WHOSE LITERACIES AND NUMERACIES COUNT IN THE CURRENT POLICY ENVIRONMENT AND WHY

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Benefits of learning

Attitudes & values
Civic participation
Employment
Enjoyment
Family/ friends/ networks
Health & wellbeing
Knowledge
Motivation to learn
Plans/ goals
Qualifications
Self-concept
Skills

What would be the 3 top priorities for –

- A learner
- A teacher
- Education & training provider
- An employer group
- Policy makers
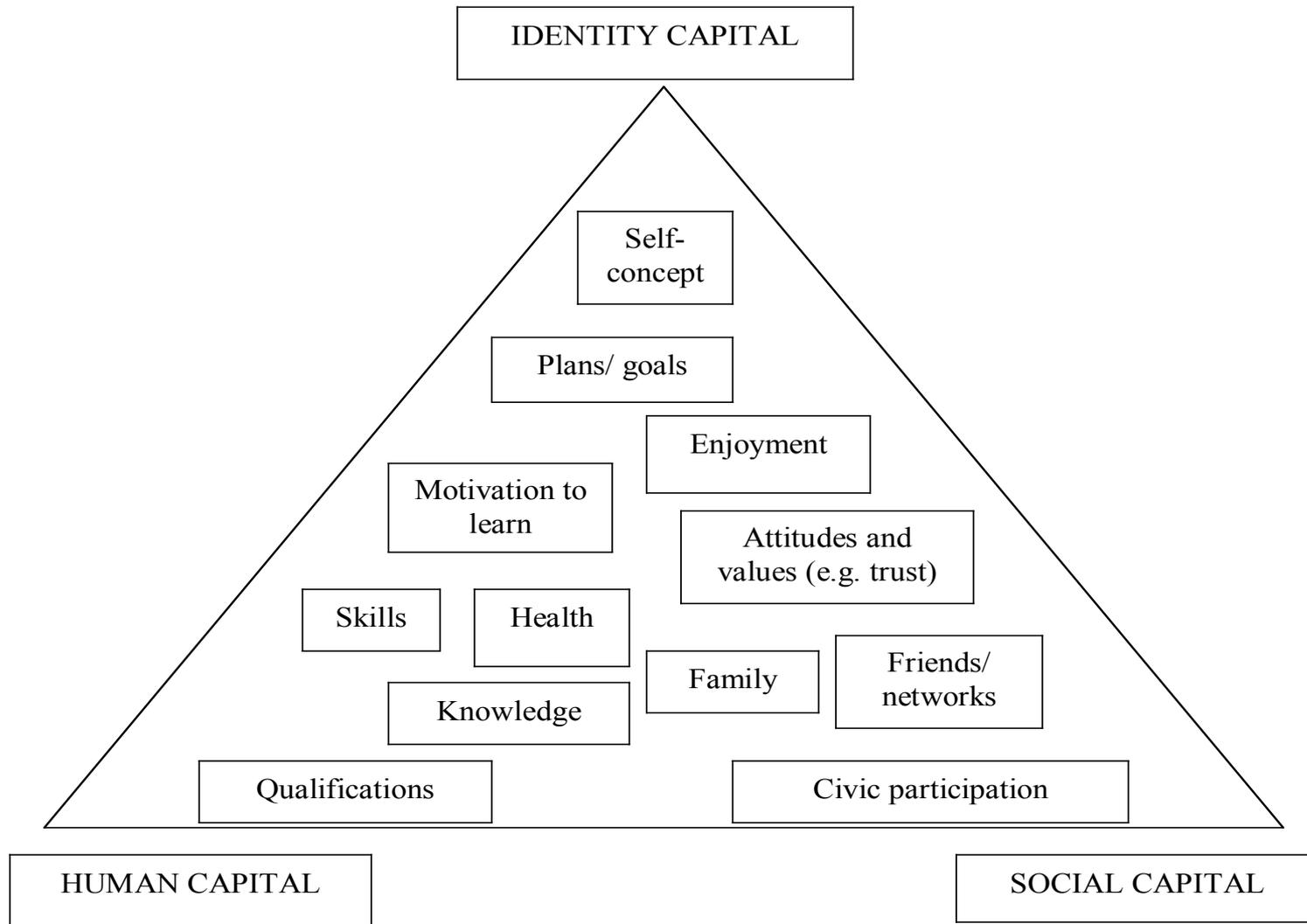
(Schuller 2004, p.13)

Different ways of understanding the benefits of learning

Policy – what is it?

