



**ALL Briefing No. 23**

**Date : May 2020**

**Theme: Cultural Capital – the contribution of Language learning**

**Background:**

OfSTED writes in the Education Inspection Handbook that ***cultural capital*** 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 EIF refers to schools responding to local context to boost pupils' cultural capital and sets out to investigate how well leaders use the curriculum to enhance the experience and opportunities available to children, particularly the most disadvantaged.

**Key messages :**

The term 'cultural capital' is often associated with the writings of Bourdieu who places it on a social context, especially in relation to social mobility, and one of the controversies around the term is around whether the 'cultural capital' being aspired to is a fixed concept, with specific class connotations (e.g. is it awareness of a certain view of what is 'good literature, or art or music' etc.?)

To counter this some writers on 'cultural capital' refer explicitly to the **cultures, languages and traditions** that might be brought into the classroom by learners and their families, or by teachers, and how we might value and celebrate these – this is something Languages teachers will recognise.

For example the Cultural Learning Alliance (CLA) *'believes strongly that this new Ofsted requirement 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 their 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.*

\* defined as someone who mixes interests in a wide range of forms of culture, both those seen as historically 'legitimate' by society, and emerging forms

To underline this contribution to citizenship, we note that the Council of Europe (ECML) Democracy Framework has a language in every competence.

There is overlap in the UK with the theme of SMSC (Spiritual , Moral, Social and Cultural learning) to which Language learning also makes a distinctive contribution.

## **References :**

OfSTED Education Inspection Framework para 163

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>

Cultural Learning Alliance: <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/what-is-cultural-capital/>

Articles on Cultural Capital were published by ALL in Languages Today Summer 2020. A further article appears in the LT Extra of the ALL website.

An article on SMSC is planned to appear on the ALL website. Watch your ALLNet for news.

## **Points for reflection / action:**

Language teachers and Departments can make a good case for their contributions to this aspect of learning and personal development. Participation in Language learning contributes to an individual's Cultural Capacity in a variety of ways:

Common elements of classroom practice in Language lessons - listening to each other, listening for gist, tone and detail, taking turns to speak, speaking clearly and carefully, justifying opinions - are all elements of active participation as a citizen.

The exploration of other people's lifestyles, customs and social behaviours introduce learners from a young age to notions of difference and tolerance.

Authentic texts in audio, video, speech and writing bring thinking from around the world to the attention of students.

Requiring learners to manipulate language and ideas carefully and for specific purposes also encourages creativity.

Some interpretations of 'cultural capital' focus on personal characteristics - resilience, capacity, confidence and self-assurance - all of which are developed in a Languages curriculum.

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