy skills

Maxwell: The social cost of low literacy skills



How? Evidence on which to build a National Strategy

- *Experience and expertise across the National Advisory Committee organizations*
- *Policy Research Papers – commissioned to summarize knowledge on seventeen key topics → nsei.cllrnet.ca*
- *Canada-wide consultation to hear recommendations from broad cross section of organizations and individuals*





Policy Research Papers

- ***The social cost of low literacy skills*** (Judith Maxwell, Canadian Policy Res. Network)
- ***The economic costs of low literacy skills*** (Scott Murray, Data Angel Inc.)
- ***Large-scale efforts to improve literacy*** (Ben Levin, OISE/University of Toronto)
- ***The Role of Parents, Families and Caregivers in Young Children's Literacy Development*** (Janette Pelletier, OISE/University of Toronto)
- ***Literacy Outcomes in French Immersion*** (Fred Genesee, McGill University)
- ***The Effect of Family Literacy Interventions on Children's Acquisition of Reading from Kindergarten to Grade 3*** (Monique Senechal, Carleton University)
- ***Criteria for the Evaluation of Reading Assessment Tools*** (Alain Desrochers, Univ Ottawa)





Policy Research Papers

- ***Aboriginal young children's language and literacy development*** (Jessica Ball, University of Victoria)
- ***Evidence-Informed Teaching Strategies for Improved Literacy*** (Robert Savage, McGill University)
- ***Reading Skills Development: The Role and Education of Regular and Resource Teachers*** (Monique Brodeur, Université de Montreal)
- ***Definitions of Learning Disabilities in Canadian Provinces and Territories*** (M. Kozey, UBC)
- ***Closing Canada's Rural/Urban Literacy Gap*** (Tracy Lavin, Canadian Council on Learning)





Policy Research Papers: Overall

- Canada has a literacy problem. This costs us dearly, but the issue has not achieved a high level of public awareness
- Knowledge varies widely across issues
 - *Some issues are well understood, but*
 - *There are significant gaps in our knowledge*
- There is a gap between what we know and what we do
 - *Need more, and more effective, knowledge exchange*
 - *Key role for training programs for educators and others*





Policy Research Papers: Some things we know

Literacy challenges

- Begin early
- Are often preventable
- Vary by population subgroup

Experiences and activities – in the home, in early learning/childcare settings, and in and out of the classroom are all very important



Literacy is embedded in home language and culture

- Parents are children's first teachers
- Siblings and other family members provide important learning opportunities
 - *Build oral communication on a positive affective base*
 - *Build vocabulary*
 - *Tell stories, point out environment, play with sounds*
 - *Read books*
- Vast difference among children according to parent vulnerability (SES, supports, education, linguistic status)
 - *Disparities in vocabulary*
 - *Interest in language and books*
 - *Educational versus entertainment television*

Pelletier: The role of parents, families and caregivers in young children's literacy development





High quality early learning and child care environments

- Offer a rich learning context for literacy development
- Can improve outcomes for children at risk
- Higher levels of practitioner training, including knowledge of language and literacy development is associated with richer communication between adults and children

Pelletier: The role of parents, families and caregivers in young children's literacy development

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R. Savage, McGill University: What do we really know about effective literacy practices?

Phonics –strong evidence to support inclusion of phonics in early literacy to aid word reading from at least 6 systematic meta-analytic reviews

- Some (less reliable) evidence to support systematic teaching of synthetic phonics over other approaches to phonics
- Inconsistent evidence of the role of phonics in spelling
- Little reliable evidence of the optimal amount of phonics instruction
- Phonic approaches help typically developing and delayed reader groups

Phonological Awareness – mixed evidence from meta-analysis about teaching this skill over direct letter-sound instruction





Effective Practices (Cont.)

- Rich home and school environments significantly impact early literacy
 - *E.g., shared book reading, meaningful language, active learning, naturalistic play*
 - *Suggests school and preschool initiatives should be linked!*

Savage: What do we really know about effective literacy practices?





(Brodeur, et al. *Reading Skills Development: The Role and Education of Regular and Resource Teachers*)

- **Tier 1** :Regular classroom teachers implement research-based practices.
 - **Tier 2** : Students with reading difficulties benefit from a more tailored intervention in small groups, by resource teachers.
 - **Tier 3** : Students who still have reading difficulties benefit from a more adapted intervention, by resource teachers..
- ➔ Teacher pre-service and in-service education must be based on solid research.



