

Why Canada needs a youth literacy strategy



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Recommendations:

- Policies that serve to increase the demand for literacy skill use
- Policies and programs that increase the supply of literacy skill
- Policies and programs that improve the average level of skill youth and reduce the number low skilled youth leaving the system

The case for federal-provincial cooperation:

- A **national** youth literacy strategy could help set targets and standards and foster the development of individual assessment and remedial tools.
- Provinces should cooperate because:
 - High rates of inter-provincial labour mobility mean they are training students for work in other provinces
 - Cost avoidance through technology transfer

Why we care about skills and learning :

People are the common denominator of progress. So... no improvement is possible with unimproved people, and advance is certain when people are liberated and educated. It would be wrong to dismiss the importance of roads, railroads, power plants, mills, and the other familiar furniture of economic development.... But we are coming to realize... that there is a certain sterility in economic monuments that stand alone in a sea of illiteracy. Conquest of illiteracy comes first.

John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (1958) US (Canadian-born) administrator & economist (1908 - 2006)

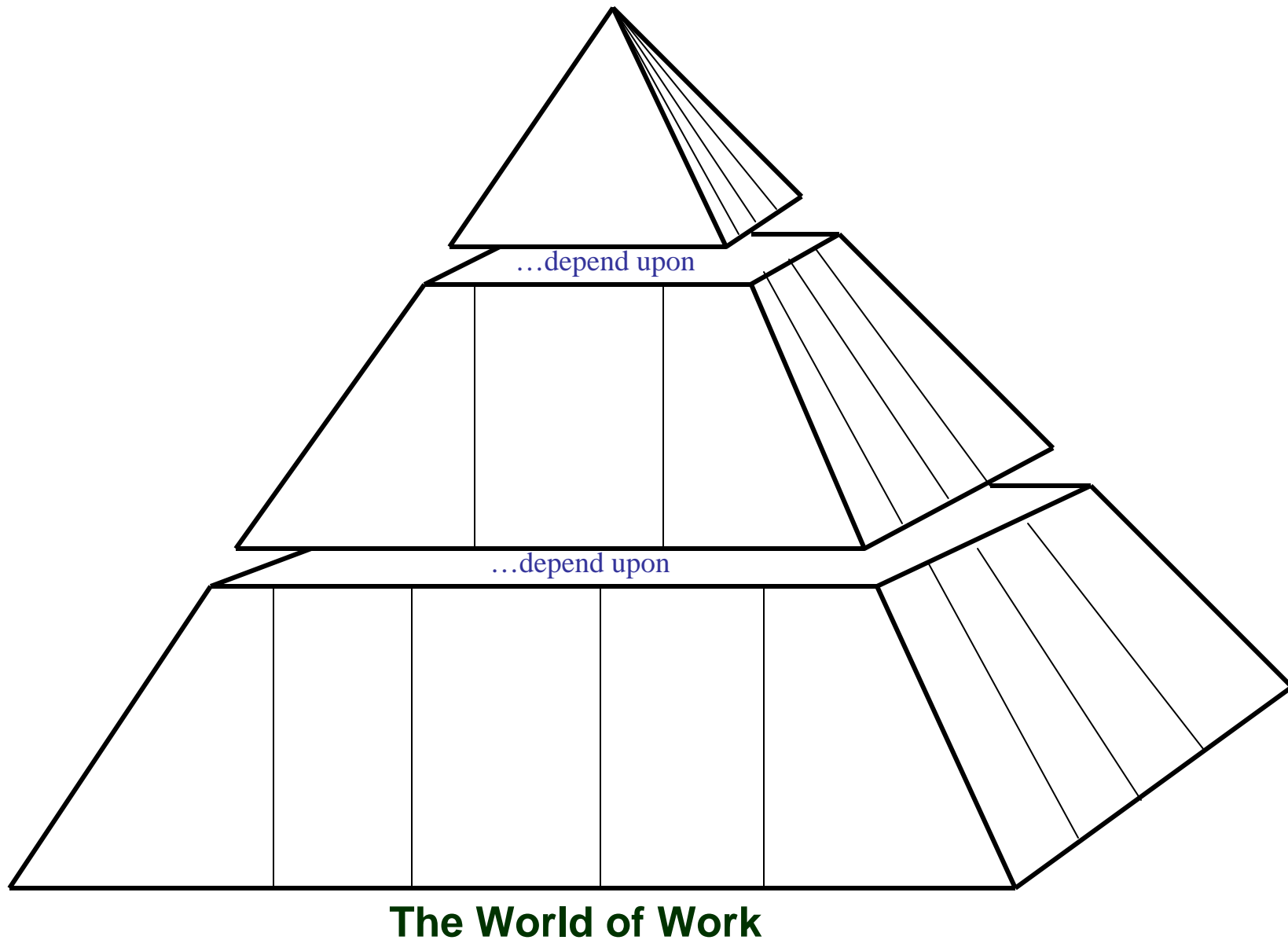
Why we care about skills and learning: Sources of policy interest

- **concerns about skill barriers to economic growth, productivity growth and rates of technological innovation (GREED)**
 - skill supply and demand balance**
 - high end skills vs essential skills**
- **concerns about the role of skill in creating social inequity in economic outcomes (FAIRNESS)**
- **concerns about the demand for and efficiency and effectiveness of investments in public goods and services such as education and health (PARSIMONY)**

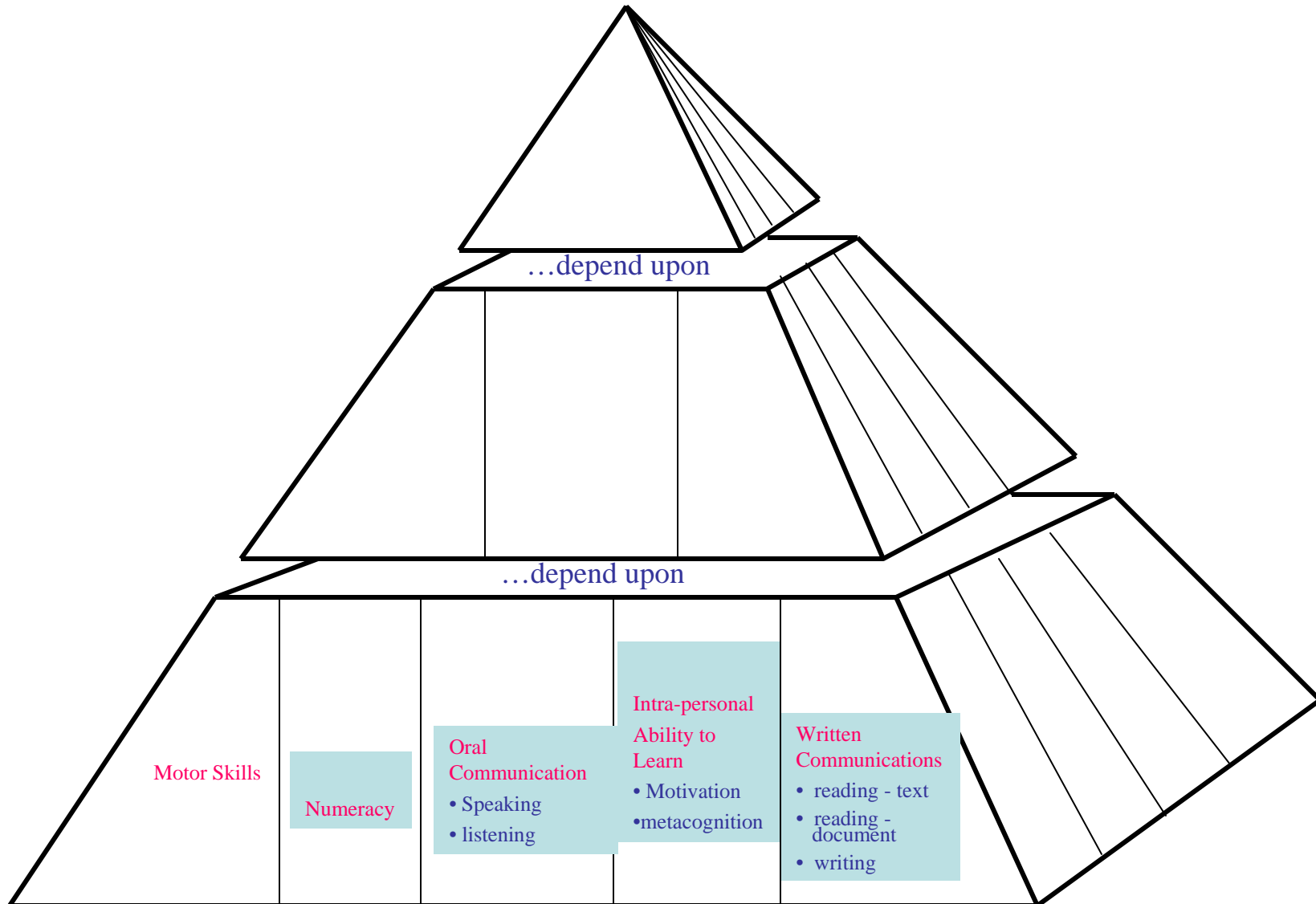
What makes skill more important now: Key policy drivers

- Demographics: not enough kids**
- globalization of markets for goods and services: huge opportunity**
- globalization of markets for capital and technology: everyone has access to the same inputs at the same costs**
- Multinationals and outsourcing: job loss is inevitable**
- diffusion of information and communication technologies: increases productivity, amplifies skill-based inequalities**
- Rising skill supply in the developing world: they are able to compete**

A Framework for Thinking About Essential Skills : Profiles of Skill Supply and Demand

