

Early Childhood Forum 6th June 2019

What Do We Mean By Cultural Capital?



Helen Moylett

‘Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.’

Raymond Williams (1983) *Keywords, a vocabulary of culture and society*

Cultural Capital Matters

- We all have it
- It has been extensively thought about and written about eg Bourdieu and other writers on education and social control
- It is a complex and contested concept
- Ofsted have decided to make it part of the new Education Inspection Framework

So what is it?

Cultural Capital

Values, beliefs, norms, skills, tastes, knowledge, understandings and status that we acquire through being part of a particular social class and/or cultural group

What does yours look and feel like?

Whose cultural capital counts?



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A capital idea?

Reference to 'cultural capital' in the draft Education Inspection Framework has sparked a number of concerns in the early years sector, finds consultant and author **Helen Moylett**



A new phrase has entered the early years lexicon: cultural capital. Associated with the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the term now appears in the draft Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF) and accompanying handbooks – and already it is raising questions and concerns

ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life' (draft EIF).

However, it is important to acknowledge that every child has cultural capital. As the New Zealand early years curriculum Te Whariki says, 'I come not with my own strengths but bring with me the gifts, talents and strengths of my family

One concern is that 'cultural capital' might be narrowly middle-class

experience the awe and wonder of the world in which they live, through the seven areas of learning.'

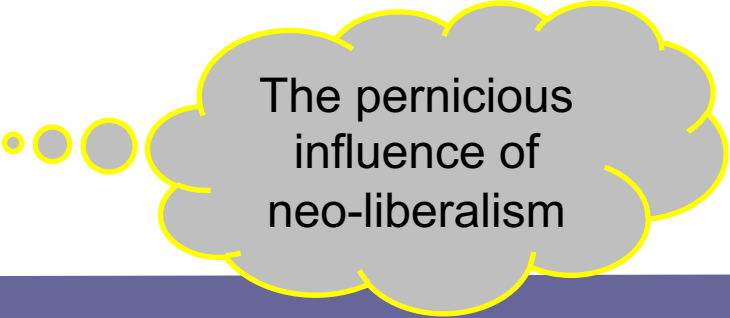
And a footnote explains, 'Ofsted's definition of knowledge and cultural capital matches that found in the aims of the national curriculum. Cultural capital is the essential knowledge that children need to be educated citizens.'

Ofsted's use of the term

Schools handbook

Today's Policy Context

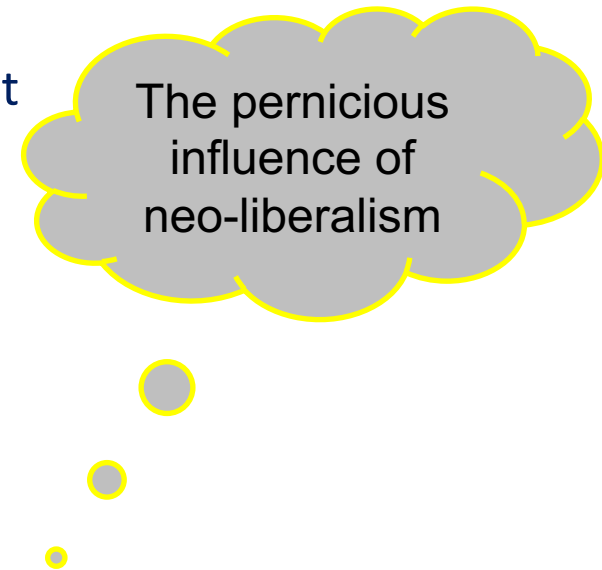
- Austerity, poverty and sharp funding cuts – increased inequality
- BREXIT
- Reduced and changed role of LAs
- Academies and free schools
- Reduced services and focus on mandatory functions
- Service commissioning v public sector provision
- Lack of co-ordinated expert advice to civil servants
- Short term reactions to perceived 'in-child' and 'in-family' problems
- Changing role of Ofsted?



