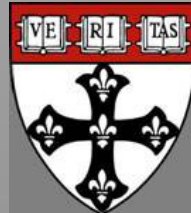


# Health Literacy: Policy & Practice

Annual Health Promotion Conference  
National University of Ireland Galway  
June 18, 2015

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# Citation

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# Health Literacy Foundation: Measures of Adults' Literacy Skills

**Three waves of assessments** [OECD sponsorship]: IALS 1990s, ALLS 2003, PIAAC 2011

**Focus:** Literacy, numeracy, problem solving skills of adults in industrialized nations

**Measures:** Adults ability to use everyday materials to accomplish everyday tasks with accuracy and consistency

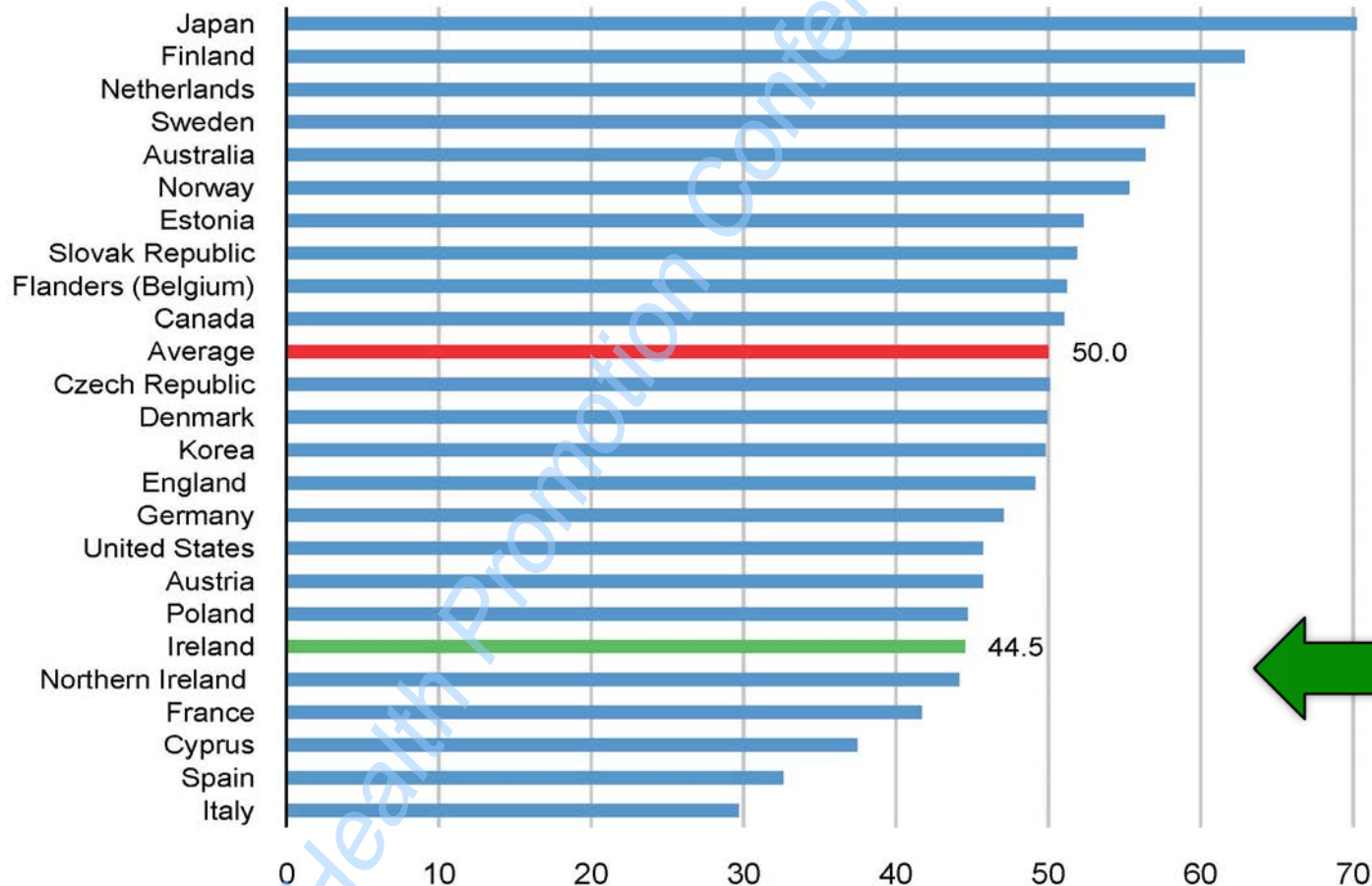
**Findings:** Significant numbers of adults in most industrialized nations do not possess the most basic information-processing skills considered necessary to succeed in today's world.