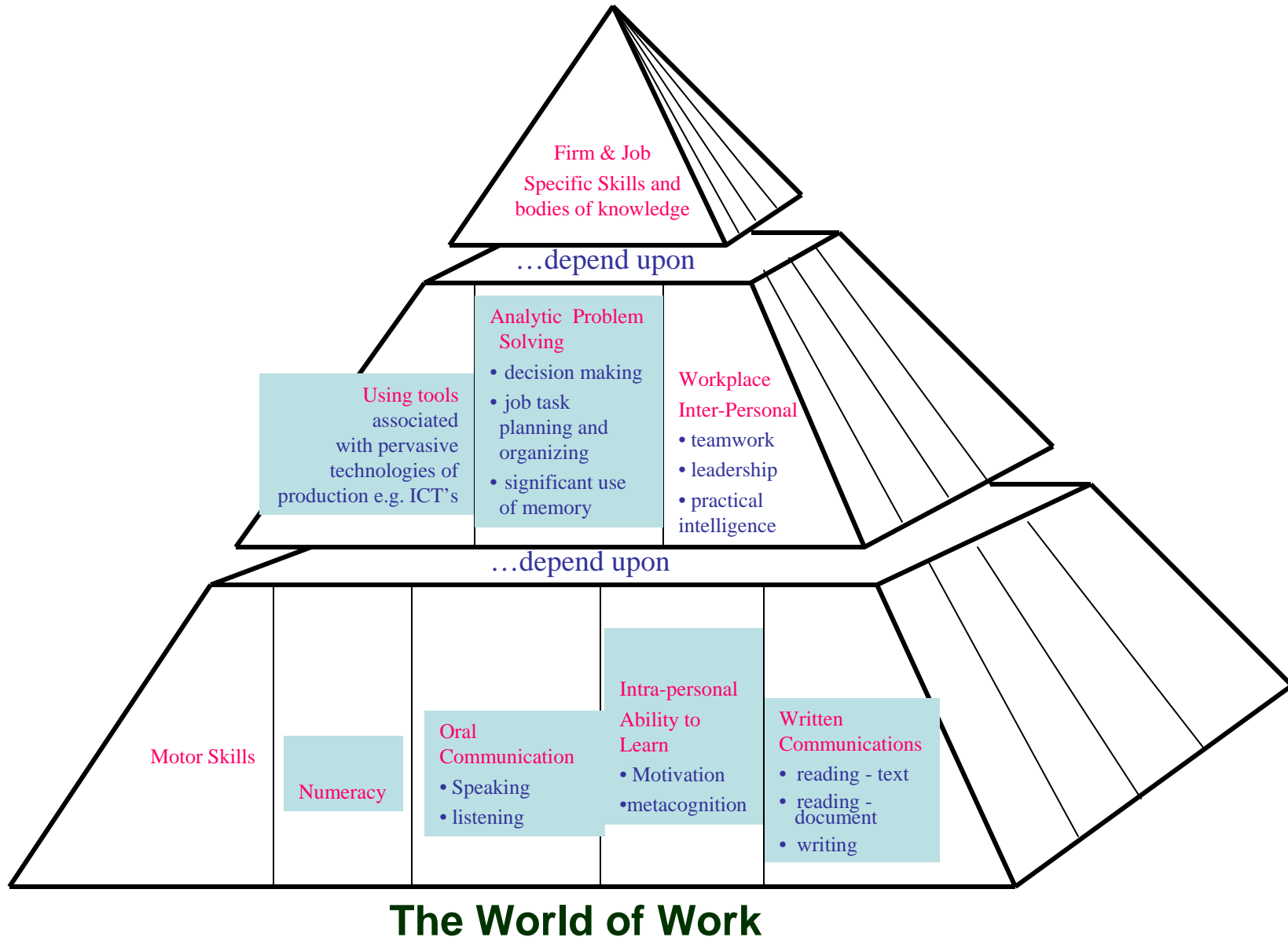


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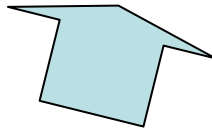
The World of Work

A Framework for Thinking About Essential Skills : Profiles of Skill Supply and Demand

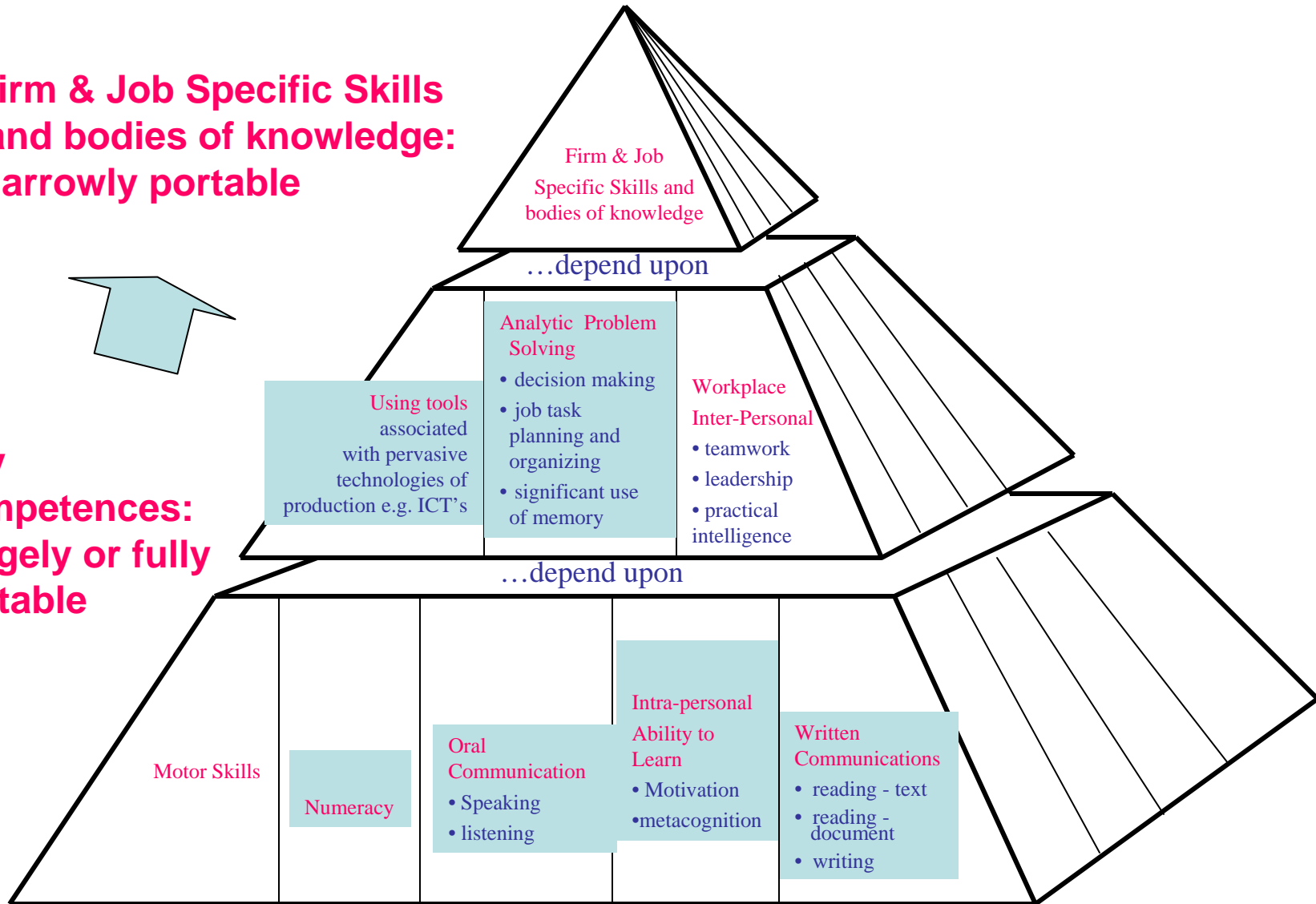


A Framework for Thinking About Essential Skills : Profiles of Skill Supply and Demand

