

## Health Literacy: Time to Refocus & Expand

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## Origins: Educational Research & Findings

### Adult literacy skills in industrialized nations

1990s: NALS, IALS

2003: NAAL, ALLS

2012: PIAAC

### Words Get in the Way

Significant numbers of adults in most industrialized nations are limited in their ability to participate in economic & civic life

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## New Area of Inquiry: Health Literacy Research

Literacy is linked to health outcomes



AHRQ  
Reviews 2004  
2011  
IOM  
Report 2004

- Health Promotion
- Disease Prevention
- Screening & Early Detection
- Chronic Disease Management
- Morbidity
- Mortality

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## Time for Action

- ✓ **Documented:** Literacy & numeracy skills of adults
- ✓ **Documented:** Literacy skills are linked to social factors
- ✓ **Documented:** Literacy skills are linked to health outcomes

**Implications: Health Disparities**

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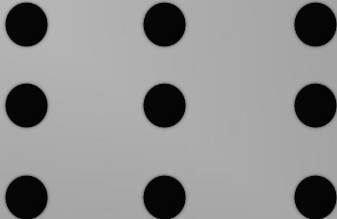
# Action

Objective for the Nation:

Improve Health Literacy

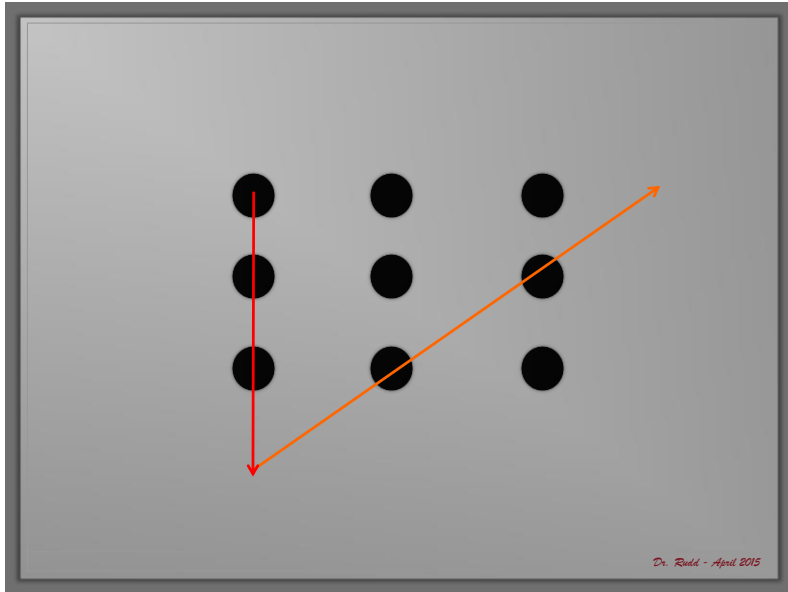
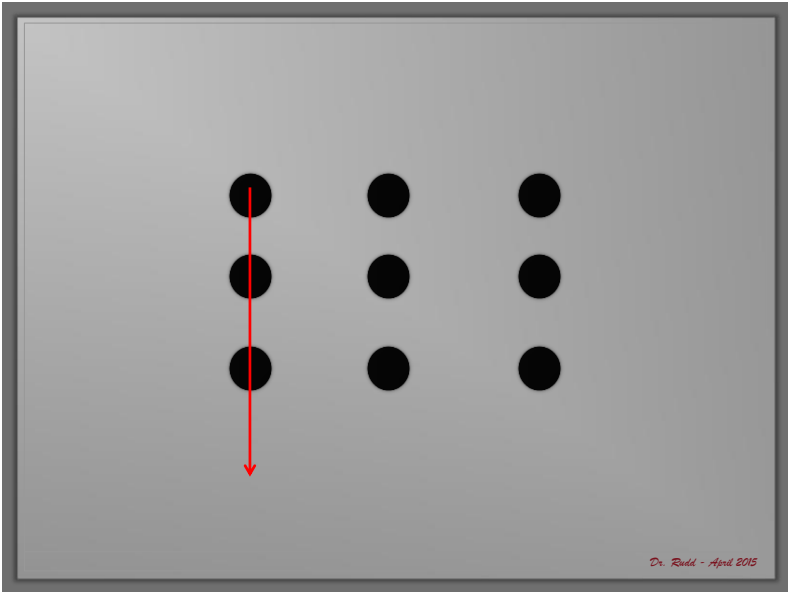
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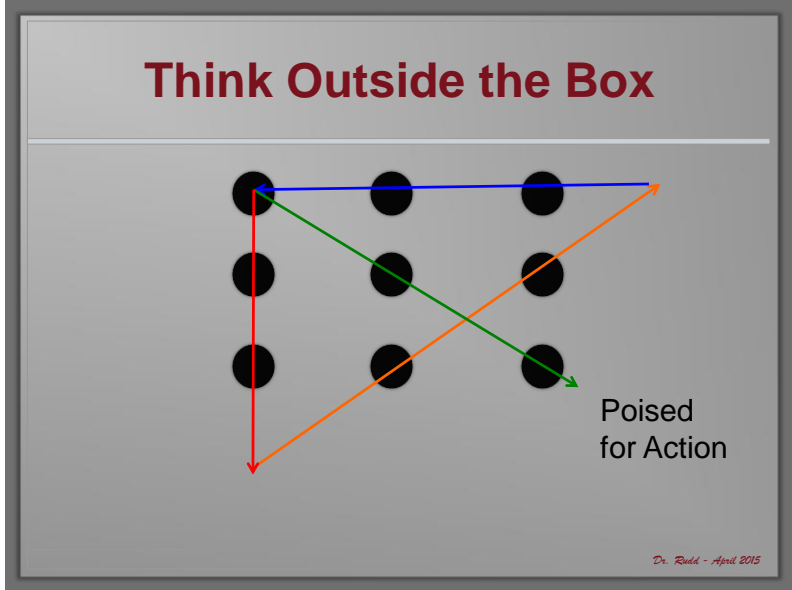
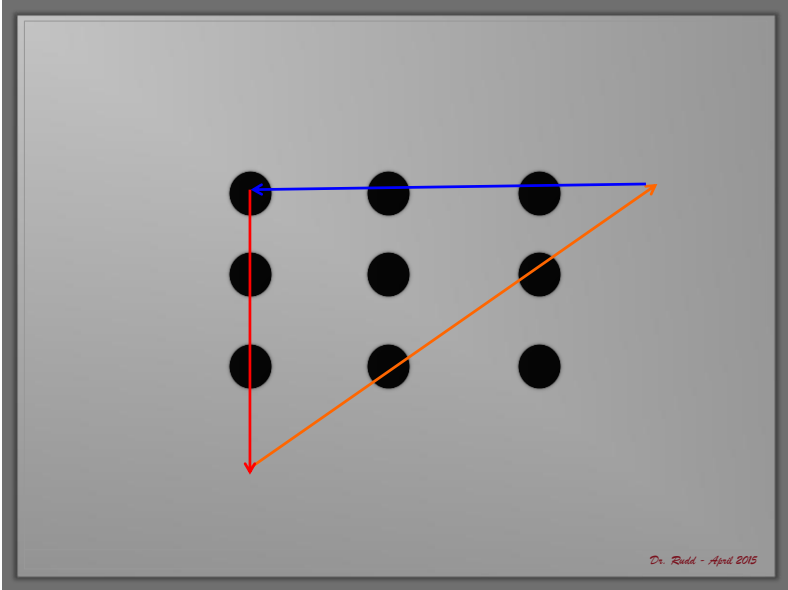
# Dilemma: How?



