Developing professional knowledge for inclusive education

Elizabeth Walton

Pre-service teachers reflect on their course in inclusive education:

In-service teachers agree …

Forlin & Du Toit (2009, p. 656) found teachers wanting training to be "practical and feasible … 'we want it in layman's terms: ten easy steps to pin-point a problem'".

Walton, Nel, Muller & Lebeloane (2014, p. 326) report teachers saying that they "'practical, not theoretical training'".

I will argue that this clamour for 'practical' knowledge is problematic, and that we need more, not less theory in inclusive education

Structure of this presentation:

1. Introduction of the conceptual tools of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT)

    with a discussion of Shay's contribution to understanding types of

    curricula

2. An LCT analysis of sources used for

    Concepts taught in pre-service courses in inclusive education

    Assessment of pre-service courses in inclusive education

3. Problematising inclusive education as practical knowledge

4. Suggestions for developing inclusive education as professional knowledge

5. Conclusion … a call to South African teacher educators

Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) (Maton, 2014)

LCT emerged in the 1990s and draws on the work of Basil Bernstein and Pierre Bourdieu in proposing that fields are knowledge-knower structures

LCT " enables knowledge practices to be seen, their organising principles to be conceptualised and their effects to be explored" (Maton, 2014, p.3)

There are 5 strands of LCT:

Specialisation

Autonomy

Temporality

Gravity

Semantics
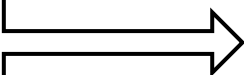
Semantics

Semantic Gravity (SG): The extent to which knowledge is dependent on context for its meaning – may be weaker or stronger

Semantic Density (SD): The extent to which abstract meanings are made independent of context and condensed in concepts – may be weaker or stronger

SG- Abstract

SD- **SD+**

Simple Complex

SG+ Concrete
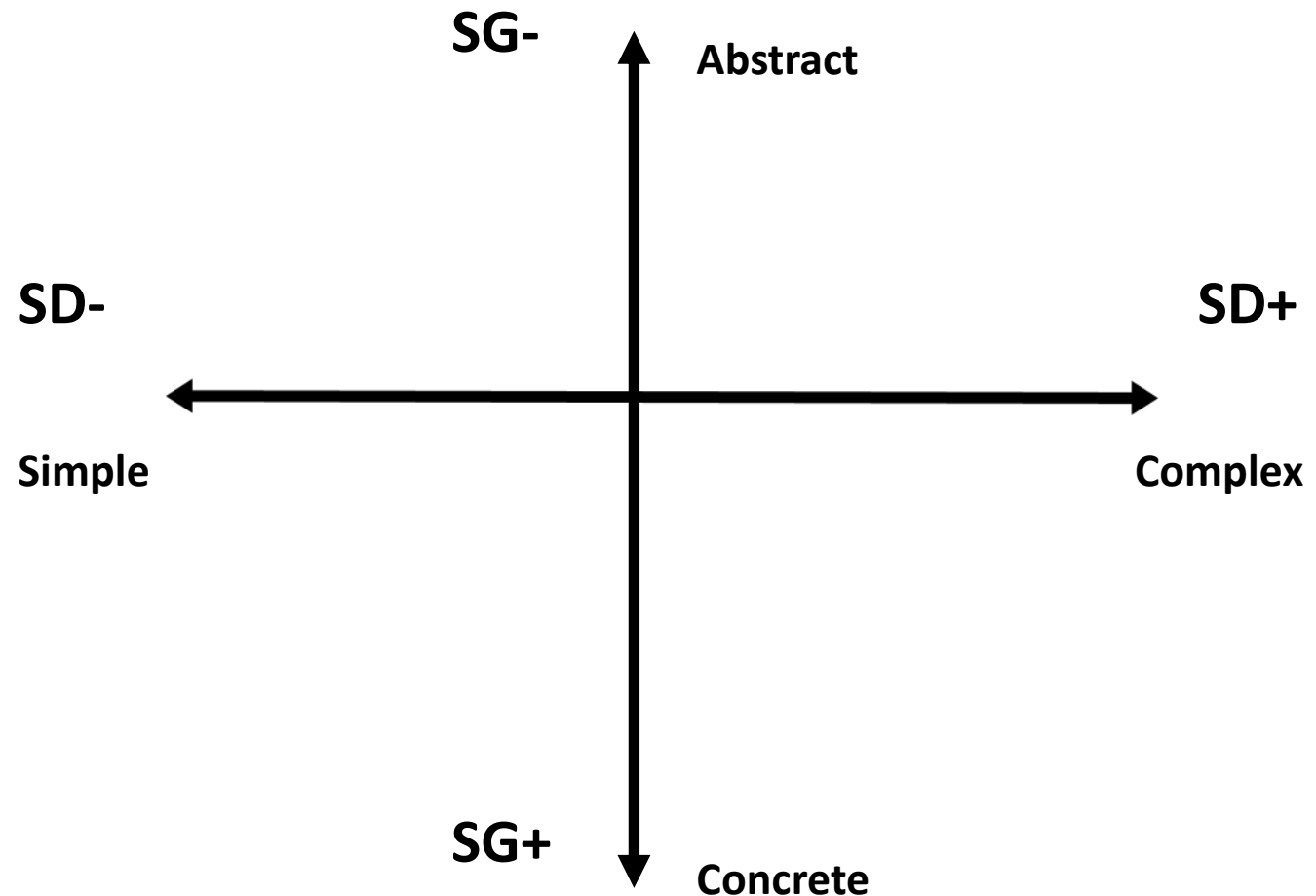
The semantic field of recontextualised knowledge (Shay, 2013)