**Firm & Job Specific Skills
and bodies of knowledge:
Narrowly portable**

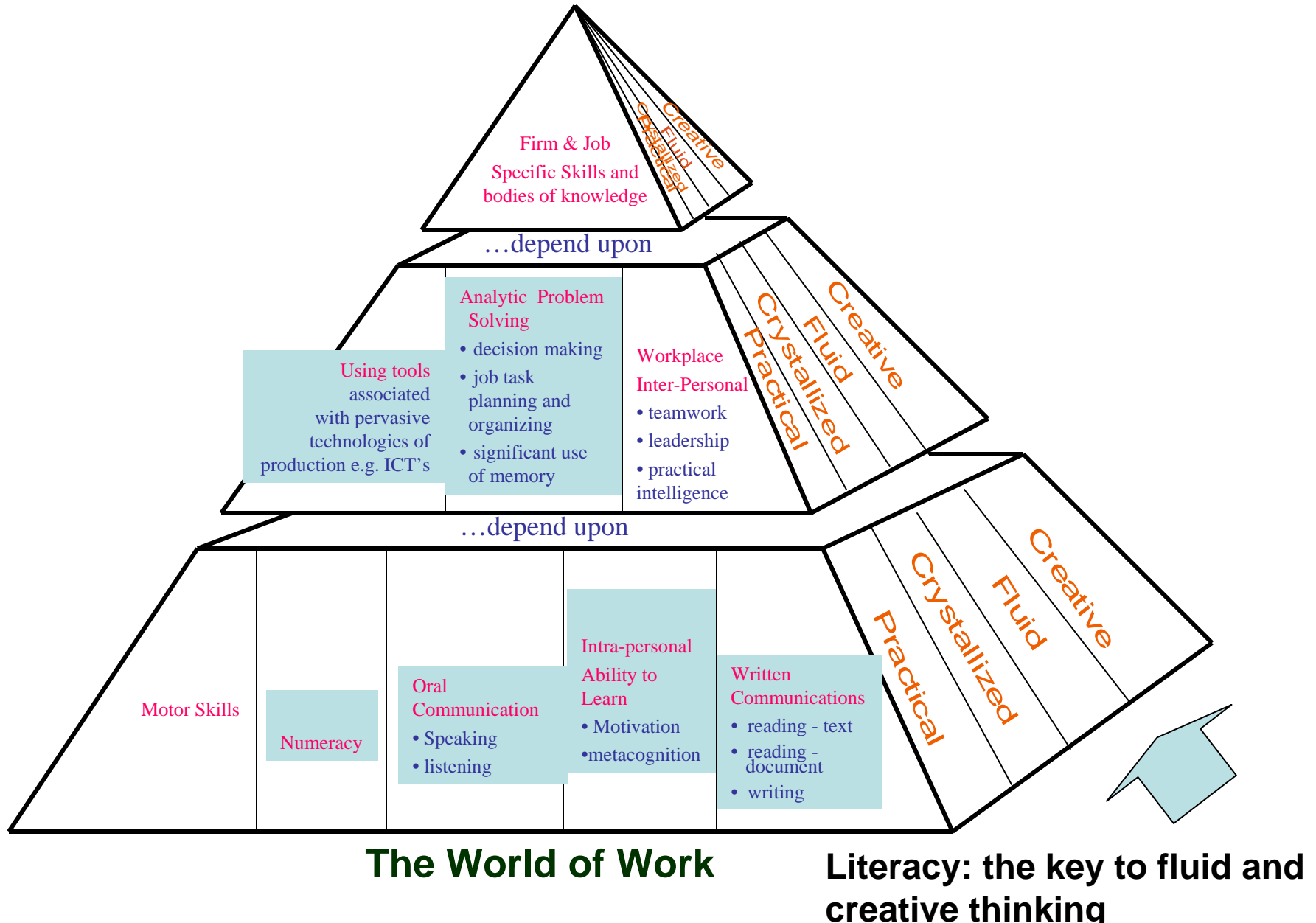


**Key
competences:
Largely or fully
portable**

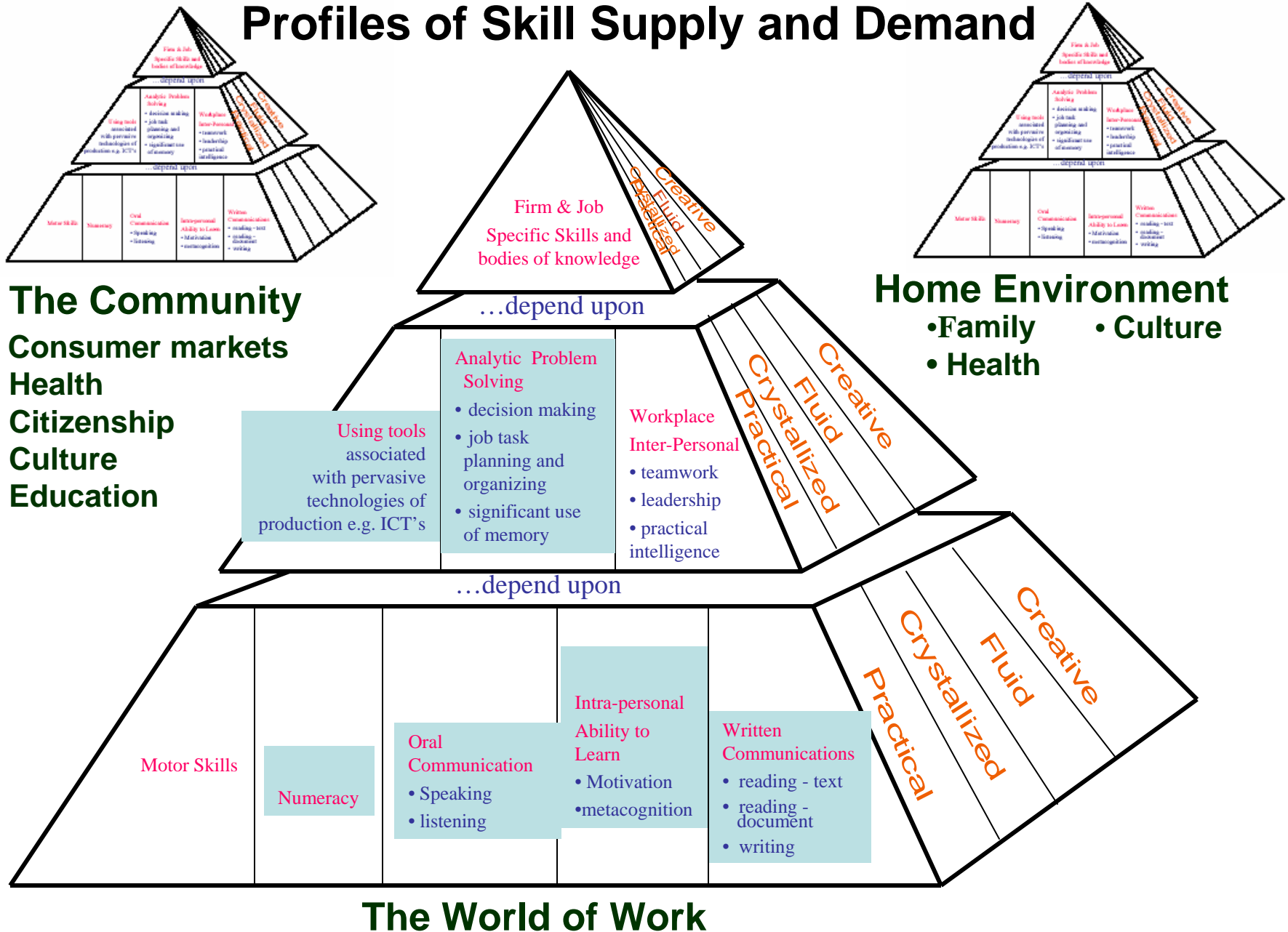


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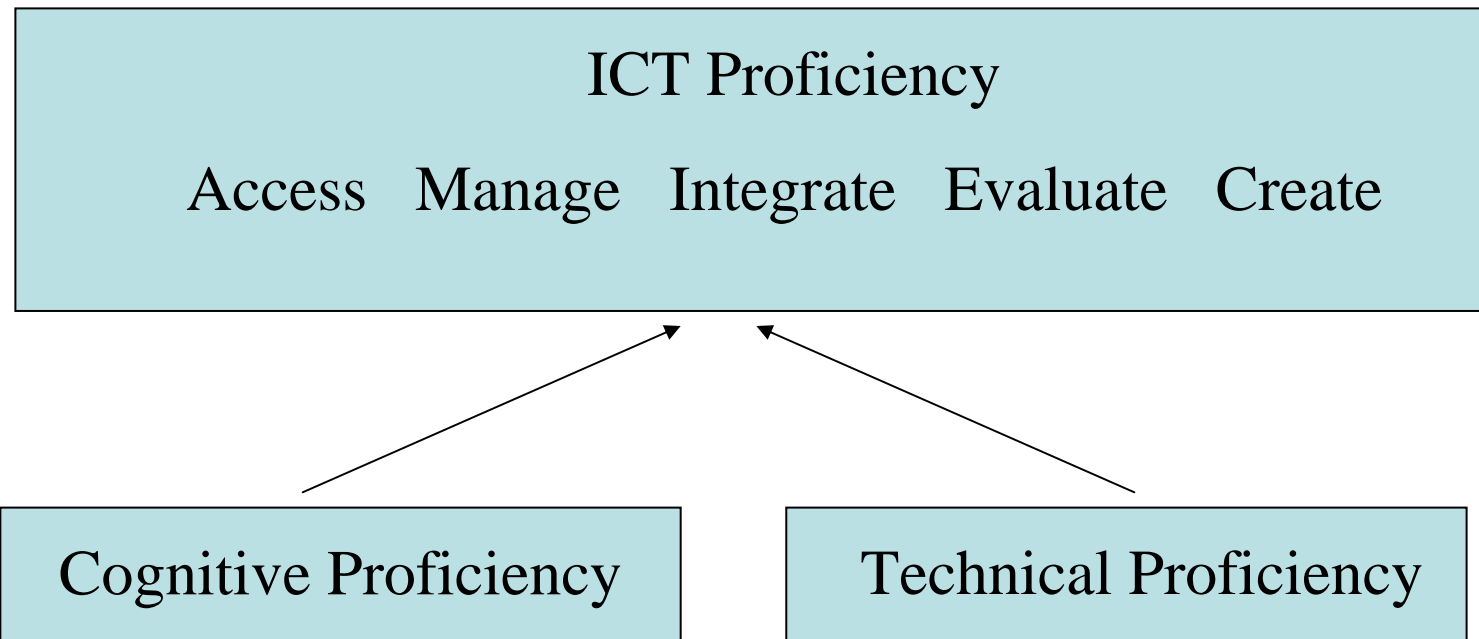
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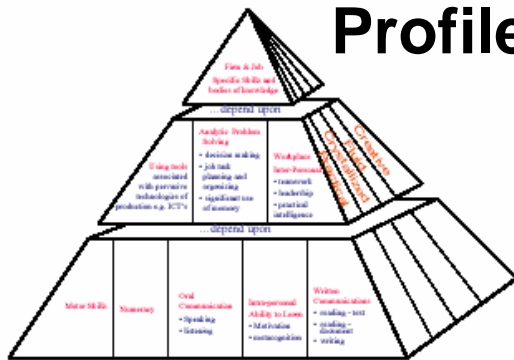


ICT Literacy: The key to productivity and innovation in a knowledge intense economy