Type of activity matters – e.g., Studies of parent involvement in children's reading

Read	Listen	Teach

(Senechal – Effect of parent involvement)

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Type of Activity Matters – e.g., Studies of parent involvement in children's reading

Read	Listen	Teach
No diff. (ES = .18)	8-pt gain (ES = .51)	17-pt gain (ES = 1.15)

(Senechal – Effect of parent involvement)



Implications for Education

Should educators train parents to teach their child to read?

→ Yes, parents are most helpful when they are trained to teach skills to their child

Issues:

- Need to know which techniques and strategies are most effective
- Training and preparing teaching materials has resource implications for schools

(Senechal – Effect of parent involvement)



Implications for Education

Should educators train parents to listen to their child read?

→ Yes, listening enhances children's reading skills

Issues:

→ Need to know which techniques and strategies are most effective

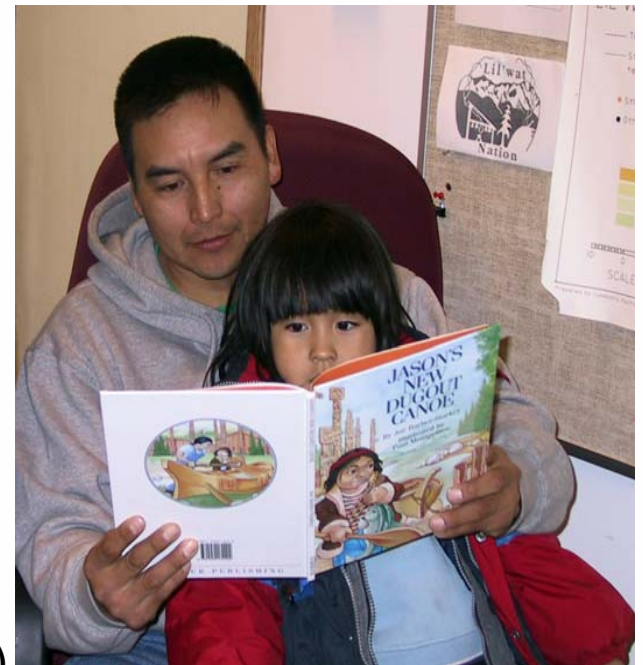
→ Training and preparing teaching materials involves some resource commitments for schools

(Senechal – Effect of parent involvement)

Implications for Education


Reading to children

- Enhances the acquisition of spoken language
- Appears to have less impact on reading acquisition



(Senechal – Effect of parent involvement)





Jessica Ball, University of Victoria: What we don't know about young Aboriginal children's language and literacy development and how to get over it

- **Literature searches yielded no reports of**
 - Successfully completed empirical studies assessing language development (e.g., age norms, prevalence of atypical conditions & patterns) for this population
 - Controlled studies evaluating outcomes of early language support programs *or early interventions*.
- Not included in NLSCY, no large sample in UEY
- RHS data and Aboriginal Head Start practitioners report speech-language services for children a top priority





Roles of Regular and Resource Teachers

- Significant differences in reading instruction practices between teachers, as well as the organization of services in that area.
- No clear delineation between regular and resource teachers' reading instruction practices.

Brodeur, et al. *Reading Skills Development: The Role and Education of Regular and Resource Teachers*





Current educational preparation of regular and resource teachers

- Education of regular and resource teachers in the area of reading instruction varies across provinces and institutions
- Courses are not always in step with current research findings
- There is a common willingness to reinforce the importance of professional development, but
 - *Need for a cohesive, long-term vision for professional development*
 - *Need for a collective commitment to research-based professional development practices.*

Brodeur, et al. *Reading Skills Development: The Role and Education of Regular and Resource Teachers*





ELCC programs related to language and literacy

- Providing training to ELCC in fostering language and literacy can lead to gains in practitioners' attention to language and literacy & in turn, to children's outcomes
- We do not yet know which curriculum models are most effective in promoting literacy in child care and in which contexts





NSEL: What?

- *An evidence-informed plan to improve the literacy skills of Canadian children and youth*
- *Two Fundamental Questions:*
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How?

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How?

- Your experience
- Your expertise
- Your recommendations





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Understanding International Literacy Studies

- Results from international standardized measures are categorized into five levels of literacy skills:
 - *Level 1 (lowest) through Level 5 (highest)*
 - *Level 3 – minimum level for participation in today's society*
 - *To illustrate, a person at:*
 - Level 1 -- typically unable to determine the amount of medicine to administer to a child based on simple instructions printed on a bottle
 - Level 2 -- can read simple materials only
 - Level 4-5 – people in this room
 - *Those at low levels frequently develop coping skills*
 - mask their difficulty
 - allow them to deal with everyday literacy demands
 - they (and others) may overestimate their proficiency
 - have difficulty in novel situations, such as when learning new job skills.