SG-

SD-

SD+

SG+

Theoretical knowledge with a theoretical curriculum

Practical knowledge with a practical curriculum

Professional knowledge with a professional curriculum
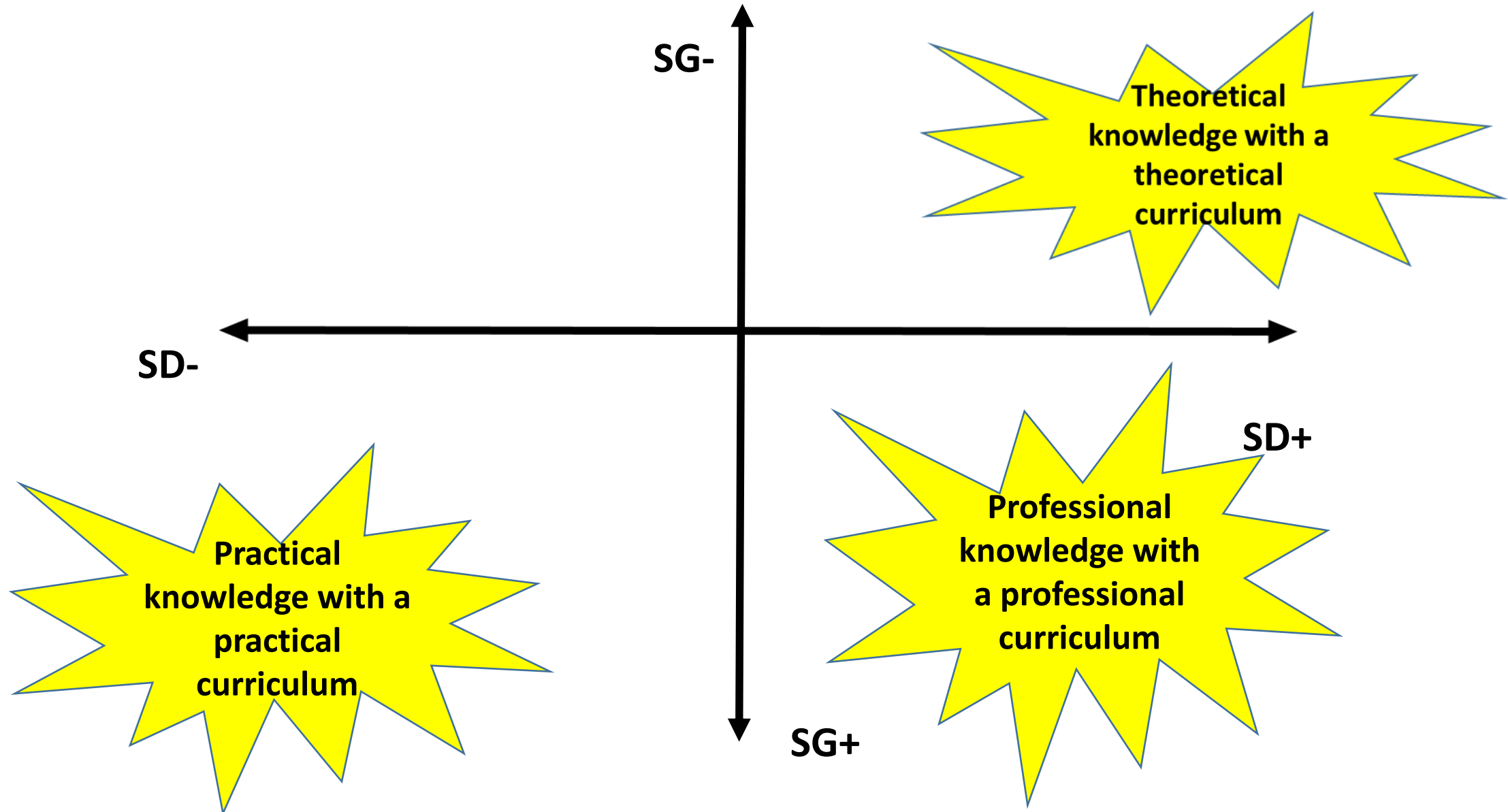
Data used in this analysis:

Material and outlines for ITE courses in inclusive education at three Higher Education Institutions

My focus is on 5 concepts taught:

Co-operative Learning
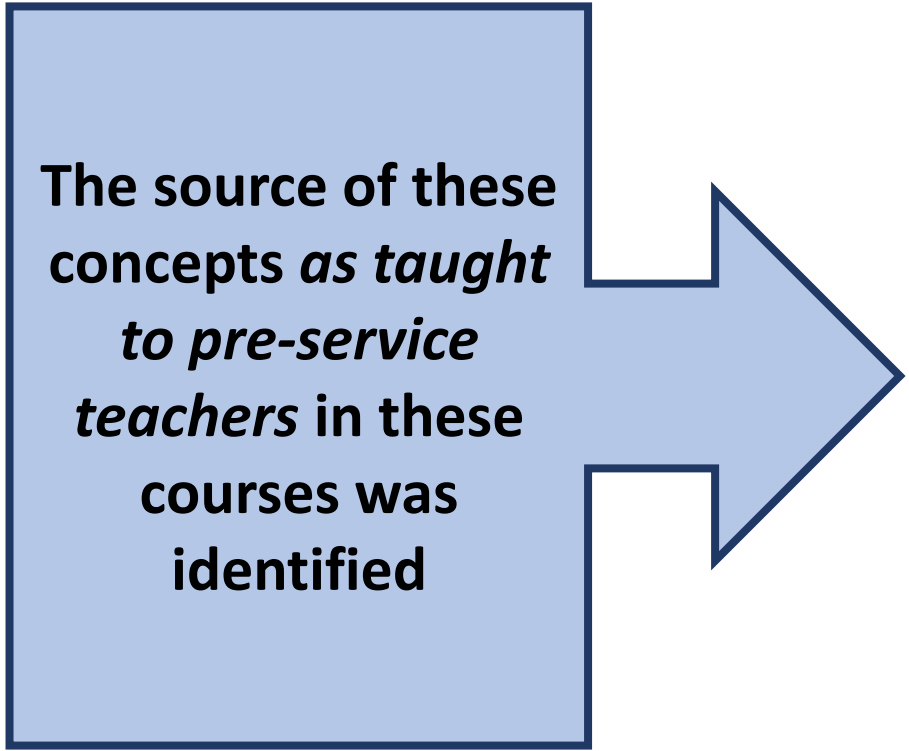
Differentiated Instruction

Learner Support

Contextual Disadvantage

Social Problems

The source of these concepts *as taught to pre-service teachers* in these courses was identified

Using the sources of concepts taught in courses, it becomes possible to map the relative semantic gravity and density with which concepts are presented

Semantic gravity	Concept	Source given in course	Semantic density
−	Co-operative learning	Theories: Social learning/ social interdependence	+
	Differentiated instruction	Codified principles of good practice	
	Learner support	Policy (SIAS)	
	Contextual disadvantage	Case studies	
+	Social problems	Own view/experience	−