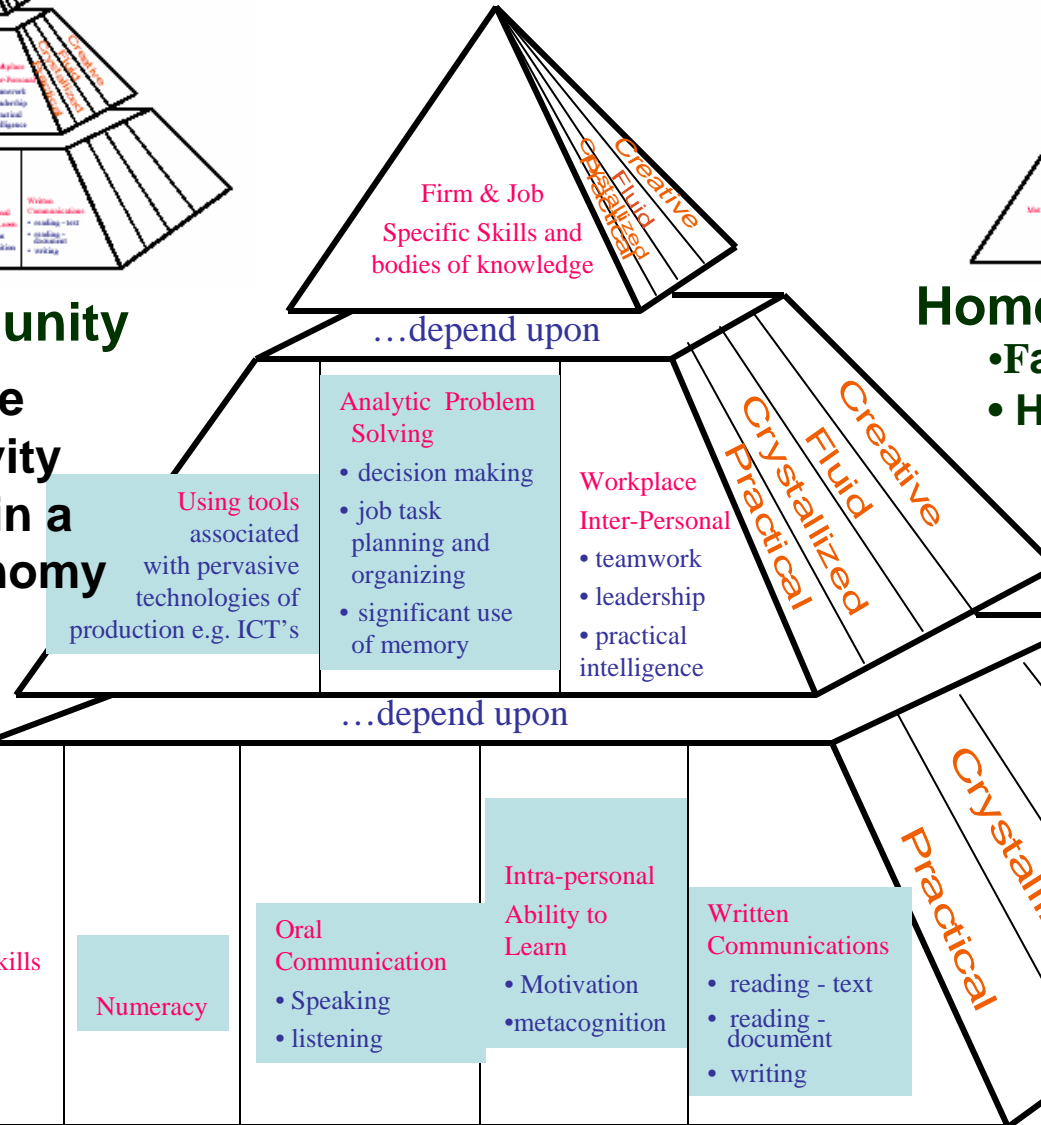
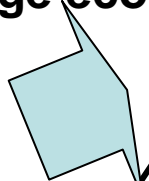
The acquisition and application of ICT literacy depends upon literacy skill

A Framework for Thinking About Essential Skills : Profiles of Skill Supply and Demand



The Community

ICT Literacy: The key to productivity and innovation in a knowledge economy



The World of Work

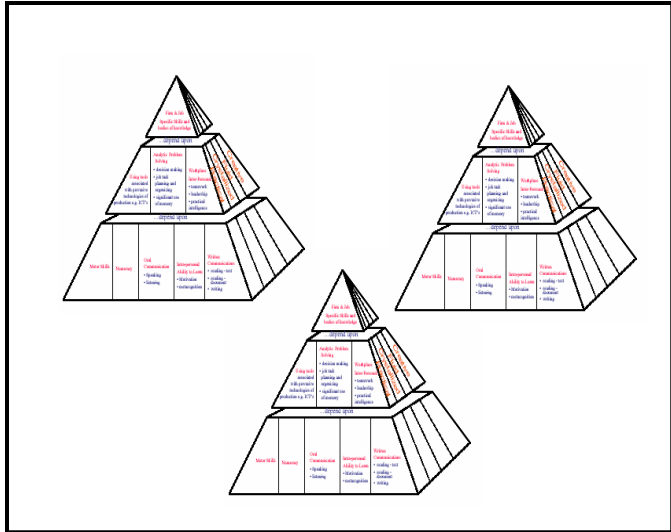


Home Environment

- Family
- Culture
- Health

Theoretical Framework: a “Markets” Model of Skill

Skill Demand



Markets for skill:

- Education
- Labour
- Health
- Social

Skill Supply = skill stock + net skill flow from lifelong, life-wide learning

- + quality of early childhood experience
- + quantity of primary and secondary education
- + quantity and quality of tertiary
- + quantity and quality of adult learning (formal, non-formal, informal)
- +/- immigration
- +/- emmigration
- skill loss associated with insufficient demand
- +/- social demand for skill
- +/- economic demand for skill

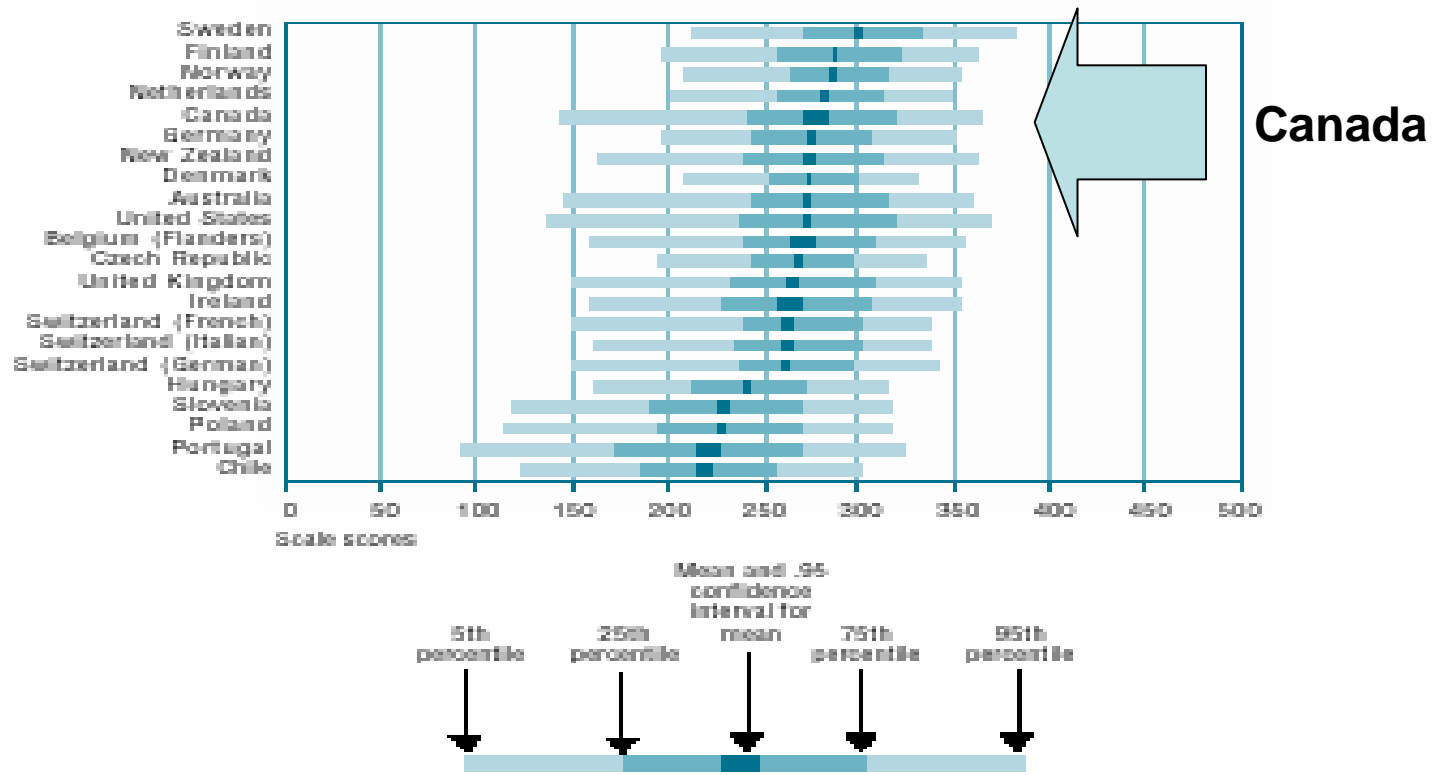
Context	Outcomes		
	MICRO (Individuals)	MESO (Social Institutions)	MACRO (Systems)
• Economic			
• Social			
• Educational			
• Health			

The stock of skill: Canada's average skill level is relatively high but we have a very wide range of skill...