The pernicious influence of neo-liberalism

..“neoliberalism” is not simply a name for pro-market policies, or for the compromises with finance capitalism made by failing social democratic parties. **It is a name for a premise that, quietly, has come to regulate all we practise and believe: that competition is the only legitimate organising principle for human activity.**

Metcalf (2017) The Guardian 18.08.17



If you doubt the relevance of this ideology in early education think about baseline and ‘social mobility’

“Another paradox of neoliberalism is that universal competition relies upon universal quantification and comparison. The result is that workers, job-seekers and public services of every kind are subject to a pettifogging, stifling regime of assessment and monitoring, designed to identify the winners and punish the losers.”

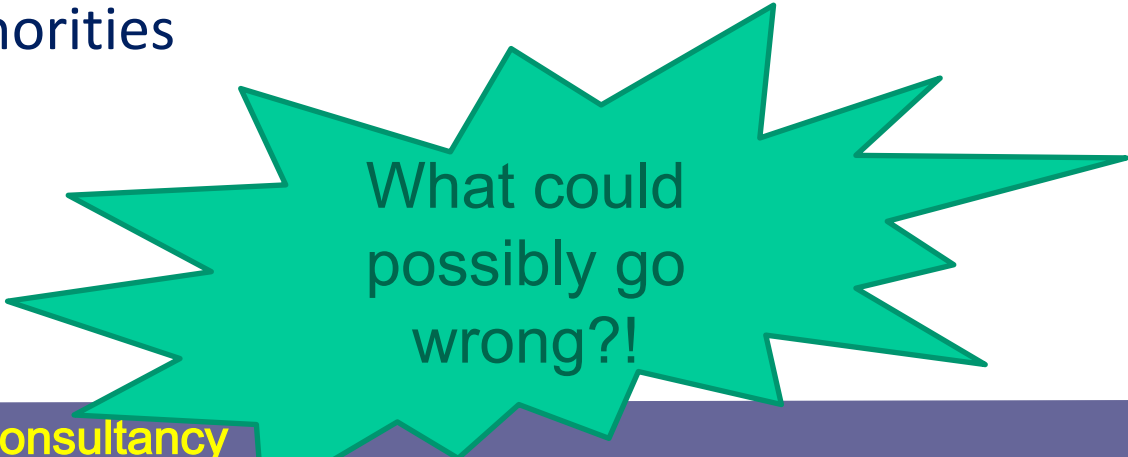
Monbiot(2016)

Testing to compete and win

Standardized testing

- investigates the amount of knowledge gained through binary questions → data → fed in to the system
- → used to compare one learner with another
- → generates a comprehensive view of 'learning' across all children.

Scores can be used to rate children, teachers, schools and local authorities



What could possibly go wrong?!

10



DON'T TEST 4-YEAR-OLDS

Our children are

morethan a **score**

<https://www.morethanascore.org.uk/>

independent
thinking 

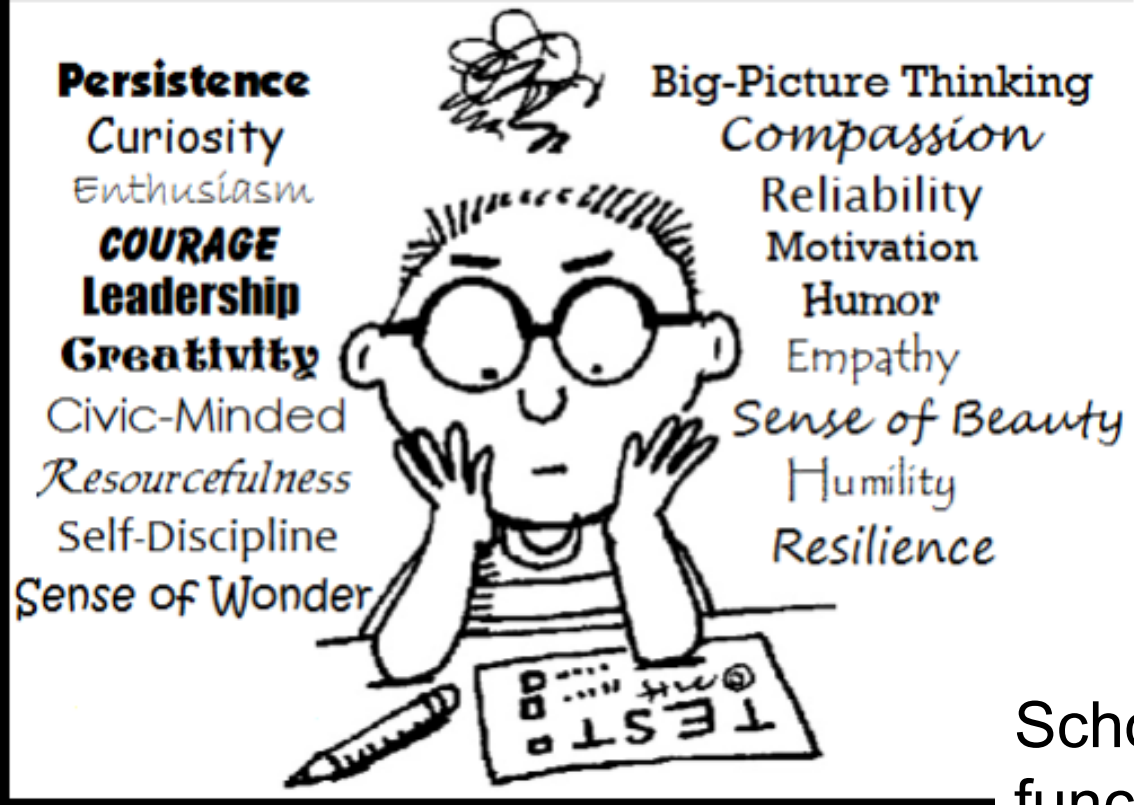
“Because children aren't data, obedience isn't engagement, silence isn't respect, learning is more than memorising and there's always another way.”