Personal opinions & experience = legitimate educational knowledge

Mapping the source of course concepts in terms of SG & SD

SG-

SD-   SD+

Codified principles of practice

Theories

Policy

Case studies

Experience

SG+
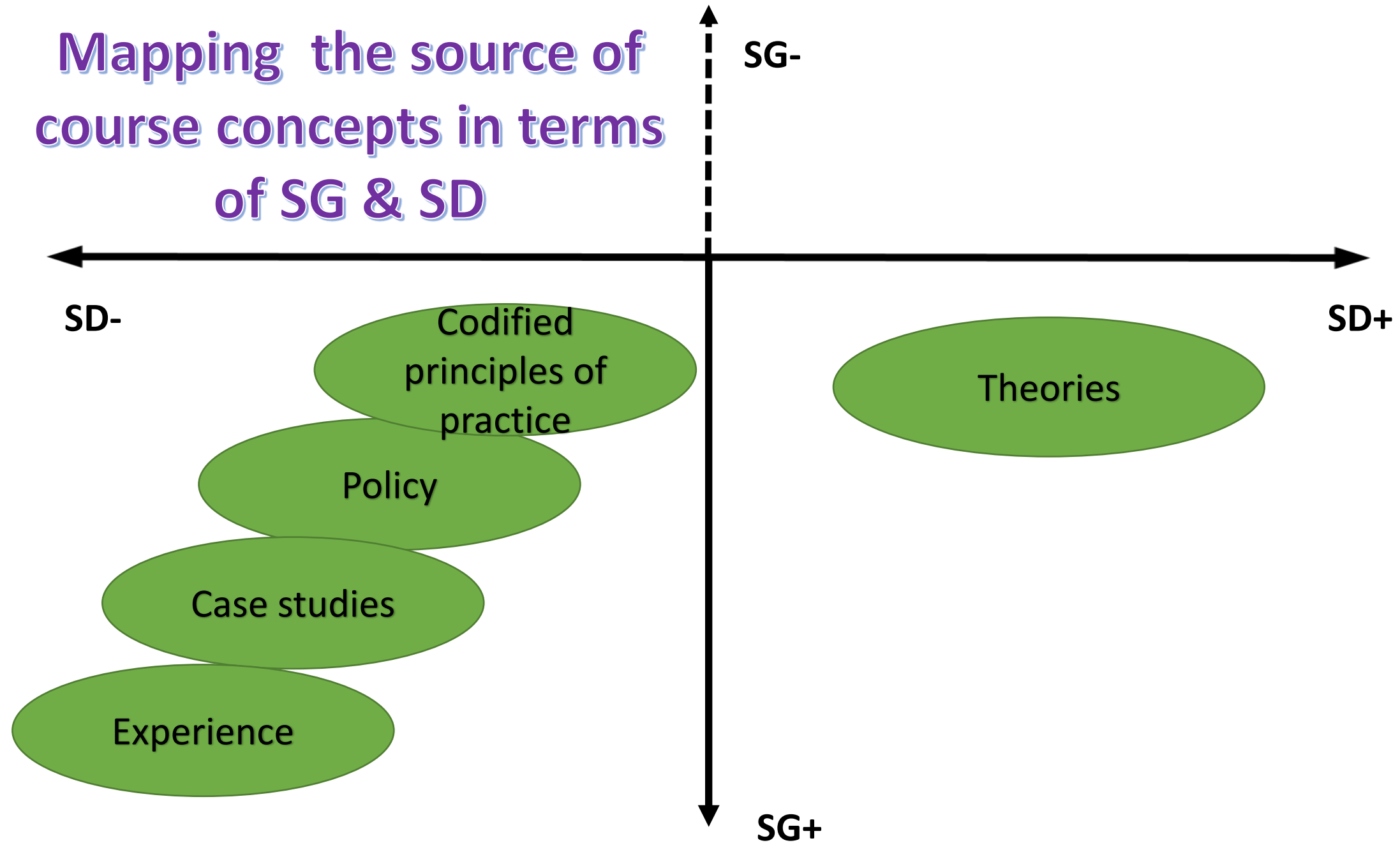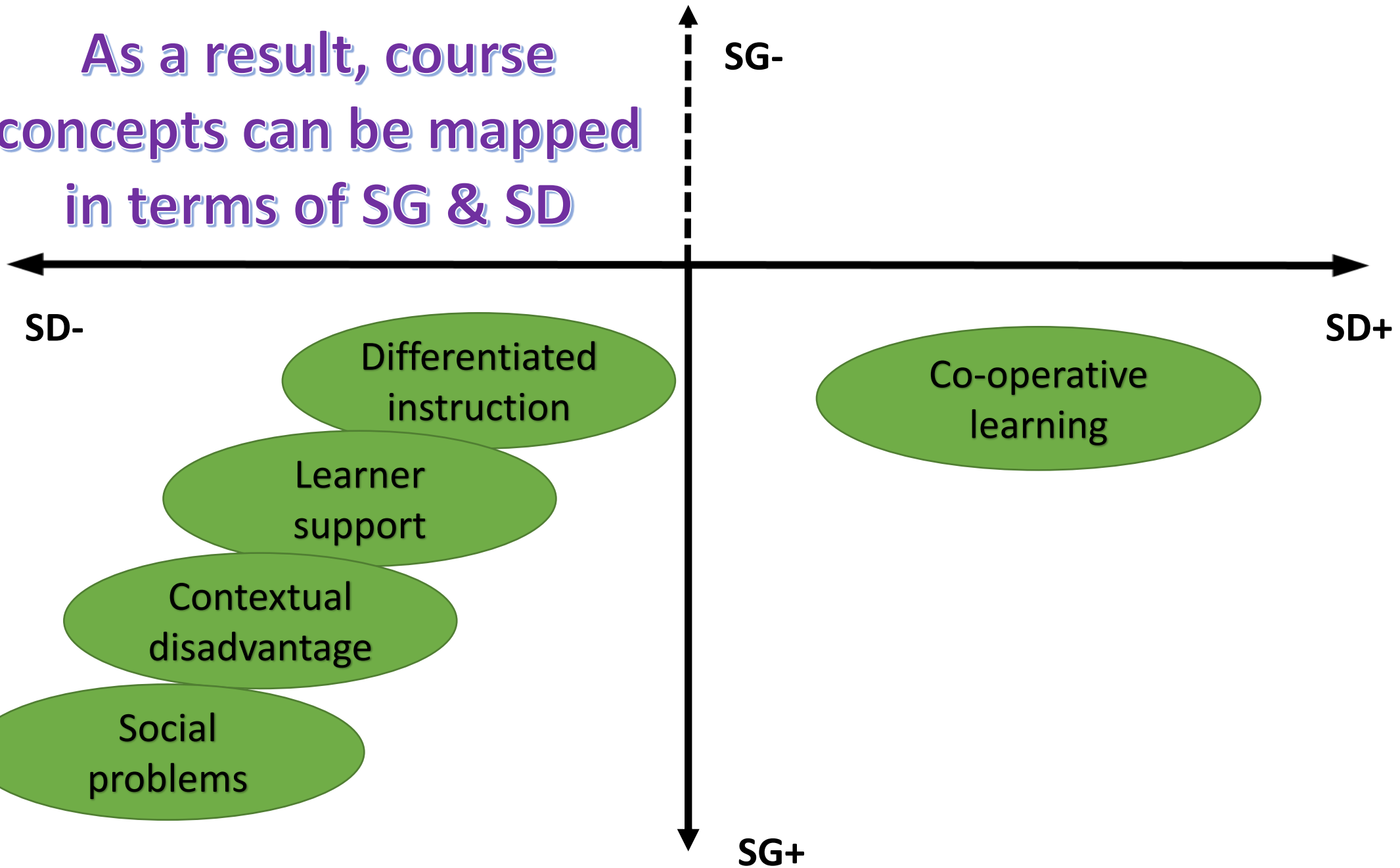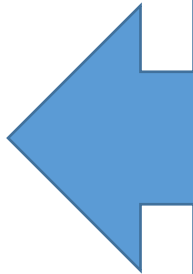
Similarly, using the source of information that students are directed to in assignments, it is possible to map the relative semantic gravity and density of course content

- "Select a lesson that you taught during your previous practicum. Redesign ONE aspect of the lesson (for example, the learner activity, or the content instruction) in a way that it meets the learning needs of THREE learning ability groups. Provide a rationale for the way you have divided learners into these three learning ability groups and submit all revised worksheets and resource materials"

- "Go to two of your home schools (Primary and High schools), collect information about OVCs and learners experiencing barriers to learning and development. Discuss the types of barriers experienced and show how the schools tackle these challenges"

Strong semantic gravity – meaning made in context, enacted in practice.

