

# **Negative capital: A generalised definition and application to educational effectiveness and equity**

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## **Abstract**

The concept of capital has risen in prominence within educational policy and practice in the UK since Ofsted introduced cultural capital into its inspection processes in 2019. At the same time, fractured discourses exist across different types of capital - one of which concerns capitals that are negative in constitution and/or impact. This paper addresses both through:

- A systematic literature review of these negativities (in social, economic, and intellectual capital) and a thematic analysis of these papers, leading to the derivation of a definition of negative capital.
- An evaluation of the merit of negative capital via its compatibility with Bourdieu's concepts of social field, social field homology, habitus, and hysteresis.
- The application of negative capital to a range of examples from educational practice and theory, including a challenge to Ofsted's use of cultural capital.

## 1. Introduction

This paper concerns how the concept of capital can be used in policies, practices, theories, and research concerned with educational effectiveness and equity. There are twin drivers prompting this paper. On one hand, the concept of capital and its utility within educational policy and practice in the UK has risen in prominence since Ofsted introduced cultural capital into its inspection processes in 2019 (Ofsted, 2019a, 2019b)<sup>1</sup>. On the other, a fractured discourse exists in academic papers that consider types of capital that are negative in constitution and/or impact. This paper makes an original contribution to the literature by responding to both and by undertaking:

1. A systematic literature review of these negativities and a thematic analysis that leads to the derivation and definition of negative capital that satisfies the themes in these papers;
2. An evaluation of the merit of negative capital via its compatibility with Bourdieu's concepts of social field, social field homology, habitus, and hysteresis; and,
3. The application of negative capital to challenge Ofsted's use of cultural capital and to account for and develop several other educational practices, theories, and concepts that concern educational effectiveness and equity

Bourdieu's work on capital (specifically his *Generalised Theory of Capital*; see Wacquant, 1998, p.26) is drawn upon in this paper. Aside from the fact that Bourdieu first wrote about cultural capital in the context of education (Bourdieu, 1977a, 1977b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) - there are two good reasons for this usage: 1. there is arguably an infinite variety of capitals (cf. Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and 2. Bourdieu writes about the interplay

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see the various pieces published in the Times Educational Supplement (TES, 2020), the UK Guardian newspaper (2019), and by professional education organisations including the British Association for Early Education (McTavish, 2019), the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY, 2019), and the Early Years Alliance (2019).

between multiple types of capital. Thus, Bourdieu's work provides a rationale for conducting a bounded review of the ways that negativity is considered within academic papers concerning capital: The review is limited to expressions of negativity concerning just three types of capital (social, economic, and intellectual) plus capital in the abstract. By drawing out the concept of negative capital in the abstract from these papers, we articulate a concept that can then be applied within any one of the infinite types of capital that readers may encounter. Bourdieu's consideration of capital beyond a single type (e.g. Bourdieu, 1986) then provides a means by which to interrogate the concept of negative capital. The underlying rationale is that for a concept of capital to have intellectual merit and utility it needs to be compatible with concepts that are central to Bourdieu's (above) theory.

After drawing out the concept of negative capital from a thematic analysis of our reviewed papers, defining it based on the results of our review, and demonstrating that this concept is fully compatible with four of Bourdieu's core concepts (social field, social field homology, habitus, and hysteresis) this paper then returns to educational policy, practice, theory, and research. Negative capital is used to challenge and extend: Ofsted's definition and use of cultural capital in their current policies related to inspection processes; the impact of these policies on educational practice; the theory of educational effectiveness and improvement from Hargreaves (2001); plus the Dynamic Model of Educational Effectiveness and the Dynamic Approach to School Improvement from Creemers and Kyriakides (2008, 2012).

### ***1.1 Capital and its relation to education***

Conceived by influential theorists including Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) as socio-cultural assets that are valorised and exchangeable within dominant social fields ('*structured arenas of social action*'; Wacquant, 1998, p.26), this conception of capital has had

considerable influence in explaining individuals' access to (socially stratified) social and economic goods including education and educational progress (Sullivan et al., 2001; van Zanten, 2014; Brown et al., 2016). An uneven distribution of capital can lead to inequities between groups as a result of unequal access to reward structures within these social fields (Skeggs, 1997) - although and the degree to which inequality is accepted as a facet of social justice is a contested moral and philosophical issue (Kelly & Elliott-Kelly, 2018).

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p.114) claim that the very identification of a social field is the same as determining the, '*species of capital active within it*'. Although the existence of multiple species/types of capital speaks to a broad take-up and application of the underlying concept of capital in theory and research, these varying types and this widespread application have fractured, and therefore stymied, attempts to develop the concept itself. The notion that capital can be negative in constitution and/or impact is no exception to this fractured development and application. For example, the reviews of social capital by Portes (1998) and Liu (1999) both include sections on economic capital and both consider negative social capital, but neither mentions the possibility of negative economic capital.