FIGURE 2.1

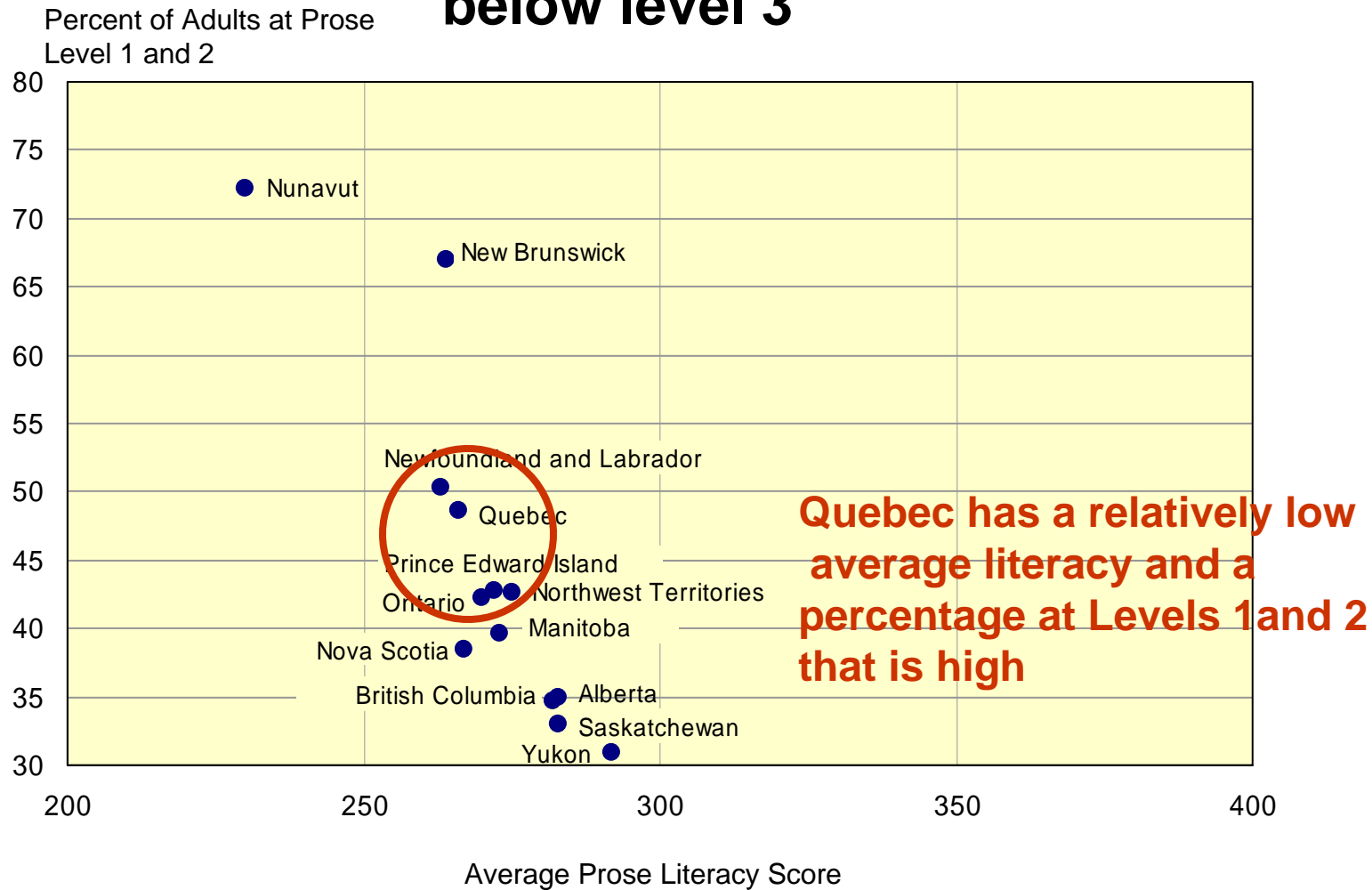
DISTRIBUTION OF LITERACY SCORES

A. Mean scores with .95 confidence interval and scores at 5th, 25th, 75th, and 95th percentiles on the prose literacy scale, population aged 15-65, 1994-1998



Countries are ranked by mean scores.

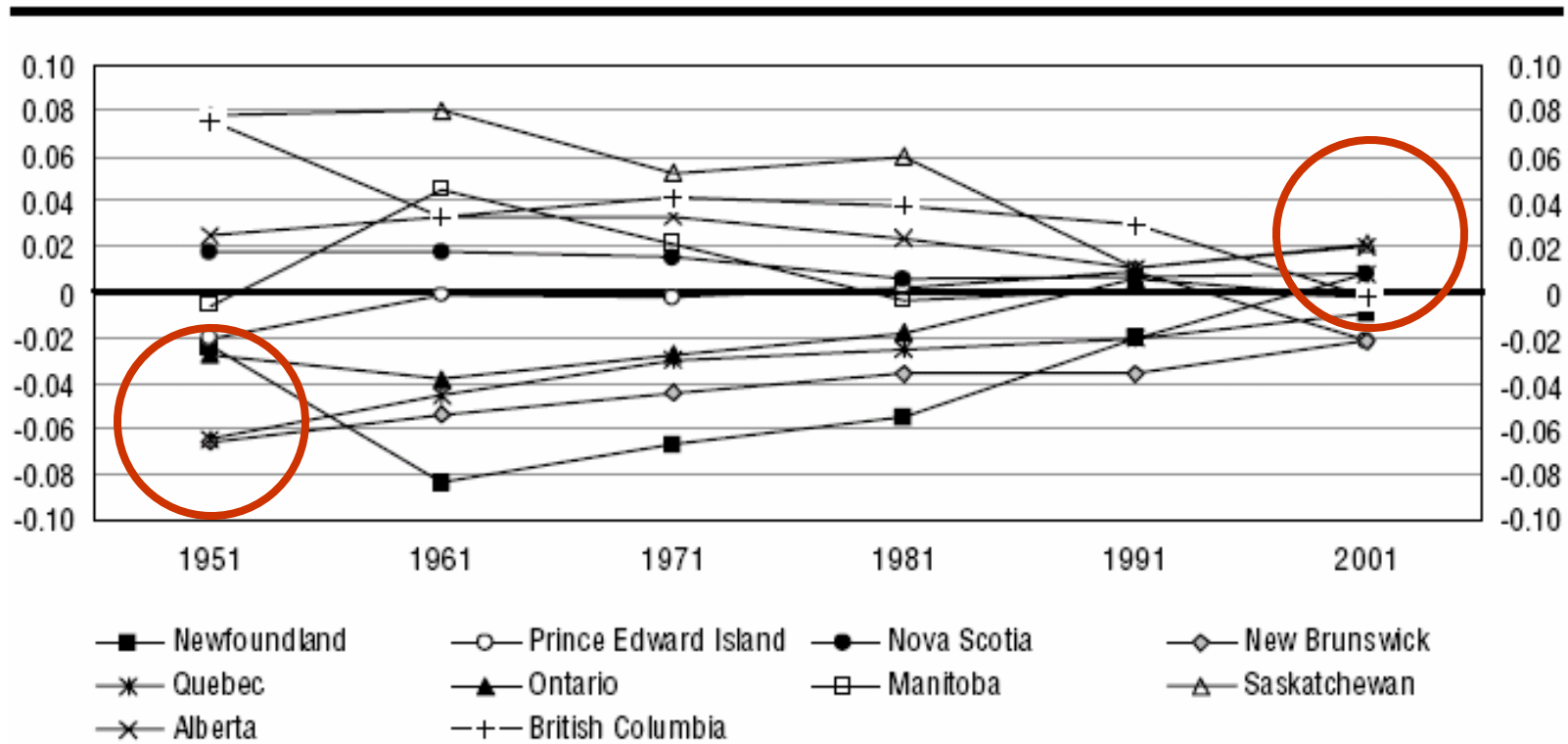
The Distribution of Prose Literacy Skill By Province and Territory: Average score by percent below level 3



The scope for public policy to influence skill

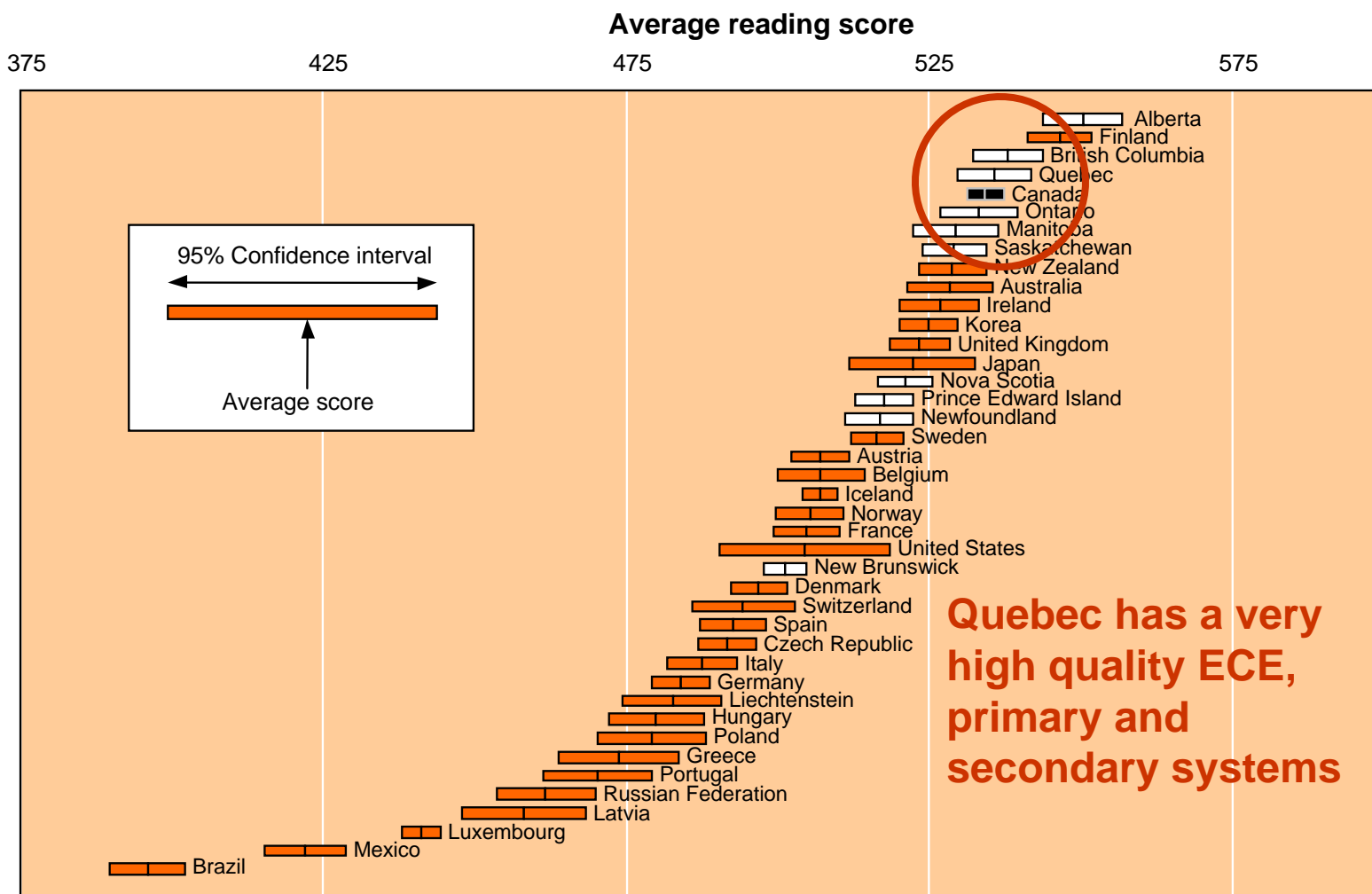
Figure 2

Average literacy scores of population aged between 17 and 25
(log of deviations from the mean)



