

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.