What are general capabilities?

In the Australian Curriculum, general capabilities refer to an integrated and interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that can be developed and applied across the curriculum to help students become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens. Throughout their schooling, students develop and use the general capabilities across all learning areas, in co-curricular programs and in their lives outside school.

There are seven general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Information and communication technology (ICT) capability
- Critical and creative thinking
- Personal and social capability
- Ethical understanding
- Intercultural understanding.

Why does the Australian Curriculum include general capabilities?

The Australian Curriculum is based on the belief that to meet the changing expectations of society and to contribute to the creation of a more productive, sustainable and just society, young people will need a wide and adaptive set of knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions.

Although the curriculum is organised by learning areas, it also includes general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities which add richness and depth to the learning areas and help students see the interconnectedness and relevance of their learning.

How are the general capabilities evident in the Australian Curriculum?

In the Australian Curriculum, general capabilities are addressed through the learning areas and are identified wherever they are developed or applied in content descriptions. As part of the online curriculum, icons indicate where general capabilities have been identified in learning area content descriptions and elaborations. Teachers may find further opportunities to incorporate explicit teaching of general capabilities depending on their choice of activities.

Each learning area includes a brief description of the general capabilities that have been explicitly included in the content or advice about those that could be developed through particular teaching contexts.

General capabilities are represented to different degrees in each of the learning areas. Literacy, Numeracy, ICT capability and Critical and creative thinking are fundamental in students becoming successful learners. While the primary development of Literacy Numeracy and ICT capability is based in English, Mathematics and Technologies respectively, the development and application of these capabilities across the curriculum is essential to effective teaching and learning. Further information about the relationship between English and Literacy and Mathematics and Numeracy in the Australian Curriculum is provided in the introductions to the Literacy and Numeracy capabilities.

Personal and social capability, Ethical understanding, and Intercultural understanding focus on ways of being, behaving and learning to live with others, and are more strongly represented in some learning areas than in others. While all learning involves some personal and social dimensions, these capabilities are most evident wherever personal, social and cultural learning is highlighted.

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Why has ACARA developed specific materials for general capabilities?

To ensure the strong and coherent inclusion of the general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum, ACARA has prepared a set of general capabilities materials. Initially, these were developed to inform the writing of learning area curricula (Foundation to Year 10). They have been further developed to assist schools and teachers in understanding the general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum and in supporting the individual learning needs of diverse learners.

What do the general capabilities materials look like?

For each general capability, the materials are in three parts:

- an introduction that describes the nature and scope of the capability, its place in the learning areas and its evidence base

- organising elements that underpin a learning continuum

- a learning continuum that describes the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that students can reasonably be expected to have developed at particular stages of schooling.

Each learning continuum has six stages from Levels 1 to 6. Each level typically, but not always, applies to students by the end of a given year of schooling from Foundation to Year 10. The learning continua for Literacy and Numeracy include additional levels at Level 1 to maximise the curriculum's flexibility for all students and assist teachers in catering for student diversity and personalising learning.

General capabilities materials can be found on the Australian Curriculum website at:
http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/

How will teachers be able to use the general capabilities materials?

Teachers can use the materials to:

- develop a shared understanding of the nature, scope and sequence of the general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum

- confirm their understanding of intended learning wherever general capabilities are identified in learning area content

- plan for and guide students' development of the general capabilities in school and classroom learning programs.

Teachers are expected to teach and assess general capabilities to the extent that they are incorporated within each learning area. State and territory school authorities will determine whether and how student learning of the general capabilities will be further assessed and reported.

For some students, it may be necessary to adjust the levels of complexity and the processes they use to develop capabilities. However, the role and place of general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum remain the same for all students.

Work associated with general capabilities is ongoing. Future work includes:

- verification of the extended learning continua in schools
- monitoring and review of the materials as additional learning areas are developed
- investigating whether there is a need to further extend other capability learning continua to better reflect the learning needs of all students
- revision of the ICT capability in conjunction with the development of the Australian Curriculum: Technologies
- following completion of all learning area curriculum, a review of the extent to which general capabilities have been addressed in the Australian curriculum.

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