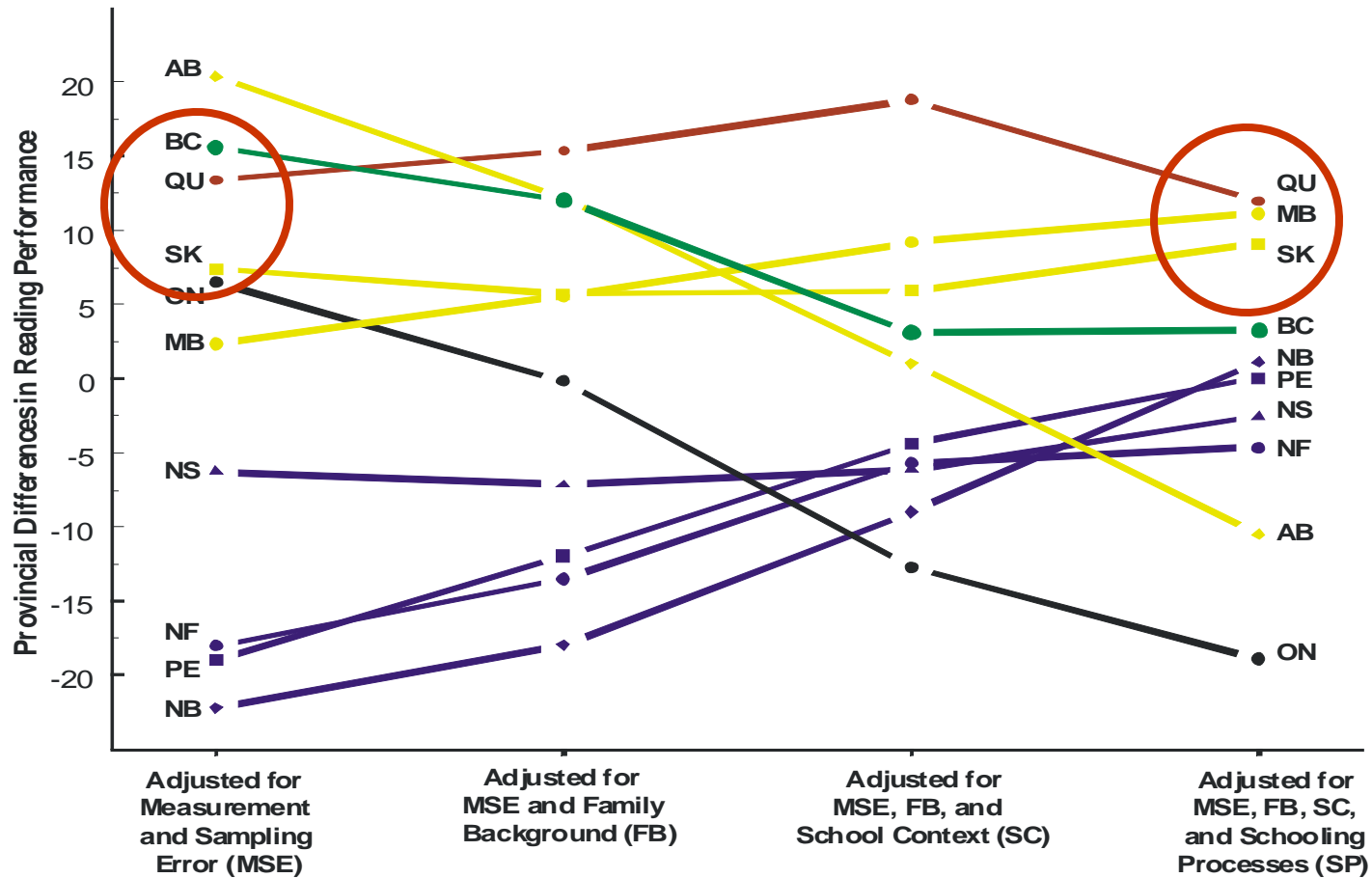
The relative performance of Quebec's school system has steadily increased
The transfer of best practice has led to reduced inter-provincial variance

Quality of skill flow from the initial education system: Canada rates near the top of the world in reading literacy



Source: Programme for International Student Assessment, 2000.

Relative Provincial Differences in Reading Performance: Raw and Adjusted

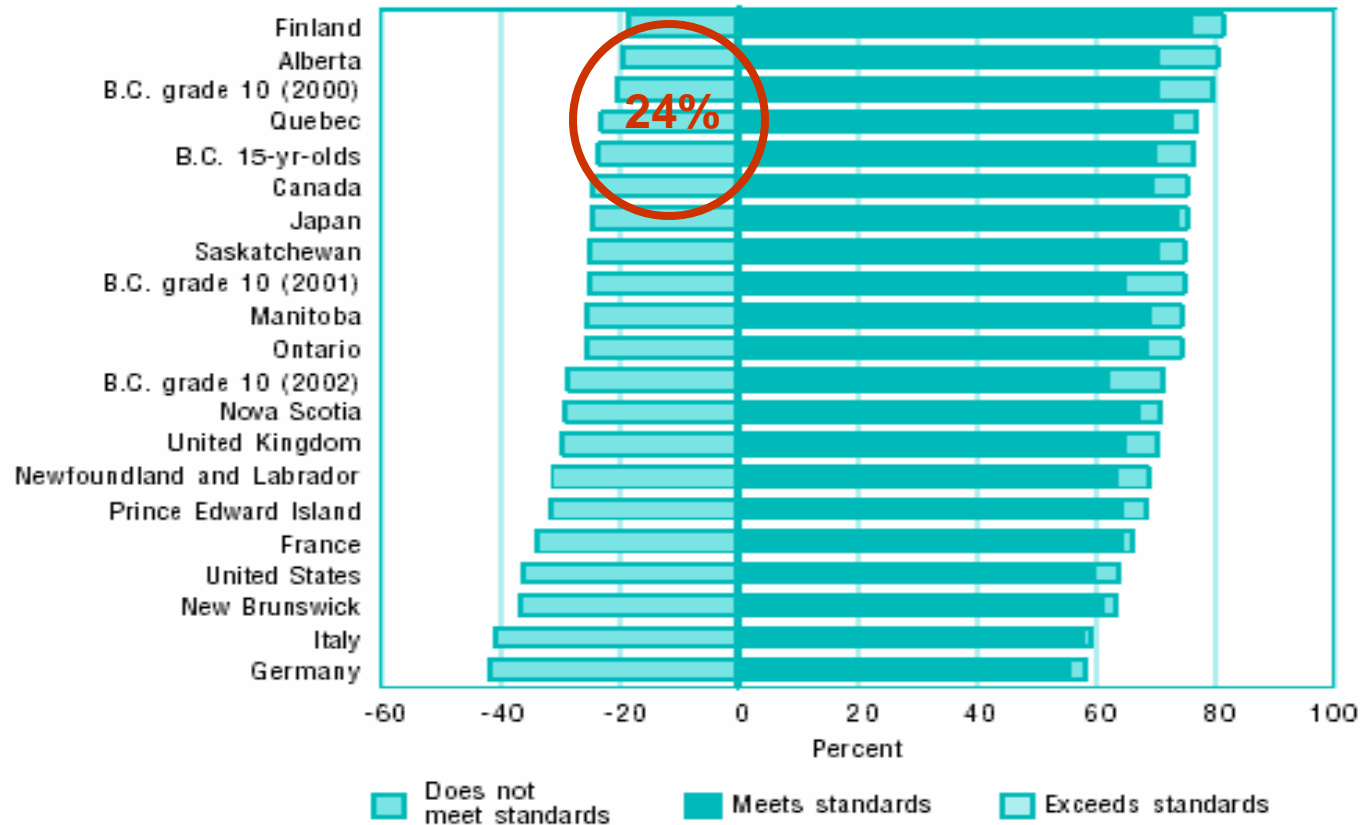


After adjustment for differences in family background, school context and schooling processes Quebec's school system is performing well

The quality of skill flow from the secondary system:

Almost 1/4rd of Quebec's 15 year olds fail to meet B.C.'s grade 10 performance standards...

Percentage of 15-yr olds from various jurisdictions attaining B.C. grade 10 reading standards, 2000



1. All results shown here are for 15-year-olds except for B.C. grade 10 students who are, on average, 6 months older than B.C. 15 year olds.

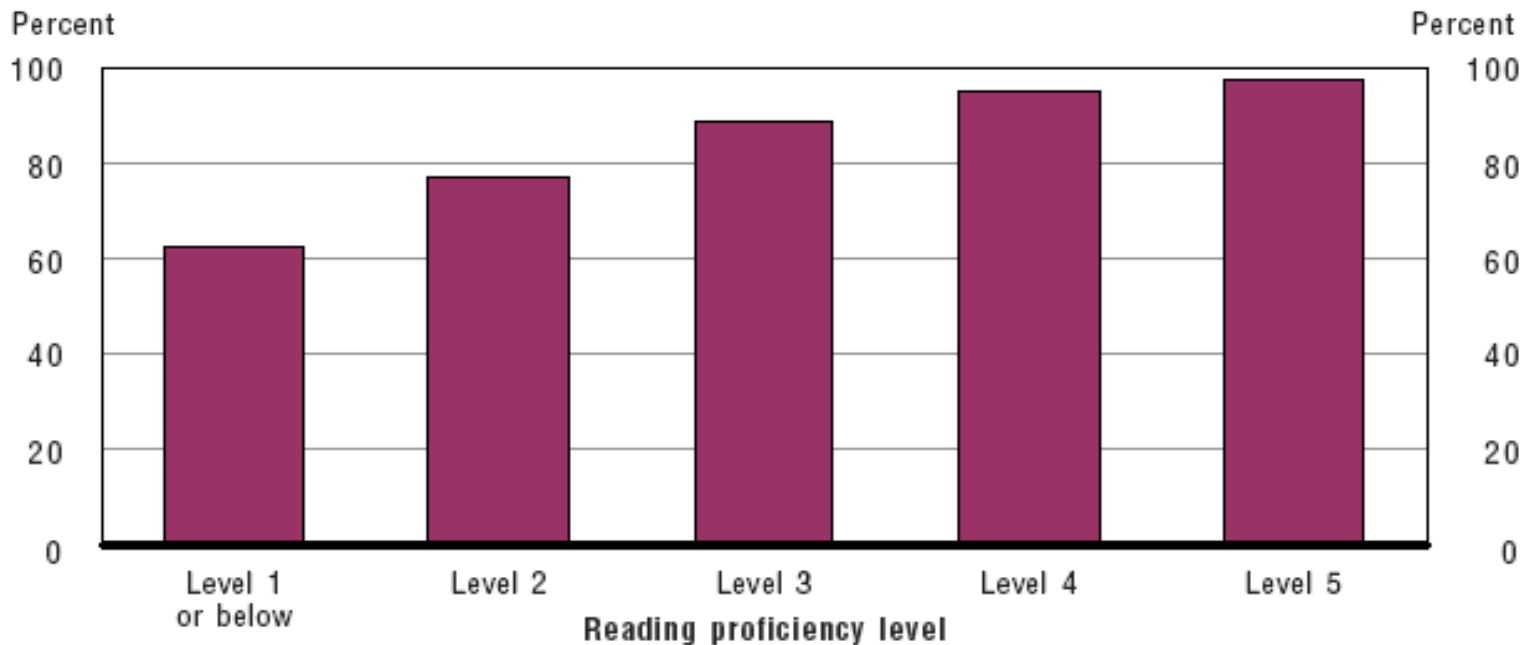
Jurisdictions ordered by the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations.

