

Capital and Capability: Expanding Evaluative Spaces of Educational Disadvantage

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In policy and research processes, what we find often depends on where we look; the kind of problem we respond to is in part determined by our informational basis of judgement. For example, sociological analysis of educational advantage and disadvantage tend to focus on the interplay between social position and capital. The core assumption is that a person's educational opportunities are mediated mainly by the structure, volume and interaction of capital at their disposal. However, this reproductionist account of educational inequality understates the potential of public action and the possibility of social mobility. A more nuanced analysis of educational disadvantage needs to consider intersectional factors of inequality and the role of transformative equity instruments. In this respect, the paper argues that Sen's notion of capability expansion productively complements Bourdieu's capital-based explanation of inequality. The capability perspective widens the evaluative space of educational disadvantage, emphasising the importance of social arrangements and conversion abilities of equity targets. In other words, while *capital interaction* is about drivers of the reproduction of social position, *capability expansion* concerns the availability of genuine options and the extent to which people can use the options to achieve what they have reason to value.

Keywords: Bourdieu, capability, capital, conversion ability, Sen, substantive opportunity

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