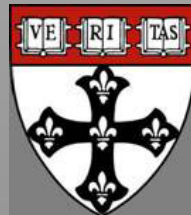


Health Literacy: Policy & Practice

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

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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

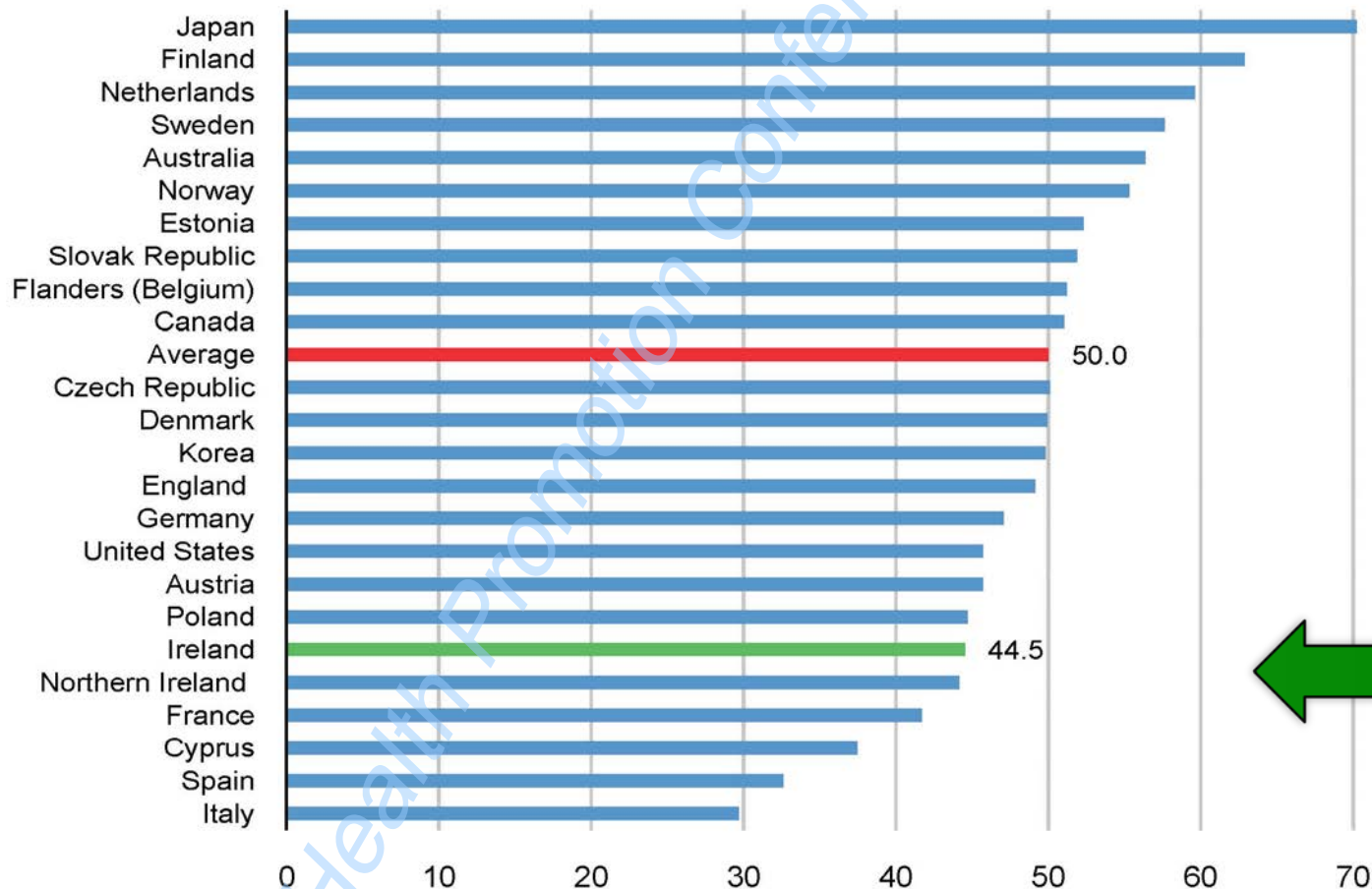
Findings: Significant numbers of adults in most industrialized nations do not possess the most basic information-processing skills considered necessary to succeed in today's world.