For the foundational concept of capital and its relation to education, the result of such 'silo-thinking' is a profound disjunction between the fractured attempts to develop the concept of capital and the possible breadth of its application. Thus, when one type of capital features in education – be it in policy and practice (e.g. Ofsted's use of cultural capital) or in theory and research – the full range of developments of capital are sometimes omitted. This risks impeding capital as an explanatory concept in education (just as in other fields) and impedes our understanding of education including of educational attainment and equity in education. The partially articulated notion that there may exist negativities relating to capital is an

important example as it is fundamental to the concept of capital itself. If social capital has been developed to the point where a negative aspect to it is now understood to exist (e.g. Portes, 1998; Liu, 1999), to what extent have negatives also been expressed in other types of capital or in relation to capital in the abstract? Further, to what extent is there an underlying negative capital that is evident across different papers? The identification of such a common underlying negative capital (in the abstract) would facilitate a deeper critical engagement with policies, practices, theories, and research that use capital *of any type* or in the abstract. A systematic literature review (SLR) helps to answer these questions.

## **2. A systematic literature review (SLR) of negative capitals**

This SLR bounded its search to expressions of negativity within papers that consider capital in the abstract and to three types of capital (social, economic, intellectual). This decision to bound was prompted by: the practical need for concrete search terms, the fact that some types of capital feature more prominently than others in Sociology, and an intent to encompass not only concepts that feature in Bourdieu's *Generalized Theory of Capital* (Wacquant, 1998, p.26) but also those featured elsewhere in Economics and the Social Sciences (looking beyond just education in order to avoid field-specific 'silo-thinking'). Economic capital is defined as, '*material resources... immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights*' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.242). Social capital refers both to individuals via, '*interpersonal relationships that facilitate action*' (Portes & Landolt, 1996, p.21) and to social structures and networks via, '*features of social organization, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit*' (Putnam 1995, p.67). Intellectual capital is the leveraging of knowledge, experience, competencies, and intellectual assets to boost the field positioning of individuals or of the group or institution that they belong to (e.g. Roos et al., 1997; Kelly, 2004).

Papers in the SLR came from five databases: ERIC; Sociological Abstracts; Social Services Abstracts; PsychINFO; and Web of Science. The same Boolean search terms were applied in all five databases: ‘negative capital\*’ OR ‘negative social capital\*’ OR ‘negative economic capital\*’ OR ‘negative intellectual capital\*’. No ‘earliest date’ was set although where a database required one this date was set to 1850 to reflect the fact that both capital and social capital are concepts with a provenance of more than 100 years<sup>2</sup>. No language limitations were imposed; where papers were not fully published in English, Google translation was used. The review search did not exclude any type of publication: books, theses and research reports were all included. Duplicate studies were manually removed as were outputs where the word ‘capital’ referred to something other than the concept in this paper.

The number of papers resulting from the search process is shown in Figure 1 (Online Appendix 1 presents the full list). Of the 139 papers and other outputs collated in the final corpus, 17 mentioned negative economic capital, 115 mentioned negative social capital, and 7 mentioned negative capital either in the abstract or across multiple types of capital. None mentioned negative intellectual capital which is perhaps unsurprising given the positive connotations within definitions of intellectual capital that can be found in the literature. Six papers were written in a language other than English with no translation provided by the authors or publishers<sup>3</sup>. The earliest published paper to mention ‘negative capital’ was found to be Orosel (1975).

[Insert Figure 1 here]

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the term ‘social capital’ can be seen in 19<sup>th</sup> century papers (e.g. Marshall, 1890) despite claims that it is more recent such as Graham, Shier and Eisenstat (2015) who attribute ‘social capital’ to Loury (1977).

<sup>3</sup> One each for Dutch, French, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, and Serbian. These were respectively: de Haan, Baay & Yerkes, 2015; Levesque & White, 1999; Zadkowska, 2012; das Neves Bodart, 2010; Zara, 1997; Pavicevic, 2012.

The various expressions of negativity identified within the corpus of papers resulting from the SLR were synthesised through use of inductive thematic analysis. First, the papers were read to identify categories (types of capital, field of enquiry) and sub-categories (e.g. sub-domains of social capital). Then the texts were re-read to identify codes (e.g. capitals described as negative in impact; capitals expressed as negative in constitution). After that, themes were extracted that reflected relationships, commonalities, and differences that existed within and between both the categories and the codes, for example, the different ways that negativity was represented in papers discussing social capital rather than economic capital (see below).

The variety of papers within the corpus returned from the SLR provides us with a number of immediate findings. First, that attempts to express and conceive of negativity in relation to capital have not been bound to any one type of capital. Second, that there are different expressions of negativity across different types of capital. Third, that these considerations of negative capital have not been limited to papers published in the English language. Fourth, that for some types of capital, the current literature omits discussion of whether and/or how this type of capital may be negative. Fifth, then even when looking at the type of capital with the greatest volume of discussion of negativity (social capital), there still remains variation in the ways in which negativity is conceived and communicated. For example, the corpus contains ten different terms that each express negativity that relates to either the impact or the constitution of social capital. Differentiated by how this negativity was expressed and in historic order, these ten terms are:

- Social capital associated with negative impacts:
  - Downside of social capital (Portes & Landolt, 1996)

- Social capital deficiency (Harris & De Renzio, 1997)
- Working-class social capital (Das, 2006)
- Constraints of social capital (das Neves Bodart, 2010)
- Social capital expressed as negative in constitution:
  - Anti-social Capital (Beali, 1997)
  - Perverse social capital (Rubio, 1997)
  - The dark side of social capital (Putzel, 1997)
  - Bad social capital (Norton, 2001)
  - Antagonistic social capital (Neira, Vázquez, & Portela, 2009)
  - Sour social capital (Faist, 2010)

Looking next at the corpus and attempts within it to define a concept called ‘negative capital’, attempts exist that are both explicit and implicit. Several papers made *explicit* claims to have invented negative capital as a concept - in application to just one type of capital or otherwise. Two examples concern social capital (Portes, 1998; Liu, 1999) while other definitions can be found in Wacquant (1998), Becker and Murphy (2000), and Osella and Osella (2000). *Implicit* attempts to define negative capital (often indicated by use of inverted commas around the term used) include Schmidt et al. (2002), Kerka (2003), and Carpiano and Kimbro (2012).