Privileges the knower rather than specialist knowledge

Identify a real learner in a real classroom who experiences a barrier to learning. Observe the learner in class and decide on the accommodations necessary for the learner. Discuss with the class teacher how you would implement the accommodations as prescribed in the SIAS process. Then write a report on the following:

1. Your observations of the specific barriers to learning that the learner experiences in the classroom

2. Your discussions with the teacher of your ideas and of the implementation of the SIAS process.

3. Your observation of the teacher's implementation of the first 2 stages in the SIAS process.

4. Your recommendations towards the further accommodation, assessment and support strategies that you would implement as part of the SIAS process, after consultation with the teacher.
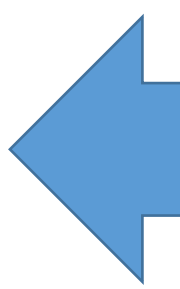
Extremely strong semantic gravity – meaning made in context, enacted in practice.

Privileges the knower to the exclusion of specialist knowledge

- "Explain the relative merits of an individual/medical model, a social model and a (bio)ecosystemic model in understanding disability in education."

- "Account for the theoretical foundations of co-operative learning."

Stronger semantic density –

Privileges specialist knowledge, rather than the knower
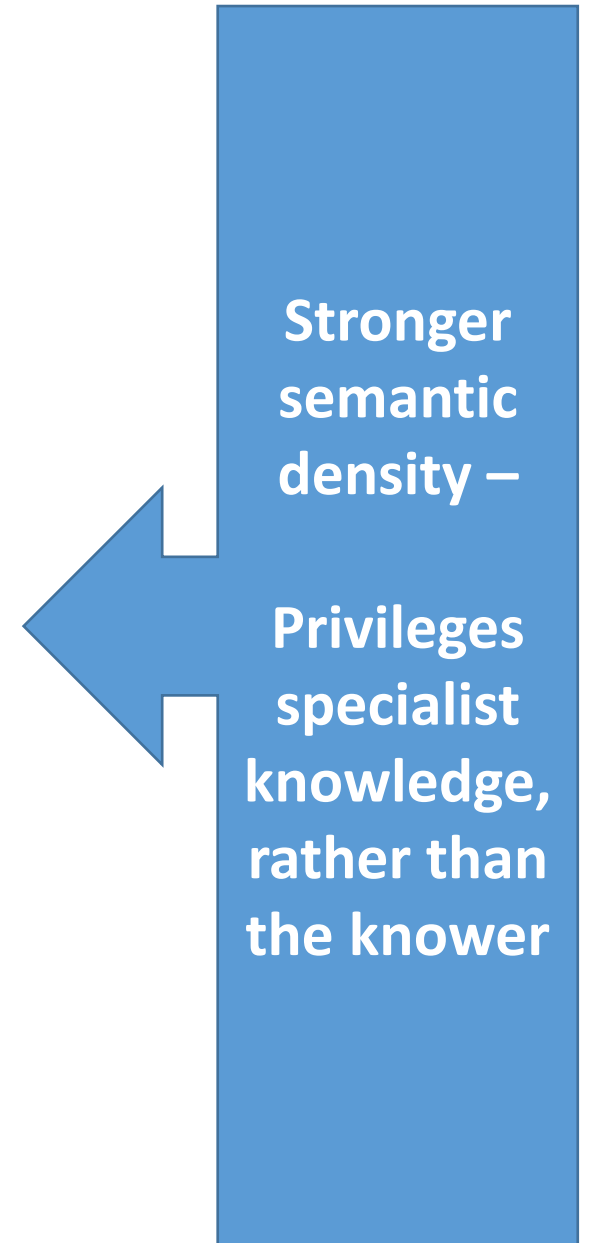
Mapping assessment in terms of SG & SD

SG-

SD-   SD+

Assessment: Differentiate a lesson for 3 ability groups

Assessment: Merits of disability models/ theoretical foundations of co-operative learning