<https://www.independentthinking.co.uk/>

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Qualities Not Measured by Most Tests DyslexicKids.net



- Schools have 2 functions
- Teach and test knowledge
 - Control behaviour



Every child deserves the best possible start in life

Towards the Education Inspection Framework 2019

Slide 2

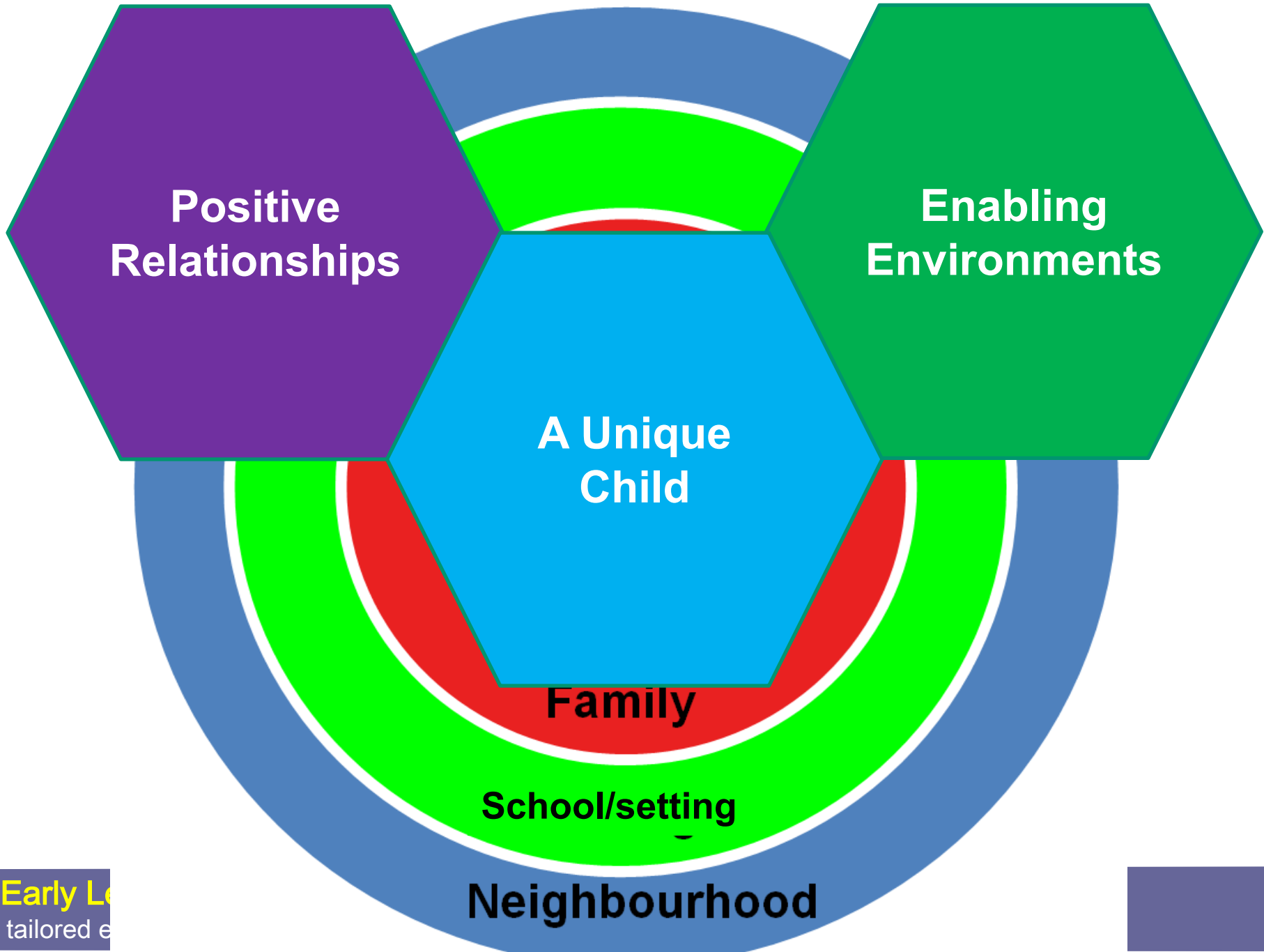
Concepts that matter when discussing the curriculum