From the inductive thematic analysis that was carried out on the expressions of ‘negative capital’ within the corpus, multiple common themes were identified. One of these themes concerned the extent to which the labelling of a type of capital as negative (in impact or in constitution) was more objective or subjective. While the majority of papers made an objective judgement as to this negativity (e.g. Dufur, Parcel & McKune, 2013; Vázquez-

Rodríguez & Lombe, 2017) there was also a minority where this judgement was clearly more subjective (e.g. Levesque & White, 1999; Friedman, 2003; Cox, 2007). For example, ‘...there is a dissonance between its [social capital’s] popular/policy use and using the concept as value neutral (should not be assumed a public good).’ (Cox, 2007, p.504).

Two other themes identified within the papers were: 1. Whether a negative capital existed independently of a parallel positive capital (or not); and 2. How negative and positive capitals coexisted. When ‘negative capital’ featured in papers published within the field of Economics it was often treated as part of a broader concept of capital – a capital that has no inherent positivity to it but rather both positive and negative facets (imagine a number line centred on zero). Simple summation dictates how contributions to these positive and negative facets co-operate and the result dictates whether a capital should then be labelled positive or negative (DeYoung, Distinguin & Tarazi, 2018). While a minority of papers from outside Economics also adopted this perspective (Hawkins & Abrams, 2007; Mangino, 2009; Flores et al., 2013), the majority conceived of negative and positive capitals as *separate* concepts and that these concepts coexist and co-operate in ways that are more complex than mere addition. For example, Bokek-Cohen and Ben-Asher (2018, p.408) consider individuals attempting to overcome (or conceal) the consequence of having one type of capital that is negative by accruing and using a second type that is positive. Another example (Bideshi & Kposowa, 2012) argues that while contributions to a type of capital (positive or negative) function via simple summation, how multiple types of capital work together is more complex.

A fourth theme was also evident - that the use of the word ‘capital’ implied something positive rather than neutral. Evidence of this theme is clear from terms used by O’Brien

(2012): ‘negative social capital’ is one concept but the other is not ‘positive social capital’ but instead ‘(positive) social capital’. This assumption of an inherent positivity when using the word ‘capital’ may come from its definition as a *resource* (Flores et al., 2013) or as an *asset* (Walter, 2015). Regardless, a tension exists in all papers that on one hand want to discuss negativity relating to capital while on the other also wanting to maintain the assumption that ‘capital’ is *ipso facto* positive. O’Brien (2012) not only recognises this tension (through the use of brackets around the word positive) but does so while recognising the subjective judgements involved in labelling a capital as positive or negative. ‘(Positive) social capital’ is understood not to involve *resources* or *assets* but rather *opportunities to secure benefits* while ‘negative social capital’ involves *pressures to incur costs*. Importantly, the earlier definitions of capital as resource/asset are not contracted by these definitions. Instead, the more objective identification of a resource or asset depends upon the more subjective judgement of what constitutes a secured benefit. What is viewed as beneficial to one person or group need not be the same for another, or be consistent across contexts, over time, or across social fields (cf. Lareau, 2001).

### ***2.1 Identifying and defining a common negative capital from within the SLR corpus***

The findings of the SLR and thematic analysis provide a set of criteria for use when identifying and defining a common concept of negative capital. Any definition of negative capital must respect:

- That there are multiple types of capital
- That sub-categories can exist within a type of capital
- That capital may be negative in impact and/or constitution
- That judgements of capital as negative in impact and/or constitution can vary in their subjectivity

- That the concept of capital can be conceived of either as neutral (with positive and negative facets) or as *ipso facto* positive (but with a negative counterpart)
- That positive and negative capitals can vary in how they co-exist and co-operate

O'Brien's (2012) definitions of '(positive)' and 'negative' social capital provide a giant's shoulder upon which to stand when identifying and defining a common underlying negative capital. This is because the definitions in O'Brien (2012) reflect two of the themes from the thematic analysis thereby meeting two of the above six criteria. By generalising and extending the definitions (concerning social capital) from O'Brien (2012) a definition of a common underlying negative capital emerges, along with a counterpart definition of positive capital, that satisfies the above six requirements:

Negative capital can be understood as *the pressure on an individual or on a group to incur costs* based on what they (or others believe them to) know and have at their disposal, what they (or others believe them to) think and believe, how they behave, and who they know (and the visibility of these social connections).

Positive capital can be understood as *the opportunity for an individual or for a group to secure benefits* based on what they (or others believe them to) know and have at their disposal, what they (or others believe them to) think and believe, how they behave, and who they know (and the visibility of these social connections).