Source: Table 6

Impact of literacy skill on High school completion:

Figure 2

Percentage of youth who had completed high school by age 19 by their reading proficiency level at age 15

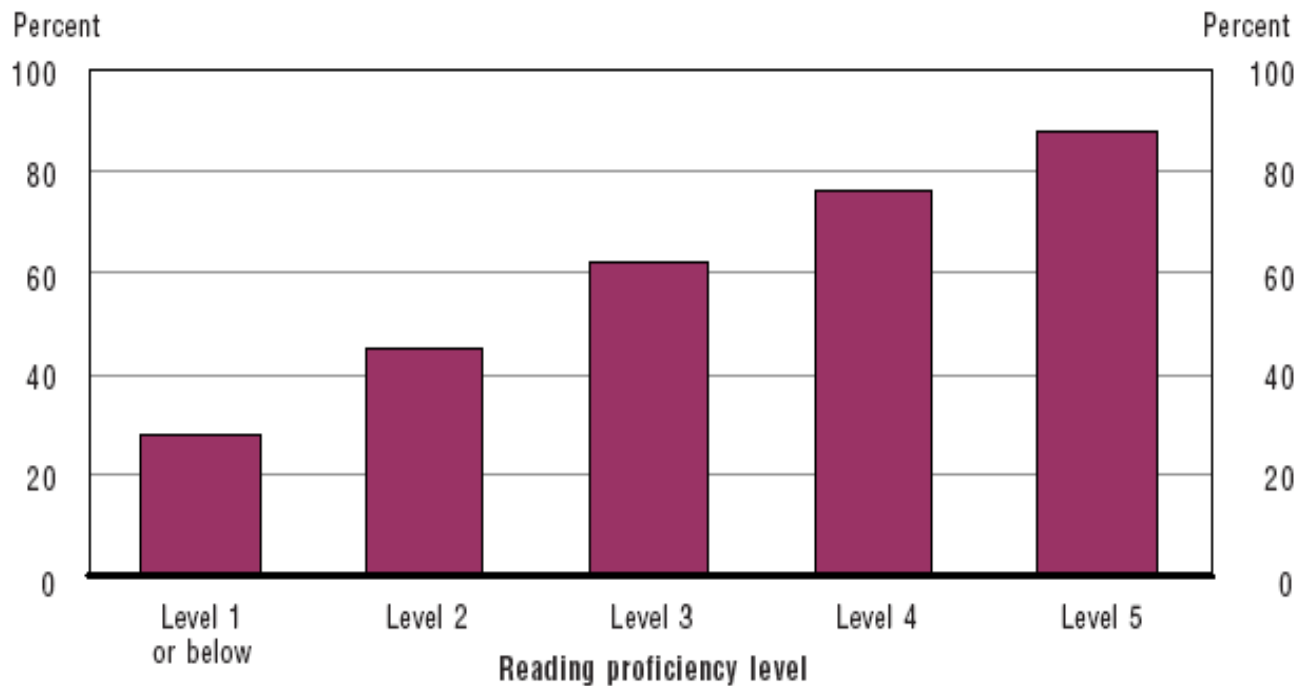


Literacy level has a profound impact on the probability of secondary completion

Impact of literacy skill on PSE participation:

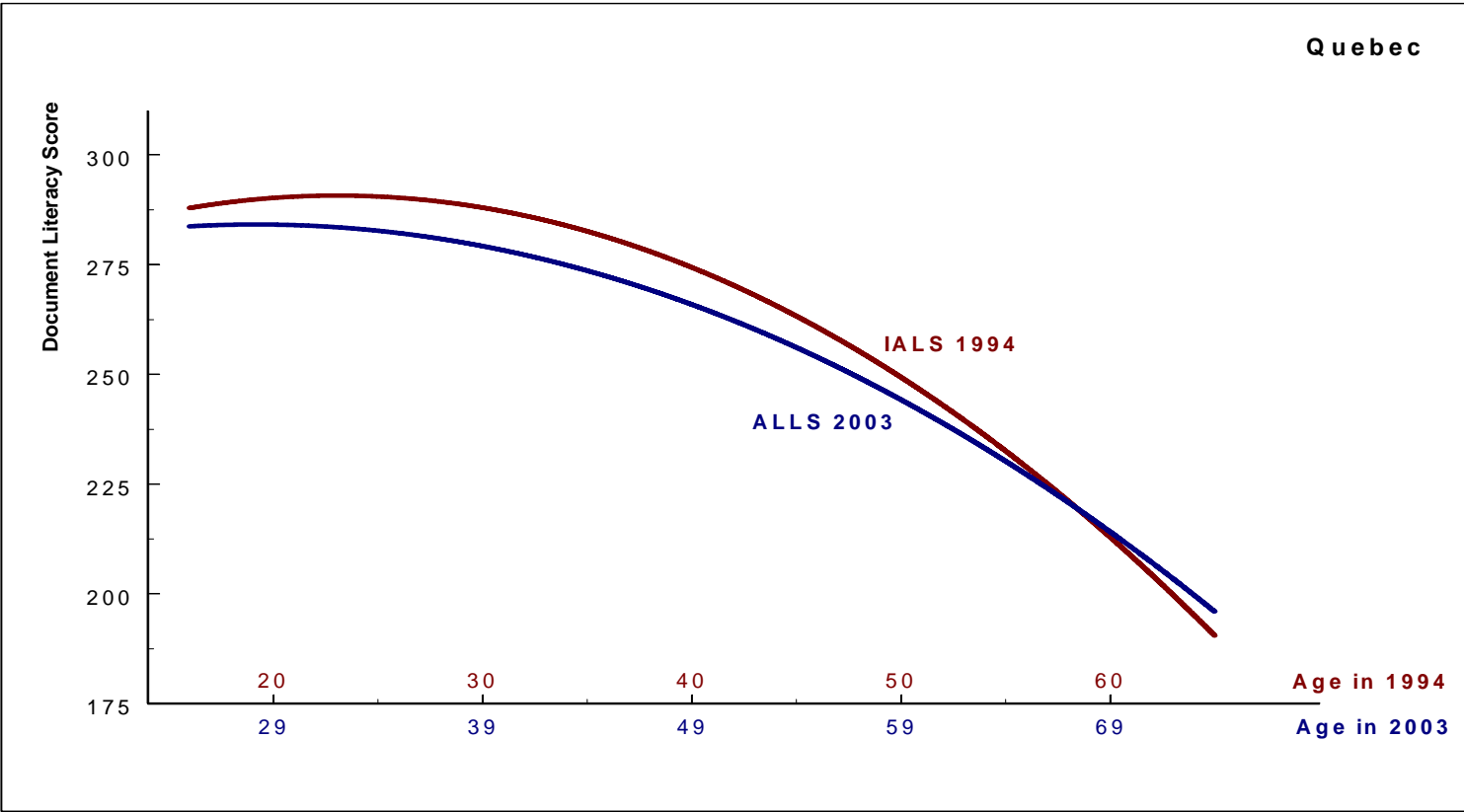
Figure 3

Postsecondary participation rates by reading proficiency level at age 15



Literacy level has a profound impact on the probability of post-secondary participation