Quality of life and cultural issues

Supports for health and development

- Early screening, diagnosis, timely intervention
- Access to quality early childhood development programs
- Housing > mold > recurrent otitis media, asthma > early hearing loss

Language Considerations

- Children's acquisition of heritage mother tongue is a goal for many Aboriginal parents.
- Gaps in understanding the learning processes that support mother-tongue based bilingual language learning
- Gaps in research on increasingly popular immersion/submersion programs
- Conflict between English/French to prepare children for mainstream schooling and goals of heritage language pre-schooling

Ball: What we don't know about young Aboriginal children's language and literacy development.

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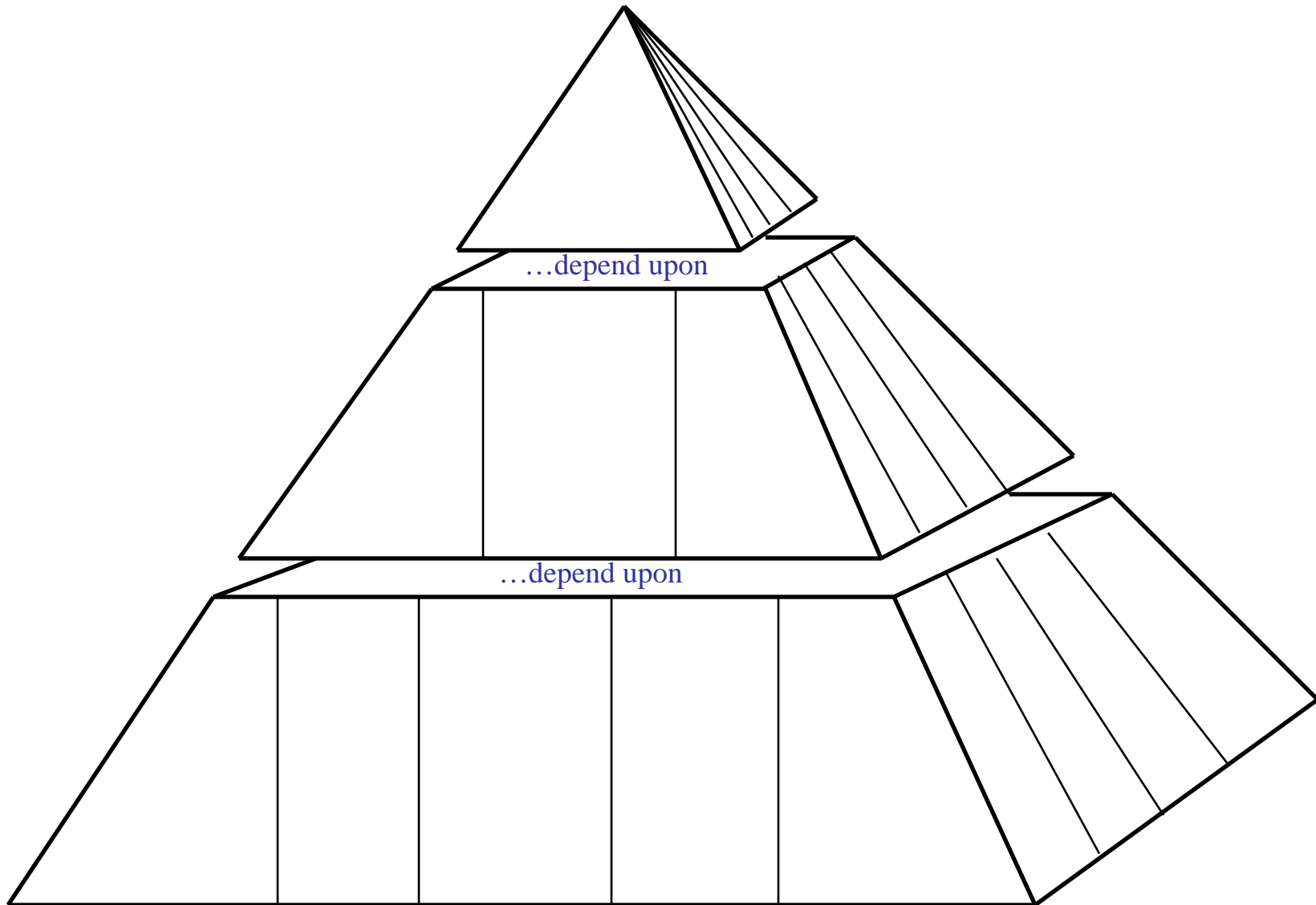
Effective Practices (Cont.)