**Implications:** Agency, civic engagement, economic policy, health

# PIAAC [2011]: Ireland

## Compared to Other Countries

Figure 2.2  
Percentage of adults (16-65) at Levels 3-4-5  
of literacy proficiency



# Genesis of Health Literacy Studies

**Foundation:** indication of links between maternal literacy in developing nations and child health outcomes

**First publication of findings** from US [1992 NALS] and International Adult Literacy Surveys [1994-6 IALS]

- Significant proportion of adults in industrialized nations have difficulty using print materials to accomplish mundane tasks with accuracy and consistency
- Faulty assumptions uncovered

**Research Question:** Are there health consequences?

# A Previously Unexamined Variable: Health Literacy

**Social Determinants of Health:** Well established links between health and key social factors such as education, income, social status, access to resources . . .

**Health Literacy Research Findings:** Health literacy is linked to a wide array of health outcomes

**Health Literacy studies** have illuminated the pathway between education and health outcomes

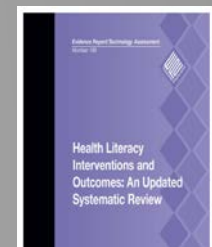
# Health Literacy Findings

Health literacy is related to / predicts

- Knowledge
- Reported health promotion and disease prevention behaviors
- Management of long term illness [chronic disease measures]
- Morbidity
- Mortality



IOM, 2004  
Analysis & Recommendations



AHRQ, 2004, 2011  
Systematic Reviews

# Study Limitations: Conceptual Errors



**Limited  
Focus &  
Measures**



**Misplaced  
Responsibility**



**Neglected  
Context**



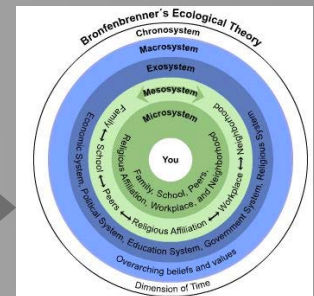
# Insights from Research & Theory

## Literacy

- Literacy measures must include attention to **texts**, **tasks**, and **contexts** [see Snow; LeVine; Purcell-Gates]

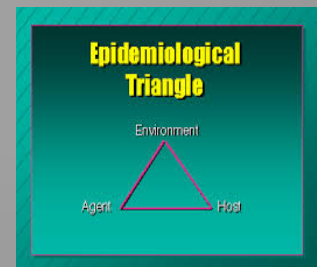
## Health Education/ Health Promotion

- Bronfenbrenner: Social Ecological Model →



## Epidemiology

- Reciprocal relationship between persons and environments →



# Corrections: Paradigm Shifts



From Focus on Skills of individuals

→ **Mismatch**

From Focus on Public's Capabilities

→ **Professionals' Skills**

from Focus on Practitioners

→ **Institutional Culture &  
Literacy Environment**

From Focus on Health Care

→ **Health Promotion &  
Public Health**

# Health Literacy: *An Evolving Concept*

Don Nutbeam, *Social Science and Medicine*, 2008

the cognitive and social **skills** which determine the motivation **and ability of individuals** to gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health Nutbeam, WHO, 1998

the degree to which **individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand** basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions USDHHS, 2010

**engagement** in a wide range of health actions that extend from personal behaviors to social action to address the determinants of health Nutbeam, SSM, 2008

# New Definitions

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Consider a definition that shifts attention to the **capacity of professionals and health institutions** to provide access to information and support the active engagement of people

Rudd, McCray, Nutbeam. Health Literacy and Definition of Terms, chapter 2 in Health Literacy in Context: International Perspective. Canada: Nova Science. 2012.

