

Health Literacy Research 2.0: towards theory guided measures and their critical application

u^b

b
UNIVERSITÄT
BERN

2nd European Health Literacy Conference

Aarhus April 2014

Thomas Abel

Health Literacy Research 2.0: towards theory guided measures and their critical application

- I. Key elements of health literacy
- II. Health Literacy: short intro to a context perspective
- III. Theory guidance in HL research
- IV. Locating HL research projects within the Public Health discourse
- V. Summary and future research topics

“All in one sentence”

Key elements of health literacy

- > **Knowledge** (health relevant) – links HL to the individual
- > **Health relevant knowledge** – links HL to the production of health by the individuals
- > **Learning** – links HL to social environment
- > **Application** – links HL to the contextual and (inter) personal conditions of its use

Health literacy: its context and conditions



Context and Health Literacy



Where one lives, the social and physical environment determines...

- > the chances for him/her to acquire health literacy
- > the chances for him/her to apply health literacy
- > the meaning of health literacy for each individual

Relevance of health literacy: context matters

The relevance of HL for a person's chances to live a healthy life will vary according to his/her living context!

Relevance of health literacy: agency matters

u^b

b
UNIVERSITÄT
BERN

On their living conditions, individuals have their own expertise, knowledge and skills!

'Context – insensitive' HL research

Risks may include...

- > Wasting resources because we are measuring/intervening besides the point
- > Bothering the people for nothing
- > Missing the potentials individuals might have as experts of their own contextual conditions for health
- > Un-ethical research practices

Health Literacy Research 2.0: towards theory guided measures and their critical application

u^b

b
UNIVERSITÄT
BERN

- I. Key elements of health literacy
 - II. Health Literacy: a short intro to a context perspective
 - III. Theory guidance in HL research
 - IV. Locating HL research projects within the Public Health discourse
 - V. Summary and future research topics
- “All in one sentence”

Theory guidance in HL research

Empirical research needs theory to...

- Focus the research question
- Develop a framework
- Guide the selection or development of measures
- Select the methods and models of analysis
- Allow for meaningful interpretation of findings

Theory example: HL as Cultural Capital

u^b

b
UNIVERSITÄT
BERN

Social inequalities in health are linked to people's possession and access to economic, cultural and social capital.

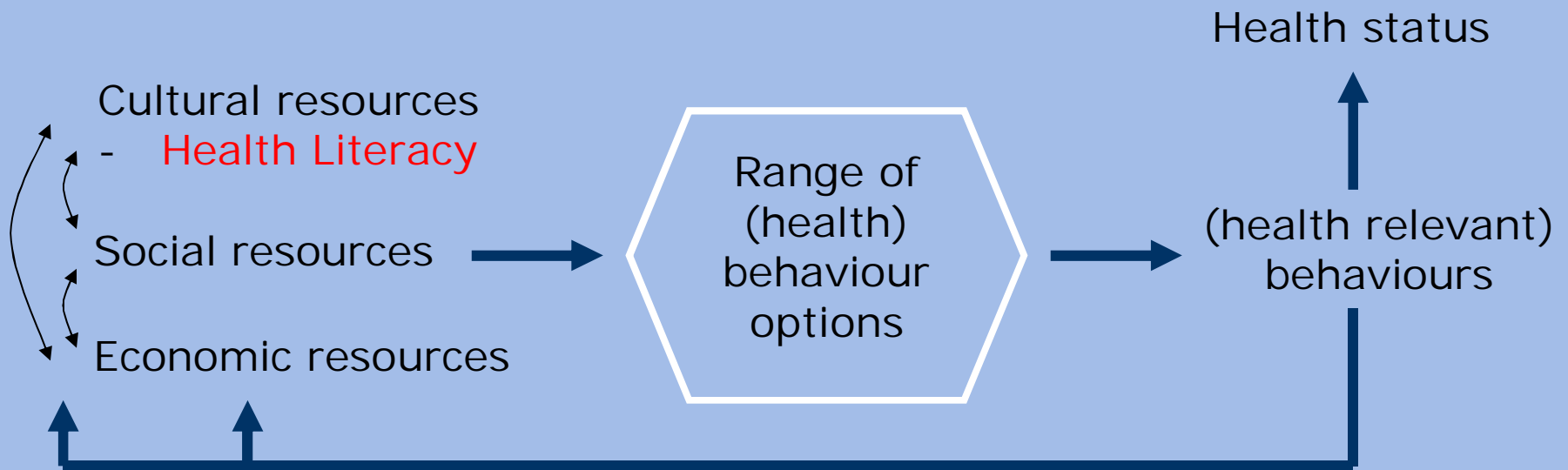
Cultural capital is a socially stratified resource relevant for achieving life goals and is functional in the use of other capitals. Cultural capital is a key factor for individuals' agency for health.