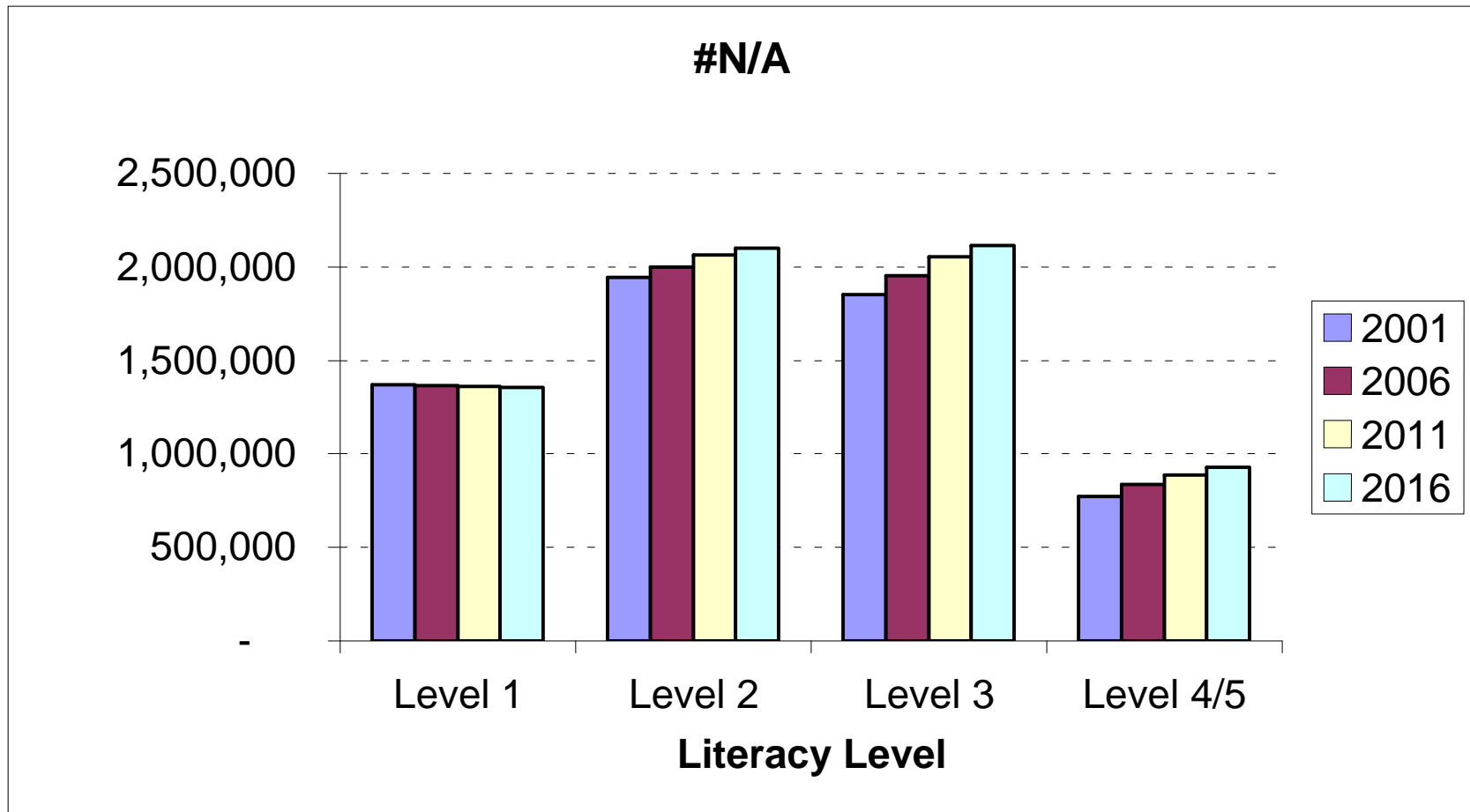
Adult skill loss in Quebec: 1994 -2003



Workers in Ontario experienced significant skill loss at all ages

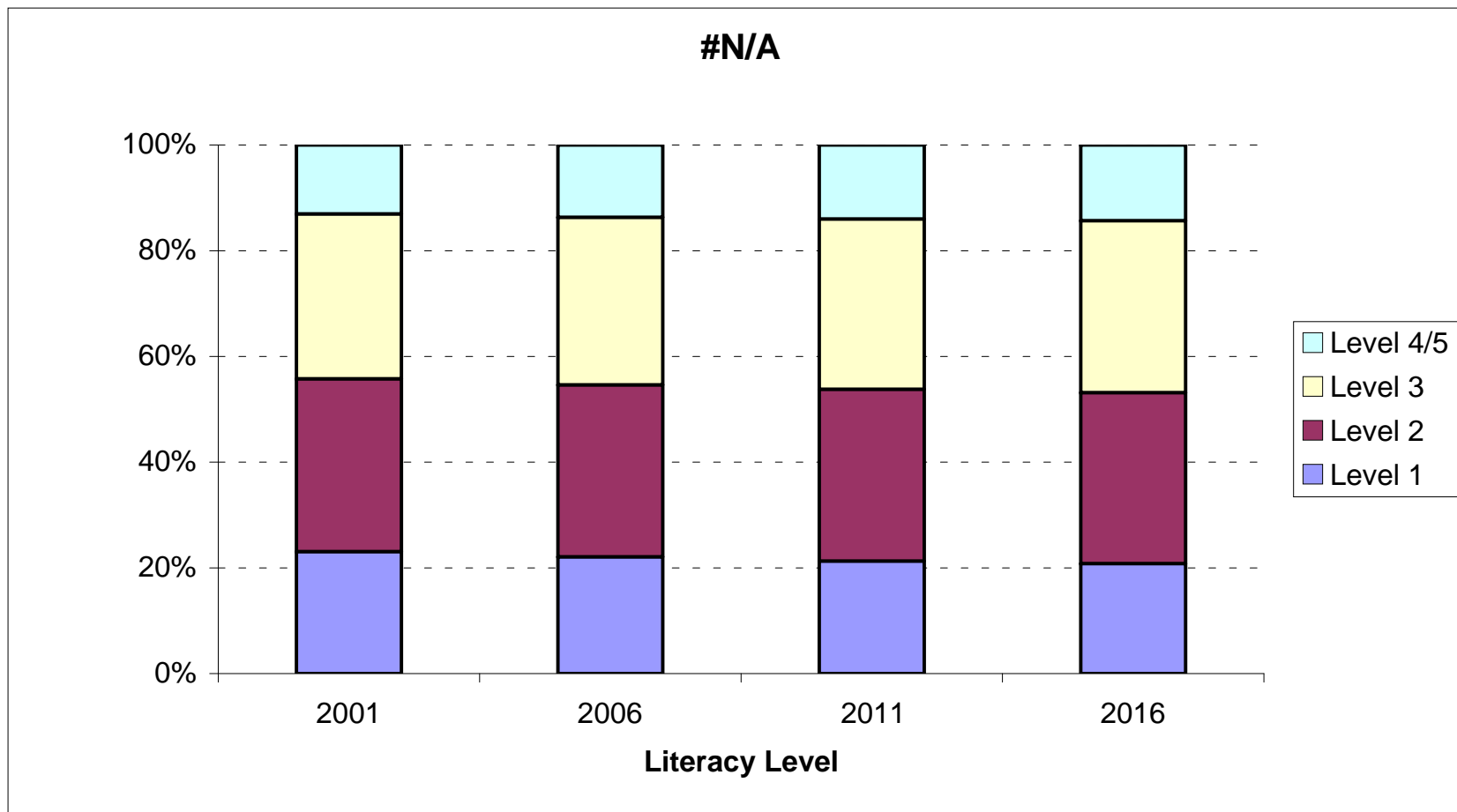
Source: Willms and Murray 2006

Projected numbers adults by proficiency level: Quebec 2001 - 2016

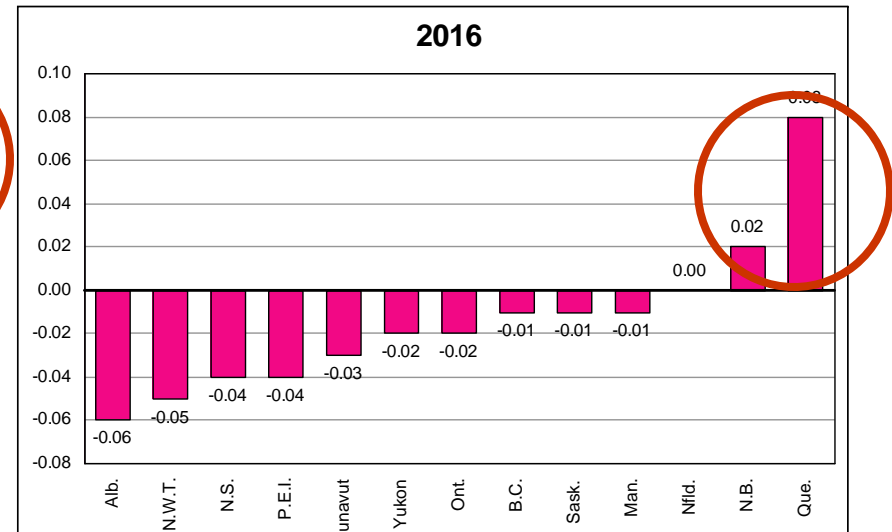
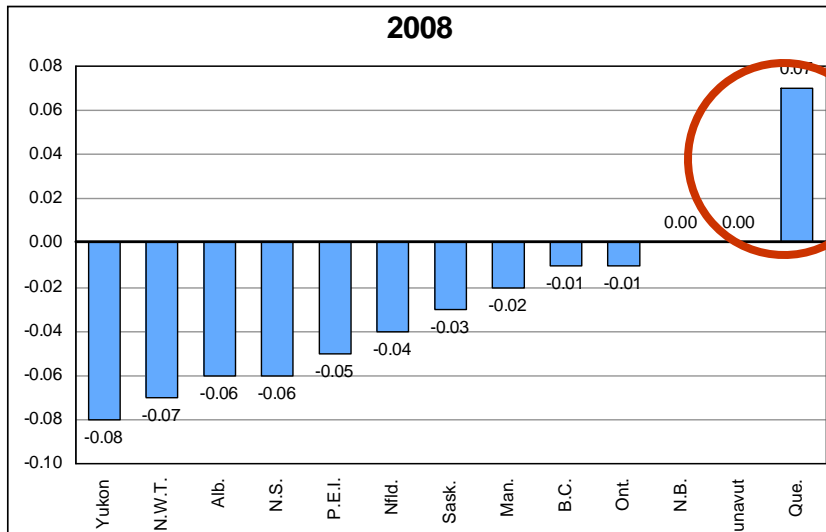


In the absence of additional investment the numbers of low skilled Adults will grow - at a time when low skills will matter more

Proportions at proficiency levels: Quebec adults 2001 – 2016



Rank in proportion of adults below Level 3 relative to national average : 2008 - 2016



Status quo: without additional investment Quebec's Relative literacy rank remains unchanged

Summary:

- **Literacy skills matter to our economic and social success and what we get for our tax \$**
- **There is an urgency to act but who should pay and who needs to do what is complex**
- **The problem will not go away itself – the skill flows are of variable quality**

Summary: cont'd

- **We need to do four things:**
 - **Improve the average literacy skill of secondary leavers**
 - **Reduce the numbers of secondary leavers with low literacy skill levels**
 - **Upgrade the literacy skills of large numbers of adults**
 - **Adopt policies that increase the economic demand for literacy skill**
- **A Pan-Canadian Youth Literacy Strategy would help to meet the first two of these goals.**

Summary: cont'd

- **If we could fix the problem the net cost would be low due to the massive benefits**
- **If we don't act the economic consequences will be severe - employment and wages and benefits will drop**

Scott's policy prescription:

- **Heard of the guaranteed minimum wage? Why not a guaranteed minimum literacy skill for students and adults?**