# Filling the Research Gaps

## The oral exchange

- e.g. Nouri & Rudd, Health literacy in the oral exchange, *Patient Education & Counseling*, 2014

## Numeracy

- e.g. Apter et al., Do the Math, *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 2008

## Mismatch

- e.g. Rowlands et al., The Health Information Gap, *British Journal of General Practice*, 2014.

## Health Literacy Environment of Hospitals

- e.g. Groene & Rudd, Results of a Feasibility Study to Assess the health literacy environment, *Journal of Communication in Health Care*, 2011.

# Filling the Research Gaps

## Health Literacy Environment in Dentistry

- e.g. Horowitz et al., Health Literacy Environmental Scans of community based dental clinics in Maryland, *American Journal of Public Health*, 2014.

## Public health

- e.g. Institute of Medicine, Implications of Health Literacy for Public Health. *Roundtable on Health Literacy, Workshop Summary*, 2014

## Communication in Times of Chaos/Disaster

- e.g. Goto et al., Health literacy training for Public Health Nurses in Fukushima, *Japan Medical Association Journal*, 2014.

## Health Promotion Practice

- e.g. Institute of Medicine, Promoting Health Literacy to Encourage Prevention and Wellness, *Roundtable on Health Literacy, Workshop Summary*, 2011.

# Implications for Research & Practice: New Focus

## Attention to 'both sides of the coin'

- The reader & text
- The text & the writer
- The speaker & the listener
- Math displays and concepts
- The 'traveler' & the environment
- Assumptions & norms
- The interactions between lay and medical cultures

## Attention to commonly examined literacy-related factors

- Texts
- Tasks
- Context

# Implications for Research & Practice: New Processes

**Deconstruct** health activities to understand the complexity of health tasks, health texts, and health related tools

Examine our health & health care systems & institutions to **identify the facilitating factors and barriers** that support or inhibit access to information and active engagement of people

**Study options** that reduce complexity, eliminate barriers, and increase access

**Improve practice**



# Implications for Research & Practice: New Measures Needed

A definition determines the scope of a concept

A definition determines measures [who/what/how]

**We have:** Over 50 measures of patients' skills/deficits

**We lack:** Measures of tool complexity/ease of use  
Measures of professionals' skills  
Measures of practice attributes  
Measures of institutional characteristics  
[complexity & demands]

# Implications for Practice & Policy: Rigor Required

## Practice

Attention to adult literacy assessments

Respectful attention to health communication

## Insistence on scientific rigor

- Formative research
- Testing with intended audiences

## Policy

Plain language initiatives

Regulations for development & dissemination of critical texts

- Institutional Review Boards & rigorous standards
- Contractual obligations

# Time for Action

- **Documented:** Significant proportions of adults in most industrialized nations have limited literacy & numeracy skills
- **Documented:** Literacy skills are linked to social factors
- **Documented:** Literacy skills are linked to health outcomes
- **Documented:** Mismatch between reading level of health materials and average reading skills of adults
- **Documented:** Health systems & health care processes have become increasingly complex