Health literacy is part of individuals cultural capital and in this form it affects the chances of people from different social classes to act in favor of their health and the health of their families.

*Abel 2007 and 2008
Abel and Frohlich 2012*

Health Literacy as Cultural Capital

Social inequality and health behaviour



Paradigm: Health Promotion – Ottawa Charter

Theories: Capital Interaction Capability Approach

Sources: Bourdieu

Sen

Abel and Frohlich 2012
Abel and Schori 2009

Health Literacy Research 2.0: towards theory guided measures and their critical application

- I. Key elements of health literacy
 - II. Health Literacy: a short intro to a Context perspective
 - III. Theory guidance in HL research
 - IV. Locating HL research projects within the Public Health discourse
 - V. Summary and future research topics
- “All in one sentence”

Locating HL projects within the health research discourse

Categories for locating HL research projects

- > Context of HL application
- > Paradigm (incl. the basic values
parts...))
- > Theory
- > Study Population
- > Forms of HL: (Functional, interactive and critical)

Locating HL projects within the health research discourse

u^b

b
UNIVERSITÄT
BERN

Example:

Health Literacy among young adults. Abel et al 2013, HPI

The study aim was to develop and test a **short survey tool** that captures different dimensions of health literacy in the context of **family and friends**. The eight item measure may help to improve our understanding of how this form of health literacy is **distributed in the general population**.

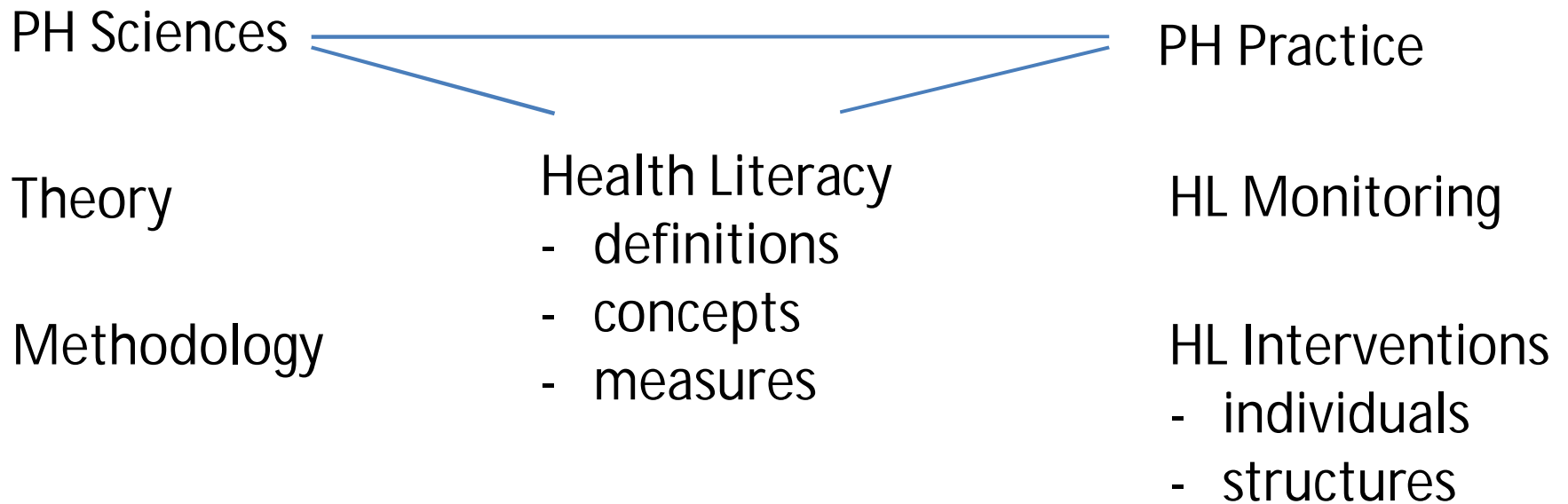
Locating the study “*Health Literacy among young adults*” within the health research discourse