Assessment: Identify barriers to learning and schools' responses

Assessment: Implementation of accommodations ITO policy

SG+
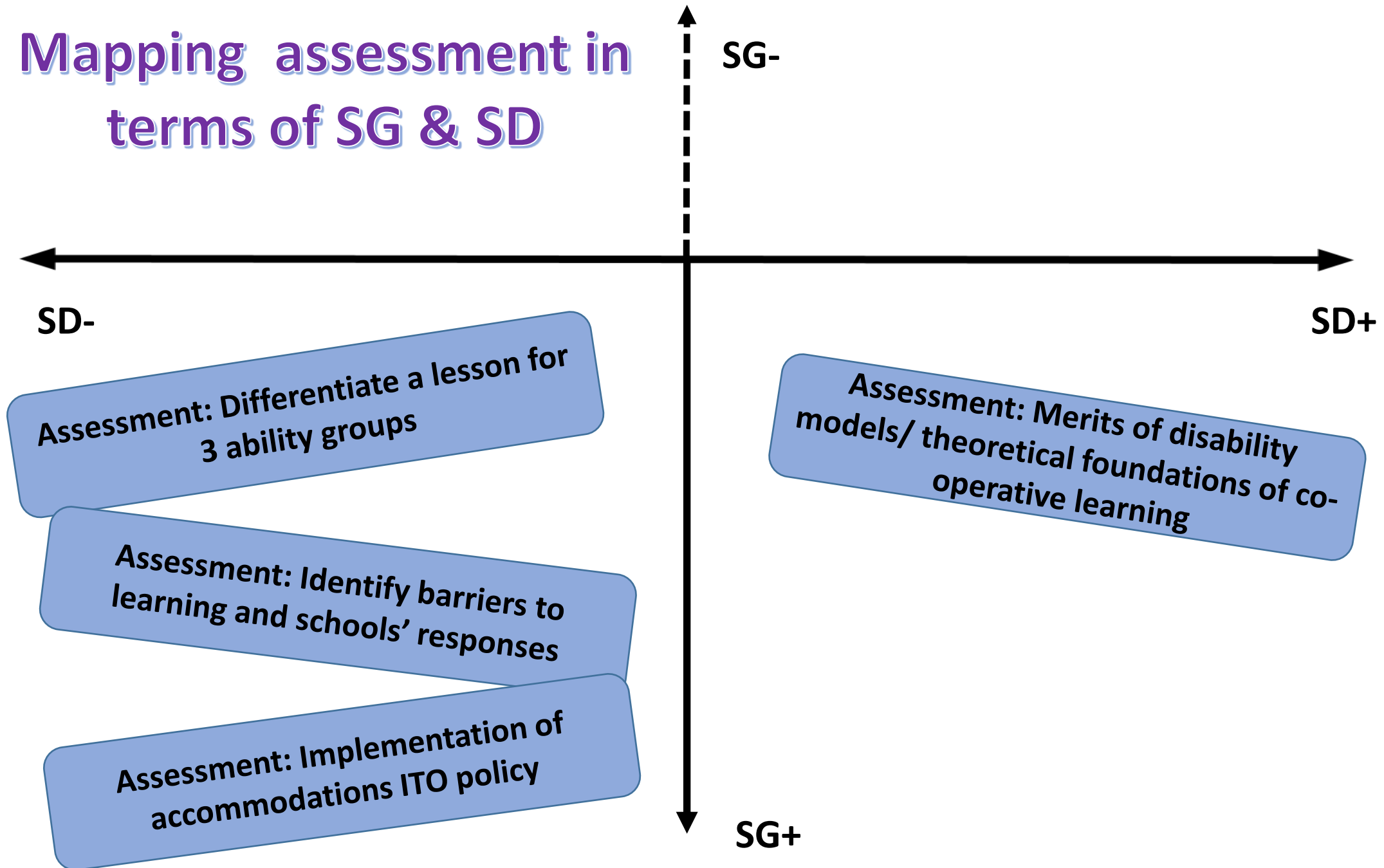
Conclusion: we are working mostly in the quadrant of relatively strong semantic gravity and relatively weak semantic density in inclusive education.

SG-

SD-   SD+

Assessment: Differentiate a lesson for 3 ability groups

Co-operative

Assessment: Merits of disability models/ theoretical foundations of co-operative learning

Learner

Assessment: Identify barriers to learning and schools' responses

disadvantage

Assessment: Implementation of accommodations ITO policy

Also consider textbooks, websites, etc.