**Implications: Health Disparities**

**Action: Remove barriers**

# Create a Balance

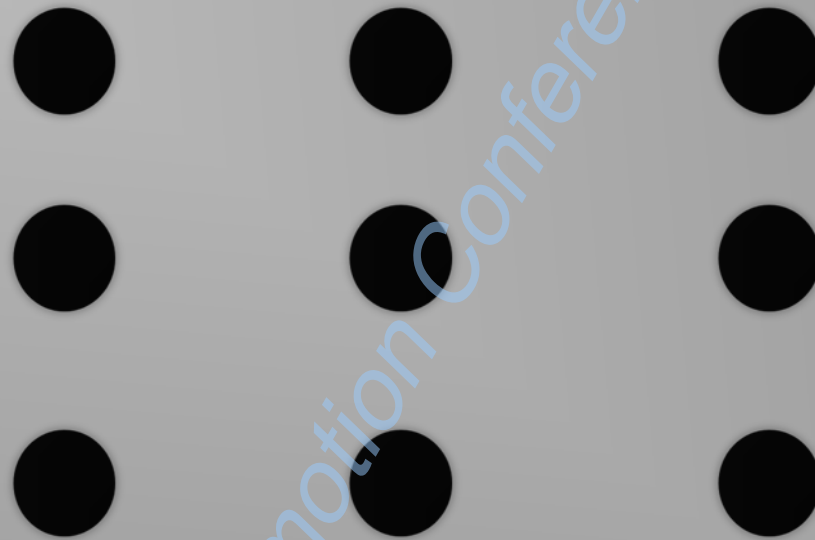
**Demands +  
Expectations**

**Individual  
Skills**



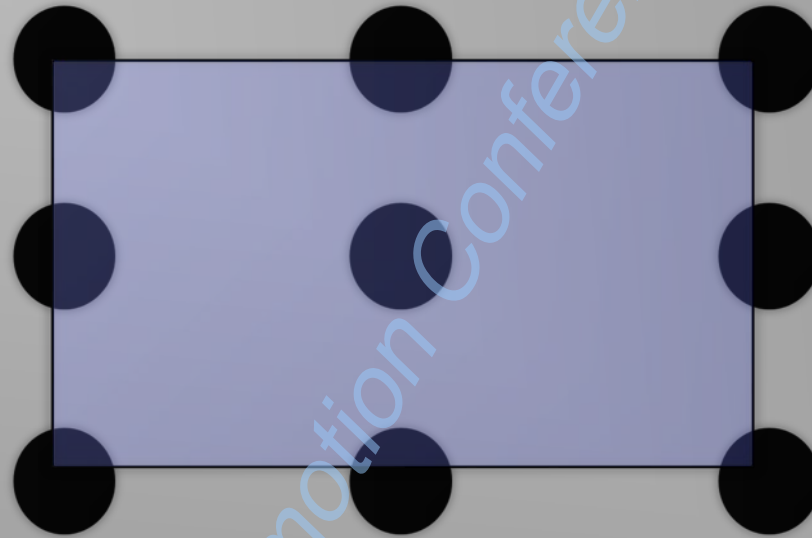
**Health  
Literacy**

# Game: Connect All the Dots



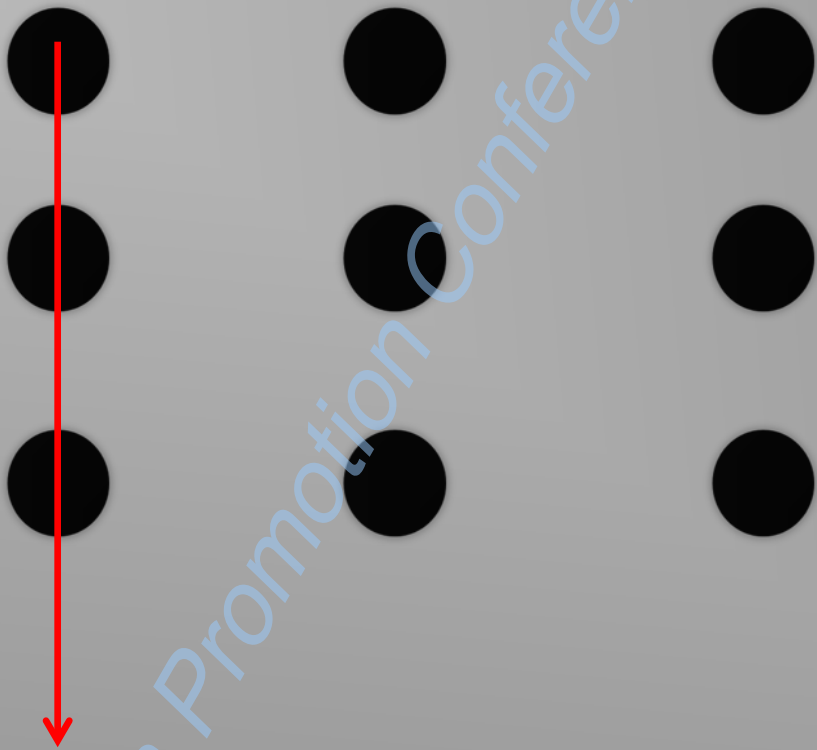
Use 4 straight connected lines  
Once you begin: Do not lift pen from  
paper