- > **Context:** affluent western society, public health, private realm
- > **Paradigm:** concepts and principles of HP - people are agents for their health acting under unequal structural conditions
- > **Theory:** cultural capital in the structure-agency reproduction of health inequality
- > **Study population:** male and female young adults
- > **Forms of HL:** functional, interactive and critical

Health Literacy Research 2.0: towards theory guided measures and their critical application

- I. Key elements of health literacy
 - II. Health Literacy: a short intro to a Context perspective
 - III. Theory guidance in HL research
 - IV. Locating HL research projects within the Public Health discourse
 - V. Summary and future research topics
- “All in one sentence”

A Public Health science approach to HL research



Discipline: sociology, psychology, economics, others

Theory: cultural capital, social learning, rational choice, others,

Methodology: empirical qualitative/quantitative

Future research areas and topics

- > The use of theory to be explicit on ‘what for’ we do HL research and to guide our measurement and interpretation
- > Comprehensive frameworks to assess and understand HL
- > Critical HL (\Rightarrow Jane Will’s session)
- > Bring in people’s own expertise, knowledge and potentials
- > Relevance of individuals’ HL to the health of others e.g. family, neighborhoods, even societies

“In one sentence”

Health Literacy research has great potential for the health sciences if we do it in a

...theoretically meaningful,

...methodologically sound

...and ethically correct way.

Health Literacy Research 2.0: towards theory guided measures and their critical application

u^b

b
UNIVERSITÄT
BERN

Thank you for your kind attention!

Health Literacy Research 2.0: towards theory guided measures and their critical application

- I. Key elements of health literacy
- II. Health Literacy: short intro to a context perspective
- III. Theory guidance in HL research
- IV. Locating HL research projects within the Public Health discourse
- V. Summary and future research topics

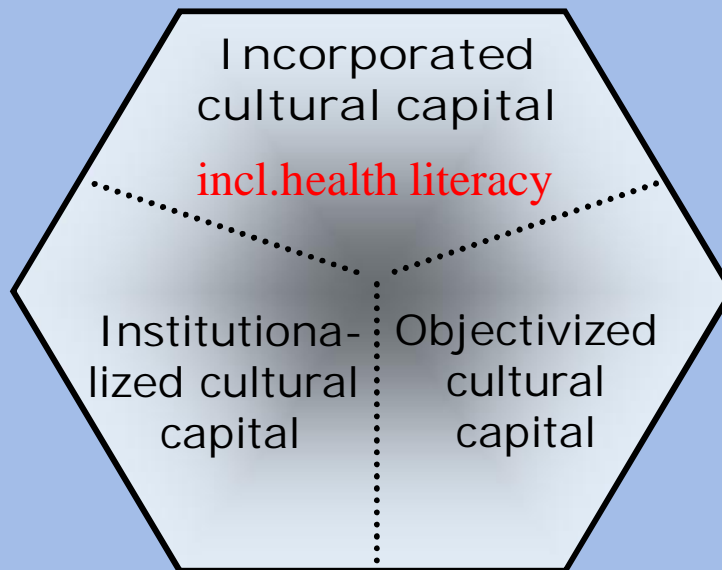
“All in one sentence”

2. Example of measurement development “Symptom knowledge”

- > A second example for applying categories to locate a HL study from our research in Bern:
- > ...from the abstract of IJPH paper...
- > **Context:** minority conditions in an affluent western country
- > **Perspective:** PH - at the edge to clinical settings
- > **Paradigm:** concepts and principles of HP - people are agents for their health acting under unequal structural conditions;
- > **Theory:** Cultural capital in the structure-agency reproduction of health inequality
- > **People of interest:** adult migrants from Southern European countries
- > **Forms of HL:** Functional, link between factual and procedural health

