Editorial: Capital, capability and educational justice

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Educational disadvantage – including lack of access to quality education as well as lack of positive environment for learning experiences at school and at home – is a significant factor of social inequality (Dorling, 2015; Piketty, 2014). The latest report on the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that students' educational performance across all participating countries is associated with the background characteristics of students and mediating factors in schools (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016). The report concludes, that across Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries 'socio-economic status continues to have an impact on students' opportunities to benefit from education and develop skills' (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016: 39). At the policy level, global trends – shaped by OECD international tests and internationalisation of education that favours a market-oriented perspective of education – increasingly focuses the value of education on knowledge and skills for economic productivity and competitiveness of individuals and societies. Seen from the human capital perspective, education is relevant for economic growth and development 'only insofar as it entails cognitive skills' (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2015: 110). In the prevailing neoliberal political economy, the role of education in promoting democratic citizenship in pluralistic societies (Nussbaum, 2006) as well as social justice goals of education – such as inclusivity, equity and fairness in access to and effective participation in quality schooling – remain marginal policy agendas.

In this special issue, we draw on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *capital* (Bourdieu, 2011; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) and Amartya Sen's capability approach to social justice and human development (Sen, 1985, 1999, 2002, 2009) to understand the factors constructing

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educational disadvantage, and the implications for policy development to improve *opportunities* and *processes* of education for those that encounter educational disadvantage. Bourdieu (2011) identifies four forms of capital: economic (money and assets); cultural (for example, knowledge, taste, language and aesthetic); social (affiliations and networks, family, religious and cultural heritage); and symbolic (transformed forms of other capital, for example, recognition of credentials, knowledge and expertise, financial resources; legitimacy of one's actions and inactions over others). Bourdieu argues that one's stock of capital depends on one's socioeconomic background, and plays a critical role in shaping educational opportunities and experiences. Unequal scholastic values and attitudes, and differences in cultural resources valued in the education system mean that students of different social origin are not equally positioned to benefit from equal access to education. Seen from Bourdieu's perspective, educational institutions act as a social filter of privilege and exclusion in the sense that they select and socialise students on the basis of implicit social and cultural resources, or capital.

Sen's (1985, 1999, 2009) capability approach is a normative evaluative framework for assessing well-being, justice and human development. Sen (2009) argues that a person's life is a combination of various doings and beings (i.e. functionings). Understanding the quality of a person's life requires assessing the substantive freedoms (i.e. capability) to choose the life he or she has reason to value (Sen, 2009). The policy implication is to ask whether or not people have real opportunities to achieve what they value in life rather than resources they have access to or the level of satisfaction that they are able to attain. As Sen underscores, 'A person's advantage in terms of opportunities is judged to be lower than that of another if she has less capability – less real opportunity – to achieve those things that she has reason to value' (Sen 2009: 231).

This special issue focuses on the intersection of capital and capability in relation to educational opportunities, experiences and outcomes of individuals. That is, how might people's ownership of capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) shape their *opportunities* (e.g. access to education) and their *processes* (e.g. participation and achievement in education)? How might people's education enable them to have the real choices and capabilities to improve their well-being and effectively pursue the kind of life that they value? We aim to examine how capital mediates capabilities *for* education, and capabilities *through* education. Capabilities *for* education require understanding the forms of capital that constitute educational disadvantage, and how they shape the *opportunities* for students to access schools and effective learning. Capabilities for education also refer to the *processes* in which students deploy owned capital to negotiate the school systems such as governance structure, curriculum and assessment, classroom practices, learning environment, student selections and teaching and learning personnel such as principals and school leaders, teachers and learning support staff, and other students in their engagement in schools and uptake of learning offered.

Understanding the intersection of capital and capability in capabilities *for* education extends the informational bases to examine the conditions that give rise to educational disadvantage (or advantage) at an institutional level (e.g. school systems and schools structure), and at the individual level (for example, students, teachers and principals). As Sen envisions, capabilities *for* education cannot be understood unless we examine both the derivation of opportunities as well as processes of education, because student's experiences of the processes in schools shape their perception of opportunities for education as much as the actual opportunities themselves, and how they might then pursue future opportunities.

The idea of capabilities *through* education draws on the assumption that education is a foundational capability in itself; that is, it is one of the central beings and doings that are crucial to human well-being (Sen, 1992). The focus is on enlarged freedom and choice (Sen, 1999) including the learning outcomes and associated benefits to the individual. Capabilities *through* education (Gale and Molla, 2015) include gainful employment and democratic citizenship; and are linked with cultural capital and social capital. A person's choice in employment and civic engagement is shaped by their perceived opportunities – what they see as available to them and experiences in pursuing these opportunities; both are dependent on the skills, knowledge and attributes gained from education and the processes in which they can deploy these forms of resources in their workplace and communities (Pham, 2015). The extent to which the person can negotiate and effectively manage these processes also depends on the forms of capital they own, which can act as conversion factors of their individual resources to capabilities.