SG+
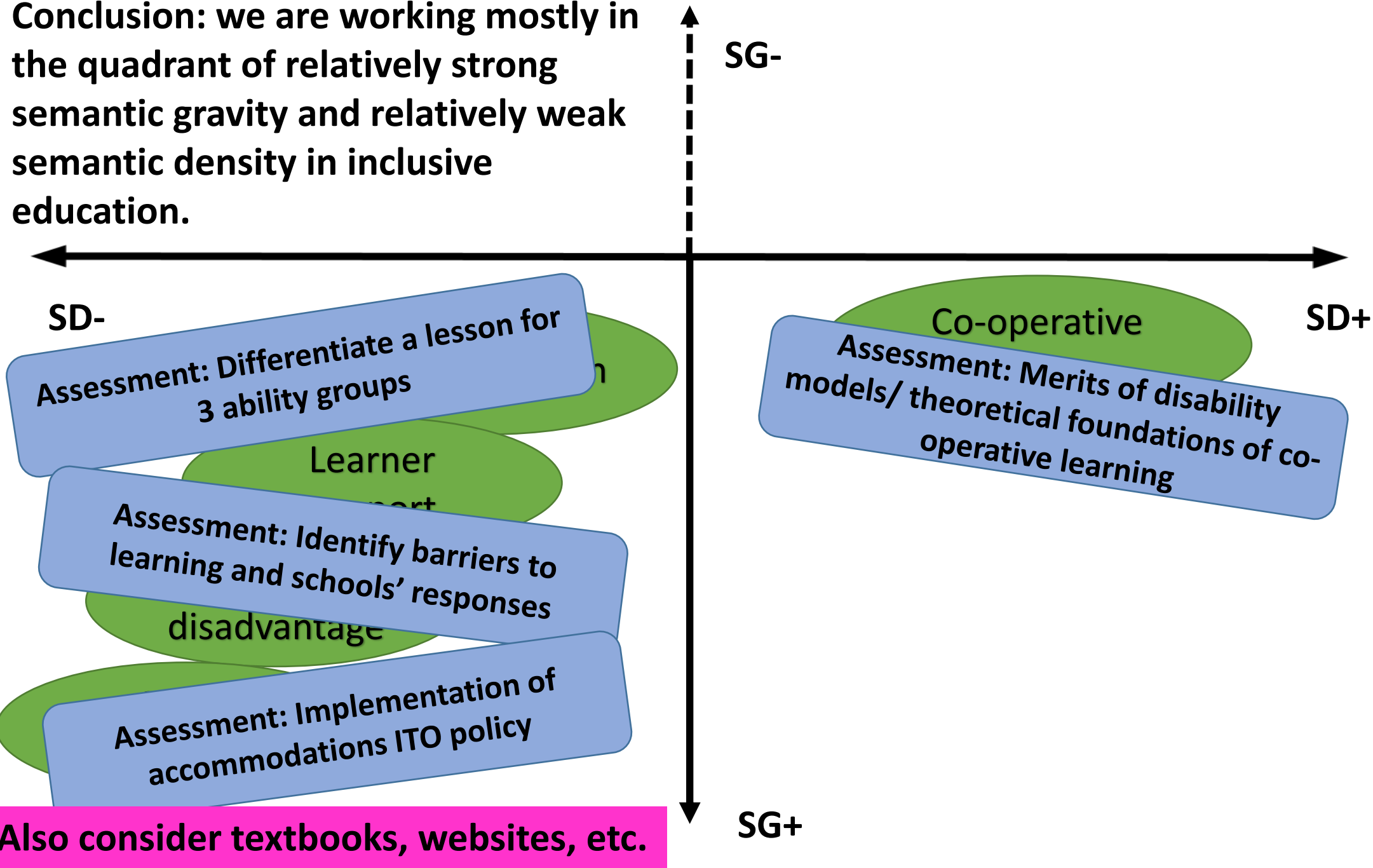
Possible reasons for this ...

- The field of knowledge production from which teacher educators select knowledge is characterised by strong semantic gravity ('what works' in idiosyncratic contexts and with particular learners, individual experiences).

- The field of knowledge production from which teacher educators select knowledge is characterised by weak semantic density (Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou, (2010, p.37) note the "theoretical vacuum" in which inclusive education sits and Slee (2011, p.65) says that we need to "Build a theory of inclusive education").

- The influence of teacher educators' "ideological screens" (Bernstein, 2001, p.115).

As a result, we have inclusive education positioned as practical knowledge within a practical curriculum

SG-

SD-   SD+

Assessment: Differentiate a lesson for 3 ability groups

Co-operative
Assessment: Merits of disability models/ theoretical foundations of co-operative learning

learner support

Assessment: Identify barriers to learning responses

Practical knowledge with a practical curriculum

Assessment: ...tation of accommodations ...policy

SG+

The problem with inclusive education as a practical knowledge in practical curricula:

- Inclusive teaching potentially becomes procedural rather than a principled, theoretically informed responsiveness to learner diversity

- Learner diversity is a 'bounded' problem rather than a complexifying factor

- Limited transferability or abstractability

- Training can never be enough – there will always be a unique situation for which a teacher has not been 'trained'

- Experiential and idiosyncratic knowledge is valorised.

Inclusive education would be better conceptualised as professional knowledge in professional curricula

Professional knowledge …

… Is characterised by the accumulation of esoteric or abstract knowledge which can be applied in complex situations (Abbott, 1988).

Inclusive classrooms are complex situations!

Professional curricula are unique in that they require both theory <u>and</u> practical application

Professional curricula are different from theoretical curricula because the logic of professional curricula "is the demands of the practice" (Shay, 2013, p. 575).

Professional curricula differ from practical curricula in that "the principles informing the practice are derived from theory" (Shay, 2013, p. 575).

How do we move from practical knowledge to professional knowledge?

SG-

SD-   SD+

Assessment: Differentiated lesson for

Co-operative
Assessment:
models

Practical knowledge with a practical curriculum

?