Policy is –

- an *authoritative response* to a public issue or problem;
- a *hypothesis* that contains incentives the encourage one behaviour over another, or disincentives to discourage particular actions
- about achieving *objectives*, a means to an end.

(Bridgman & Davis 2004:4-7)

But -

- whose authority?
- whose hypothesis?
- whose objectives?

are written into a policy text?

But what's the problem?
Subjective vs Generalising approaches to literacy and numeracy

- We can see numeracy (and literacy) as able to be (a) defined generally within a professional group, across a country, or even transnationally; and (b) measured/tested in a standardized way. We might call this a **generalizing approach**—starting either with claims about societal and/or labour market requirements for adults' mathematical (and literacy) competences, or with demands from the academic discipline.

- We can also see numeracy (and literacy) from a **subjective approach**—starting with adults' own perceived needs for mathematical (and literacy) competences and their beliefs and attitudes towards mathematics (and literacy).

(Evans, Wedege & Yasukawa 2013; Wedege 2010)

Examples of generalising approaches to literacy and numeracy

- The Adult Literacy & Life Skills Survey (ALLS)

- The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

- The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)

… 'attractive' for policy making because they allow for 'objective' comparisons – eg internationally, demographically, by occupation, gender, age, etc

… objectivity legitimises authority to make decisions

… quantification is a technology of distance, a key for the pursuit of objectivity (Porter 1995:ix)

Expressions of a generalising approach – the Adult Literacy & Life Skills Survey results

For each literacy domain, proficiency is measured on a scale ranging from 0 to 500 points. To facilitate analysis, these continuous scores have been grouped into 5 skill levels (only 4 levels were defined for the problem solving scale) with Level 1 being the lowest measured level of literacy. …. To assist with interpreting the results, **Level 3 is regarded by the survey developers as the "minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work in the emerging knowledge-based economy"** (Learning a Living: First results from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey', available from Statistics Canada's website (www.statcan.ca)).

(ABS 2008: 5)

HEATHER RIDOUT: Well the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey found that something like 46 per cent of adult Australians, that is Australians between the ages of 15 and 64, had literacy skills below the benchmark needed to function at work and in modern society and that 53 per cent of adult Australians had the numeracy skills less than that benchmark.

(ABC 2010)

Expressions of a generalising approach (cont'd) – The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)

The ACSF provides:

- a consistent national approach to the identification of the core skills requirements in diverse personal, community, work and training contexts.

- a common reference point for describing and discussing performance in the five core skill areas.

(DIISRTE n.d.)

From eligibility criteria for WELL funding

… in addition, participants must be:

- *Employed on a full-time, part-time, casual or temporary basis and have English language, literacy and numeracy proficiency at Levels 1, 2 and/or 3 of the ACSF i.e. below the level where a person is able to communicate in English with sufficient accuracy to meet specific workplace needs; or*

- *IEP participants whose LLN proficiency is at Levels 1,2 and/or 3 of the ACSF …; or*

- *Employees under a contract of training (Australian Apprenticeship) whose LLN proficiency is at Levels 1,2 and/or 3 of the ACSF ….*

(DEEWR 2009:11)

Expressions of a subjective approach – workplace literacy and numeracy practices[1]

Literacy and numeracy as workplace practices

- embedded in the workplace context
- dependent on the social, cultural, historical 'rules' and practices of the particular workplace teams
- shaped by power relations

Eg a company producing high-tech hearing aids, with a very linguistically diverse workforce, most of whom had no post-school qualifications, some who had not finished high school

There's no specific training. Ideally a person who comes here should have soldering skills, good hand skills and good eye sight. Other than that there are no special requirements. Everything they do here is on the job training. Someone who's got a little bit of computer modelling will fit into the process much faster than somebody who is not very familiar with the computers and this kind of stuff. Part of the process - they rely on the computers quite a lot, but most of the people have very, very basic need for a computers in use.

(Production Manager)

Facilitator: So you don't think if suddenly everyone's English language and literacy and numeracy skills improved, that it would make a big difference on productivity?

Interviewee: To be honest, no. I would say no. I don't think it would. Not on the productivity level, no. When you're looking at the basic aspects of manufacturing and all that, ….

