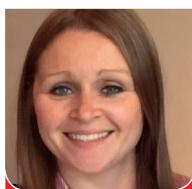


# A cultural revolution

A focus on the unique child is key to understanding how cultural capital relates to best practice. Here Sian Marsh of Best Practice Network highlights the approach of Kids Planet Day Nurseries.



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Cultural capital has quickly become a hot topic in early education. The concept isn't new, but it has been raised to the top of the agenda with its introduction into Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework.

While Ofsted describes cultural capital as 'the essential knowledge that children need to prepare them for their future success' it is useful to delve deeper to explore what exactly we mean by the term.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed the concept of cultural capital during the 1960s and 1970s, describing it as 'the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, credentials, etc. that one acquires through being part of a particular social class'.

Bourdieu defined cultural capital as 'familiarity with the legitimate culture within a society'; what we might call 'high culture' (Social Theory, 2016). He saw families passing on cultural capital to their children by introducing them to dance and music, taking them to theatres, galleries and historic sites, and by talking about literature and art over the dinner table.

The vision for our Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) programme is that every child has access to an excellent early years education, regardless of their background, and that every practitioner is supported to be their best in a well-led early years setting. In essence, this is an example of cultural capital. It is about giving children the best possible start to their education.

This year we have strengthened our focus on the importance of helping early years teachers become more aware and committed to designing and developing a curriculum based on the individual needs of the children who attend their setting or school.

***'We made it a rule that the team would create a space with suitable props and see it in action, observing children's use of it. If after a few days it wasn't working, they would try something else.'***

The environment plays a huge part in this and that environment will be different depending on the areas we work in and the children and families we work with.

The development of cultural capital depends on how well practitioners and teachers know their children and in turn develop an exciting and engaging curriculum that fulfils EYFS principles. Our early years teacher trainees are being encouraged to identify how cultural capital is already

embedded into the EYFS framework. It is about using their skills as early years specialists to introduce children to new and exciting learning opportunities that build on their own interests and curiosity and discover more about the world around them.

Kids Planet Day Nurseries, a family-owned group of nurseries established in 2008, is now working in partnership with us to deliver EYITT across the North West of England. Kids Planet has 44 nursery settings across the North West and the midlands as well as its own training academy and is responsible for the care and education of over 5,000 children. Over 20 Kids Planet settings were rated outstanding following their last Ofsted inspections. 'We are fully committed to ensuring each child is given the best opportunities during their time with us,' said Gill Mason, training manager at Kids Planet. 'And we believe that cultural capital is about giving children the best possible start to their early education and future success.'

## Cultural capital and the early years

It is easy to identify the notion of culture in the EYFS principle of the unique child. In our settings and schools children are learning to be resilient, confident individuals who identify themselves as part of a group or early year's community. Effective practitioners plan stimulating activities that meet the needs of the individual child and build on their previous experiences and understanding of the world. The challenge is for practitioners to decide what the children in their setting need to learn and how their provision can build on children's experiences, create new knowledge and prepare for what comes next in their individual learning journeys.

*The Early Years Inspection Handbook* states that 'inspectors will evaluate how well leaders ensure that the curriculum they use or create enhances the experiences and opportunities available to children, particularly the most disadvantaged. Some children arrive at an early years setting with poorer experiences than others, in their learning and play. What a setting does, through its curriculum and interactions with practitioners, potentially makes all the difference for children.' (Ofsted, 2019: 31)

The term cultural capital has certainly created a buzz across the early years sector. Practitioners and teachers are expressing concern about how they will demonstrate that cultural capital is being enhanced in settings and schools. Ofsted has continued to issue clarification statements. In a recent tweet, Ofsted said: 'Inspectors aren't inspecting "cultural capital", they're looking at whether the school

provides a rich and broad curriculum. A great curriculum builds cultural capital.'