Because they consider capital in the abstract, these definitions:

- Can be applied to any type or sub-category of capital (see below and Section 4 for examples)

- Encompass expressions of negativity in both the constitution ('...*the pressure on...*') and impact ('...*to incur costs*') of negative capital
- Permit both these expressions of negative capital to vary as regards the extent to which they involve more or less subjective judgements (see below)
- Permit capital to be conceived of either as neutral (with the definitions defining positive and negative facets of this) or as *ipso facto* positive (where capital becomes the same as 'positive capital') alongside a negative counterpart.
- Allow for varying descriptions of how multiple capitals (and their components) can co-exist and co-operate (by not specifying these relationships; something returned to in Section 5)

Figure 2 provides a simplified graphical illustration of these definitions in application to the types of capital considered in the SLR. Positive and negative capital are depicted as varying in volume, co-existing in differing volumes within differing types of capital, and varying across contexts. This variation across contexts captures the subjectivity that can be involved in identifying pressures and opportunities and the judgements involved within sociological concepts including structuration and symbolic struggles for legitimation (e.g. Giddens, 1991), plus within social psychological theories of the self that have their origins in Cooley (1902) and the '*looking glass self*'.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Turning to examples of these positive and negative capitals within education, we can consider one from each of the types of capital considered in the SLR, drawing upon the definitions of social, economic, and intellectual capital presented earlier. Positive and negative social

capitals within education are perhaps the most straightforward to give examples of given the volume of literature on negative social capital that the SLR revealed to exist. One source of both is the peer relations of students. These can result in both a pressure to incur costs (e.g. peer pressure to play truant) as well as opportunities to secure benefits (e.g. emotional support). Variation between individuals (e.g. students, their peers, their parents, and their teachers) as to how these varying costs and benefits may reconcile speaks to the subjective judgements that can be involved in consideration of positive and negative capitals and to the complexity of how capitals can co-exist and co-operate.

Considering next positive and negative economic capitals within education, one example would be student loans facilitating access to higher education. As with peer relations and social capital, student loans are both a source of pressure to incur costs (financial debt) as well as a source of opportunities to secure benefits (granting access to the cultural capital that comes from possessing a degree from an institution). While there is greater objectivity in the judgements as to what constitutes a cost and benefit when compared to the above example concerning social capital, common to both is the subjectivity in the judgements as to how these costs and benefits reconcile. A student loan, with the same terms and conditions and affording access to the same degree from the same institution, can involve two individuals coming to different conclusions as to how the costs and the benefits reconcile. The possibility that students from more socially disadvantaged backgrounds may be more likely to reconcile these costs and benefits in favour of the negative as compared to their more advantaged peers (e.g. Herbaut & Geven, 2019, pp.12-14) also provides an example of how negative capital is a concept pertinent to contemporary global debates on educational equity.

Finally, one source of positive and negative intellectual capital within education would be the varying knowledge and experiences that students and teachers bring to their lessons. For example, in science lessons there are tensions that can exist between knowledge pertaining to religion and knowledge pertaining to science. That each type of knowledge can, at times and by some, be viewed as incompatible or opposed to the other means that each can be a source of negative intellectual capital – knowledge and experience that instead of boosting an individual's position within a field may instead limit or hinder this position. This can result in debates between education stakeholders as to whether the differences between these types of knowledge can be reconciled (e.g. Taber et al., 2011).

### **3. Negative capital and its compatibility with Bourdieu's concepts of social field, social field homology, habitus, and hysteresis**

For negative capital to have utility as a concept that helps us to explain and develop our understanding of education it needs to (as a minimum) be compatible with existing concepts of capital. If negative capital can be shown to work alongside these existing concepts then it is well-positioned for uptake by others for use in the future. Four concepts related to capital as described by Bourdieu are turned to for this purpose: social field, social field homology, habitus, and hysteresis. Bourdieu's work is drawn upon again here because education features heavily in his writings about capital (including his first descriptions of cultural capital; Bourdieu, 1977a, 1977b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), he revisited education regularly (Bourdieu 1986, 1998), he was explicit that education plays a crucial role in the relationship between social capital and economic capital at the macro/societal level (Neira, Vázquez, & Portela, 2009), and he articulated a *Generalised Theory of Capital* (see Wacquant, 1998, p.26) – i.e. considered multiple types of capital, their co-existence, and their co-operation.

Bourdieu explains that the extent to which individuals vary in position relative to one another across different *social fields* (again, ‘*structured arenas of social action*’; Wacquant, 1998, p.26) is constrained (homologous); that there are limits on the extent to which a type of capital can vary across different social fields (see Hilgers & Mangez, 2015). This idea is compatible with and extends the concepts of negative and positive capital presented in Section 2. *Social field homology* limits the extent to which an opportunity to secure benefits can simultaneously also constitute a pressure to incur costs across different social fields (and vice versa). In other words, there is a limit to which capital that is positive in one social field can also be negative in another. This idea also helps to further explain a variety of phenomena in education. For example, a teacher’s understanding of the costs and benefits of a friendship between two students can influence how the costs and benefits of this friendship are understood by these students’ parents. Similarly, values and experiences in the home (e.g. those that are gendered regarding reading and science) can carry over into the classroom where they can constitute negative cultural capital with consequences for persisting educational inequalities (e.g. Andre et al., 1997; Ozturk, Hill & Yates, 2016). Figure 3 illustrates the variations of negative and positive capitals across social fields.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