**Connect the Dots:** Use 4 straight connected lines  
Once you begin: Do not lift pen from paper

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## Boxed In



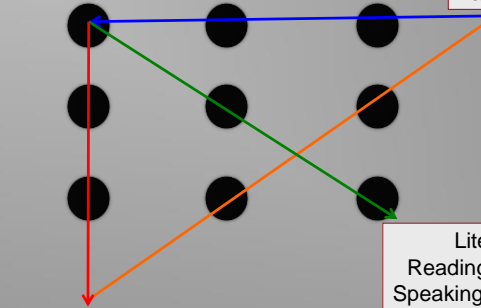
Narrow Focus on Skills  
Without Attention to Key Variables

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## Understand Literacy

Measure  
Contextual Factors

Examine  
Task Difficulty



Calibrate  
Text Complexity

Literacy:  
Reading & Writing  
Speaking & Listening  
Calculations &  
Numeracy  
**Text, Task, Context**

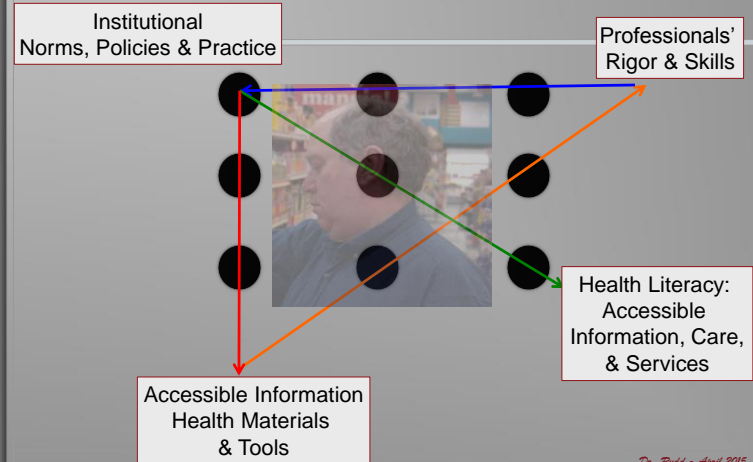
## Boxed In



Focus on One Player  
& One Side of the Coin

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## Consider Key Variables



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## Boxed In



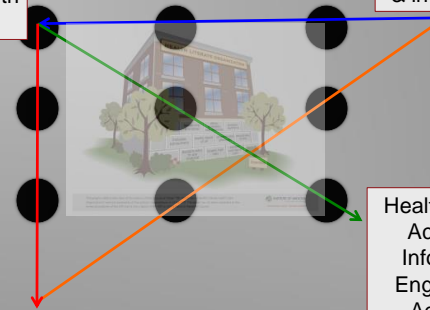
Limited Research Settings  
in Clinical Encounter  
& in Health Care

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## 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

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## Conceptual Errors



Limited  
Focus &  
Measure  
s



Misplaced  
Responsibility



Neglected  
Context

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## 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

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## Change & Action



### Current Shifts

From Skills of individuals

➔ **Mismatch**

from Public's Capabilities

➔ **Professionals' Skills**

from Practitioners' Actions

➔ **Institutional Culture & Literacy Environment**

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## New Definitions

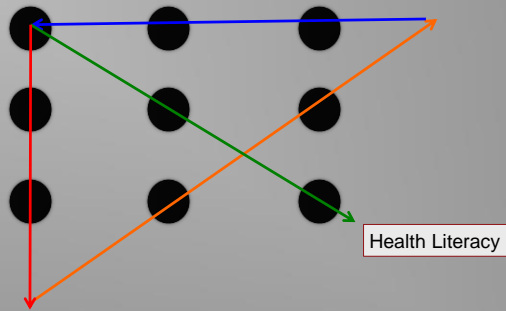
Consider a definition that shifts attention to the **capacity of professionals and health institutions** to provide access to information and support the active engagement of people

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

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

[Rudd 2010, Rudd, McCray, Nutbeam 2012]



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## Needed: New Measures

**A definition determines the scope of a concept**  
**A definition determines measures**

**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]

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## Needed Research: Systemic Change & Health Outcomes

**Study options** that Reduce Complexity, Eliminate Barriers, & Increase Access to Information, Care, and Services

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

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

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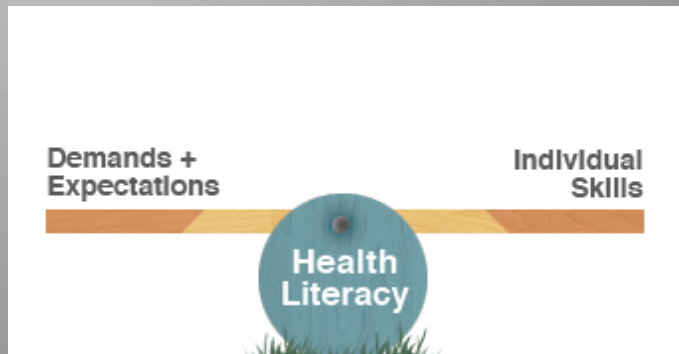
## Expand the Scope

### Public Health Literacy

- Accessible Information: Scientific Findings
- Welcomed Participation: Engagement in Identifying Community Health Issues & Problem Solving
- Key Issues for Equity: Occupational Health, Environmental Health, Disaster Planning & Management

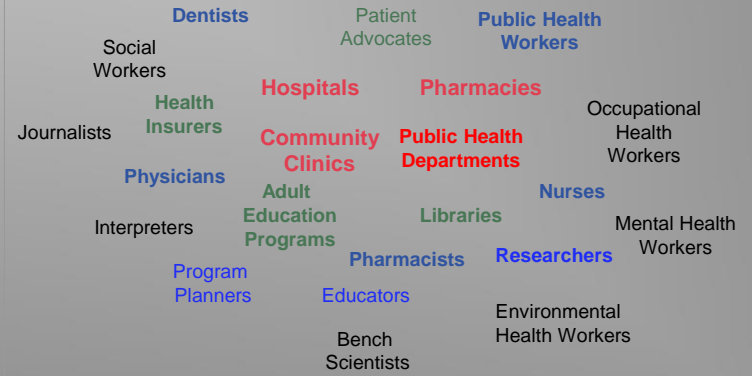
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## Create a Balance



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## Action



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