- Progress means knowing more and remembering more.
- Knowledge is generative (or 'sticky'), i.e. the more you know easily you can learn.
- Knowledge is connected in webs or 'schemata'.
- Vocabulary size relates to academic success, and schooling is crucial for increasing the breadth of children's vocabulary.



Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.





Schools Inspection Handbook

Cultural capital

176. As part of making the judgement about the quality of education, inspectors will consider the extent to which schools are equipping pupils with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life. **Our understanding of 'knowledge and cultural capital' is derived from the following wording in the national curriculum:**

'It is the **essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens**, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.'

The national curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said, and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.

Early Years Inspection Handbook

- 90. Inspectors should consider how effectively senior leaders use performance management and their assessment of strengths and areas for improvement within the setting to provide a focus for professional development activities, particularly in relation to increasing children's **vocabulary and cultural capital**.

Cultural capital

- 142. **Cultural capital is the essential knowledge that children need to prepare them for their future success.** It is about giving children the best possible start to their early education. As part of making a judgement about the quality of education, inspectors will consider how well leaders use the curriculum to enhance the experience and opportunities available to children, **particularly the most disadvantaged.**
- 143. Some children arrive at an early years settings with different experiences from others, in their learning and play. What a setting does, through its EYFS curriculum and interactions with practitioners, potentially makes all the difference for children. It is the role of the setting to help children experience the awe and wonder of the world in which they live, through the seven areas of learning.



hara taku toa i te toa takitahi engari he toa takitini.

I come not with my own strengths but
bring with me the gifts, talents and
strengths of my family, tribe and
ancestors. (*Te Whāriki*, page 12)



The rich child
with 100
languages

2 year old rapping https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZh1_aaFqTQ



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Some obvious questions which Ofsted HMIs do not appear to be asking themselves or any of us..

- Do you agree with this new definition of cultural capital?
- Who decides what is the best that has been thought and said?
- Does appreciating human thought and creativity start with appreciating your own critical and creative thinking and making?
- Do we want everyone to be middle class – is that the mission of education or do we want to make schools more inclusive ?
- To be inclusive should we much more explicit about the differences and richness that children bring rather than casting some of them as disadvantaged?

Questions for early years settings

What cultural capital do your children and families bring?

How do you acknowledge and value it?

Human drama v political ideology

A nation is not a firm. A school is not part of that firm efficiently churning out the 'human capital' required to run it. We do damage to our very sense of the common good to even think of the human drama of education in these terms.

It is demeaning to teachers and creates a schooling process that remains unconnected to the lives of so many children.

Michael Apple *Ideology and Curriculum* 1990