The illustration shown in Figure 3 also depicts the possibility that capital can vary over time and this temporal element facilitates consideration of negative capital alongside *habitus* - the, ‘*durable dispositions acquired by the individual through socialization*’ (Bonnwitz, 2002, p.94). The socialisation referred to here is, ‘*a set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporal schematic perception, appreciation and*

*action*' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.16). Therefore, the beliefs, behaviours, and perceptions of individuals and groups have history, temporality, and continuity. Habitus thereby provides a means by which to understand both continuity and discontinuity in the pressure for individuals and groups to incur costs (negative capital) and the opportunities for them to secure benefits (positive capital). When new social fields are encountered (e.g. when transferring phases of education and educational institution), the dispositions yielded by habitus can result in the continuation of pressures to incur costs (i.e. retention of negative capital), attempts to end pressures to incur costs (i.e. cessation of negative capital), and new pressures to incur costs (i.e. acquisition of negative capital). The consideration of a student moving to a new phase of education (and to a new institution) illustrates all three. For example, students who develop negative perceptions of themselves as learners<sup>4</sup> in an earlier phase of education can retain or lose these beliefs (this negative capital) when they move into a new phase of education. Further, even the retention of beliefs that constituted positive capital in an earlier phase of education may cease providing opportunities to secure benefits in the new phase and instead may now pressure an individual to incur costs; a lag in the transformation of their habitus has had a negative consequence. For example, retention of beliefs that others judge to be age inappropriate. This relationship between habitus and a shift from positive to negative capital over time is an idea that is closely related to Bourdieu's concept of *hysteresis*, 'a counter-adaptive 'lag' in the habitus that retards adaptation to a changed social context' (Kerr & Robinson, 2009, p.833). Therefore, the idea that capital can shift from positive to negative provides a means to describe one consequence of hysteresis.

#### **4. Application of negative capital to understandings of educational effectiveness and equity**

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<sup>4</sup> Thereby those who come to possess negative intellectual capital in various social fields in education including engagement in class and academic attainment

Further demonstrations as to the utility of negative capital can be shown through its application to challenge and extend a variety of real-world policies, practices, theories, and concepts that concern educational effectiveness and equity.

We turn first to the inclusion of cultural capital within the inspection processes of the UK's Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2019a, 2019b) – inspection processes that involves judgements as to educational effectiveness and equity of educational practice. Although the inspection handbook for schools (Ofsted, 2019a, p.43) contains a different definition of cultural capital<sup>5</sup> to one of the definitions within the inspection handbook for the early years (Ofsted, 2019b, p.31)<sup>6,7</sup>, there is a common phrasing, '*Cultural capital is the essential knowledge that children need...*'. This definition is quite different from that articulated by Bourdieu (1977a, 1977b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977)<sup>8</sup> and summarised in the context of education by Lareau (1987), '*schools utilize particular linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula; children from higher social locations enter schools already familiar with these social arrangements.*' (p.74).

Note the *ipso facto* positivity to cultural capital in both the above definitions and the objectivity that both express – that some knowledge is essential and who has this. The definitions presented in Section 2 are purposefully worded to be compatible with both this positivity and objectivity and can therefore be used to extend and challenge Ofsted's conception. By applying the definitions in Section 2, Ofsted's (positive) cultural capital can

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<sup>5</sup> "...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.' " (Ofsted, 2019a, p.43).

<sup>6</sup> "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" (Ofsted, 2019b, p.31).

<sup>7</sup> "Cultural capital is the essential knowledge that children need to be educated citizens." (Ofsted, 2019b, p.31).

<sup>8</sup> Ofsted's definitions also fails to recognise the three components of cultural capital that Bourdieu described (Bourdieu, 1986): embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Ofsted's common phraseology is closest to embodied cultural capital.

be understood as *(essential) knowledge of cultural rules that children need to afford opportunities for them to secure benefits*. The quote from Lareau (1987) provides examples in education. From this definition, there is not only the potential for a lack of this positive cultural capital/cultural knowledge but also for the presence of negative cultural capital: *knowledge of cultural rules that pressurise children to incur costs*. These definitions and understandings prompt the following observations of Ofsted's cultural capital and attempts to inspect for it in educational settings:

- That the objectivity in Ofsted's definition means that there is only one type of cultural knowledge worth inspecting for – that which their inspectors judge to afford an inconsistently defined set of future opportunities (see Ofsted, 2019a, 2019b).
- That this knowledge is intrinsically socially stratified – with children from more socially advantaged backgrounds being more likely to have more of it (cf. Lareau, 1987). Thus, Ofsted inspectors are obliged to judge settings for the conveyance of the knowledge that will be held in greater volume by more socially advantaged groups.
- That Ofsted has no explicit interest in inspecting for knowledge of cultural rules from the home that pressurise children to incur costs in educational settings. For example, gendered notions of what and how children should and do learn (see Section 3).
- That Ofsted has no explicit interest in the potential for knowledge conveyed in educational settings (implicitly that held by more socially advantaged children) to pressurise children to incur costs outside of this setting. For example, the psychological discomfort that would come from children coming to believe that they should be something, have something, or be doing something that they are not, cannot be, do not have, or cannot have. Ultimately, failing to inspect for this negative cultural capital risks passively facilitating marginalisation.