Examining the intersection of capital and capabilities is instrumental in highlighting relational and structural factors that mediate access to and success in schools and after schools. It questions the structures and practices of educational institutions that privilege certain forms of capital while they marginalise others. Social justice through the lens of capabilities *in* and *through* education entails problematising the policy-framing of educational inequality. Hence the purpose of this special issue is to highlight the importance of broadening the evaluative spaces of educational disadvantage and implications of equity policies and programmes in schools and after schools contexts. Rather than assuming a set of narrowly composed and assumed economic goals of jobs and deployment of skills, we expand the informational bases to understand the forms of capital and the contexts in which they can be mobilised as conversion factors for people in different circumstances to expand their capabilities. In doing so, we bring forth an ethical dimension of social justice by accounting for individuals' values and goals in policies that seek to improve the opportunities and processes for disadvantaged students.

The articles in this issue examine the intersection between capital and capabilities in relation to educational opportunities, processes and outcomes. That is, through the lens of capital and capability, the authors point to the need for re-imagining the social justice goals of education beyond improving inequality in terms of human capital to ensuring equality of living and participating in society in ways that people value.

Hart's paper offers a critical examination of the nature of inequalities in relation to education and the pursuit of social justice. Drawing on Amartya Sen, the paper premises the value of education for its contributions to civic, political and community life, and for its role in advancing social justice. Hart argues that assessment of educational resources and measures such as school enrolment and educational achievement are limited in what they tell us about the injustices that learners may experience. Rather, attention should be paid to the relative value individuals place on various freedoms to achieve that are broader then learners' achievement. Hart makes clear the connection between socially dynamic processes within which learners and formal educational systems in order to deepen insights into the multiple factors influencing the development of learner values, and the unequal possibilities for realising their aspired valued achievements. She draws attention to the three spaces where educational inequalities occur: the opportunities to access education; the experiences of education; and the outcome of opportunities afforded to individuals on leaving formal education. By locating the analysis of educational inequalities in these three spaces and attending to sociological concepts from Pierre Bourdieu, she offers the Sen–Bourdieu

Analytical Framework, a model she first developed in Hart (2013) to aid understanding of social justice in relation to widening participation in higher education in England. Hart offers not only an alternative development paradigm but also an expanded evaluative framework that looks beyond measures such as enrolment or literacy achievement to understand opportunities to achieve as well as the achievements themselves.

Pham's paper combines the key concepts of Bourdieu's forms of capitals and Sen's capabilities to understand the generative mechanisms of educational advantage or disadvantage. Using the results of Australia's 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment and its supplementary contexts assessment framework, Pham explains some of the effects of students' socioeconomic background and other student-level and school-level factors on educational performance and the contexts in which they occur. She offers three contextual aspects of educational inequalities: *structures* of schools and school systems; *relations* of students and families with schools, teachers and peers; and *representation* of students' voice and educational values. Pham's analysis points to the production and reproduction of educational disadvantages that are attributable to economic capital and other forms of capital within these contextual aspects. She highlights the importance of understanding how certain forms of capital can act, or not act, to convert a person's resources to capabilities in specific contexts, thereby creating or limiting opportunities as well as processes in schools for students from varied backgrounds. While acknowledging that the challenges of finding ways to close 'test score gaps' among groups of students are both urgent and very real, she critiques PISA's implicit and simplistic view that socioeconomic backgrounds or some other pedagogical practices or school features are causal factors of educational inequality. Rather, she argues, that we have to understand and account for students' different stocks of capital and situations in schooling contexts to gain insights into how educational disadvantages that appear in socioeconomic differences or schooling practices actually come about. As with Hart, Pham brings to our attention the need to question the larger purposes and social values that animate education and which can produce or reproduce educational disadvantages. Focusing on the positional disadvantage of students and their families, both papers underscore the idea of social justice as plurality: that human beings are different and unique and policies to improve social justice in education should be about protecting, securing and creating a space to disclose students' differences and uniqueness.

