

General capabilities: A perspective from cognitive science

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Background

[General capabilities: A perspective from cognitive science \(PDF, 650kB\)](#) uses insights from cognitive science to explore the most effective ways of supporting students to develop key capabilities such as critical and creative thinking.

Key findings

- This paper contributes to the conversation about how school systems can best support their students to develop the capabilities they will need to thrive in the future.
- The debate to date has been hampered by a lack of clarity about key terms and concepts, and a range of assumptions that are not supported by evidence.
- Cognitive science research shows that developing capabilities such as critical thinking is dependent on having content knowledge.
- As such, general capabilities need to be developed through a deep and rich knowledge of content in each of the curriculum learning areas.

Practical implications

The publication is accompanied by a [professional learning protocol \(PDF, 234kB\)](#) to support educators to consider the implications of this research for practice in their schools.

The publication complements the findings from the department's Education for a changing world report: [How to teach critical thinking](#) by Professor Daniel T Willingham.

Further information

For more information on cognitive science and the insights it offers for education, see CESE's [Cognitive load theory: Research](#) that teachers really need to understand, and [Cognitive load theory in practice](#).