On a manufacturing level, when you start - when you look at what we do here in manufacturing right up to getting it made and being able to send it out, I would not - I'd never make language a big or the number one basis of do we employ someone because of that. It was always the skill level. It was always the person's ability to be able to adapt to certain things. Hand skills were the most important that we needed here. (Asia Pacific Service & Support Manager)

Modelling the shell of a hearing aid – positioning an electronic component

… all the components are to scale, to actual size, and it's just placing them until they go green with a bit of allowance or space each side for various things. … if the components are green that means they're okay. They're not squashed together, they're not going to cause feedback and things, and there's adequate room for the assemblers to put the physical in reality components inside the shell. (Bert)
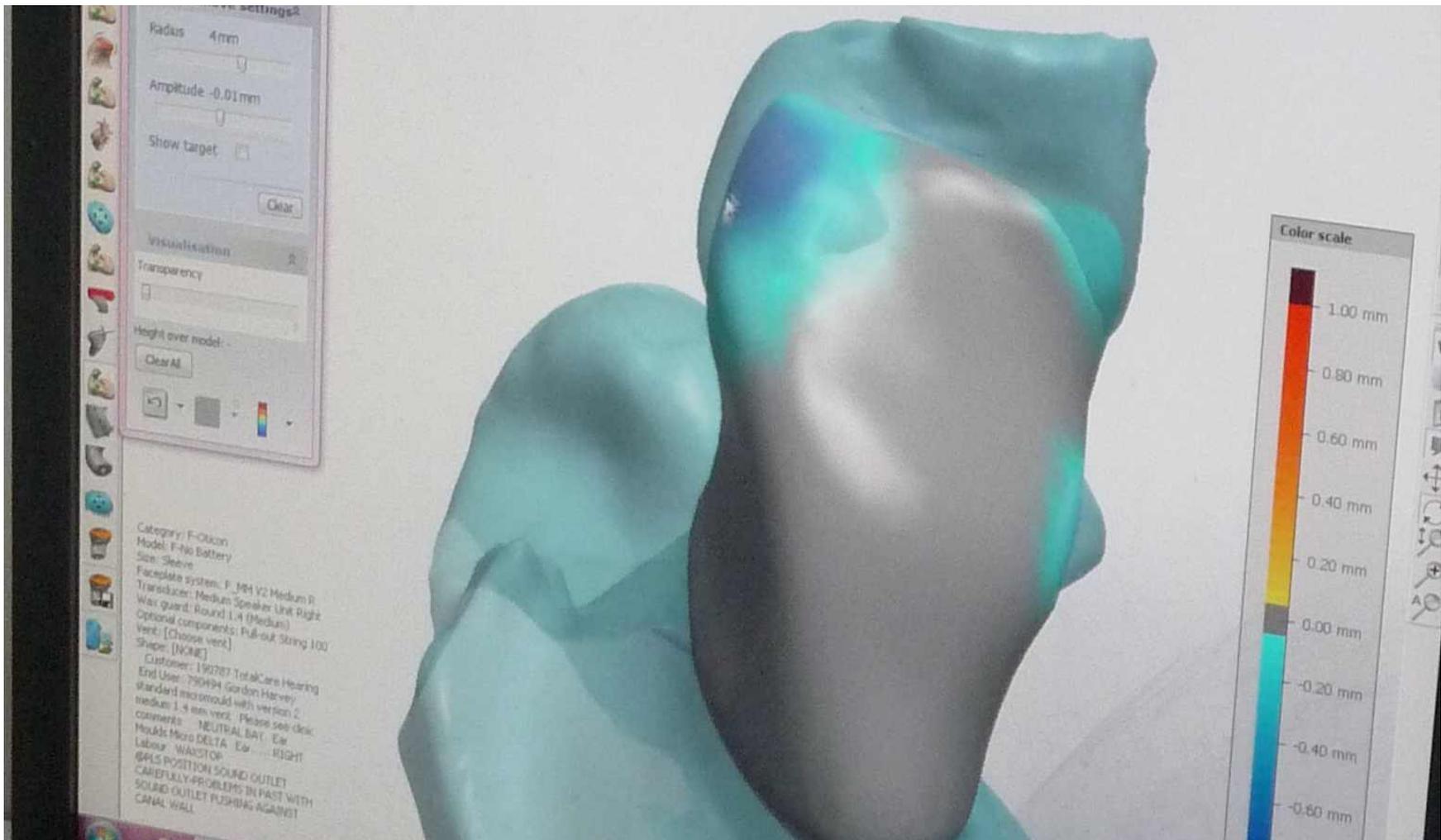
But in recent years - it's just my perception, but a lot of the ears are really smaller, and it's more difficult to fit things in compared to how it was three to five years ago. … I think it's for a younger [group of clients] - instead of being traditional elderly people. Over the years people get old or they've had industrial deafness and they worked a lot, they're retired, they've got hearing aids. They're already adults, probably 50s, 60s onwards. Now we're getting stuff for children and teenagers and stuff because of the iPods jammed in there and cranked up loud. (Bert)
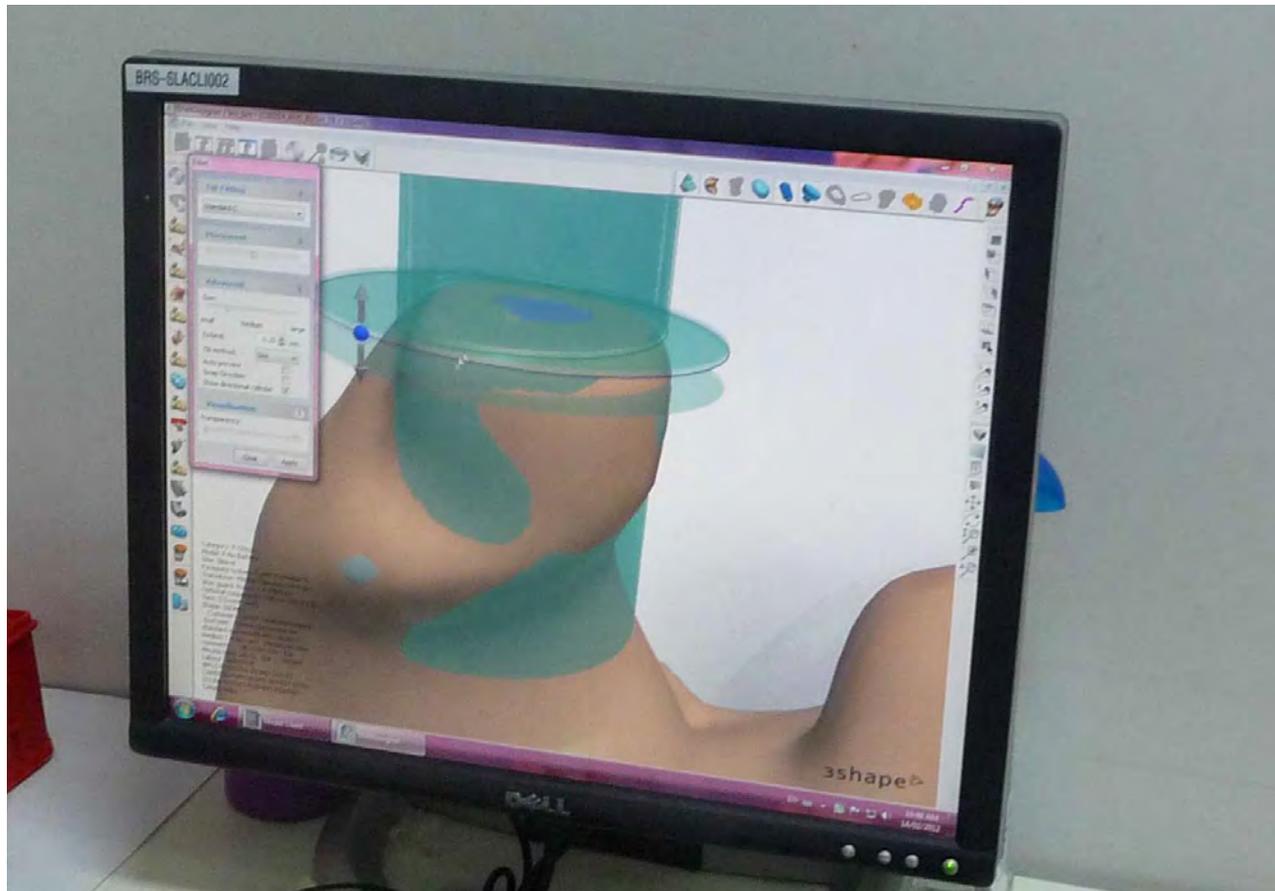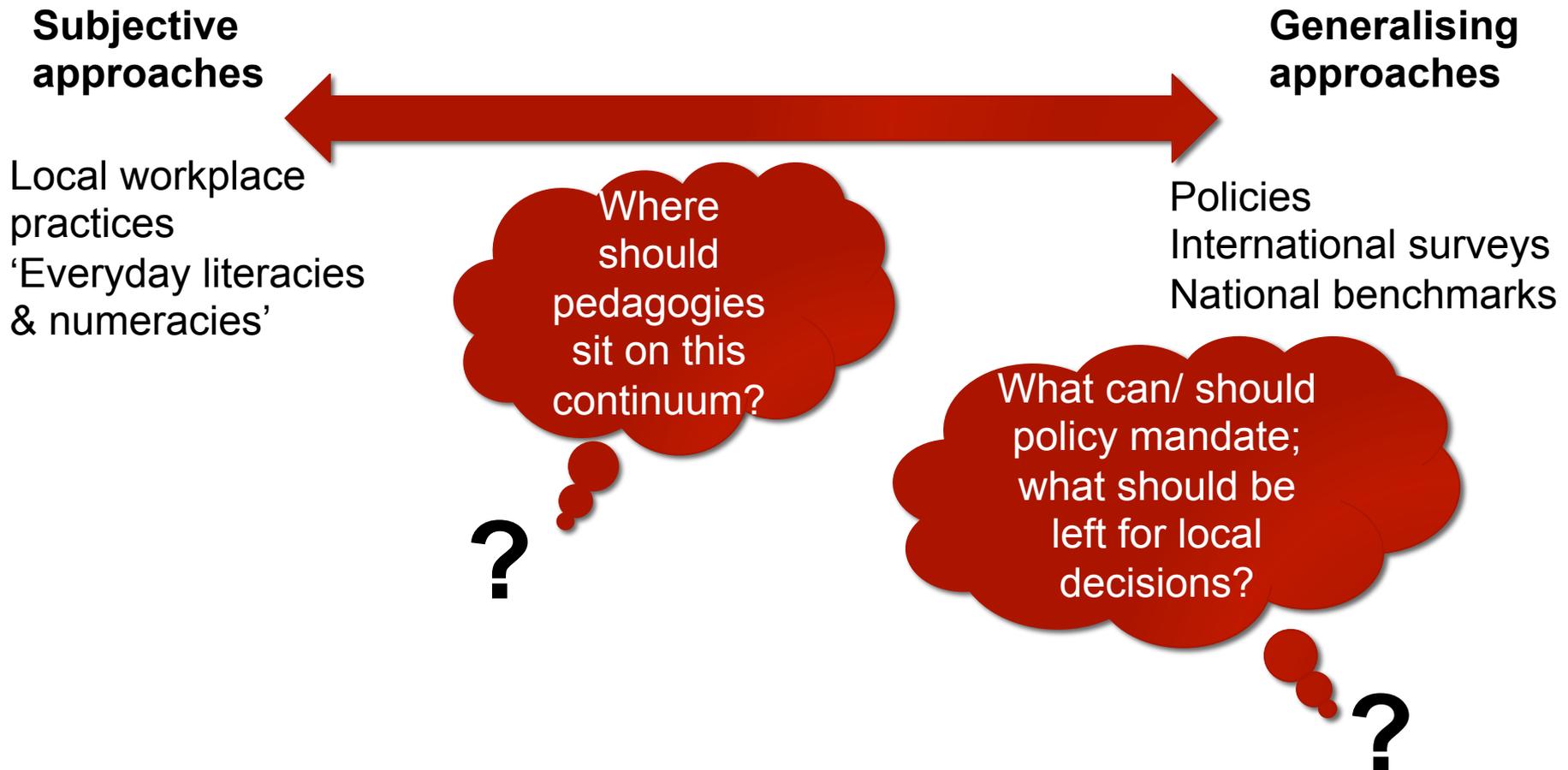
Batteries can be positioned horizontal or vertical or 45 degrees. Then there's so many special instructions you have to really be careful. (Bert)

Subjective approaches to literacy and numeracy

- Who is looking/ observing?

- Is it modelling or is it numeracy?

- Does numeracy matter?

- Does it matter for ......whom/ what?

Subjective and Generalising approaches – a continuum?

Subjective approaches

Generalising approaches

Local workplace practices
'Everyday literacies & numeracies'

Policies
International surveys
National benchmarks

Where should pedagogies sit on this continuum?

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What can/ should policy mandate; what should be left for local decisions?

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