# Common Conceptual Error: Self Imposed Box

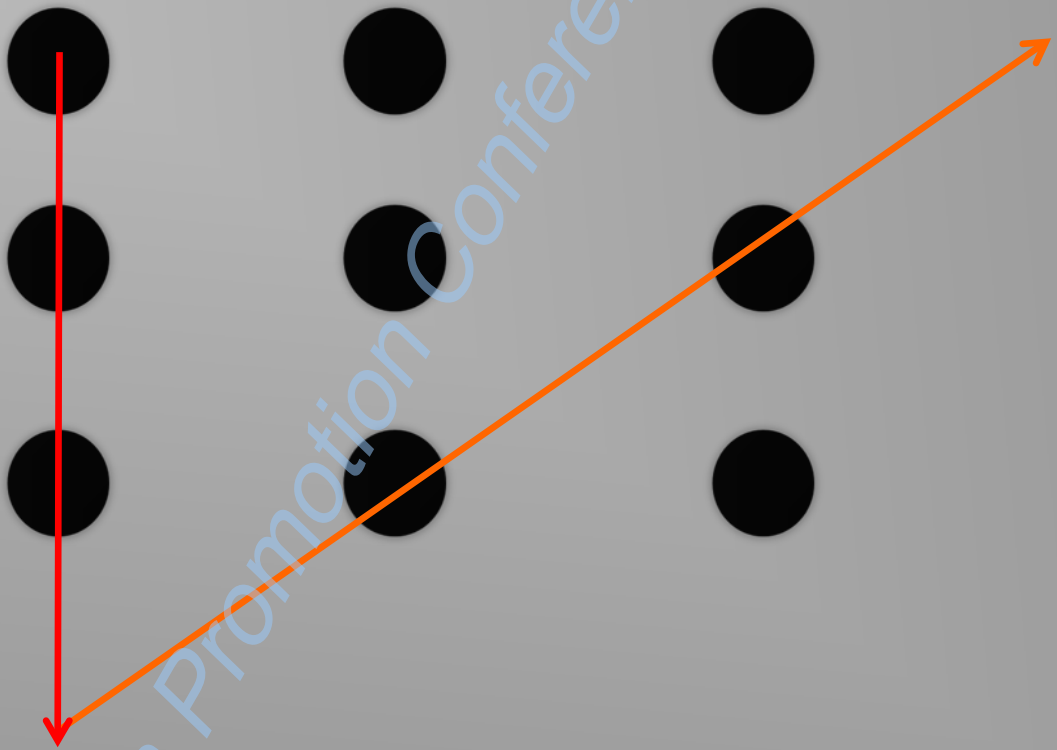


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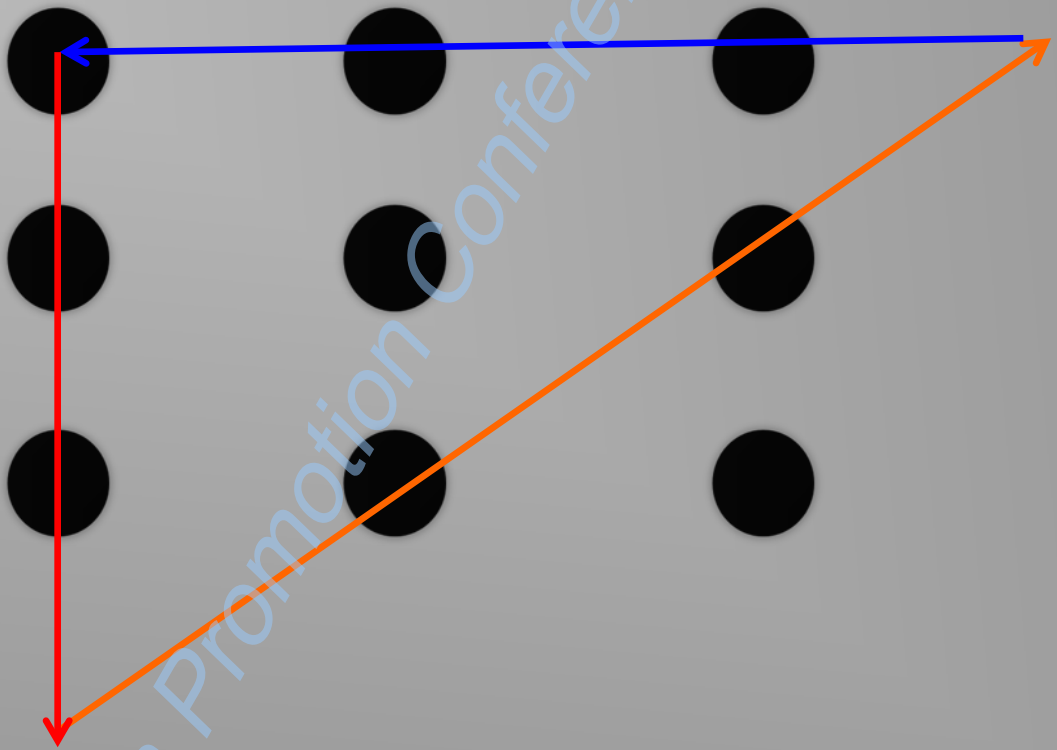


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