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

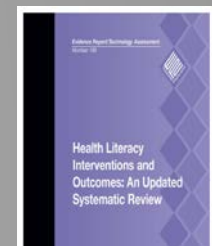
Health Literacy Findings

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**

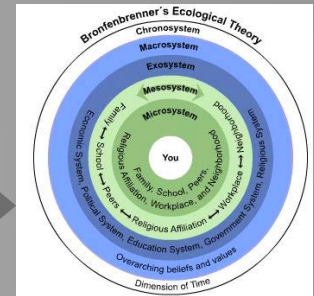
Insights from Research & Theory

Literacy

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

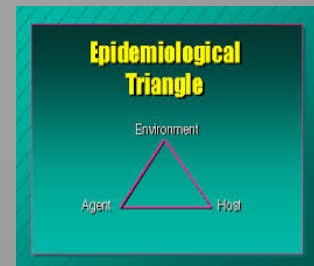
Health Education/ Health Promotion

- 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

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

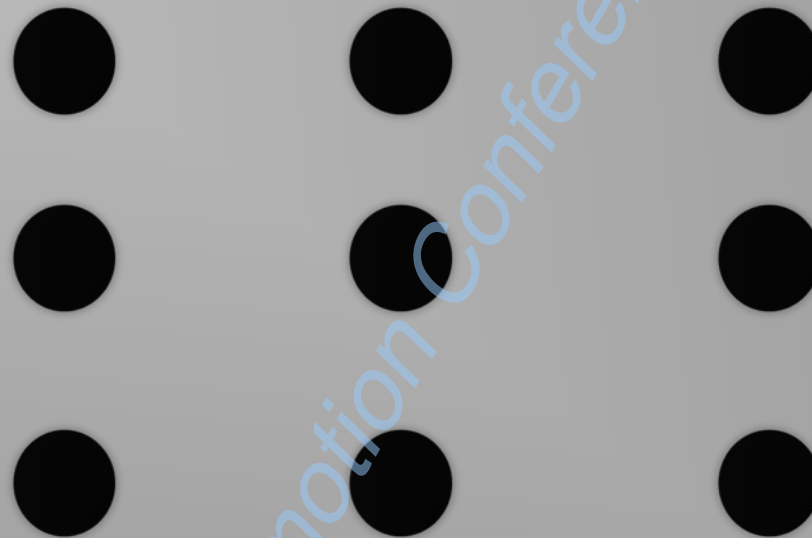
**Demands +
Expectations**

**Individual
Skills**



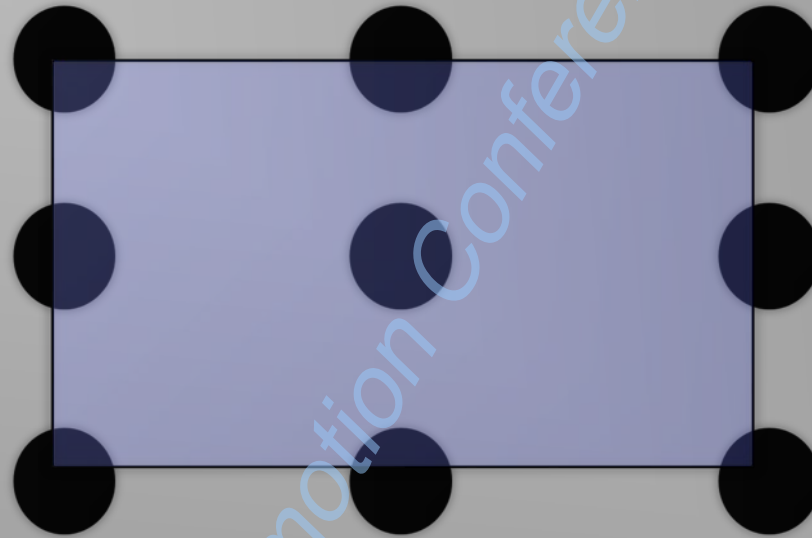
**Health
Literacy**

Game: Connect All the Dots



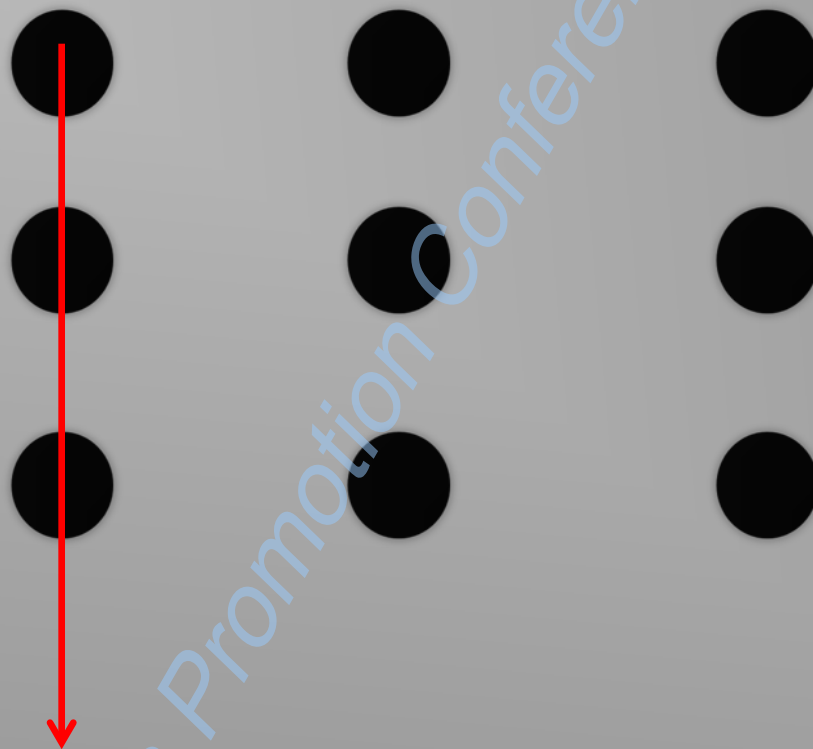
Use 4 straight connected lines
Once you begin: Do not lift pen from
paper