The concept of negative capital also facilitates development of the ‘*Capital Theory of School Effectiveness and School Improvement*’ (Hargreaves, 2001). This theory limits itself to two types of capital and specifies that, ‘*An effective school mobilises its intellectual capital ... and its social capital ... to achieve the desired educational outcomes...*’ (p.490) and that, ‘*An improving school increases its intellectual capital... and its social capital... to achieve the educational outcomes...*’ (p.491). Intellectual capital is defined as, ‘*the sum of the knowledge and experiences of the school’s stakeholders that they could deploy to achieve the school’s goals*’ (p.490) and social capital is defined, ‘*...in terms of its cultural and structural components ... the cultural part is mainly the level of trust between people and the generation of norms of reciprocity [and] the structural aspect is the networks in which the people are embedded by strong ties*’ (p.490).

The definition of social capital and intellectual capital as *ipso facto* positive within Hargreaves’ (2001) theory is in line with the findings of our systematic review and the definition of positive capital presented in Section 2. Applying the concept of negative capital to Hargreaves’ theory both develops it and provides another illustration of the utility of negative capital to educational theory and research more generally. To be effective and improving, a school will need to do more than use and increase its positive capital to achieve desired educational outcomes; it must also work to minimise and mitigate the pressure to incur costs (the negative capitals) which threaten to impede the school as it seeks to achieve its goals – ideas excluded from Hargreaves’ theory. In a practical sense for example, there may emerge competing experiences, personalities and/or beliefs that at odds with one another and with the expressed mission of the institution. Hence, the efforts of schools to engage actively with parents - parents whose educational experiences and values may be at odds with a school’s improvement goals.

The concepts of negative and positive capital presented in Section 2 can also be used to challenge and extend theories and models of school (or educational) effectiveness and improvement that do not explicitly reference capital. For example, the *'Dynamic Model of Educational Effectiveness'* (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2008) does not mention capital as such, but considers educational effectiveness across all the levels of the educational system from national policy through to individual teachers and students. Negative capital allows us to better understand process acting within and across levels. For example, autonomous spending at the school level can be positive economic capital for the school but negative economic capital at local or national policy levels. Similarly, the *'Dynamic Approach to School Improvement'* (DASI; Creemers & Kyriakides, 2012) presents an approach to school improvement that is based on partnerships between school stakeholders and researchers as regards what is to be improved and how this improvement will be evidenced. While the DASI also does not expressly refer to capital, this approach can be seen as simultaneously conferring positive and negative capitals to schools. While working in partnership with researchers may provide schools with new insights and opportunities, this partnership working may also incur costs (it is time and resource intensive and both are always limited).

## **5. Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to make an original contribution to our understanding of how the concept of capital can be used in policies, practices, theories, and research that are concerned with educational effectiveness and equity. With Ofsted's use of cultural capital in its current inspection handbooks, capital is not simply a concept that features in theory and research – it can feature heavily in the daily lives of educational professionals. At the same time however, the concept of capital is not singular or fixed; there are (arguably) infinite

types of capital and each undergoes development as a heuristic tool to help explain social, economic, and educational systems. This paper focussed on the notion that capital may be negative in impact and/or constitution, derived a definition that satisfied the themes from a review of three types of negative capital, and showed how this definition was compatible with four of Bourdieu's core concepts and can be used to challenge and develop a number of policies, practices, theories, and concepts that concern educational effectiveness and equity<sup>9</sup>.

Looking ahead, there are implications for educational policy, practice, and research beyond the examples considered in this paper. Policy makers need to consider the inherent negativities that come with policies designed to increase some notion of ipso facto positive capital for educational settings and professionals as well as communities, families, and children. This requires examining institutionalised biases in the formation and framing of policy. For example, Ofsted's 'cultural capital' risks promulgating middle-class values to the exclusion of all other cultural groups. Practitioners need to be aware of the inherent social stratification of capital and how it may affect curriculum and day to day experiences in educational settings, and may have differential consequences for themselves, colleagues, and students. Finally, for educational researchers, the definition of negative capital put forward here signposts opportunities to reconsider previously overlooked dimensions within existing theories and concepts with practical applications.

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<sup>9</sup> With equity an intrinsic component within the field of Educational Effectiveness and Improvement Research (EEIR; Chapman et al., 2016)