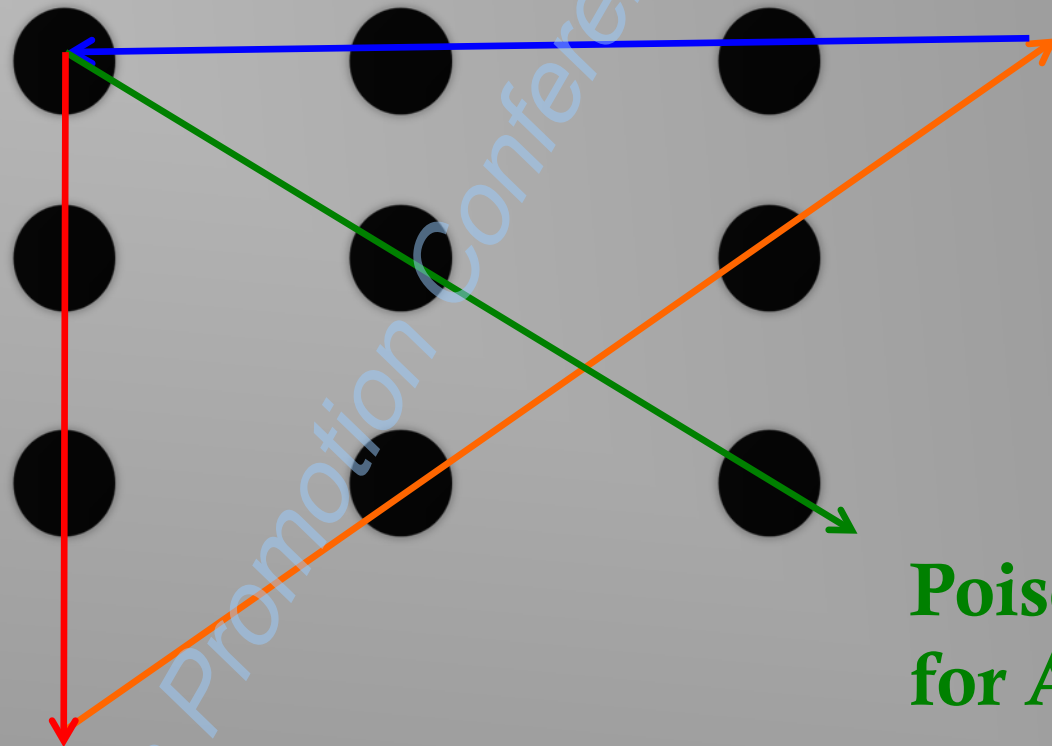




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# Think Outside the Box



**Poised  
for Action**

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# Initial Health Literacy Error