Common Conceptual Error: Self Imposed Box

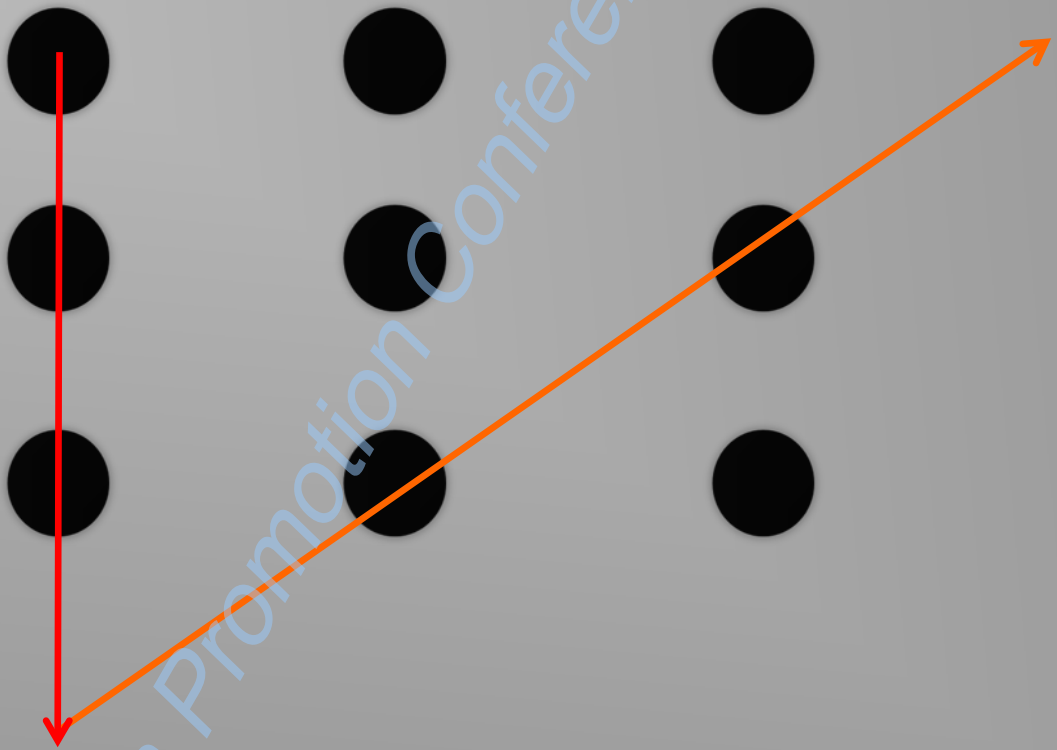


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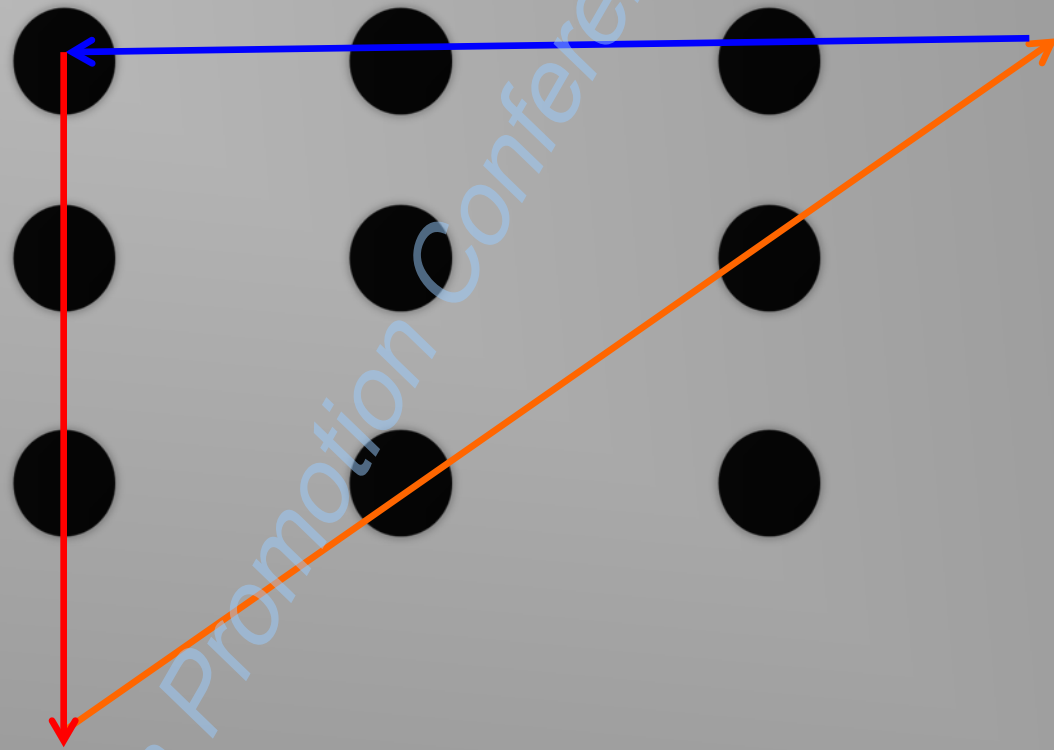
