

Cultural Capital Toolkit

Evidence base and rationale for PPG spending

The Sutton Trust commissioned report [Subject to Background](#), based on data produced through the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) project found that bright disadvantaged children would be more likely to attain 3 A-Levels if, in addition to a high quality education, they had enrichment and supportive home learning environments from a young age. This included reading books and going on educational outings in the early years of secondary school. Further, the importance of homework, especially during Year 11 was uncovered.

The Social Mobility Commission report [An Unequal Playing Field](#) uncovered evidence that extra-curricular activities are important predictors for participation in beyond compulsory education, help to boost confidence in social situations and help develop social networks.

Whilst there is no direct focus on cultural capital within the EEF T&L toolkit, there are evaluations of approaches which are linked to it. For example:

Arts Participation



Homework (Primary)



Homework (Secondary)



Sports Participation



Outdoor Adventure



What is Cultural Capital?

The concept of cultural capital was first developed in the 1970s by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Building on Marxist theories relating to power being derived from capital, Bourdieu proposed that in addition to economic capital, class divisions and social order were maintained through an understanding of the legitimate ‘high culture’ within a society, passed on to children by their parents through, for example, dance, music, theatre attendance, visiting galleries and historic sites and talking about literature and art. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is made up of three component parts: *institutionalised capital*—e.g. education & qualifications; *objective capital*—e.g. books & art; *embodied capital*—e.g. language, mannerisms. More modern academics have suggested further components relating to 21st century life: *technical capital*—e.g. marketable skills, IT; *emotional capital*—e.g. empathy, sympathy; *national capital*—i.e. traditions creating a sense of belonging; *subcultural capital*—i.e. language & behaviour used to fit into a subset. (Adapted from *Cultural Capital Alliance* website). Cultural capital could therefore be defined as wide ranging knowledge relating to specific cultural contexts combined with the experiences and skills to successfully and confidently deploy and discuss this knowledge in a given situation. Or put more simply: ‘the skills, know-how and attitudes needed to get on in life’ (Bhavin Tailor).

Since the introduction of the 2014 National Curriculum which defined cultural capital as ‘the essential knowledge pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said’, the phrase has become common place within education in the UK, usually relating to ensuring that disadvantaged pupils are provided the cultural experiences and knowledge that non-disadvantaged pupils are more likely to have access to. The 2019 Education Inspection Framework outlines how Ofsted plan to inspect how well a school curriculum gives ‘all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils ... the knowledge and cultural capital that they need to succeed in life’. There is however a fair degree of opposition to such a focus. Some of this stems from a belief that the development of cultural capital as a progressive method to help close disadvantage gaps is a misunderstanding of Bourdieu who believed cultural capital contributed to educational inequality as cultural experiences at home gave some pupils an advantage. Others are sceptical that improvements in cultural capital can be measured. Further opposition relates to the notion of what constitutes ‘culture’ and who decides what is and is not culturally significant. For such opponents the idea of cultural capital reinforces elitism as it suggests that some forms of culture are more valuable than others. To Ofsted however, the EIF serves the function of tackling social justice issues and emphasises that developing a curriculum aimed at improving the cultural capital of all pupils, regardless of starting points, backgrounds or individual needs, will contribute to the creation of successful, well-rounded and informed citizens.

For Consideration

On their website, the *Cultural Learning Alliance* outline how they ‘want definitions of cultural capital to celebrate and embrace the different backgrounds, heritage, language and traditions of all the children living in this country’

They ‘believe strongly that th[e] new [EIF] constitutes an opportunity for schools to define the cultural capital that their children need and to think more widely than existing ‘legitimate culture’ ...

... ‘this will ensure that ... pupils are confident creators, able to be the ‘cultural omnivores’ that can make informed decisions about what culture they consume and participate in, and can articulate why it has value.

TOP IDEA

Many schools appoint a ‘Cultural Capital Coordinator’ to ensure that the development of cultural capital becomes a high profile, integral part of the school experience of all pupils.