Professional knowledge with a professional curriculum

Social
Assessment: Implementation accommodations IEP policy

SG+
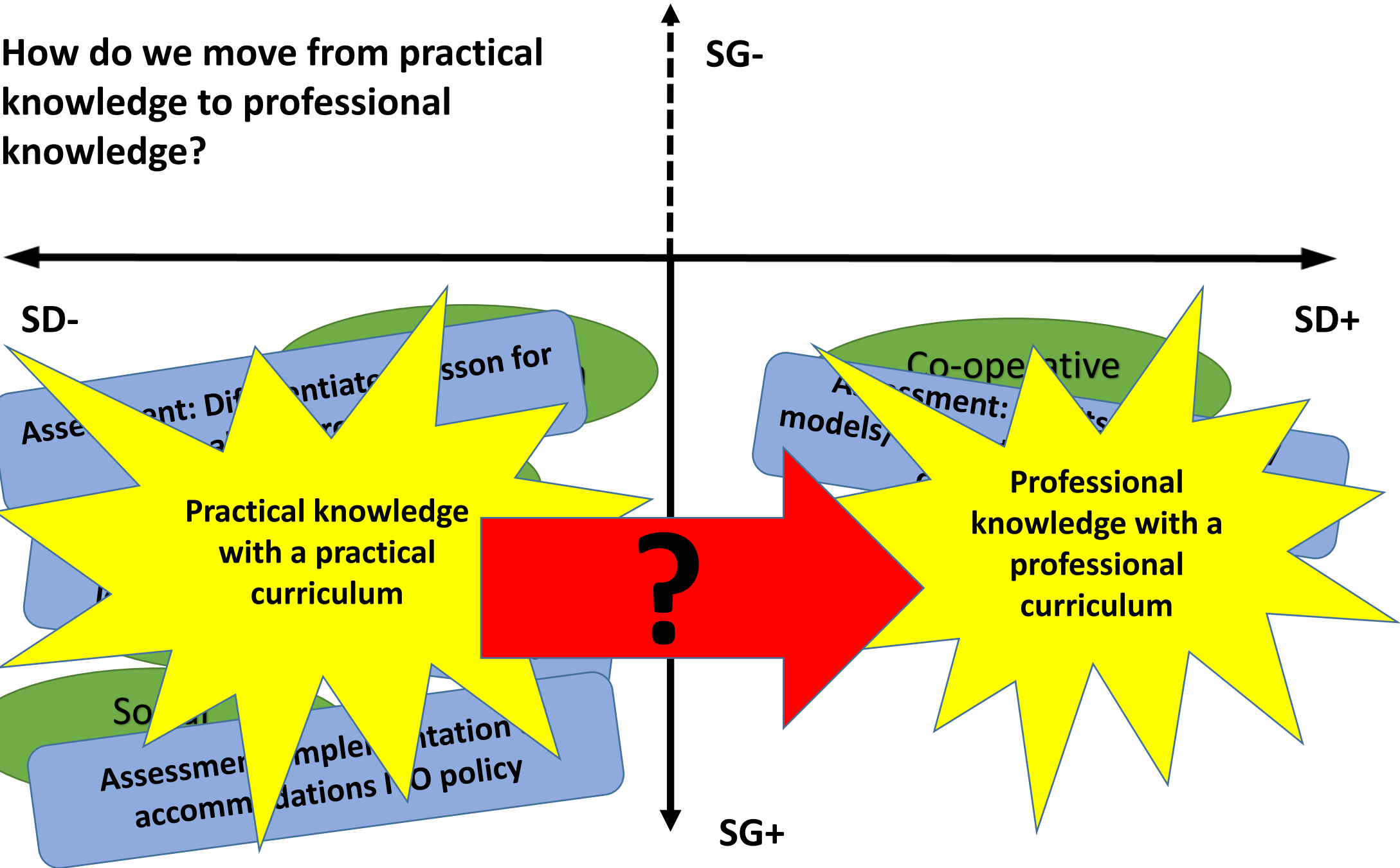
To develop inclusive education as a professional knowledge in professional curricula requires "knowledge progression" (Shay, 2013, p.576) through strengthening semantic density, while not losing its semantic gravity.

This means moving inclusive education from SG+ and SD-

to SG+ and SD+

Semantic density can be strengthened by:
- Complexifying rather than simplifying knowledge
- Deriving concepts from theory rather than policy, practice or experience

Alternative sources for inclusive education concepts that would strengthen semantic density		
Concept		
Co-operative learning	**Theories: Social learning/ social interdependence**	**Theories: Social learning/ social interdependence**
	Supplement …	**With …**
Differentiated instruction	**Codified principles of good practice**	**Diversity theories, theories of learning and pedagogy**
Learner support	**Policy (SIAS)**	**Capability approach (Sen, Nussbaum, Terzi)**
Contextual disadvantage	**Case studies**	**Reproduction theories from critical sociology**
Social problems	**Own view/experience**	**Functionalism/Conflict theory/ Eco-systemic theories**

In conclusion ... a call to South African teacher educators

... let's not neglect practical knowledge, but recognise its limitations in developing professional teachers who rely on theory to inform their professional judgment

... let's make the theory that informs practice explicit to students

... let's resist allowing the clamour for 'what works' to reduce our field to a series of tips for teachers

 And finally

... let's recognise the limits to what we can achieve!

Thank you

Elizabeth.Walton@wits.ac.za

🐦 **@EWalton253**

Forum Member of the

UNESCO CHAIR in TEACHER EDUCATION for DIVERSITY and DEVELOPMENT

WSoE
Wits School of Education

NRF

References

Abbott, A. (1988). *The Systems of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labour.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Armstrong, D., Armstrong, A. C., & Spandagou, I. (2011). Inclusion: by choice or by chance? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 15*(1), 29-39.

Maton, K. (2014). *Knowledge and knowers: towards a realist sociology of education.* London: Routledge

Shay, S. (2013). Conceptualizing curriculum differentiation in higher education: a sociology of knowledge point of view. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34 (4), 563-582.

Slee, R. (2011). *The irregular school*. London: Routledge