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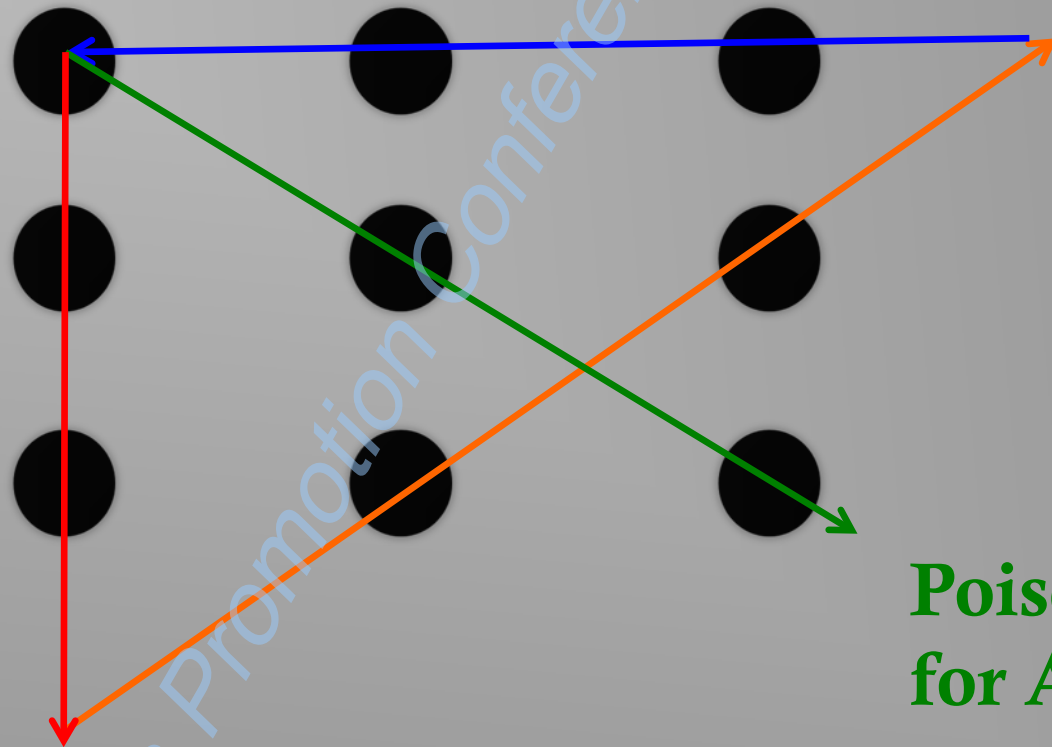
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Think Outside the Box



