



Thinking skills instructional strategies: teaching students with additional learning needs to think

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21st Century skills such as critical and creative thinking have been gaining prominence as a vital foundation for learning and have been emphasised increasingly in curricula internationally. Research has shown that such skills are a key component of success academically and in life and that students with additional learning needs benefit from explicit instruction in thinking to build skills to learn and access the curriculum. However, there are little resources available to teach thinking skills to this cohort of students.

The aim of this study was to develop an assessment for thinking skills to provide teachers with an integrated system of assessment, reporting, planning, and instructional advice. The study was conducted as part of a broader program of research, funded by an ARC Linkage grant in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET). It followed a previously established methodological approach to create judgement-based assessments reported against criterion-referenced learning progressions (e.g., Coles-Janess & Griffin, 2009; Roberts & Griffin, 2009; Woods & Griffin, 2013).

This paper will describe a phase of the research in which experienced special education teachers collaborated to propose and review a bank of thinking skills instructional advice for students with additional learning needs. First, draft strategies were assembled from review of research into instructional strategies in thinking skills such as self-regulation, critical thinking, executive functioning, and metacognition. These were mapped to levels of increasing proficiency on the thinking skills learning progression. Teachers (n=16) with experience teaching thinking skills to students with additional learning needs were invited to a workshop. They were provided with de-identified case studies of students at each of the levels defined in the learning progression. In pairs, they referred to the reports generated about each student and the learning progression to draft learning goals and strategies. They also reviewed the prepared draft strategies sourced from literature for the student's level of learning. Their reflections were collected in the form of annotated individual learning plans which were analysed for applicability and appropriateness for students of all age groups in both mainstream and specialist settings. These were then piloted with teachers in mainstream and specialist settings to further establish their suitability for use in the classroom. Ultimately, the aim of the strategies is to facilitate opportunities for students with additional learning needs to think, a skill necessary to learn and gain access to the general curriculum.