### Cultural capital and the home learning environment

Gill Mason said: 'At Kids Planet we do so much to build on children's cultural capital, including opportunities for children to be independent and learn new skills through self-serving their meals and self-care stations. Our core curriculum offers a wide variety of enrichment activities, which have a cultural relevance to individual settings and their demographic, opportunities to explore real life items throughout our nurseries, which ignites their curiosity and in turn, introduces strange and fascinating words.

'We offer a wide range of cultural experiences. For example, we introduce children to different artists with our "artist of the month". This supports the introduction of new words and experiences, such as visits out into the community, including local care homes, local businesses and trips to the post office to post our pen pal letters.

'We are aware that a parents' cultural capital affects how they interact with our settings and how our staff members interact with them, which in turn affects the child's cultural capital. Thus we understand that our settings need to be creative, consider all the ways we can communicate with parents, seek their opinions about their child and facilitate shared experiences.

'We encourage parents to come into our settings to read to the children in their home language, to attend our many free classes such as baby massage, yoga and sensory classes and have recently delivered maths and English classes for parents.'

Ms Mason reports that the setting has worked hard to create a 'mindful pedagogy'. This involves encouraging mindfulness into its daily routines for staff and children and it has also launched its own mindfulness programme called Mindful Me, which equips children with essential coping mechanisms to manage their feelings and behaviours.

She says: 'Our approach is to inspire, educate, and empower practitioners to increase the amount and quality of physical and emotional experiences they offer children by providing an innovative and engaging variety of active play and mindfulness activities that can easily integrate into any daily routine.'

In April 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) announced its plans to support parents to improve children's early language and literacy skills in the home learning environment, stating:

'This government wants every child to have the best start in life, which means mastering the basics of speaking, reading and writing at an early age. It is important that parents and families can feel confident about supporting their children so they can start school with the appropriate level of language and social skills' (DfE, 2018).

Research suggests that the home environment is a major influencer in supporting children to develop the language skills they need to succeed throughout their educational career. Partnerships with parents are fundamental to the

*Effective practitioners plan stimulating activities*





*Each Kids Planet nursery develops culturally relevant activities for its children, while following the group's core curriculum*



PHOTO CREDIT

### Useful resources

- Best Practice Network is a national provider of training and professional development, working in partnership with early years' settings and schools across the country to deliver nationally recognised early years training programmes and qualifications. For more information and support, including Early Years Initial Teacher Training, visit: [bestpracticenet.co.uk/early-years-courses](http://bestpracticenet.co.uk/early-years-courses).
- For more information about Kids Planet Day Nurseries, go to [kidsplanetdaynurseries.co.uk](http://kidsplanetdaynurseries.co.uk).

success of joint working between early years settings and the home.

'At Kids Planet practitioners spend a great deal of time getting to know children and families, and from the offset they quickly gain a strong understanding of what children know and what they need to learn next,' Gill adds.

She reports its managers are committed to working within communities and know a great deal of information about each community in which the nurseries are based. They aim to act as a local community hub.

'We make ourselves aware as to the opportunities children have within each community and the purpose behind these to provide rich and diverse experiences. We use examples of awe and wonder and how staff members model language and help children learn and hear new words.'

She explains that the familiar term 'awe and wonder' is used when describing how practitioners plan activities that build on children's interests and experiences.

'We are therefore talking about the features of the Characteristics of Effective Learning that define our work,' she says. 'In developing the awe and wonder of the world through

the environment we create, we are helping children to develop their language skills, to think critically, to ask questions, to solve problems and ultimately be better prepared to leave their early years as successful learners for life.

'If children come into our settings and schools with their own set of experiences and their own cultural capital, our job is as it has always been. The focus remains on the development of the unique child.' **eye**

### References

Department for education (2018) Multi-million fund to boost children's early language skills. DfE

Ofsted (2019) Early years inspection handbook for Ofsted registered provision. Ofsted

Social Theory (2016) Pierre Bourdieu. <http://routledgesoc.com/profile/pierre-bourdieu>