Cultural capital and the unequal distribution of health resources

Fig. 7: States of cultural capital:
interdependence



Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital



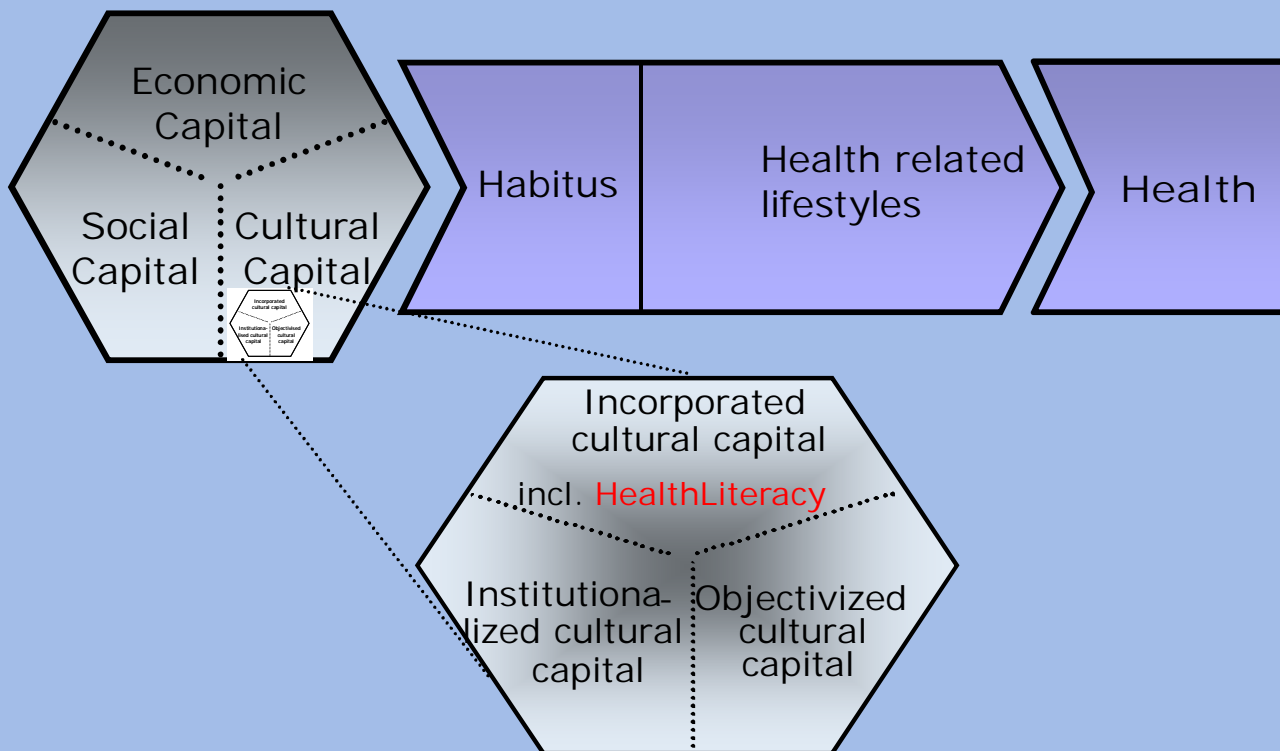
Conclusions



Discussion

Cultural capital and the unequal distribution of health resources

Fig. 1: Capital interaction in the social distribution of health



Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital



Conclusions



Discussion

- > **key elements of health literacy**
- > *Our current understanding of HL seems to center around*
- > knowledge (health relevant)– links HL to the individual
- > health relevant knowledge – links HL to the production of health by the people
- > Learning – links HL to social environment
- > Application – links HL to the contextual and (inter) personal conditions of its use
- > (others: e.g. health relevant values, skills to act)
- >
- > *Next I want to contextualize those 4 key elements...*
- >

u^b

^b
**UNIVERSITÄT
BERN**