TOP IDEA

At Chosen Hill School in Gloucestershire cultural capital is broken down into 6 key component parts:

Personal: e.g. careers, finance, work experience, metacognition, growth mind set, interview skills

Social: e.g. volunteering/charity work, political awareness, mental health

Physical: e.g food preparation & nutrition, lifestyles, competitive sports, healthy eating

Spiritual: e.g. collective worship, inter-faith lectures & activities, visits to spiritual buildings

Moral: British Values, charitable work, justice, law and order

Cultural: arts participation, alternative cultures & languages, racial equality, community cohesion

All departmental curriculum planning directly support students in the development of each component part.

‘...Deciding that children do not need to know things that some consider elitist or offensive condemns them to ignorance’. He suggests that ‘the more children know about their cultural inheritance, the more they can question, critique and respond to what has gone before.’

In response to concerns relating to cultural elitism, Didau argues: ‘When we express our righteous indignation that some knowledge is valued over other knowledge, and decide to teach this other knowledge in the name of liberty and social justice, what we’re actually doing is denying children choice...’

‘...If some people know something and others don’t, those who don’t will find themselves excluded or marginalised from the group which does.’ Further he outlines ‘knowing what is considered culturally important...allows...a richer, fuller life, to take part in a community of ideas’.

He says ‘being able to quote Shakespeare or knowing Pythagoras’ theorem may seem like trivia but it enables us to access society in a way which would be impossible if we didn’t know any of this. It’s only important because other people know it...’

In his book *Making Kids Clever: A Manifesto for Closing the Advantage Gap*, the education writer David Didau suggests that ‘the most important things to know are those things that last and which most influence other cultural developments’.

As the philosopher Michael Oakshott said: ‘We are inheritors neither of an enquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries’.

Cultural Capital Toolkit

Some important questions to consider ...

- Have we considered the research evidence about what could work?
- Do we know specific differences in cultural understanding of our pupils?
- Is a lack of cultural capital inhibiting access to our curriculum?
- What do we perceive as being the overriding 'legitimate culture'?
- How do we support children to go beyond 'legitimate culture'?
- Do we encourage pupils to critique or passively accept 'legitimate culture'?
- Do we encourage pupils to think beyond their experiences out of school?
- Do we support pupils to see the world in new ways?
- Do our pupils develop knowledge about what others believe is valuable?
- Can they therefore access debate they would otherwise be excluded from?

Acknowledgments/Further Reading/Web Links:

Making Kids Clever: A manifesto for closing the advantage gap - David Didau, (Crown House, 2019)

[Creating Cultural Capital](#)—Lee Elliot Major, (The Sutton Trust, 2015)

[Ideas for developing students' cultural capital](#)—Kate Chhatwal (SecEd, 2015)

[How to increase students' cultural capital without spending a fortune](#)—Matt Pinkett (TES, 2018)

[Subject to Background](#)—Katalin Toth, Kathy Sylva, Pam Sammons, (The Sutton Trust, 2015)

[An Unequal Playing Field](#)—Michael Donnelly, Predrag Lažetić, Andreas Sandoval-Hernandez, Kalyan Kumar, Sam Whewall (Social Mobility Commission, 2019)

[Cultural Learning Alliance](#)

[IVE](#)

Cultural Literacy

American educationalist E.D.Hirsch argues the importance of developing the cultural literacy of pupils to afford them the ability to access and fully participate in 'prevalent' culture.

It is often assumed that any reader or observer will possess a certain degree of knowledge based on this 'prevalent' culture. In all likelihood such knowledge will not be explained, especially as texts become more complex and sophisticated. Those not privy to this knowledge therefore may struggle to fully understand.

This links to adaptations of Bourdieu relating to *sub-cultural capital*: children from more deprived backgrounds finding it difficult to fit into contexts of 'high culture' (e.g. higher levels of deprived students dropping out of university).

Whilst therefore there are potentially valid arguments about the elitist nature of 'legitimate culture' we have to accept that it does form part of the world in which we live and our pupils will enter as they move into adulthood. Providing opportunity to experience and learn about and develop the ability to critique 'legitimate' or 'high' culture could help to develop their confidence and levels of comfort within such contexts.