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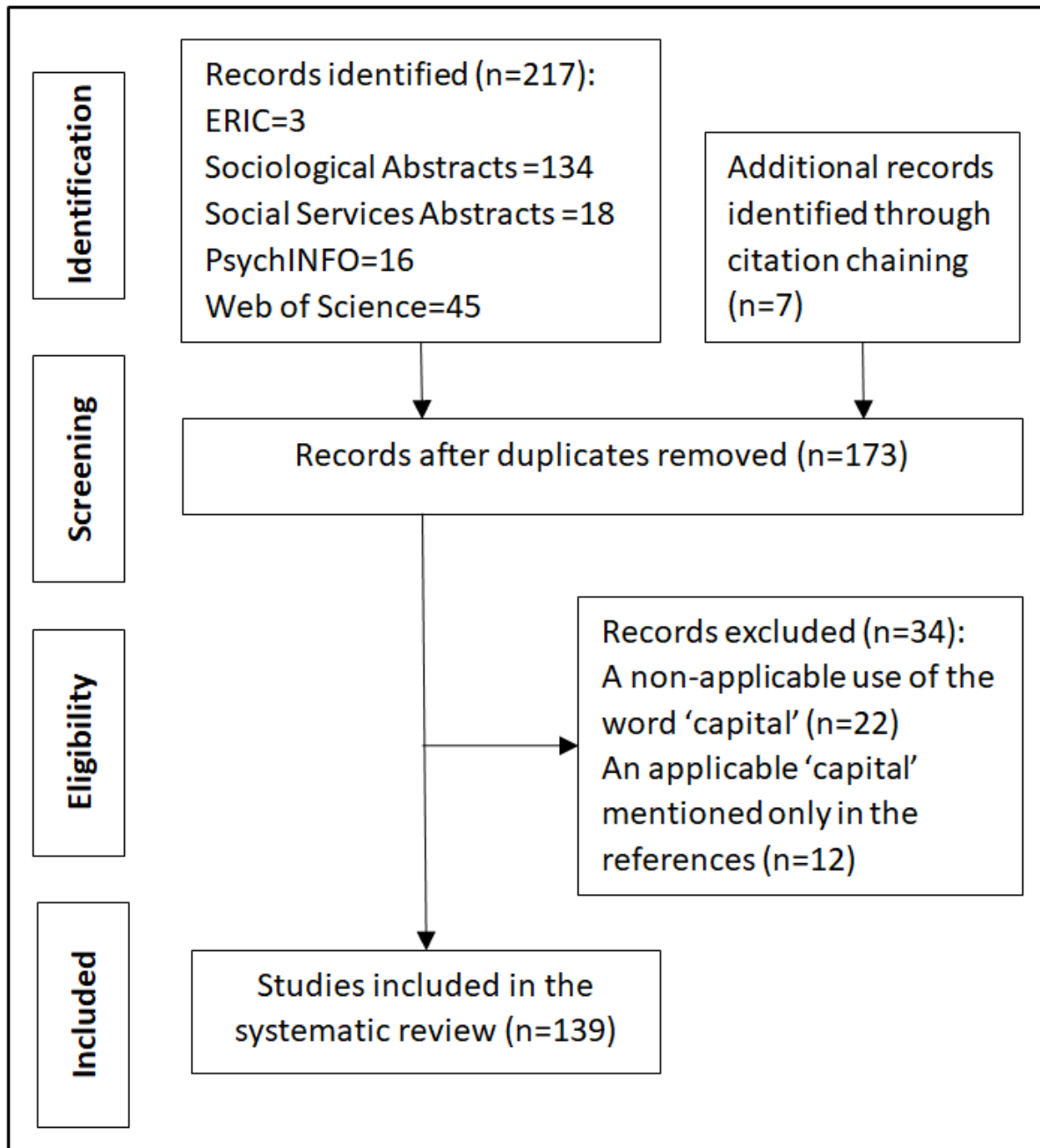
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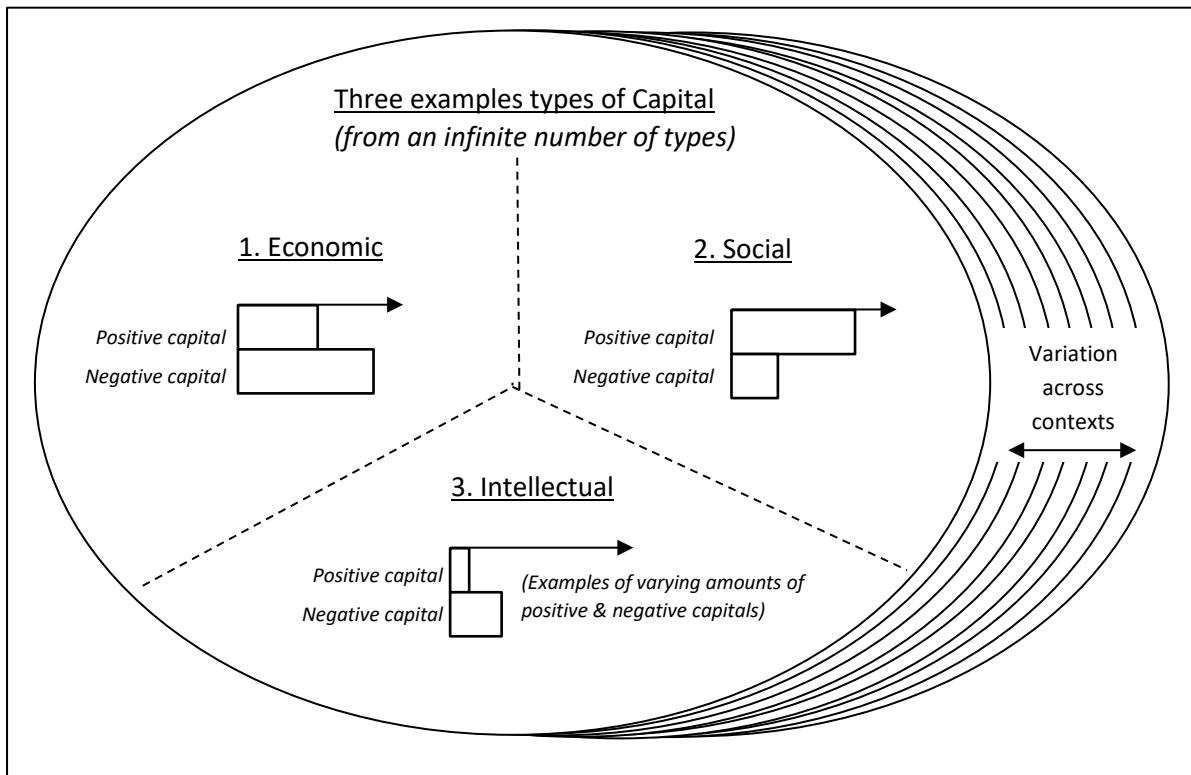
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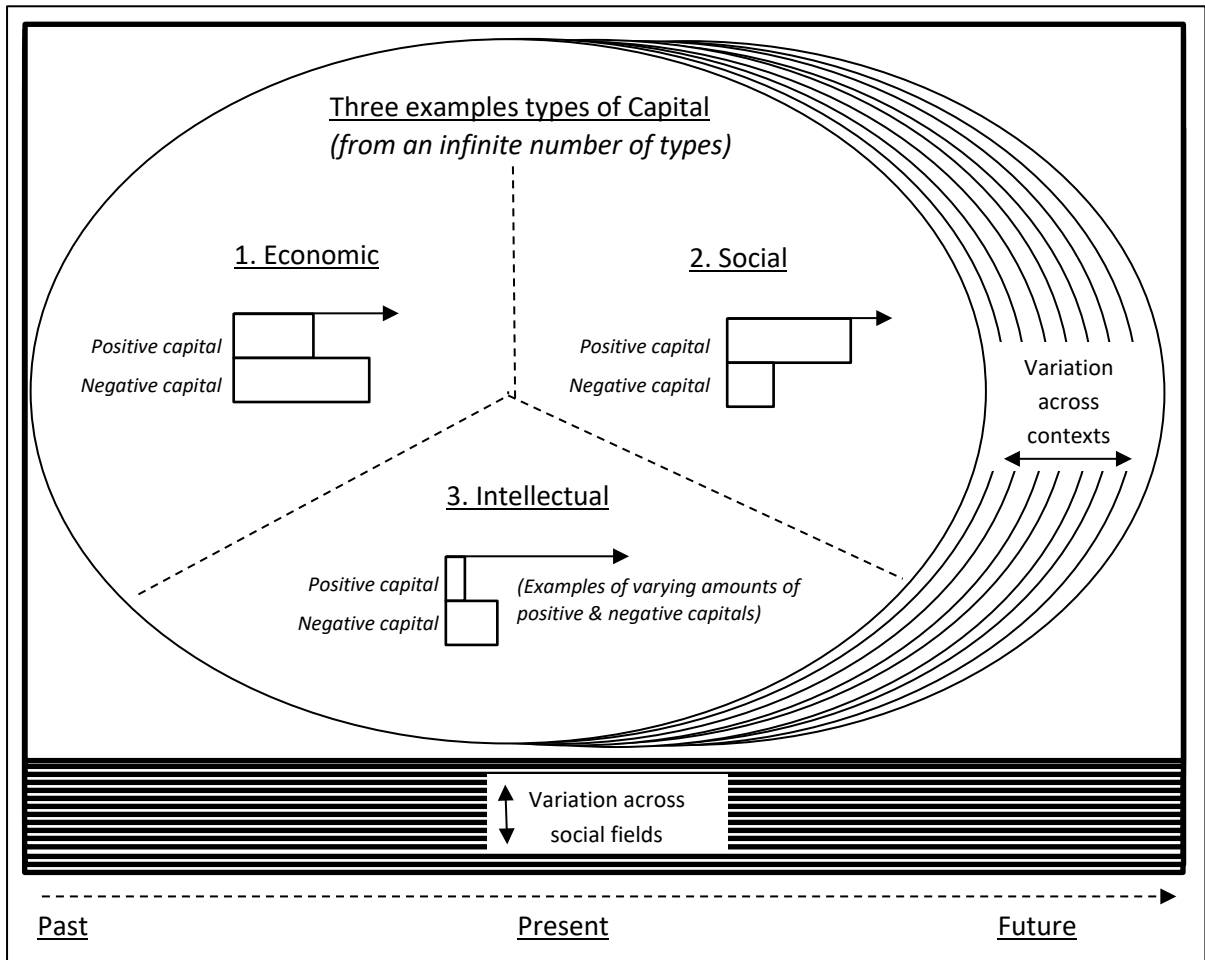
**Figure 1.** A systematic review of ‘negative capital’ and its presence within papers focusing upon economic, social, and intellectual capital



**Figure 2.** The simultaneous presence of varying amounts of positive and negative capital within multiple types of capital plus variation in these amounts across contexts



**Figure 3.** The simultaneous presence of varying amounts of positive and negative capital within multiple types of capital plus variation in these amounts across contexts, social fields, and time



**Online Appendix 1:** The final 139 papers included in the systematic literature review

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