Nolan and Lamb's contribution focuses on the social justice work of early childhood educators. It places the educator in the centre of enabling capabilities *in* education as well as a professional pursuing capabilities *for* education. Using qualitative datasets generated for a nationally funded large-scale project, and guided by the capability approach as an evaluative framework, the authors highlight what opportunities educators have to be and do what they have reason to value in their professional practices. Nolan and Lamb applied the capability approach to highlight: (a) 'unchallenged' and 'under-valued' aspects of professional practices of educators; and (b) discords between policy expectations and educators' experience and practice that work against the realisation of quality practice in relation to children's learning, as set out in policy guidelines. They argue that the social justice work of educators is mediated by both objective structures in the workplace and subjective meaning systems of the practitioners. Lack of professional responsiveness to the social justice core of educators' work is a form of professional unfreedom. Hence, for Nolan and Lamb, enabling professional agency means removing the constraining factors that hinder educators from converting their professional capital into valued outcomes, including being responsive to the rights

of all children they work with and questioning the grounds on which pedagogical decisions are based.

Van Aswegen and Michael Shevlin's paper undertakes a critical policy analysis of Ireland's Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015–2024. Using Foucault's critical discourse analysis, the paper highlights policy rhetoric that assumes the role and value of education in producing human capital to meet the needs of labour market imperatives. Van Aswegen draws attention to the concepts of disablism and neoliberal ableism, and highlights how such policy rhetoric is the means by which the 'ableist' culture perpetuates itself, which in turn has implications for the role of social justice *through* education for people with disabilities. The paper offers some alternative prospects to neoliberal imperatives using Sen's capabilities approach. First, instead of emphasising the specifics of the disabling situation that centres on what a person with disabilities lack or is not able to do, the capabilities approach shifts the focus to establishing equality in terms of possibilities and choices that they can do. The implication is to promote a 'no tolerance' policy rationale for unequal treatment of individuals. Second, a neoliberal discourse assumes self-interests and drivers and tends to overlook structural barriers which could undermine the personhood of people with disabilities. By bringing these barriers to account, policy imperatives could aim to overcome them in ways that ensure that all individuals in a society can achieve their capabilities. Third, improving participation of people with disabilities in education necessitates dismantling discourses about disability that prioritise the worth of a person purely on their economic capacity and reshaping discourses toward personal fulfilment, social inclusion as well as economic independence for people with disabilities. Aswegen echoes Nolan and Lamb in highlighting the tensions between rhetorics of policy aims and realisation of those aims from the perspectives of both the professionals whose work is to improve social justice and those that social justice policies aim to help.

The final contribution by Harvey and Mallman assesses the experiences of new migrants in Australian higher education. The paper draws on qualitative data generated through semi-structured interviews with new migrant students in two regional towns in the State of Victoria, Australia. The authors present a more nuanced account of cultural backgrounds and educational participation of new migrant students, thereby providing insights into the ways that cultural backgrounds could be the conditions for capabilities *in* and *through* education. They use critical race theory, particularly the notion of cultural wealth, to expand the analytical scope of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital discussed in Pham's and Hart's papers. In the findings, Harvey and Mallman highlight three aspects of cultural wealth of migrant students: resistant capital; familial capital; and linguistic capital. They show that resistant capital – 'the personal reassurance and heightened motivation arising from opposition to imposed racialised assumptions' – is productive: it boosts the confidence and navigational capacity of students from refugee-backgrounds. Akin to social capital, familial capital provides students with role models and support networks. Harvey and Mallman also argue that linguistic capital, which includes social and communicative skills and styles, has direct implications for educational outcomes of refugee-background students. The notion of cultural wealth provides insightful theoretical resources to understand strengths and challenges of new migrant students in the Australian education system.

The collection of contributions in this special issue points to the idea of social justice as fostering opportunity freedoms for students and their families, and the development of those freedoms. Understanding of the complex contributory social processes is critical to understanding the ways that opportunity freedoms may emerge unequally for different

individuals. Moreover, these inequalities may be compounded in the process of entering schools and experiencing schooling practices. In offering policy implications, the authors view the role of education as promoting democratic citizenship in pluralistic societies (Nussbaum, 2006), for its capacity to open to people worlds of cultural and artistic excellence, and in the largest sense for its contributions to 'human flourishing' rather than a single-minded view of education as preparing people for work.

This special issue aims to raise the importance of questioning the relationship between public and political understandings of educational purposes and values, on the one hand, and educational policies and practices on the other. This is, of course, a problem of 'theory and practice' in education at the broad social level which mirrors the issue of the relationship between educational research and practice at other points in this special issue. Analytical, historical and empirical work that probes effectively and creatively into these deeply challenging issues can contribute toward policies and practices that move social justice in education along constructive paths.

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