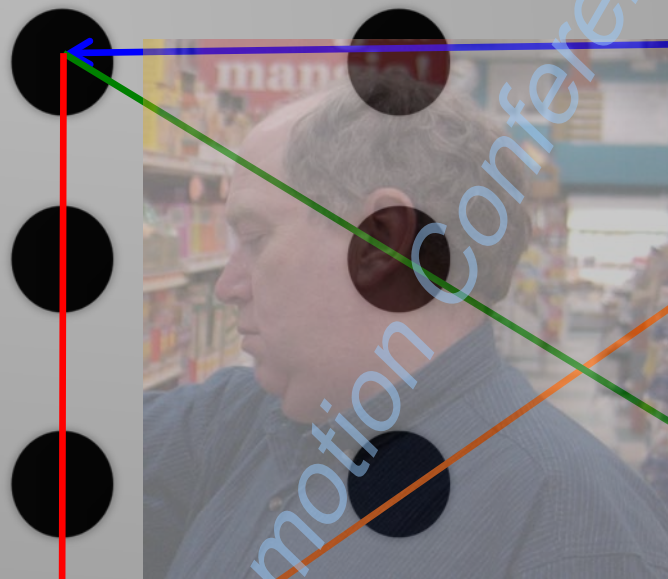


Boxed in by a focus  
On the patient

# Thinking Outside the Box

Institutional  
Norms, Policies & Practice

Professionals'  
Rigor & Skills



**Health Literacy:  
Accessible  
Information,  
Care,  
& Services**

Accessible Information  
Health Materials  
& Tools

# Continuing Health Literacy Error

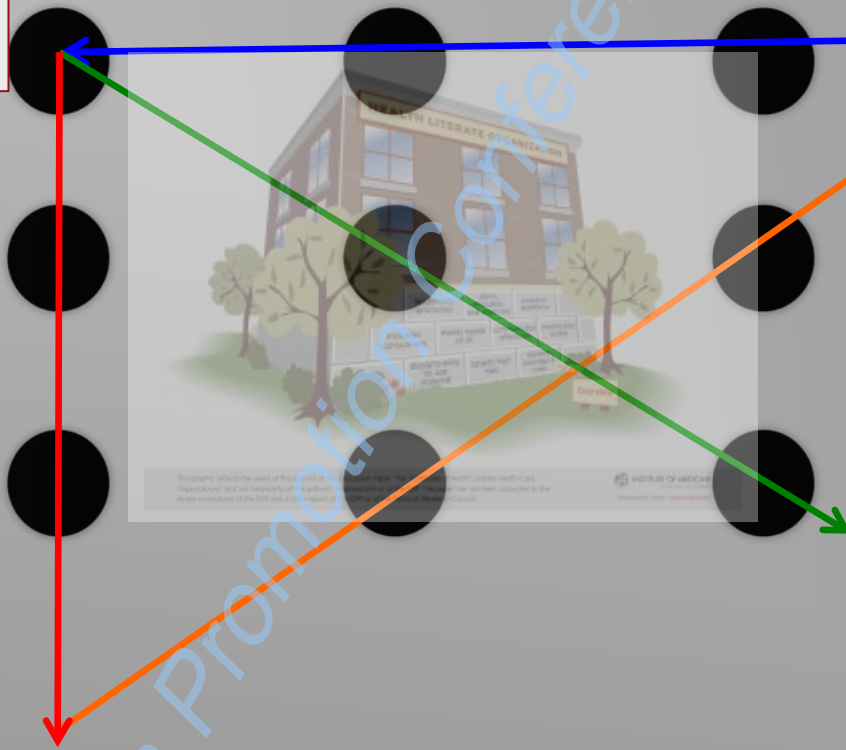


Boxed in by a focus  
within the Clinical Setting  
& Medical Care

# Thinking Outside the Box

Civic Engagement:  
Community Health  
Environmental Health  
Health Policy

Activities at Work  
& in Community



Activities at Home  
With and for Loved Ones

**Health  
Literacy:  
Accessible  
Information,  
Engagement,  
Advocacy,  
Public Health**

# The capacity of professionals & health institutions to provide access to information and support the active engagement of people [Rudd 2010]