- Evidence base for **reading comprehension** and **fluency** is substantially weaker
 - *Studies report modest to no effect sizes*
 - *Research suggests use of 7 meta-cognitive strategies most effective for reading instruction*
 - *Group work in mixed ability contexts most effective*
- Modest (and disputed) evidence for **guided reading** suggests caution towards this method
 - *Children should read widely and enjoy reading for multiple purposes*

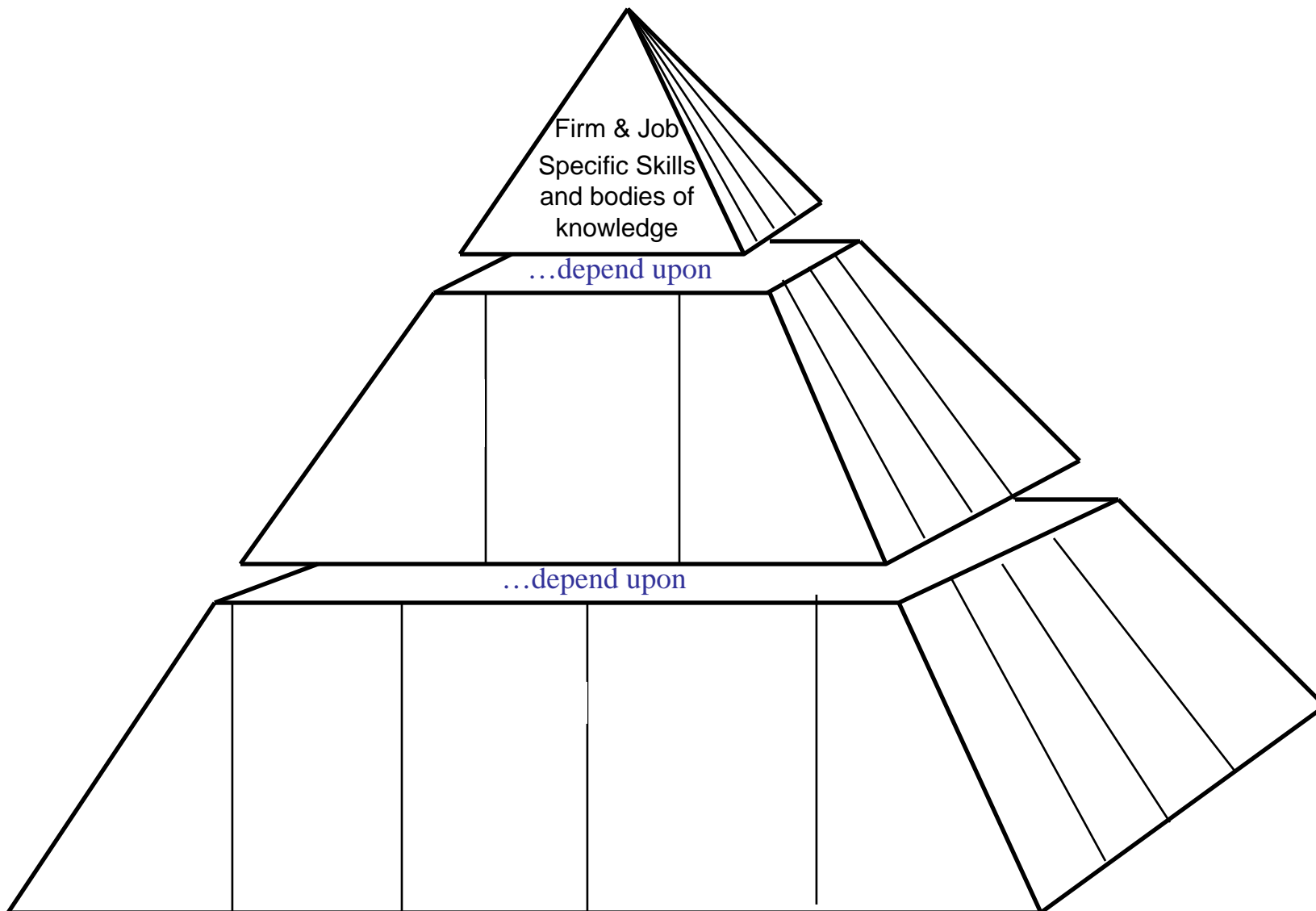
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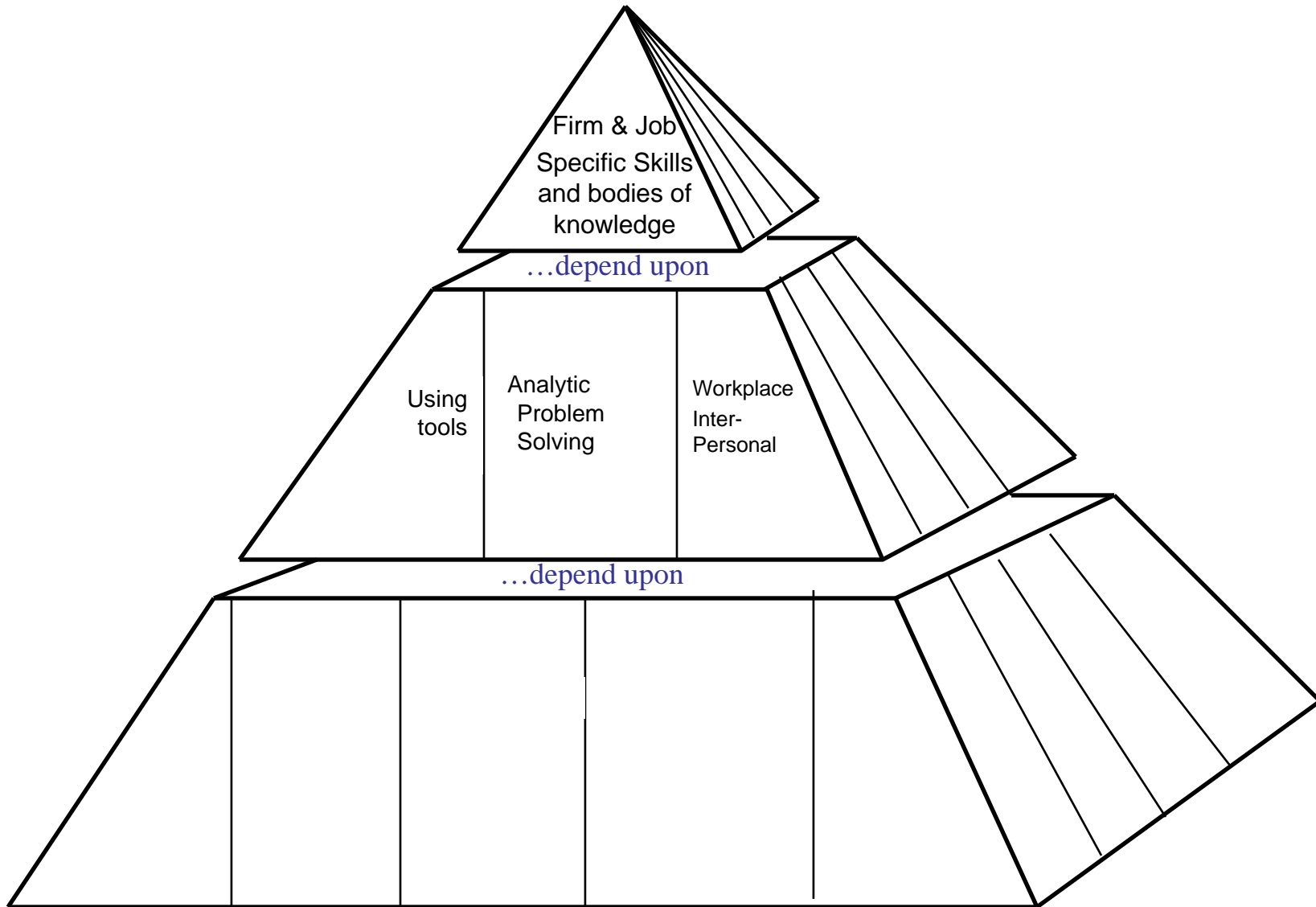
Literacy Skills are Foundational



An example -- Skill Supply and Demand



An example -- Skill Supply and Demand





Family literacy support programs

Oral language

- moment-to-moment informal language opportunities (sounds, rhythm, pragmatics)
- build home language
- vocabulary: rare words, new words
- play builds language

Written language

- illustrations, meaning, connections
- labels, games, literature
- media technology

Pelletier: The role of parents, families and caregivers in young children's literacy development





Early learning and child care

- As with families, the **moment-to-moment** interactions between child care providers and young children have a significant impact on children's learning
- ELCC **training** is critical to program quality
 - *But, ELCC training regarding language and literacy development is typically very limited*
- Observational research in child care settings shows very little time devoted to literacy-promoting activities

Pelletier: The role of parents, families and caregivers in young children's literacy development





Filling the gaps:

- Community-based research on promising practices
- *Aboriginal Children's Survey* (Stats Can) to characterize trajectories for language acquisition and estimate service use
- Increase accessibility of culturally competent Speech Language screening, diagnostic and early intervention services.

Ball: What we don't know about young Aboriginal children's language and literacy development.

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