**Poised
for Action**

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Initial Health Literacy Error

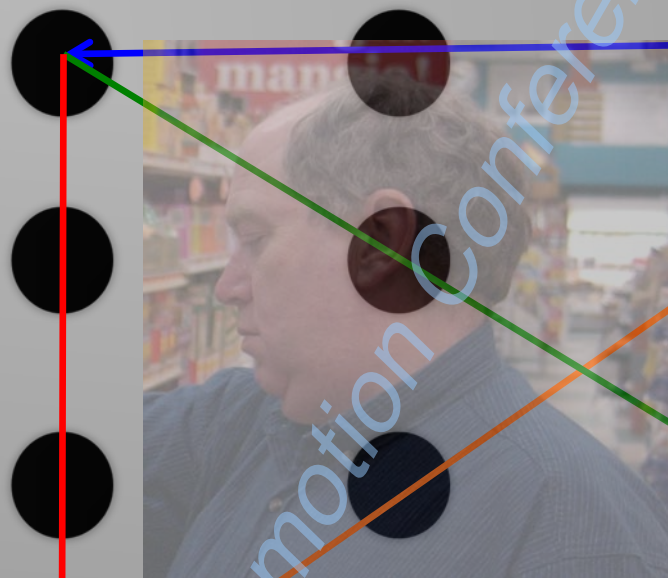


Boxed in by a focus
On the patient

Thinking Outside the Box

Institutional
Norms, Policies & Practice

Professionals'
Rigor & Skills



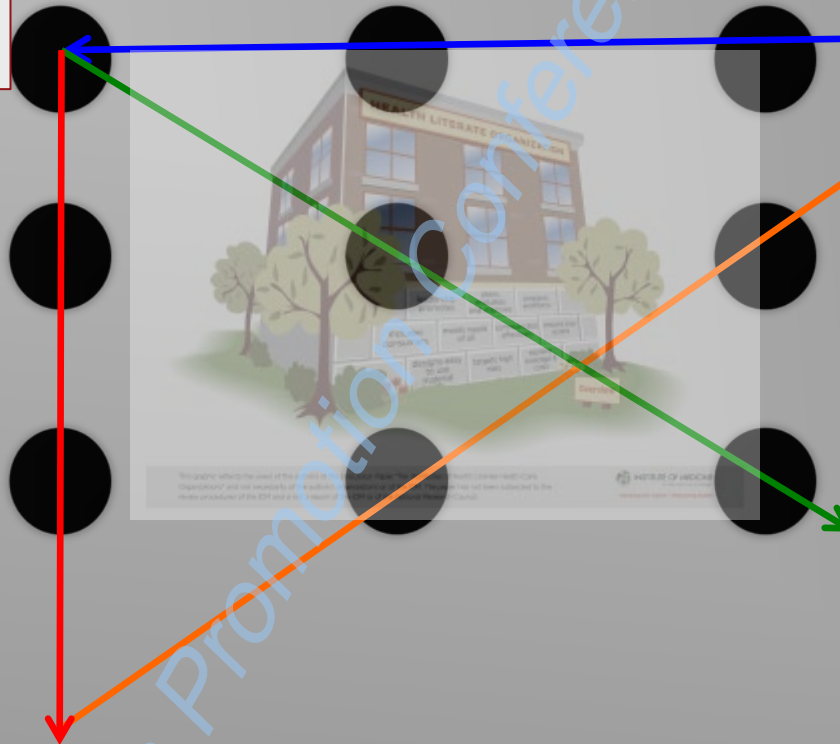
**Health Literacy:
Accessible
Information,
Care,
& Services**

Accessible Information
Health Materials
& Tools

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]

