Commentary on the KAPPAS2 Findings: A pedagogical perspective

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A challenge for higher education pedagogy

- 44 % of students perform at a *developing* level or below; very few reach the highest levels (Ursin et al., 2026).
- Wide sector gap at entry: 59 % of undergraduate UAS students at the lowest levels, compared with 6 % of undergraduate university students.
- Socio-economic background matters: matriculation examination, native language grade, and cultural capital all shape outcomes (e.g., Kleemola et al., 2023; Ursin et al., 2021; 2026).

Generic skills are learnable – with intentional pedagogy

- **What we know works**
  - Generic skills require *knowledge, skill, and will* – they are not stable traits (Hyytinen et al., 2025).
  - Effective teaching of critical thinking includes three elements (Hyytinen et al., 2025):
    - **Explicit teaching** of what the skill means.
    - **Varied practices** in different contexts, with tasks that directly target the skills to be learned
    - **Formative assessment and feedback**.
- Evidence: students who receive targeted instruction in critical thinking demonstrate stronger critical thinking skills than students who do not receive such instruction. (e.g. Abrami et al., 2015; El Soufi & See, 2019; Roksa et al., 2017).

A systemic pedagogical response: From individual courses to curricula, assessment, and equity

- **Pedagogical leadership.** A systemic response cannot rely on individual teachers. Leadership is needed to set shared goals, allocate resources, and create structures that support generic skills across degrees (Tuononen et al., 2023, 2025).
- **Curriculum-level design.** A single course can cover only a few skills. Generic skills should be embedded across the curriculum and integrated with disciplinary knowledge, not taught as separate or isolated element (see Arum & Roksa, 2011; Virtanen & Tynjälä, 2019; Hyytinen et al., 2025).
- **Aligned assessment.** Engagement and effort explain 12–14 % of CLA+ variance (Ursin et al., 2026). Assessment design matters. Use performance-based tasks and formative feedback. Make generic skills visible to students (Hyytinen et al., 2023).
- **Teacher competence.** Teaching experience alone is not enough. Teachers with pedagogical training use a wider range of methods that support generic skills (Tuononen et al., 2025).
- **Equity.** Students do not start from the same point (Kleemola, 2023). Explicit and integrated teaching helps first-generation and vocationally educated students most (El Soufi & See, 2019; Roksa et al., 2017). *Pedagogy is an instrument of equity.*

The way forward: intervention research

- **From mapping to stronger evidence on what works**
- KAPPAS1 and KAPPAS2 have **mapped the landscape**. We now know the level, the variation, and the factors associated with generic skills.
- The next step is **pedagogical intervention research** (Ursin et al., 2026):
  - Which pedagogical designs **most effectively support** the development of generic skills?
  - What works for whom – especially for students with weaker initial skills?
  - How can effective practices be **transferred and scaled** across disciplines and HEI sectors?
- Methodological needs:
  - Longitudinal, design-based and quasi-experimental research approaches.
  - Performance-based outcome measures, such as CLA+.
  - Combining cognitive, motivational, contextual, and pedagogical variables to understand which teaching practices best support generic skills.

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Thanks! Kiitos!

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